

BIRDS OF  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
AND  
NEIGHBOURHOOD





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NOTES  
ON THE  
BIRDS OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.





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# NOTES

ON THE

## BIRDS OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.

BY  
*Thomas Littleton* Powys, 4<sup>th</sup> Baron,  
1833-1896.

LORD LILFORD,

PRESIDENT OF THE BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION AND OF  
THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY.

VOL. II.

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ILLUSTRATED

BY

MESSRS. A. THORBURN AND G. E. LODGE.

AND A MAP.

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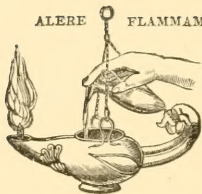
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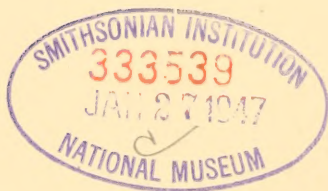
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ALERE FLAMMAM.



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MAP OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE at end of the Volume.





# NOTES

ON THE

## BIRDS OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.

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VOL. II.

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### 133. STONE-CURLEW.

*Œdicnemus crepitans.*

This bird, which is known as Norfolk Plover, Stone-Plover, Great Plover, Thick-knee, and Short-billed Curlew, as well as by the name at the head of this article, is a rare straggler into our county. I find in my journals only two records of its occurrence within our limits as by law defined; the first of these was communicated to me by letter from the late H. O. Nethercote, Esq., of Moulton Grange, in the following words, dated July 11th, 1880:—"On Monday, May 10th, I was a-tennising at Arthingworth; Rokeby (the rector of that village) said 'I have a rare bird to show you, wounded this morning by a shepherd and brought to me.' He then showed me a rather small specimen of the Stone-Curlew, which had been seen

in company with six or seven more, but what became of it ultimately I cannot say. It is undoubtedly a rare bird in this midland and much-frequented neighbourhood, as I take it that few birds are disposed to be less philanthropic." The second instance is that recorded by Mr. W. Tomalin in the 'Field' of Nov. 19th, 1881, as having occurred at Gayton, near Northampton, on October 28th of that year. Many years ago I saw a bird near Achurch that I cannot attribute to any species but this, with which I am well acquainted, but as the bird in question passed at a great height overhead, and did not call, I cannot be certain of its identity. The Stone-Curlew arrives in April at its breeding-localities in this country, I have met with it during the summer and early autumn in West Norfolk in some abundance, also on the chalk downs in the neighbourhood of Winchester, and on Salisbury Plain, where we took several with the Falcons of the Old Hawking Club. It is recorded in Yarrell as breeding in Dorsetshire, Sussex, Kent, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Bucks, Beds, Herts, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Worcestershire, Rutland, Nottingham, Lincoln, and the East Riding of York, besides the counties above specified from my personal observation. In Cornwall it seems to be a winter visitor, and occasionally remains on the moors of that county throughout the cold season. It is an exceedingly rare bird in Scotland and Ireland, and an infrequent straggler to Wales and the northern counties of England. In Spain the Stone-Curlew is exceedingly common, and resident in all suitable localities. I have also met with it in Algeria, Tunis, Sicily, European Turkey, Crete, and Cyprus. The favourite haunts of this species are open downs,

warrens, sheep-walks, heaths, and fallow fields. Yarrell, or the editor of the fourth edition of his *British Birds*, says very truly that the distribution of the bird coincides locally with that of the cretaceous formation in this country, the chalk downs being especially suited to its habits. The few eggs of this species that I have found *in situ* were laid on the bare fallow, without any sort of nest, or even a scratching of the earth; they are two in number, of a light drab or earth-colour, with streaks and blotches of dark brown or grey, and, from their resemblance to the usual surrounding, very difficult to discover.

The Stone-Curlew is, as a rule, very wary, but often attempts to avoid observation, especially when approached by a mounted person, by squatting or remaining erect and motionless. I should often have passed one without noticing it from horseback or a carriage, had it not been for the glint of the sun upon the brilliant yellow of the irides. From the stomachs of the few birds of this species that I have examined, I am inclined to think that their principal food consists of snails, beetles, grubs, and worms, but they will also devour frogs and young mice, and I know that many gamekeepers in Norfolk accuse them of destroying the young of feathered game. We have generally found these birds, singly or in couples, during the spring and summer; but before leaving their breeding-districts they unite in flocks, and I have more than once seen as many as fifty or sixty on wing together in the first fortnight of October in West Norfolk. At that time of year they often frequent young plantations of fir and larch, and are easily driven over the guns; but their flesh is worthless, and I consider it more than a shame to destroy

a harmless and rapidly diminishing species of bird merely for the sake of letting off powder and shot. The Stone-Curlew, in my opinion, feeds principally at night, and his loud and somewhat melancholy note is to be heard throughout the dark hours, as he flies to and from the nearest soft places. In captivity these birds become exceedingly tame, and will eat almost any animal or vegetable food.

#### 134. DOTTEREL.

*Charadrius morinellus.*

No part of our county with which I have any acquaintance is now suited to the usual habits of this species, except possibly the fens of our extreme north-east; but as the bird is a vernal migrant to this country and used formerly to visit parts of Cambridgeshire and West Norfolk, more or less regularly, on passage to its northern breeding-stations in April and May, and again in September and October on the return journey to winter-quarters, there is at least nothing improbable about its chance appearance within our limits.

At the time of the first writing of these notes for publication in the 'Journal of the Northampt. Nat. History Society,' I had no better evidence of the occurrence of this species in our county than my own recollection of a story of one having been killed against the telegraph-wires on the London & N.W. Railway near Thorpe, about the year 1849. I can, however, now add the Dotterel without any hesitation to my list. A very fine adult specimen was killed on the Grange Farm, Raunds, on October 26th, 1886,



and most courteously presented to me by Mr. W. Nichols, of that place, in July 1889. Under date of April 14th, 1887, my decoy-man wrote: "I saw twenty Dotterels on the 13th, and three on 14th inst.;" these birds were noticed by my informant (who is an East Anglian, and perfectly well acquainted with the present species), on a meadow near Aldwinckle. On October 6th, 1893, I received a very young Dotterel, shot some two or three days previously on Castor Field, from the Rev. W. Hopkinson, of Sutton Grange near Wansford, who subsequently informed me that another was seen and shot at the same time and place, and sent to Burghley House, where it was considered as a "Short-billed Woodcock," and eaten with great satisfaction. The specimen sent to me, as above mentioned (for identification), was too "high" for preservation, but did not fail to maintain its specific reputation from a culinary point of view.

On the first arrival of the Dotterel in this country, at the end of April or beginning of May, it may be occasionally met with in small trips on drained marshes, downs, and fallows, generally choosing the most bare and open spots, and on these, if not molested, these little parties remain till late in the latter month, feeding upon beetles, worms, slugs, and grubs. For a long and most interesting account of the breeding of this species some fifty years ago in the mountains of the English Lake District, written by the late Mr. T. C. Heysham, I must refer my readers to the fourth edition of 'Yarrell,' vol. iii. I have never been amongst the Dotterels in the breeding-season, but have found them, now and then in considerable numbers, in certain parts of the Highlands of Scotland, and on one high hill in

Peebleshire, in August. Their general habits at that time of year appeared to me to resemble closely those of the Golden Plover; but they are usually much more tame and easy of approach than that species, which, with some exceptions, becomes wary as soon as the young are strong on the wing, whilst Dotterels, even when united in large flocks, will often allow themselves to be approached within half a gunshot.

My first personal acquaintance with this bird was formed in my school-days, whilst on a holiday visit to an uncle in Peebleshire. I had very recently been allowed to carry a gun for the first time, and my keen love of shooting was much stimulated by the information given to me by my relation and his factotum that a few pairs of Dotterels annually bred about the top of a very bare and steep isolated hill at no great distance from the house, and that some had been seen a day or two before my arrival, about the third week of August. My uncle owned some very fair Grouse-moors, but had let the shooting over them to a neighbour, only retaining the hill above mentioned and a small range of heathery braes, for the most part planted with young fir trees, in his own occupation. Accompanied by the factotum above mentioned, who united the offices of game-keeper, gardener, and farm bailiff in his own person, and was a most trustworthy and intelligent man, a good shot, and an observer of birds, I sallied on the morning after my arrival with full permission to shoot anything that I could find worthy of powder and shot, but with my mind entirely absorbed with the prospect of seeing and perhaps shooting a Dotterel. We wound our way along the bank of a purling burn, up a steep and narrow glen, with tall heather,

bracken, and young coniferous trees all about us, disturbing a Water-Ouzel, several Ring-Ouzels, and an old Blackcock, which last I had the luck to bag as he bustled up the glen from underneath a fir tree ; I looked upon this as a good omen, as it was the first bird of the species that I had ever shot at, and I have no doubt that some of my readers will share with me the delightful memory of a first Blackcock, glossy and heavy, but probably, if at the same time of year, tailless, like mine. Stowing my prize carefully away in a bed of fern, to be picked up on our descent, we soon emerged upon the open hill-side, and on looking upwards perceived that the summit of the hill to which we were bound was concealed by a dense cap of mist ; this was disheartening, as my companion assured me that *there* only were the Dotterels to be found ; but he suggested that we should let his pointer (one of the best that I ever saw) hunt and try for a Grouse or two, though he warned me not to expect much, as he had shot over the small stretch of likely ground on the first two days of the season and killed very fair bags for the locality. The ground was exceedingly steep and very bare of covert, but we secured a few grouse and a hare, and, having exhausted our beat, sat awhile for luncheon and consideration ; I was for pushing on to the summit, but the canny Scot assured me that although the low ground about us was perfectly clear, we should not be able to see ten yards in the mist above, which, however, did not seem to descend at all. I had not in those days the resource of smoking, a process that I have since found to be most consolatory in all cases of disappointment and annoyance ; in these circumstances I determined to

climb the hill in spite of the mist and strong remonstrance from the Scot, who said that if I insisted upon going up he must go with me, as I should otherwise lose myself and probably fall over a tremendous precipice, which I subsequently discovered to be a steep moss-covered slope of perhaps ten or twelve feet. However, up we went, and after a stiff half-hour's scramble arrived at the edge of the mist and sat down on a stone to take breath; hardly had we done so when I heard a soft whistle apparently from close behind us, I turned and peered into the mist, but could see nothing. My companion said, "Indeed that is only a pluffer," but it was not the note of any Plover I was acquainted with, and I did my best to imitate it; I was immediately answered, and after a short interchange of sibilous remarks, I was aware of a bird on the wing in the mist flying slowly and looking as big as a Peewit, apparently at 30 yards' distance. I fired instantly, but could not see the result of my shot, so went higher up, and to my intense delight found my first Dotterel within fifteen yards of the stone on which we had been sitting, but very clean killed. The mist did not lift, and we waited and listened in vain for an hour, so came down the hill for home. The next day was beautifully clear and bright, and we made another ascent, but did not see a Dotterel, though we shot a few Golden Plovers. On another occasion we found large trips of Dotterel on the high tops about Glenlyon, and I have occasionally seen a couple or two in the deer-forest of Gaick, in Inverness-shire, in August and September.

A few Dotterel used to appear every year in May upon some reclaimed moss land belonging to me in



S.W. Lancashire, but I have not heard of any having been seen on my own property there since 1883, or between that year and 1862; but in 1886, on writing to thank one of my Lancashire neighbour's gamekeepers for sending me some Peewit's eggs, I asked him if he ever saw any Dotterels now-a-days, and he replied by return of post, sending me five beautiful specimens of this bird, with a note saying that they were the first he had met with for many years \*. My feelings on receiving these birds were rather mixed, as although the Dotterels are very properly protected by law in May, and it is certainly a great pity to destroy them on their way to their breeding-quarters, it does not answer to look a gift-horse in the mouth; I had not asked for the birds, and was not sorry to have such perfect specimens for my collection, to say nothing of their excellence from a culinary point of view at all seasons.

I found this species in great abundance on the plains near Tunis in the late autumn of 1856, consorting with Sand-Grouse, Peewits, Golden Plovers, Little Bustards, and Cranes, and shot a good many from horse, donkey, and camel; on foot I found it impossible to get within shot, unless I had the luck to fall in with the Dotterels away from any of the above-named associates, although I have frequently seen them and the Golden Plovers running fearlessly about within a few feet of the Arab ploughmen.

The only Dotterel that I ever kept in captivity was a young bird purchased in Leadenhall Market in the autumn of 1885; he seemed naturally very tame and

\* I have, since the above was written, been assured of several occurrences of the present species in the locality to which I here refer.



did well till the first severe weather, to which he at once succumbed. In May the few Dotterels that I have met with have been almost stupidly tame, and on being approached would run for a few yards, halt abruptly, nod two or three times, stretch out a wing and leg, and take wing with apparent reluctance, settling down again at a short distance even when some of their number had fallen to the gun. It appears from various ancient authors on natural history that these birds were formerly driven into nets and thus taken in large numbers with great ease; and Gesner, as translated by Willughby and quoted in Yarrell, says "I call it *Morinellus* for two reasons, first because it is frequent among the *Morini* (Flemmings); and next because it is a foolish Bird even to a Proverb, we calling a foolish dull person a Dotterel."

I have heard from many eye-witnesses stories of the abundance of the Dotterel on the spring migration in certain spots in our eastern counties, and one most trustworthy individual assured me that he well remembered the killing of a great many with sticks and stones on the Yorkshire wolds in his youth, some seventy years ago. It seems that these birds were always held in high estimation for the table. I have lately been supplied by a friend with an extract from Miss Strickland's 'Lives of the Queens of England,' in the form of a letter, dated 1535, written for Anne Boleyn to thank Viscountess Lisle for sending some Dotterels and a live Linnet as a present to the Queen, it runs as follows:—"Pleaseth you to understand that Her Grace liketh both presents very well; the one for being a special good dish, and the other for a pleasant singing bird which does not cease at

no time to give Her Grace rejoicing with her pleasant song. The Queen did appoint 6 of your Dotterels for her supper, 6 for Monday dinner, and 6 for supper. My Lord of Rochford (the Queen's brother) presented them himself, and showed her how they were killed now at 12 of the clock in Dover; of the which she was glad, and spake many good words towards your Ladyship's good report, as I was informed by them that stood by." On this subject I also find in a work entitled 'A Second Edition of the Anecdotes and History of Cranbourn Chase, by William Chafin, Clerk,' kindly lent to me by my friend Professor Alfred Newton, a story of how the author in November 1751 bagged five Dotterels out of some ten or twelve on a piece of ground that had been sown with turnips, between Andover and Salisbury, how he was greeted from a post-chaise by a Mr. Evelyn, who was "hastening to town to be in waiting on Prince Frederick ('Father of our King')"; how Mr. Evelyn begged for one of the birds as a present for the Prince, and went on his way "in high glee" with two brace. It is remarkable that Dotterels should be found in England so late as November, and still more remarkable that the author on the same day put up and pursued twenty-five Bustards without success; he states in conclusion that he never had an opportunity of renewing the wild-goose chase, but believes "such a number of Bustards will never be again seen together in England." I fear that if Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, or the Prince of Wales, should now-a-days order Dotterels for any particular occasion, it would puzzle the most loyal and devoted of subjects to carry out the command, for this species has

become comparatively scarce in England, not only on account of its culinary excellence, but also for the sake of its feathers, some of which are highly prized for artificial fly making.

The Dotterel is recorded as breeding in some numbers on the mountains of Norway and Sweden, in a few localities of Central Europe, and on the vast moors of N.W. Asia. The female of this species is larger and more brightly plumaged than the male, as is the case with several species of birds besides the majority of the *Raptores*, though probably less generally known than in their's. The eggs of this species are very beautiful, but as I never had the good luck to find or even to see an unblown specimen, I must refer my readers to more fortunate ornithologists for a full description of them.

The Dotterel visits Spain in spring and autumn and occasionally winters in the plains of Andalucia.

### 135. RINGED PLOVER.

*Charadrius hiaticula.*

This bird, which is also known as Ringed Dotterel, Stonehatch, Sea-Lark, and, on some parts of our coast, shares, with its frequent associate the Dunlin, the name of Purre, is an uncommon and irregular visitor to the Nen valley, in the neighbourhood of Lilford; most of its occurrences there have been in April and May. Mr. J. Hensman, in a letter dated February 22nd, 1876, informed me that there was then a stuffed specimen of this species in the Northampton Museum, killed in 1866, but gave no particulars as to exact date or locality.

The Ringed Plover, although for the most part a sea-shore loving bird, often breeds on the shingly banks of inland lakes and rivers, as also on the great sandy warrens of Suffolk and W. Norfolk. I found a pair of these birds, in June 1853, on a high warren near Winchester, but in spite of careful search could not discover eggs or young birds. More or less Ringed Plovers may be found on almost all low-lying parts of our coast throughout the year, but there is no doubt that many of our birds leave this country for the south in severe weather and return in the spring. The editor of the 4th edition of Yarrell states that a small and more slender form of this species appears in numbers on our southern coasts in May, but, with few exceptions, leaves us after a short stay. I had an opportunity some years ago of comparing two of the smaller race with some of the ordinary British type at Brighton, near which town they had all been obtained; the differences of "make" and size were certainly remarkable, but not, in my humble opinion, sufficient to constitute two separate species.

Most of the nests of this species that I have found were on a stretch of shingle at a very short distance above high-water mark, on the coast of Merionethshire, and consisted merely of a slight scratching amongst the smaller pebbles, and occasionally two or three bents or pieces of broken shells, by way of lining; the eggs are four in number, of a pale stone ground-colour, thickly spotted with black and very dark purple. As the nests above mentioned contained fresh eggs in July, and very young birds, unable to fly, were running and hiding in the shingle, it is obvious that this species must rear more than



one brood in the season, and in Yarrell, as last quoted above, will be found a record of four eggs having been laid four times in succession in the same season.

This species is very tame and easy of approach, appearing to trust principally to the colour of its plumage to escape observation in its breeding-places, but very bold in feigning injury to draw off attention from its young; it runs very swiftly, with occasional abrupt halts and noddings of the head, and has a sweet low whistle, besides what might be almost termed a short *song* in the pairing-season.

In autumn and winter the Ringed Plovers collect in large flocks, and are generally to be found on tidal flats of sand or mud in company with various other species, from which, however, they usually separate on being disturbed. In inland localities I have several times seen a Ringed Plover consorting with Peewits, and in May, 1852, found a good many of these birds with some Dunlins and Common Sandpipers on the banks of the Isis above Oxford. This species thrives well in captivity.

### 136. KENTISH PLOVER.

*Charadrius cantianus?*

I confess to having some doubts about admitting this species to a place in these notes, as my only authority for its occurrence is a note from Mr. A. G. Elliot, of Stamford, who, under the date of January 17, 1883, wrote to me:—"Kentish Plover sent in from Wansford, but whether it was killed on the Norths or Hunts side of river I do not know; date

November 25, 1882." I wrote at once to Mr. Elliot expressing doubts, and asking for details, but received no reply, and although I know my correspondent has a very fair acquaintance with British birds, I cannot avoid a suspicion that he may have been mistaken in this instance, as the Kentish Plover is a vernal migrant to this country, generally leaving our coasts in August or at the beginning of September, and so far as I know is very seldom met with at any considerable distance from salt water. In England I have only twice met with the Kentish Plover, in both instances on the south coast of Devon; it is recorded as breeding, or having formerly bred, in the neighbourhood of Dungeness in some numbers, and has, according to Yarrell, been met with on the coasts of Yorkshire, Lincoln, Norfolk, Cornwall, and not uncommonly in the Channel Islands. My own acquaintance with this bird is chiefly confined to Spain; I found it common on the shores of the Bay of Cadiz in February, and later in the year observed it in small parties on both banks of the Guadalquivir, as far up as to within a few miles below Seville.

These birds are extraordinarily tame and fearless of man, and will run about and feed unconcernedly within a few feet of a boatful of people, and if a flock is fired at, many of the survivors will very shortly return to the spot from which they were started by the shot.

In general habits this species resembles the Ringed Plover, but appears to me to be more exclusively addicted to shingle and hard sand than that bird, and I have seldom found it upon the tidal muds. The eggs average three in number and may be



readily distinguished from those of the Ringed Plover by the deeper yellowish tinge of their ground-colour and the irregular and scratchy character of their markings.

A third species of this family is recorded as having been occasionally found in our country, and has been described by many English authors under the name of Little Ringed Plover, it is a smaller and more slenderly built bird than either of the two species above mentioned, in general appearance much resembling the Ringed Plover. I have met with it in small numbers on most parts of the Mediterranean shores, as well as on the banks of rivers far inland, and found its eggs on bare sandy spots in the uncultivated wastes of New Castile, near Aranjuez. As the Little Ringed Plover is an uncommon bird in this country, and has been on several occasions confounded with its commoner congener, I may be excused from quoting from the 4th edition of Yarrell vol. iii. p. 263, the principal outward differences between the two species; the Little Ringed Plover is there stated to be one fourth lighter in weight than the other, and a "constant distinction from that bird is to be observed in the colour of the shafts of the primaries, which are all dusky in the smaller species with the exception of the outer one, which alone is white throughout. In the larger species there are flecks of white crossing the whole of the primaries."

## 137. GOLDEN PLOVER.

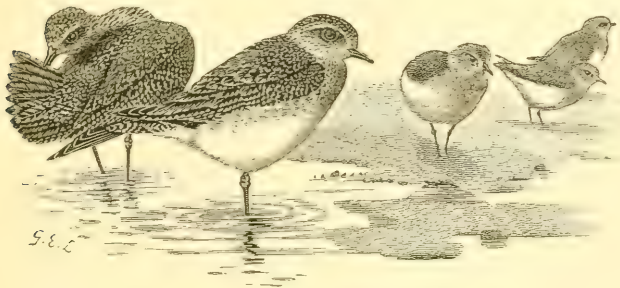
*Charadrius pluvialis.*

This well-known bird, though decidedly less abundant in the Nen valley now than some thirty years ago, is still a pretty regular autumnal visitor to our water-meadows, and certain favourite spots on our cultivated uplands. I quote from my note-books some dates of first appearance of the Golden Plover in the neighbourhood of Lilford:—Sept. 18th, 1862, Sept. 24th, 1874, Oct. 29th, 1881, Oct. 16th, 1882, Oct. 5, 1883, Oct. 2nd, 1884, Oct. 8th, 1886. An old gamekeeper positively assured me many years ago that he once found six of these birds on an upland pasture near Aldwinckle in the latter end of June, and I have no reason to doubt the truth of his statement; but this is the only instance that has come to my knowledge of the occurrence of this species in Northamptonshire during the summer.

The breeding-haunts of the Golden Plover in our Islands are almost exclusively confined to moors and mosses, for the most part at a considerable elevation, and in such localities some of these birds may be found in summer throughout the three kingdoms. I found three or four Golden Plovers, who from their actions evidently had unfledged young hard by, about Cranmere Pool on Dartmoor in the month of July 1856, and I have often met with large numbers of these birds in August on the mountains of Perth and Inverness-shire, also a few on the high moors of Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Glamorganshire, and Merioneth, at the same season. I have never found the eggs of this bird *in situ*, but have often come across

nests containing fragments of egg-shells in Scotland and Ireland; these nests consist of a slight cavity in the moss that covers the more open spaces amongst the heather, and have generally a little lining of fine grass-stems; the eggs are four in number, of a rich yellowish stone-colour, with large irregular markings of very dark brown, and are very large for the size of the bird. I used to notice during my tenancy of the deer-forest of Gaick that the Golden Plovers came down from the high tops at dusk in August and September to feed in the rushy meadows of the valley in which our lodge was situated, though I never saw or heard one there in the daytime. As a rule our birds left the forest altogether about the second or third week of September, but I once found our highest ground alive with Golden Plovers on a misty morning in October; these were evidently on their southward migration and had "lost their reckoning" in the thick weather. In August there is little difficulty in making a good bag of these birds on the moors, as they will generally allow of a pretty close approach till they have been fired at, and even then show some reluctance to leave their haunts, and may be easily driven and stalked, and even in August are well worth any amount of trouble from a culinary point of view, though not so superlatively excellent for the table as during the winter months. In our Northamptonshire meadows I have generally found the Golden Plover very wary except in foggy weather, but in the case of small "trips" have generally contrived to get a shot by a little scheming, unless these Plovers were in the company of Peewits. The birds of this species that visit us in early autumn seldom remain for any great

length of time in our neighbourhood, but severe frosts generally send Golden Plovers in greater or less numbers up our valley in December and January; many more, however, are to be seen and heard passing over high in air than ever alight within our limits; these high-flying flocks have now and then a curious habit of plunging downwards on being fired at, and I have occasionally "got in" a second barrel with effect by this method of attack. A solitary Golden Plover may often be brought up within shot-range by a tolerable imitation of the plaintive whistle which is the most common note of these birds. A vast



Golden Plovers on the mud.

number of these Plovers are often to be met with during the late autumn and winter on the tidal mud-flats of our harbours and estuaries at low water, they generally keep to the most open meadow and arable land at other times of the day, they seem to feed principally by night, and are very restless in foggy or wet weather. A great many Golden Plovers were formerly taken in Whittlesea Wash and the adjacent fen-lands by means of clap-nets, but I am informed that of late years the Plovers have become so comparatively scarce in that neighbourhood that



the netting system has been virtually abandoned there, though it still flourishes in many parts of Ireland, where this bird is generally known as the "*Grey*" Plover—not the only instance of a misapplication of names in that misguided country; for full details of the way in which this netting is carried on there, I would refer my readers to Sir R. P. Gallwey's most interesting work, 'The Fowler in Ireland.'

The flesh of this species, when in good order and not over-roasted, is, in my opinion and that of many others, about as delicious as the flesh of feathered fowl can be, and always commands a good price in the market, but in many instances I have found that Peewits, much inferior though by no means bad birds for the table, have been served up in hotels and restaurants—to say nothing of a certain famous "Hall" at Oxford—as Golden Plovers, and charged for accordingly. I need hardly say that unless the bird is deprived of its feet this fraud is easily detected, by the hind toe of the Peewit, which is absent in the Golden Plover.

This bird is a common winter visitor to all suitable districts in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean coasts of North Africa; I have met with it in great numbers on the lower Guadalquivir from Seville down to the sea, and found vast flocks in the neighbourhood of Tunis. In S. Spain the Golden Plover lingers occasionally till the beginning of April, and I have shot several in the month of March that had nearly completed the vernal change of colour on the breast from white to jet-black.

The food of this species appears to consist principally of earthworms, small beetles and mollusca, in captivity they will feed readily on raw meat finely

chopped up with a mixture of bread, rice, carrots, and millet-seed.

A very closely allied species—the Eastern Golden Plover, *Charadrius fulvus*—is recorded as having been met with in Leadenhall Market, and said to have been killed in Norfolk. A fresh specimen of the American Golden Plover, *C. virginicus*, was also found by Mr. J. H. Gurney in the same market. The Eastern form above mentioned, of which I have a Spanish specimen, may be readily distinguished from our common Golden Plover by its brown axillaries.

### 138. GREY PLOVER.

*Squatarola helvetica.*

Although I have never handled a genuine Northamptonshire-killed specimen of this bird, I feel certain of having, in the early spring of 1853, seen two of the species with a small flock of Golden Plovers in our meadows below Thrapston, and as I have received specimens from Whittlesea Wash, I consider that I am fully justified in including the Grey Plover as a bird of our district. As the editor of Yarrell remarks, this species in general appearance, and the change from white to black of the under surface of the body in spring, closely resembles the Golden Plover, but is a heavier bird, it has a hind toe, the axillary feathers are black, the note is very distinct from that of the Golden Plover, and the bird is very much more strictly maritime in its haunts and habits during its stay in our country, in which it is a bird of double passage, appearing on our coasts in May on its journey to its breeding-



grounds in the remote north, and again on its return southwards in September, October, and November.

Of the habits of this bird on our own coasts I can say nothing worthy of record, as I have, with one exception, never been in any of its favourite haunts in our Island at the right time of year, but I met with it in small numbers in the north of Spain in November and December, and on the great alluvial plains of Andalusia in great abundance during the first fortnight of May 1872: with a very few exceptions all the Grey Plovers shot by us at this latter date had assumed their full breeding-plumage; we found little difficulty in obtaining the specimens that I required, and might have killed many more, as the birds allowed of a close approach on horseback and showed but little fear of flying within easy gunshot of us when seated on our rugs and saddles on the open plain. I could not notice any appreciable difference in the habits of this bird from those of the Golden Plover in running, stopping abruptly, and nodding; but I observed a curious habit that had previously attracted my attention in Epirus—that these birds now and then threw a complete somersault in the air after the manner of a Tumbler Pigeon or Roller. For a most interesting account of the breeding-habits, nests, eggs, and young of the Grey Plover, English ornithologists are indebted to the ready pen of Mr. H. Seebohm, who, in company with Mr. Harvie Brown, found many of these birds nesting on the “tundras,” vast moorlands on the eastern bank of the river Petchora in the province of Archangel, and published a very graphic account of their explorations in ‘The Ibis’ for 1876, as well as in a separate work on this special expedition.

In the winter months the Grey Plover seems to keep pretty exclusively to the neighbourhood of salt water, and feeds chiefly on marine insects and small shells. In the harbour of Santander these birds seemed to prefer the company of Turnstones (*Strep-silas interpres*), amongst rocks and seaweed, to that of the many other wading-birds that frequent the muds and sandbanks.

The flesh of the Grey Plover is much inferior to that of the Golden. These birds thrive well in captivity and are very hardy.

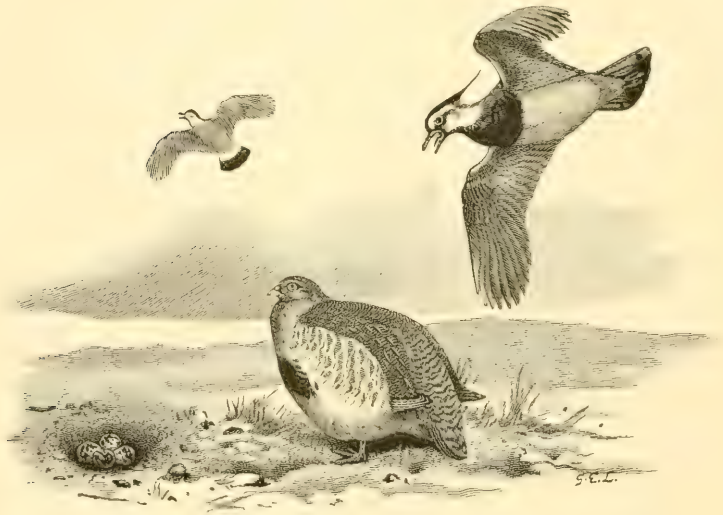
### 139. GREEN PLOVER, LAPWING, PEEWIT.

*Vanellus cristatus.*

This well-known bird is more or less common at most seasons of the year in our county, though not so abundant with us in the breeding-season as it is in moorland or other districts less constantly troubled by the presence of man, and the beasts that require his constant care and attention. Without any precise data, I think that I am justified in fixing the extreme number of Peewits breeding on our Lilford shooting-grounds at from 30 to 35 pairs, and should not put the average higher than 20 pairs\*. Our winter flocks, which have certainly greatly increased in numbers of late years, split up into pairs in March, and the few that remain with us are to be found at their nesting-places about the third week of that month. With us at Lilford most of the nests are

\* The number of Peewits breeding about Lilford has greatly increased since the above paragraph was written.

situated in the water-meadows or upland pastures, a few on certain very limited spots in our arable lands; a very great proportion of the eggs are regularly stolen by Carrion-Crows, Rooks, and Jackdaws, so that the number taken for the table by our people is no index as to the true average of eggs laid. The Peewit generally makes several scratchings before finally deciding upon a site for laying, and I have known of more than one instance in which the female bird, after laying one or two eggs, has without any apparent cause deserted them and commenced laying in a scratching within a few yards of



Peewits and Partridge: "What do you want?"

her first deposit. The full complement of eggs is four, but by removing three as soon as the laying is complete, I have several times succeeded in obtaining six or eight fresh eggs and left three or four to be hatched out, and these late eggs have the best chance

from the partial concealment afforded by the growth of the surrounding vegetation. Till the Peewit commences to sit, both old birds are very bold in flying around and even *at* an intruder, but as soon as incubation begins the hen bird slips quietly from her eggs when approached and, after running a short distance, flies off low and silently to a distance, leaving the protection of her treasure to the courage and artifice of her mate, but after the young birds leave the nest both the parent birds will do their utmost to draw the attention of men and dogs away from their downy family to themselves by screaming and feigning inability to fly, and they show very great courage in attacking and buffeting the thieving Crows, who are their principal enemies. We have often noticed that our Peewits in September, when the young are strong on the wing and able to take good care of themselves, would scream after and stoop at our ranging dogs, and I have more than once seen them act in the same manner to a hunted fox. Many tales are related of the discovery of persons concealed on the moors and fens by these habits of our birds, and the editor of Yarrell, 4th ed., quotes an interesting story of the rescue of a wounded gentleman of Lincolnshire, by the attention of his followers being directed to the spot where he lay by the Peewits hovering over him.

In our district these birds collect into large flocks in the meadows and turnip-fields in September or August, but do not, as a rule, remain with us for more than a few weeks; some fresh flocks, however, often visit us in October and November and remain till the first severe frosts. When thus flocked together the Peewits are pretty wide awake and

not easy of approach, but may easily be decoyed to within gun-shot range by means of "stales" or tethered birds, and are also sometimes attentive to an imitation of the well-known cry from which they derive their common name.

The flesh of the Peewit is very palatable, but not to be compared to that of the Golden Plover; and although I have shot a few when they gave me a chance, I never took any trouble about killing these very useful and handsome birds. The food of this species appears to consist almost exclusively of earth-worms, slugs, and grubs, and I consider them as purely beneficial to the farmer; their eggs are excellent, and with a little judicious management in the gathering of them there need be no fears of seriously affecting the breed. The prices given for early Plovers' eggs in London and elsewhere in our country are most extravagant and out of reason, and even at the height of their season they will fetch from four to five shillings per dozen. The greater part of these eggs sent to the London markets come from the Netherlands, but Iréland, Lancashire, Cheshire, and the Eastern counties also contribute a great many dozens. I have often heard it said that many Rooks' eggs are palmed off by dealers as Plovers', but there is so little similarity in shape, colour, or size that I can hardly credit the story. I have often seen eggs of several other species exposed for sale in the London markets with those of the Peewit, *e. g.* those of Redshank, Snipe, Reeve, Black-tailed Godwit, Coot, Spotted Crake, Black Tern, Laughing Gull, and others, probably all from Holland; but these, so far as my knowledge extends, do not meet with a rapid sale, and it is, I think,



improbable that the eggs of any bird of the Crow family would meet with ready purchasers.

I have met with the Peewit in great numbers during the winter and early spring in most parts of the shores of the Mediterranean and throughout Spain.

In captivity these birds become very tame, and are extremely ornamental; if turned out in a garden of any extent they do not require to be artificially fed so long as the weather is open.

#### 140. OYSTER-CATCHER.

*Hæmatopus ostralegus.*

I adopt the common English name of this species, though it is, of course, an absurd misnomer—firstly, because oysters can hardly be said to require *catching*, and, secondly, because the bird does not feed upon them. “Sea-Pie,” a name by which it is known on some parts of our coasts, is, I think, a very much more appropriate designation for this species, “Mussel-picker” still better, but as I have no hope that ornithologists in general will be induced to change a long-established misapplication of terms by anything that I can write, I am, in this instance, obliged to follow “in the ruck.” I am acquainted with several instances of the occurrence of this species in Northamptonshire. One of those that have come to my knowledge was communicated to me by the Rev. E. P. Williams Freeman, Rector of Clapton, by letter dated March 19th, 1884, in the following words:—“On the afternoon of 12th December, 1883, the Clapton gamekeeper, G. Trowbridge, was crossing a

grass field near the old toll-bar; his attention was roused by hearing a strange screaming noise, and on looking up he saw a large hawk, which he could not identify, carrying some large bird; on seeing the man the hawk dropped the bird in the little grass field just above the ash planting near the road leading from Clapton to Tichmarsh. Trowbridge went after the bird, but it got up out of range and alighted in the rough grass by the roadside. The keeper followed it; it rose within easy distance and he shot it. There had been very heavy gales just before." Mr. Freeman sent the Oyster-catcher to be stuffed at Wellingborough, and was good enough to send it to me at Lilford as a present, a few days before writing the letter just quoted. A Scotchman who was staying at Lilford in the early spring of 1877, and who knew this species well, assured me that he put up six or seven Oyster-catchers from a gravelly spot where cattle drink, on the banks of our river below Lilford. I never personally saw a bird of this species alive in our county, but I have more than once recognized its loud and remarkable whistle overhead after dark. As the Oyster-catcher finds its food of mussels, limpets, sea-worms, and other marine animals principally on our sea-coasts and the shingle-banks of rapid rivers, our Nen valley can present but few attractions to it, and its visits are exceptional and irregular, probably caused, as is the case with several species of more strictly marine habits, by being blown out of their intended course at night, though the valleys of rivers, especially when their course is, roughly speaking, north and south, are no doubt much used as lines of migration by various birds that do not make any permanent stay in them. My

acquaintance with this species in its breeding-localities was originally formed on Annet, one of the uninhabited islets of the Scilly group, low and sandy, with shingly shores, the chief vegetation consisting of short grass, sea-pinks, and clumps of the common bracken, here we found about a dozen pairs of old birds, several young unable to fly, and a few hard-set eggs, laid without a nest of any sort, in some instances on the shell-strewn sand just above high-water mark, and in others on the bare turf. The eggs, generally three in number, are of a creamy stone-colour, streaked and spotted with very dark brown and grey, but vary considerably, and I have seen specimens that might easily be mistaken, from their colour and markings, for those of the Stone-Curlew. The old birds are exceedingly clamorous when their breeding-haunts are invaded, and fly around screaming and whistling, with their wings quivering rapidly. They will also occasionally feign lameness, in the same manner as the Peewit, to draw attention away from their young. In the autumn and winter these birds collect in large flocks and haunt the sea-coasts, apparently preferring localities which present a mixture of sand, rocks, and mud. At high water in such spots the Oystercatchers generally congregate on a projecting reef of rocks or a sand-spit, and are, as a rule, very wary and difficult of approach, starting off with loud whistling cries, they usually fly out to sea for some distance and make in for the next favourite resting-place. By lying up amongst the rocks and having the birds driven, I have obtained as many specimens as I desired, but I never tried to make any havoc in their ranks, as although a young Oystercatcher is tolerably palatable, the old ones are exceedingly coarse, tough,

and fishy in flavour, and they are certainly most conspicuously ornamental in many places whose aspect would be dreary without them. In Scotland many of these birds breed on the shingly banks and islets of rivers, at a great distance from the sea, such as the Spey, the 'Tay and its affluent streams; we were frequently visited in August and September at Gaick in Inverness-shire by family parties of four or five, no doubt excursionists from the breeding-places on the first-named river, some eleven miles from our lodge. These parties frequented the sandy southern end of the largest of a chain of three small lochs, the head waters of the river 'Tromie; their food, whilst with us there, seemed to consist of small freshwater mollusks and various insects. I cannot say that I ever noticed that they searched for earthworms, of which they could, if so disposed, have found an abundant supply in the rushy meadows that fringed their favourite sand-banks.

The Oyster-catcher is tolerably common as a vernal migrant on the lower Guadalquivir and in other parts of Spain. I have also met with it in many other districts of Southern Europe. For many years past the aviary at Lilford has seldom been for any length of time without two or more of these handsome birds, which I procure generally from Leadenhall Market, they become very tame, and feed readily on raw chopped liver, broken bread, small snails, and earthworms, all of which food is carefully washed before being swallowed. In the summer my Oyster-catchers eke out their diet by the capture of many house-flies, and it is surprising to observe the accuracy with which they pick these insects from the brickwork and gravel, with beaks apparently ill adapted for the

purpose, though admirably formed for prising limpets from the rocks.

These Oyster-catchers live at peace with a great variety of other species, and when not engaged in feeding or washing, doze away the day on one leg, and if roused without being alarmed, will often hop away without *untucking* the other. They now and then perch atop of the clipped privet bushes, or on the larger perches, with which their abode is furnished, and, in common with most wading birds, show great sense in never flying against the wire netting.

#### 141. BLACK-WINGED STILT.

*Himantopus melanopterus.*

The only record that I possess of the occurrence of the Stilt in the localities of which I am treating is contained in a list of birds furnished to me by Mr. A. Elliot, late of Stamford, who, writing in 1876, states:—"Long-legged Plover. This remarkable bird, now in the possession of Dr. Tootel, Newark, was killed about 1840-45, in the fen-district of Long Sutton." This village is within a short distance of Wisbeach, and although not in Northamptonshire, is situated in a district watered by our Nen.

The Stilt is only a straggler to our Islands, and never abundant therein, generally appearing in the summer months in pairs or small parties. I gather from the fourth edition of Yarrell, that this bird has been obtained in Surrey, Hants, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Sussex, Kent, Oxon, Notts, Gloucestershire, Anglesea, Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincoln, and Yorkshire; it has also occurred in Scotland and Ireland. This



species is very abundant in Southern Spain, where it makes its appearance in April, and breeds in the open marshes, making a slight nest of dry grass or fragments of reed, often on the bare mud, occasionally in a tuft of soft rushes, and now and then actually on the water-weeds that cover the surface of the shallow pools of rain-water in the depressions of these great plains. The eggs, four in number, are laid in the first fortnight of May, and in shape and character of markings somewhat resemble those of the Peewit; but their ground-colour differs in being of a warm stone-colour, from the almost invariably green tinge of those of the last-named bird. We generally met with the nests of the Stilt in groups of from a dozen to thirty or forty in a colony, occupying a very limited space; in one instance the nests seemed to have been built at random amongst those of a large colony of two species of Tern and some of the Pratincole: the only bird, however, that breeds in any considerable number in these marshes, whose eggs might possibly be mistaken for those of the Stilt, is the Avocet, but the eggs of this curious bird are larger, and generally laid in dryer spots than those chosen by the species of which I am treating.

The Stilt appears to feed principally upon insects, which it picks from the surface of the mud and water, or catches as they fly around. We found the birds exceedingly tame, indeed they never seemed to notice our presence, except in the immediate neighbourhood of their eggs or young, when they would circle about us with loud cries and evolutions which reminded me of the Peewits at home. In other cases I have often remained for many minutes, both on horseback and on foot, entirely unconcealed,

within a few yards of Stilts as they waded, busily feeding as mentioned above.

This bird is a common vernal migrant to many parts of Southern Europe and Northern Africa. I met with a few in the winter of 1856 in the neighbourhood of Tunis, but the majority of those that breed in Europe go much further south for the cold weather. The flight of the Stilt, with its legs stretched to their full extent, somewhat resembles that of the Herons, and the bird is so peculiar and conspicuous, that I fear there is but little chance of a visitor of this species escaping the gun in our country.

#### 142. GREY PHALAROPE.

*Phalaropus lobatus.*

In an interesting work by the Rev. G. C. Green, entitled 'Recollections of Natural History and Sport,' I find that the author, in writing of the fauna of Everdon, Norths (where his Eton holidays seem to have been chiefly spent), refers to Daventry Reservoir and the smaller one not far from it, known as the Old Reservoir, as the most favoured resort of all the (feathered) rarities, and states:—"Here the Grey Phalarope was sometimes procured, one specimen of which came to our lot."\* From the context, I infer that these occurrences must have taken place about forty years ago, and it is somewhat remarkable that, although this erratic species has appeared in almost every county in England, the only other positive record that I possess of it in Northamptonshire is

\* *Cf.* concluding paragraph of this article.

contained in a letter recently received from Colonel C. I. Strong, of Thorpe Hall, near Peterborough, and runs thus:—"A Grey Phalarope was shot near Wansford some four years ago and shown to me, I think, by Mr. Chas. Percival, of the 'Haycock.'" I have only twice seen this bird alive—once on the mudflats of the harbour of Santander in the early part of December, 1876, and a few days afterwards at sea in the Bay of Biscay, where I noticed a Phalarope swimming unconcernedly almost under the bows of my yacht, about five miles off Rivadesella, so that I am, of course, unable to write anything of its habits from personal observation, except to confirm the many published accounts of the extraordinary tameness of the bird, and for full details must refer my readers to the standard modern works on European ornithology. I may, however, summarize the matter on the authority of the fourth edition of Yarrell, in which work I find that the breeding-haunts of the Grey Phalarope are the circumpolar regions of our globe, that its irregular visits, occasionally in considerable numbers, to our Islands have generally taken place in the autumn or winter. The vast majority of British specimens are in the grey plumage of winter; an exception to this is, however, quoted in the work just referred to, in the case of "a beautifully marked adult bird, which was killed in Wiltshire, in the month of August, and retained at that time a great portion of the true red colours of the breeding-season, or summer plumage." The visits of this species to our Islands appear to be much more frequent on the eastern coast of Scotland and England and the southern coast of the latter than elsewhere. Mr. J. H. Gurney, jun., is quoted, *loc.*

*supra cit.*, as having recorded the slaughter of upwards of five hundred Grey Phalaropes between the 20th August and 8th October, 1866; of these about two hundred and fifty were obtained in Sussex. I may here mention that Mr. Ed. Hart, the well-known taxidermist of Christchurch, Hants, recently informed me that fourteen of these birds were brought to him from the neighbourhood of that town in October and November, 1886.

In this family of birds the females are slightly larger and more brilliantly coloured than the males, the contrast between the bright colours of the summer plumage and the delicate greys of the winter dress is very striking. The eggs, four in number, are of a greenish yellow, thickly spotted with dark brown, and are said to be laid in June, in slight depressions in grass or on shingle, with very little, if any, nest.

A stuffed specimen of the Grey Phalarope was sent to me with other birds, all killed about Daventry Reservoir, for identification in 1893 by Mr. E. C. Burton. With a few exceptions no dates of capture accompanied these specimens, and as the Phalarope had evidently been stuffed and mounted for many years, it occurs to me that it may probably be one of those alluded to at the commencement of the present article.

#### 143. RED-NECKED PHALAROPE.

*Phalaropus hyperboreus.*

Colonel Strong, in the letter to which I have referred in the last article, gave me a short list of some uncommon birds, now stuffed, in his possession, and for the most part collected by his father, and at

the end of the said list wrote:—"Red-necked Phalarope in summer plumage (or nearly so); all, I expect, from the Mere," *i. e.* Whittlesea. I admit that the above is but slender evidence as to the occurrence of this species in our district, but I know that the majority of the rare birds collected by the late Doctor Strong of Thorpe Hall were obtained from the neighbouring fens, and as there is no great improbability in this instance, I give the story as it came to me.

Although this species still breeds in some abundance in the Hebrides and Shetland, and has only of late years been exterminated by senseless collectors in the Orkney Islands, its recorded visits to England on migration are very rare in comparison with those of the Grey Phalarope. As I never had the pleasure of seeing the Red-necked Phalarope alive, I must again refer my readers to more fortunate authors. In general habits, colour of eggs, food, relative size and coloration of the sexes, it seems that this bird much resembles the Grey Phalarope, but it is a smaller bird, with a more slender bill, the difference between its summer and winter dress is far less remarkable, and it appears to prefer the vicinity of fresh water to that of the sea. Both species of Phalarope swim with the greatest ease; in the case of the Grey Phalarope mentioned as seen by us in the Bay of Biscay, the attitude reminded me much of that of a Teal with the head and neck drawn in and slightly thrown back. I should imagine that there would be but little difficulty in keeping Phalaropes in captivity in a roomy and well-watered aviary, and most certainly it would not be easy to meet with more interesting or graceful little birds.



## 144. WOODCOCK.

*Scolopax rusticula.*

Although the Woodcock is known to the great majority of our fellow countymen only as an autumnal migrant, several instances of its breeding within our borders are on record, and it is more than probable that many more have remained unknown, or at all events unrecorded. Morton, at p. 428 of his work on the 'Natural History of Northamptonshire,' states "'tis very rarely indeed that any Woodcocks or Snipes, the former of them especially, stay the summer and breed with us; yet as rare as it is, there was found a nest of young Woodcocks in a moist ground nigh Morsley Wood, Northamptonshire, anno 1699, which were presented to Sir Edward Nicholls." I well remember hearing of the finding of some young Woodcocks on the manor of Wadenhoe, and on making enquiry of Perkins, who still is head gamekeeper on that property, he informed me, through Lieut.-Col. Irby, that on May 7th, 1863, at the bottom of Little Wadenhoe Wood, he saw one old and four young Woodcocks, the latter as big as Pheasants a month old, and able to fly a little way; he shot one young one and caught another, following it up; never saw others in breeding-season in these parts. From W. Jones, gamekeeper to L. Loyd, Esq., at Monk's Orchard, Kent, I received a letter, dated June 17, 1887, in which he wrote as follows:— "While in the service of T. Phillips, Esq., as gamekeeper, in the end of July, 1862, I saw what I thought to be an old Woodcock cross the ride in Cotterstock Wood in front of me; on walking into

the cover some little distance from the ride, I sprung two old birds and three young ones, the young being half-grown; I did not see a nest. I am quite sure as to the month and the year in which I saw them." The above are the only instances of Woodcocks breeding with us of which I possess any details, but I know that young Woodcocks were found in my boyhood by one of our gamekeepers in Lilford Wood, and I have a distinct recollection of having heard stories to the same effect with regard to Bearshank Wood and Brigstock Forest. From the testimony of many most competent observers and authors it seems that a very much larger number of Woodcocks breed in the British Islands at present than was the case fifty years ago, and I imagine that there are very few counties of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland that cannot now claim young Woodcocks amongst their "natural productions."

This bird is a very early breeder, often laying in the second or third week of March, generally before the end of that month; the time of incubation has not, it seems, been positively recorded, but from analogy should last from eighteen to twenty days. The nest is, as a rule, nothing more than a depression in the ground lined with dead leaves and occasionally a little dry moss, often, but not invariably, well sheltered above, but with open ground for some distance around it. The full complement of eggs is four; they are very large for the size of the bird, are not so pointed at the small end as those of most of the other species of the family *Scolopacidæ*, and in colour bear a certain resemblance to those of the Land-Rail, being of a creamy white with markings of ash-grey and pale rusty brown.

It is now a well-ascertained fact that the female Woodcock carries her young to and from the feeding-grounds, for, although the chicks can run within a very short time after being hatched, the nest is generally situated in a dry locality, often on light sandy soil, in which few, if any, earthworms are to be found; it appears also that the parent bird often adopts this method of removing her young from danger on the approach of man. For very interesting details on this subject, and the manner in which the carrying business is performed, I must refer my readers to the 4th edition of Yarrell, vol. iii., and the various authorities there cited.

Our bird is found from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and at the extreme S.W. extremity of its range, *i. e.* the Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands, it is stated to be a constant resident.

In a most entertaining and exhaustive monograph on the Woodcock, by Dr. Julius Hoffman, of Stuttgart, who has evidently devoted a great portion of his life, with characteristic German thoroughness, to the pursuit and study of this species, I find it stated that in Central Europe the southern limit of the breeding-range seems to lie between the 45th and 46th deg. N. lat.; their south-eastern European limit, however, extends further southwards, as the nest has been occasionally met with in Roumelia. This author adds, "Northwards of lat. 48° the Woodcock nests all over Europe, but there are many more in the East than in the West, and very few breed in France and Belgium . . . on the other hand they abound in the Carpathians."

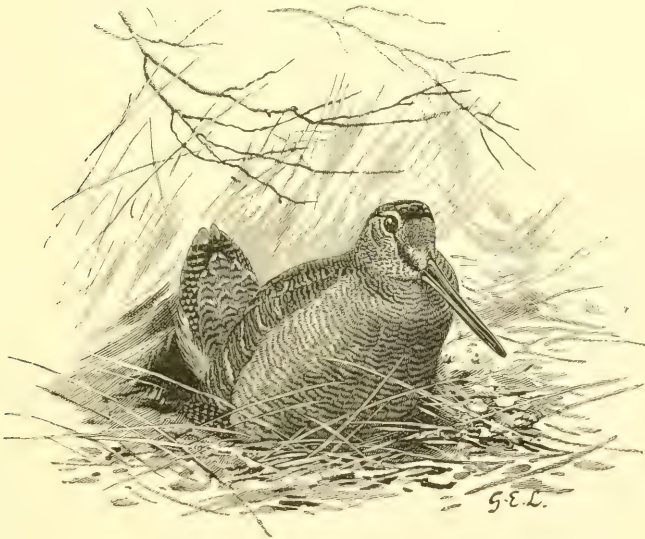
Mr. Seebohm, in his 'British Birds,' vol. iii., writes of this bird:—"In Scandinavia it breeds up to the

Arctic circle; in West Russia up to about lat. 65°; but in East Russia and Siberia not much further north than lat. 60°": he adds that in Asia the breeding-range of the Woodcock extends to the Caucasus, the Himalayas, Mongolia, and the mountains of Japan.

The migrations of this species, although no doubt guided to a very great extent by fixed rules, subject of course to the varying influences of temperature, wind, and locality, are very difficult to comprehend. My own theory is that the great majority of the Woodcocks that leave their breeding-quarters in Scandinavia and Russia on the approach of winter push towards the south-west, remaining in districts in which they can procure food till the ground is too hard for them, when they continue their journey, taking with them those that have nested in these halting-places; this broad line of migration, extending from the Arctic circle to the chain of the Balkans and the Alps, in my opinion, supplies the British Islands and France with the bulk of our autumn and winter Woodcocks. Of course it is more than possible that many N.-Asiatic bred Woodcocks also visit us, but I believe that the majority of the enormous numbers of these birds that visit Turkey in Europe, Greece, and in smaller numbers Central and Southern Italy, the north coast of Africa, the islands of the western Mediterranean, and Spain and Portugal, in autumn, have spent the previous summer in the forests of the Caucasus, Northern Persia, and possibly Asia Minor.

As regards our own Islands it is a curious fact, confirmed by many authors, sportsmen, and game-keepers, as well as by my own experience in the

Highlands of Scotland, that, as a general rule, the Woodcocks, old and young, leave their breeding-quarters very early in September, and that for at least a month, that is till the arrival of the autumn flights, many of the favourite summer and winter resorts of this species may be carefully beaten without producing a single "cock." The question of course occurs, whither do our British-bred Woodcocks migrate? as records of their appearance in September are, so far as I can ascertain, very scarce, not only in our own country, but also in France. To this



Woodcock. Ready to rise.

question I most certainly can give no answer, and should be very glad to elicit a satisfactory one. On this subject I may again refer my readers to the authorities quoted by Mr. Seebohm in his previously cited article on the Woodcock, and I could adduce many others.



I am convinced that the Woodcock often, if not generally, rears two broods of young in a year, as those of the first hatch are strong on the wing by the beginning of June, and I have, on the other hand, frequently seen young Woodcocks in Scotland who could only make a poor flight of it between August 20 and the end of that month. In Northamptonshire, at least in that part of the county with which I am best acquainted, the Woodcock pretty regularly appears between the 12th and 25th of October. In 1887 Mr. G. Hunt flushed one in his garden at Wadenhoe on Oct. 10th; this is the earliest autumnal arrival in the neighbourhood of Lilford of which I have any record; for although I heard of Woodcocks having been seen in the last week of September 1886, I have no doubt that the birds then observed were lingerers that had bred, or been bred, in our county. I may add that the above is the only report of Woodcocks in Norths in September that has come to my knowledge.

The Woodcock is a nocturnal bird, and in stormy or thick weather, at the time of his first arrival, will, as the common saying goes, "drop in anywhere," and with us may be found in turnips, or still more commonly in the old fences that border our roads and lanes. I feel certain that the autumnal migratory instinct and the intention of the Woodcock is ever "westward ho!" that he feeds greedily during the first two or three hours after sunset, and then seeks some sheltered and quiet spot for rest and digestion; the latter operation completed, if the night is clear and the wind moderate, our bird resumes his travels, and as soon as daylight appears drops into the first attractive-looking spot. If, on the contrary, the night





is very dark or tempestuous, the Woodcock does not travel from his feeding-ground further than into the nearest shelter from the wind.

In our neighbourhood the first flight of Woodcocks appears to be small in number and much scattered; the second flight, which generally arrives sooner or later during the month of November, is more numerous, and the birds of which it is composed seem to find their way at once to the coverts that they prefer, and to remain there as long as the weather remains open and our ploughed lands available as feeding-grounds; as soon as the frost becomes severe the Woodcocks naturally seek the margins of running brooks and boggy spring-heads for their nocturnal banquet, but a few days of really hard frost, more especially if accompanied by snow, soon clear our woods of these most desirable birds.

I cannot hear of any really large bag of Woodcocks having been made in Northamptonshire. An old gamekeeper of ours often told me a story of having, with one companion—a very bad shot—killed twenty-six in Bearshank Wood; this was many years ago, in the days of flint and steel. The old man always said that if his companion had been a tolerable performer with the fowling-piece the bag would have been doubled. I have been informed of “about twenty” as the largest bag ever made in one day in various of the most likely and favourite coverts of the northern division of our county.

In November 1870 I was staying for shooting at Bulwick, and well remember that on our arrival at the wood’s side our host, the late Mr. Thos. Tryon, was informed by one of his game-watchers that he had seen a flight of birds, “some dozen or fifteen,”

that he believed to be Woodcocks, flying together close to the ground in the dusk of the previous evening in the direction of one of the coverts that we were about to beat, one of which was always a pretty sure find for these birds; surely enough we flushed nineteen Woodcocks, and had the good luck to bring seventeen of them to bag. On another occasion, long before this occurrence, in my early shooting-days, we were beating in Tichmarsh Wood, near Lowick, on the Drayton property, and had nearly finished our day's sport without having, so far as I can recollect, seen a Woodcock, when suddenly we came upon a great number of them. It was growing dark, and we no doubt flushed several birds a second time, but during the short space of daylight that remained there must at least have been forty separate cries of "Woodcock!!" Only nine, however, were killed, and on beating the whole wood (of about 200 acres) over on the following day we only found three.

The favourite coverts for Woodcocks in the neighbourhood of Lilford are the fine range of woodlands on the estate of Lord Lyveden; but I do not think that the score even there has ever exceeded fifteen in one day. It is impossible to lay down any exact rules as to the most likely parts of any particular wood for Woodcocks. When they first arrive they seem to prefer young under-covert of three or four years' growth; a thick bramble bush under which they can creep and sit in comparative gloom, with ready exit by means of a rabbits' run, is a very favourite resort, and the dense jungles of old blackthorn, formerly so characteristic of our "forest" country, impervious to man except on hands and knees, but quite hollow at bottom, where the ground



is covered with short green moss, are, or I fear I should say were, the best-loved diurnal haunts of the Woodcock, especially in wet weather. It is, in my experience, rare to find a Woodcock in thick grassy or sedgy covert; the fact is that although the bird likes good shelter from rain, wind, and perhaps from the sun's rays overhead, he also likes to have a clear and open view around him, and, in common with all nocturnal feeders, the option of sunning himself occasionally; for these reasons an isolated evergreen such as a young spruce or other thick conifer, a holly bush, a clump of rhododendron, laurel, box, &c. is likely to shelter a cock, but Woodcocks, do not, I think, like masses of evergreen shrubs, unless in certain exceptional circumstances. The predilection of our bird for particular spots, and even for particular bushes, is well known to most sportsmen. It is a common thing for a gamekeeper to say "if there is a Woodcock in the country he should be in such a quarter of such a wood," and in the great majority of instances I have found these prophecies verified by events.

In the above remarks with regard to the haunts of the Woodcock I have been referring almost entirely to my own experiences in Northamptonshire, a county which is, as I have shown, by no means especially favoured by these migrants. For details as to large bags of Woodcocks in England and Ireland I must refer my readers to Yarrell, and to a most interesting work by Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, entitled 'The Wild-fowler in Ireland.' All the evidence adduced in these and many other works goes to support my theory of the westward inclination of the Woodcock. A very few instances of the occurrence

of our bird in N. America are on record, but the Atlantic Ocean is a considerable "obstacle," and accounts for the vast numbers of Woodcocks that congregate in the south-west of Ireland as the extreme limit of their travels, the comparatively mild climate and vast extent of covert and "soft" places offering every inducement as a permanent resting-place.

I have occasionally had a share in a fair day's Woodcock-shooting in Ireland, still more often in N. Devon; in this last-named locality, where, when I used to shoot there, game in the strict sense of the word was comparatively scarce, the pursuit of these uncertain autumn visitors was, to my mind, the very acme of good sport, the coverts being very varied in character, consisting of large woods of oak and other trees, fir-plantations with a dense undergrowth of brambles, furze-brakes, and perhaps prettiest of all, from a Woodcock-shooter's point of view, purling brooks fringed with alders, birch, hazel, holly, and tall bracken, besides one natural covert of considerable extent which combined all possible attraction for the birds, not the least being the almost entire absence of tame Pheasants and Rabbits, for the Woodcock loves to sit and doze through the daylight hours undisturbed, and will never remain for any length of time in woods full of Pheasants. Rabbits I do not consider as so objectionable to Woodcocks, as they do not move about much till about the time when the latter are thinking of going out to dine, but if the birds have been in any particular district for some time, my experience goes to the effect that they will almost invariably be found to prefer the woods that are least frequented by other animals of any kind.

This of course refers to England, where horned cattle are, as a rule, excluded from the coverts, but in the wilds of European Turkey, where in many cases the cattle aforesaid are the only road-makers, the insects that frequent their dung are an undeniable attraction to the Woodcock.

In our county I have more than once seen a Woodcock mobbed by Titmice, Chaffinches, and other small birds as he threaded his way amongst tall trees, a habit that proves the comparative scarcity of the bird, as these little birds no doubt took them for Hawks or Owls, and treated them accordingly. I never noticed this in any country much frequented by the subject of these notes.

The Woodcock-shooting in Epirus and Albania was, before the insane cession of Corfu, perhaps the very best to be obtained in any part of the world; it was my good fortune to spend the winters of 1856-7 and 1857-8 in those parts, with Corfu as my base of operations. It was then easy for two or three guns to kill from 50 to 100 Woodcocks in a day's shooting, and larger bags than this were constantly made. At the periods just mentioned Englishmen could land and roam at pleasure on Turkish territory without restriction of any sort, and without the danger from the murderous brigands that made the sometimes excellent sport in Greece a very questionable enjoyment. The facilities offered by the snug little harbours on the coast opposite to the island of Corfu, the beauty of the country, and the variety of game, made perfect happiness to lovers of the gun, and to one who combined with that affection a taste for ornithology, a sojourn in the Ionian Islands at that time remains "a joy for ever." These coasts

still afford attractions to many Englishmen and shooters of other nationalities, but the rapacity of the Greeks, and the veneer of civilization forced upon the Turks, must do away with a very great deal of the comforts and pleasures formerly enjoyed under the Union Jack.

To return to the habits of the Woodcock in our country, I am inclined to think that during the latter weeks of March and the first week in April more of these birds may be found in our woodlands than at any other time of the year; but they are at this season generally paired, very poor in condition, and now very properly protected by the law. It is, however, at this season that the German sportsman looks forward to his principal sport at Woodcocks, as it seems that, comparatively speaking, few of these birds remain in the woods and forests of Central Europe during the winter; whilst on the return migration in the early spring, under favourable conditions of weather, many Woodcocks drop in for a few days and are shot by ambushed gunners in the mornings and evenings as they are "roding," *i. e.* toying in pursuit of one another along the glades and rides in the woods. At this time of year in our own woodlands I have found that Woodcocks will run before beaters and dogs, and are generally wilder and more difficult of approach than in the legitimate shooting-season.

On a still evening in early April, if there are Woodcocks in our woods, one hears them rise, and if the observer is favourably situated, in a few moments one or two of these birds will come dashing down a ride about the tops of the trees with a curious guttural croak, varied by a short whistle. The birds

are pretty certain to return once at least by the same glade or opening in the wood, and sometimes pass three or four times before finally leaving the wood for their feeding-grounds. Their flight at these times is generally very rapid. An old gamekeeper used to say "they flies out like a Snipe and comes in like a [h]Owl." The Woodcocks seem to use the same glade for these evening flights year after year, and their passing-places being well known by tradition of the elders, they have in many cases acquired the name of Cockshot or Cockshoot. The Woodcock is easily snared at his feeding-places, and in certain places at home and abroad a good many were, and perhaps still are, taken in hanging nets.

I have often heard of and twice witnessed a curious habit of this bird that I do not remember to have seen in any way explained. I was sent forward to stand in a ride of an oak copse in Ireland whilst the beaters and two shooters beat the covert towards me. I had hardly reached my post when a shot was fired and the cry of "Cock forward!" reached my ears. The young oaks in front of me were pretty tall and very thick, and in a minute or two I heard something crash into them within a few yards of me. I could see for a certain distance in under the trees, and looking for what I expected would be the dead Woodcock, was astonished to see the bird crouching close and busily employed in covering itself with dead leaves, which it deliberately drew over its back by two and three at a time, scuffling meanwhile slightly with its feet to make a depression. In a very few minutes I could see nothing of the bird but one eye, and though I fired several shots at other birds from my post, this bird remained in its "cache"



till poked up by a spaniel, when it rose and flew back over the heads of the advancing beaters without giving a shot to the shooters who accompanied them. On another occasion, in Epirus, I saw a Woodcock go through a precisely similar performance, but in this case the Cock was pursued by a Sparrow-hawk, who would have caught him if it had not been for the sight of me. I need not say that I left this Woodcock in peace in his leafy couch.

Woodcocks are easily kept in confinement and consume enormous numbers of earthworms. They can be "trained off" on bread soaked in milk and chopped bullock's liver, and occasionally become very tame.

To give some idea of the great difference in weight that occurs amongst Woodcocks, I may mention that of thirteen sent to me in one winter from Northamptonshire, Lancashire, Kent, and Pembrokeshire, the heaviest weighed full  $14\frac{1}{4}$  oz., the lightest barely  $10\frac{1}{4}$  oz.; all were in good condition of flesh and feather. From twelve to thirteen ounces I take to be a fair average weight for these birds; the heaviest that I ever weighed pulled down nearly  $16\frac{1}{2}$  oz., and far heavier weights than this are on record.

#### 145. GREAT SNIPE.

*Scolopax major.*

The Great, or, as it is perhaps more generally called, the Solitary Snipe is by no means abundant in any part of our Islands at any season of the year, and in this county is decidedly a rare bird. I have received many notices of the occurrence of (so-called)

Solitary Snipes in this neighbourhood, but almost all my informants, on investigation, seem to have been deceived, either by an unusually heavy specimen of the Common Snipe, or in many cases to have taken the Green Sandpiper for the real article.

Personally I have only seen one of this species on wing near Lilford; this took place in September 1850. I had just shot two Partridges from a small covey on a grassy bean-stubble near Aldwincle, and was ramming the wadding on to my powder in reloading, when a large Snipe with a great deal of white about it, and tail spread out fan-wise, rose within a few feet of me and flew low and slowly to a high fence, which it just topped, in a manner that made me feel sure that it had dropped close on the far side of the hedge. I made for the nearest gap, and beat every inch of the large pasture-field with two good dogs, but saw nothing more of the Snipe. I was convinced at the time that this was a Great Snipe, and since I have become well acquainted with the species am more than ever certain of the fact.

Mr. G. Hunt of Wadenhoe shot a Great Snipe near Thorpe on Sept. 13th, 1880. This bird, a young female, weighing a little over 8 oz., is now stuffed in my collection, and is the only Northamptonshire specimen that I ever handled, but Mr. Hunt assured me that within a short time of killing this bird he shot another near the same spot, which fell into the river, then in full flood, and through lack of a retriever was lost.

The Hon. Thos. W. Fitzwilliam, in a letter dated Nov. 17th, 1883, wrote:—"I am quite certain that I saw two Great Snipes yesterday, one got up under my horse's nose in the ploughed field, wheat now

coming up, which lies between the two bottom Kingsthorpe spinnies (near Barnwell), the other some way further on. I never saw any Snipe half as big before, and as I have done a great deal of Snipe-shooting I am sure I am not mistaken. The flight of these birds did not seem to be as quick as that of the Common Snipe."

The above, if Mr. Fitzwilliam, was not mistaken, is a very late date for the Great Snipe in this country, in which it appears that this species is usually met with on its southward migration in August, September, and the first half of October. I have several authentic records of Great Snipes from the Whittlesea district, but those above quoted are the only notices of the bird within our political county boundaries to which I can at this moment refer without any doubt.

The Great Snipe breeds, according to Yarrell, in Norway and Sweden, Denmark, Northern Germany, and in European Russia as far south as Bessarabia. Concerning its pairing and breeding-habits I know nothing from personal observation, and must refer those of my readers who are interested in the subject to the standard works on ornithology. In those parts of Europe in which this Snipe does not nest it is known as a bird of double passage, very much more commonly met with in the western countries on the autumnal than on the vernal migration. In the Ionian Islands and adjacent mainland it is, however, more commonly met with in May than at any other time, though not rare in September in the valleys of Epirus. We shot several in Cyprus in April and May, and I shot one and flushed another on the east coast of Spain, near Valencia, in March

1864. In autumn the Great Snipe may be met with from the Caspian Sea to the Tagus, and is a winter visitor to S. Africa.

This bird does not appear to have any special predilection for the wet and swampy marshes so dear to the Common Snipe, and in Corfu we often met with it whilst Quail-shooting on perfectly dry ground amongst the currant-vines. In Cyprus we found two or three for about ten days in a rushy spot near Larnaca, on the borders of a rivulet caused by leakage in the aqueduct that supplies that town with water. We killed one or two each day that we visited this spot during those days, finding fresh arrivals on every occasion.

This Snipe will often run before a dog for some distance before taking wing, and is usually very tame, rising with apparent reluctance, and offering the easiest of shots. If not shot at, the Great Snipe generally flies low for a short distance, rises for a few yards into the air, and pitches straight down to the ground. I never saw one of these birds mount high, or indulge in the wild erratic flight so frequent with the Common Snipe.

The flesh of the Great Snipe is excellent, and much sought after wherever the bird is known.

I have been told by a friend, formerly in the military service of the Czar, of very large numbers of these birds brought to bag within easy reach of St. Petersburg in August and September. He assured me that in those parts bags of from fifty to eighty Great Snipes were often brought home, killed by one or two guns, and the latter number occasionally exceeded.

It was never my good fortune to see more than

six or eight of these birds in one day, but a gentleman whose acquaintance I made at Naples, who was devoted to Snipe-shooting, told me that if I was there in May he could assure me of from a dozen to twenty shots for several consecutive days at "Royal Snipes" in the marshes of the Gulf of Salerno, which are famous for the abundance of the common species during the winter months.

In England it would be difficult to name any special spot as likely to hold a Great Snipe, but I was told, during the first winter that I passed at Corfu, that when the vernal migration of Quails had set in I should be certain to find two or more of these Snipes in a certain currant-ground within two miles of the town, and I found this prediction verified to the letter, as on the first morning that I searched the said ground I found that I had been forestalled by a native gunner, who offered me two Great Snipes that he had just killed, with apologies for having spoiled my chance. I was there the next morning at daylight, and sure enough there were three Great Snipes, which I brought to bag. I visited this spot frequently till the middle of May, never finding less than two of these birds, and on one occasion five, though I beat similar ground in the neighbourhood for miles without finding anything worthy of powder and shot but Quails. On rising, this bird almost always spreads out its tail, and in spring occasionally utters a low croak.

I presume that the name of Solitary was originally applied to this bird from the fact that it is never seen to rise in "wisps" or flocks like the Common Snipe; but in my experience it is exceptional to find one of these birds without another or more in its immediate



neighbourhood, and I have occasionally flushed two simultaneously.

The heaviest Great Snipe that I ever weighed pulled down a fraction over  $8\frac{3}{4}$  oz. ; the lightest that I ever heard of was killed in the spring of 1888 in Cyprus, and only reached  $5\frac{3}{4}$  oz., a weight occasionally exceeded by our common species.

Double, Single, and Half Snipe are appellations occasionally bestowed upon our three British species respectively, but I think that the subject of this article is better known by the misnomer Solitary than by any other more appropriate designation.

The eggs of the Great Snipe are very large for the size of the bird, and the Editor of 4th ed. of Yarrell opines that many eggs of the Reeve (*Machetes pugnax*, ♀) are, or have been, sold to collectors as those of this species.

#### 146. COMMON SNIPE.

##### *Scolopax media.*

Although we have not as yet discovered that this well-known bird has ever been ascertained to nest in the immediate neighbourhood of Lilford\*, I shall be able to adduce good evidence of its having done so of late years, in at least one instance, at no great distance from us ; and in the Soke of Peterborough I am given to understand that it still breeds regularly in small numbers. The evidence alluded to above was kindly given to me in a letter from Mr. H. Capron of Southwick, who therein informed me that

\* I have reason to believe that I was intentionally imposed upon in this matter.

on several occasions in the month of July 1884 he saw young Snipes barely able to fly. On this subject Morton, at p. 428 of his 'Natural History of Northamptonshire,' says, "as to Snipes, some few of them yearly stay, and, as I am told, breed with us upon Long-Buckby Heath. 'Tis certain they have more than once been flush'd upon Pisford Heath, and thereabouts, in the very midst of summer."

The favourite breeding-haunts of the Snipe are moorlands and undrained sedge fens, but I know of many instances of their nesting in a tussock of rushes in well-drained meadow lands. The nest consists of a few stalks of bents or other grasses, and however moist its surroundings may be, is always placed in some dry spot.

The complement of eggs is four; for a description of them I must refer my readers to the many writers more gifted with the power of dealing verbally with shades of colour than myself.

Snipes generally lay during the first fortnight of April, sit about sixteen days, and very often rear a second brood. The aerial evolutions of these birds at pairing-time and the sounds then produced by them are most remarkable, and have been the subject of much, more or less learned, contention amongst ornithological authors.

If the weather is fine and sunny in the early part of March the Snipe, on rising from the ground, instead of giving forth its usual alarm-note, so commonly known as "scape," utters a low dissyllabic chuckle, to my ears best described as "cheevuck, cheevick," and suddenly darts up into the air, often to a very great height, and flies in wide circles, now and then stooping like a Falcon towards the earth

and producing a prolonged sound much resembling the bleat of a she-goat. I will not enter the lists by attempting to state positively how this sound is caused, as my opportunities for observation of our bird during the spring and early summer have been comparatively few, but I feel convinced that it is not a vocal performance. It is at all events easy to see that during the stoop (at which time *only* this sound is to be heard) the wings are quivering rapidly. Many authors are of opinion that the tail-feathers are the sole, or partial, agents in the performance, and a few still adhere to the "voice" theory. Be the truth as it may, the sound is so peculiar and remarkable that the bird has acquired in many countries names equivalent to "air-goat" and others quoted in the 4th ed. of 'Yarrell,' all having reference to the bleating character of Snipe-music.

In our valley near Lilford I think that I could make pretty sure of showing a Snipe or two in any month of the year except June; but taking one season with another I should fix the average date of first appearance in our meadows about the last week of July. We *always* hear of a few, and in very wet seasons a good many, Snipes in the first half of August; in that and the following month of 1853 our meadows swarmed with Snipes, of which the great majority were birds of the year, and in several subsequent disastrously wet summers we have experienced similar visitations.

These August Snipes generally lie very close on their first arrival, but as soon as they become well acquainted with the locality are as wild as at any other time of year, and in my opinion worthless for the table, as their principal diet consists of small

winged insects, and it is one of the rare true sayings that come to us from Ireland, that a Snipe is good for nothing till he has had a frost through him.

A few days of stormy rain in October generally bring in a flight of Snipes which as often as not make their first appearance in a turnip-field, but soon find out the soft places in our meadows, and remain with us till the first marked change in the weather, such as a sudden change of wind. A few nights of light frost have only the effect of adding to the weight of our birds and making them lie closer to the gun, but if the weather becomes really severe the Snipes gather for a few days at spring-heads or running brook-sides, and are difficult of approach; the main body soon shifts its quarters, leaving a few to be found singly or in couples in favoured spots; these lingerers are generally covered with fat and afford the easiest of shots. In fine still winter weather we usually find the Snipes very wild, but on a cloudy day with a stiff breeze they lie very close in this locality. Occasionally, at the first break up of a long frost in December or January, a fresh arrival of Snipes drops in at our river- and brook-sides, but this is here a very exceptional occurrence, and although, as I have previously stated, a Snipe or two may be found in almost every month of the year, we seldom see any great number after the departure of the October flights till the following March, when more or less of these erratic birds visit us on their return towards their breeding-places.

I may sum up the Snipe question in the neighbourhood of Lilford in a general way by saying that their numbers seem entirely to depend upon the amount of late summer or autumnal rain.









Excellent Snipe-shooting was formerly often to be obtained in the fen-lands below Peterborough, in Whittlesea Wash, and elsewhere. I have enjoyed a few days of capital sport there about the middle of October, and I believe that even now a good many Snipes may occasionally be found in that part of the country at that time of the year, but early information and an immediate start were essential to the making up of a bag, as the shooting is, or was, open to the public, and the birds, even if undisturbed, seldom remain there in any quantity for more than a very few days.

A late well-known friend of mine, who was at the time to which the following story relates an M.P. and an ardent supporter of his political party, told me that he once received a message in London from one of the professional gunners and pole-carriers at Whittlesea informing him that the Wash was full of Snipes, and urging him to go down thither without delay. My friend could not leave town till the early morning of the next day but one, and declared that on reaching the Wash he found no Snipes at all, but the ground dirty-white with fragments of the 'Globe' newspaper (in which he was violently attacked) that had been used as wadding by the Snipe-shooters of the day before. But the sudden movements of bodies of Snipes, though no doubt governed by fixed laws, and cogent reasons, depend upon causes more obscure to us and probably quite as rational as those of contending political parties, and in many, I might say most, of the favourite winter haunts of this species it is a common event to find a great abundance one day, and on the next, although perhaps exactly similar weather-readings may prevail, to find the ground completely deserted.

I have had some good Snipe-shooting in various parts of Ireland, my experience of that country being that the Snipes, though sometimes to be found in vast numbers upon the bogs, very seldom lie sufficiently close thereon to afford opportunities for making large bags, the best sport always being on the rushy undrained moors, pasture-lands, and swampy potato-fields.

A good many Snipes bred annually around a shooting-lodge that I formerly rented in Inverness-shire, not in the flat meadow-land at the bottom of the glen, but on the steep heather-clad hillsides that surrounded us, on the banks of the innumerable little burns that fed our principal stream. A few were always to be found on the flat in August, but their numbers were as nothing in comparison with those of the Snipes that came down nightly to feed, and might be heard after dark till the end of September.

Large numbers of Snipes breed in some of the Hebrides, and I have been told of great bags having occasionally been secured in Lewis and Harris in August and September; but in most of the districts in our country in which any considerable quantity of Snipes are bred they leave early, and very often in the great marshes of East Norfolk, for instance, but few of these birds are to be found between the end of August and the beginning of March, when they are, or should be, protected by the institution of "close time."

Our species is to be met with at various seasons throughout Europe and Asia, and in Africa it has, according to Yarrell, been recorded from the Gambia on the west, and the Somali country on the east coast of that continent. It has frequently occurred in

Greenland, but in N. America it is represented by a race to which authors have given specific rank and the title of Wilson's Snipe.

I have had excellent Snipe-shooting in the marshes of Tunis and Sardinia, and found many birds in March and April near Valencia, and on the Guadalquivir, in Sicily, Crete, and Cyprus, but never met with it in such enormous numbers anywhere as in Epirus in the winter of 1857.

We found so many Woodcocks and Wildfowl that we did not very often devote a whole day to the Snipes, but at certain spots within easy reach of Corfu there was no difficulty in killing to one's own gun (muzzle-loader) from twenty to thirty couples, and two or three experienced Snipe-shots often bagged more than fifty couples in the day. The largest number that I ever heard of as shot by one gun in Epirus was 163; this feat was performed by the late Captain Murray, formerly British Resident in Ithaca, at Butrinto, a few years before my arrival at Corfu in 1856.

In the island of Corfu fair sport might often be had in the Val di Roppa amongst the maize-fields and currant-vines; but as this happy valley lies within seven miles of the town of Corfu by an excellent road, it was much worked by officers of the garrison, and from twenty to thirty Snipes, a Woodcock or two, with an occasional Hare, Quail, Teal, or Mallard might be looked upon as a respectable morning's doing.

To my mind in the happy days when I could walk, and "hold straight," Snipe-shooting presented the most irresistible attraction, the varied character of the chances afforded by the birds, the often

treacherous nature of the ground, the never knowing "what might get up next," and the satisfaction of making quick double shots, enhancing the sport to a great extent. Many very good shots are entirely thrown out by finding an unwonted number of Snipes, and lose for a time their customary steadiness, and indeed with four or five birds rising with their sharp note of alarm at every few steps, it is very puzzling to keep the eye on the right bird, and not to shoot in too great a hurry, with a view to getting in a second barrel. A Snipe rising at twenty yards to the windward of the shooter presents a sufficiently difficult shot, whilst if approached with the wind on the shooter's back, or (to my thinking) still better on the left shoulder, the bird gives an easy shot at double that distance. There are, however, many days when it is difficult to approach within reasonable shooting-distance, the birds rising out of reach in "wisps," and going quite out of sight. In such cases, if the favourite spot is of no great extent, I have sometimes found it a successful plan to hide myself as near as possible, keeping a vigilant look out, as very often the Snipes will come dropping in again, either singly or in small numbers, and in such instances generally lie pretty close. Of course this waiting can only be of avail where there is no other favourite haunt of Snipes within a short distance, but when Snipes have found abundant food in any given spot for one or two nights they are certain to return to it sooner or later. In cases where the extent of good Snipe-ground is large, and the birds wild from wet or other causes, very good shooting may sometimes be obtained by "lying-up" in the best concealment that the locality affords, and having



the more remote portions of the marsh beaten over by a companion or two; a "rocketing" Snipe gives a very pretty shot, and is very much more easy to kill than may be generally supposed.

In many parts of the south of Europe Snipes are always more or less wild from the constant scouring of their haunts by Marsh-Harriers, which birds, though quite unable to capture an unwounded Snipe on wing, are marvellously quick at picking them up from the ground, and keep them in a constant state of restlessness. A Falcon, on the contrary, high in air will sometimes make Snipes lie very close. A good many young Snipes are taken by Merlins, and in Epirus it was rather the rule than the exception to lose slightly wounded birds through the attentions of these little robbers or the Harriers just mentioned.

For the most interesting details of, and excellent advice upon, Snipe-shooting in India, I heartily recommend to my readers the fascinating work entitled 'Letters on Sport in Eastern Bengal,' by Mr. F. B. Simson, whom I am proud to claim as a Northamptonshire man and fellow ornithologist.

The food of the Snipe consists principally of earth-worms, but in August we have often found the throats of young Snipes crammed with minute flying insects. In common with most wading birds, our Snipe is exceedingly voracious, and rapidly gains and loses flesh.

I once, and once only, weighed a Snipe that pulled down 6 oz. fair weight; with this solitary exception few have, in my experience, reached  $5\frac{1}{2}$  oz. I am inclined to consider from  $3\frac{1}{4}$  to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  oz. as about the average weight of English Snipes in winter. In Epirus I never weighed one that pulled down

more than  $4\frac{1}{4}$  oz. As I was writing this article on Sept. 18th, 1888, a Snipe was brought to me shot that morning by one of our gamekeepers near Thorpe, that weighed fully  $5\frac{3}{4}$  oz., this was an adult male with unusually long bill, and very fat. I may here mention that a good means of distinguishing this species from the Great Snipe is afforded by the number of the true tail-feathers, which in that bird *almost* always are sixteen, whilst in our Common Snipe fourteen is, as far as our experience goes, the unvarying complement.

#### 147. JACK SNIPE.

*Scolopax gallinula.*

This well-known little bird is a common autumnal visitor to this county as to most districts in our Islands, but there is no authentic record of its having bred in any part of them, though, as is the case with many species that nest habitually in the northernmost European countries, a solitary lingerer is occasionally to be met with in the summer, as if to prove the old adage that there is no rule without an exception.

British ornithologists are indebted, as in many other instances, to the indefatigable energy of the late Mr. John Wolley for the first authentic account of the breeding-habits and eggs of the Jack Snipe as discovered by him in Lapland, of which discovery a somewhat detailed account is to be found quoted in Yarrell.

With us at Lilford the Jack Snipe generally puts in an appearance in September; the earliest record I can find of killing one of these birds was on the

7th of that month, in shooting at a Partridge skimming along the embankment of the L.N.W. Railway near Thrapston; the Partridge fell, and on picking it up I was not a little surprised to find a "Jack" stone dead within a few inches of the bird at which I had fired. One of our gamekeepers, upon whose knowledge and *bona fides* I can implicitly rely, assured me that he flushed a Jack Snipe from a piece of boggy land near Thorpe on August 15th, 1891. It is a curious coincidence that the latest lingerer of this species that I ever heard of in the neighbourhood of Lilford was seen on April 16th of the same year.

This species differs in many respects from the Common Snipe, in none more so than its reluctance to take wing, its short flights, and its long endurance of severe frost. A Jack Snipe flushed one day in a particular spot, may almost certainly be found there or thereabouts every day through the winter months unless pursued relentlessly, and many amusing stories are told of a Jack Snipe having afforded sport through the season to an unskilful shooter. Now and then small flights of this species drop in upon us in the neighbourhood of Lilford in October and November, and ten or more have been killed on the same day in a ramble up our meadows by Mr. G. Hunt, who seldom allowed any attainable Snipe to escape him. This species, though not apparently so numerically abundant as the Common Snipe, has pretty nearly as wide a range in the Old World, breeding to the north of the Arctic circle, and going as far south as Ceylon, and the Blue Nile in winter. In my Snipe-shooting experience I have found the Jack Snipe more common in England and Ireland in the winter months than it is in Southern Europe or North Africa.

I presume that the food of this little bird must differ in some essential particulars from that of the Common Snipe, as it will remain for weeks at springs strongly impregnated with iron about which we never detect the borings of the latter, or indeed find one except in extreme stress of weather. The Jack Snipe may sometimes be found in the most dense cover of high reeds and sedge, and quite as often on bare ooze where there seems scarcely vegetation enough to conceal a beetle.

The "Jack" during his stay with us is almost always in excellent condition, and *always* worth a charge of powder and shot for the table, which is more than can be said of the larger bird. On one occasion I sprung a Jack Snipe, which instead of pitching again within a short distance, as is the usual practice of the bird, joined a flight of Peewits and went out of my ken with them high in the air. Many good retrieving dogs will refuse to carry a Jack Snipe; one of the best that I ever possessed, on the contrary, would sit and bark at a dead or wounded Woodcock, but never touch it except with his paw, would bring a Common Snipe by the bill or tip of the wing, but always took a Jack Snipe into his mouth without biting it, and would come and, as it were, spit it out at my feet, the bird having entirely disappeared as he brought it. I have seen many a young dog pick up a Jack Snipe by the feathers, toss it up, and roll upon it, but never attempt to carry or eat it.

The epithet Solitary would be much more appropriately bestowed on the Jack Snipe than on the species that generally bears it, as the former, though it comes to us as a rule in small flights, is as often,

or perhaps more often, found singly than in company. I was surprised to find some Jack Snipes in Cyprus late in April; these birds when flushed uttered a low hollow note, a very faint copy of the "drum" of the Emu. I only once heard this note of the Jack Snipe in this country, in the case of a bird flushed by our river-side late in the month of March. One of the Lilford gamekeepers, accustomed to shooting in our valley, assured me that he had twice flushed what he called a *Black Snipe* near Thrapston, some years ago, after the commencement of the close season. This in all probability was one of the dark-coloured somewhat rare variety of Common Snipe known as Sabine's Snipe (*Gallinago sabini*). This variety was for a long time considered by ornithologists as being of a distinct species, and curiously enough, according to Mr. J. E. Harting ('Handbook of British Birds,' p. 52), has never, or only once, been recorded as occurring anywhere except in England and Ireland.

The Jack Snipe thrives well in captivity, and becomes perfectly tame in a very few days, but it is necessary to restrict his diet, as certainly three or four times his own weight of small earthworms will, if he can get them, be devoured and digested by this little glutton in twenty-four hours; and of course in confinement "Jack" is not called upon for even the very moderate amount of aerial and terrestrial exercise that are naturally necessary in procuring his nocturnal repasts when at liberty.

The nuptial plumage of this little bird is exceedingly bright and beautiful, but nevertheless most admirably adapted for concealment in the localities generally preferred.



## 148. DUNLIN.

*Tringa variabilis.*

This bird, perhaps best known in this country as Stint, or Ox-Bird, is by no means an uncommon, although not a regular, autumnal visitor to our valley, occasionally appearing in considerable numbers in our meadows during a heavy flood, and a few may be found almost annually in March and April on their return to their breeding-quarters from the south.

The Dunlin generally nests on elevated moorlands. In the summer of 1855 we found two pairs on Dartmoor, which, from their actions, certainly had young in the bog that we were attempting to cross. Nests of the Dunlin have been found in Cornwall, Lincolnshire, and several of the northern counties of England. In Scotland it is pretty generally distributed, and the Editor of 4th ed. of Yarrell, from whom I quote regarding the breeding-range of our bird, adds that few, comparatively speaking, are known to nest in Ireland.

In autumn and early winter these birds assemble on our coasts in immense numbers, preferring tidal muds as a rule, but apparently also finding abundance of food on shingle or sand. They fly in very close order, and a judiciously timed shot is by no means a waste of ammunition, as many may be killed with the two barrels, and the Dunlin in winter is, in my opinion, not a despicable bird for the table.

It seems to be almost impossible to describe the appearance of a dense flock of these little birds on wing without more or less plagiarism from other writers;

all allude to the alternate gleams of pure white and dark colour as the birds present their lower or upper surface to the spectator. I have more than once witnessed some very interesting chases of Dunlins by one or two Merlins; indeed, on some parts of the coast of England and Wales the Dunlin seems to be the principal "quarry" of this little Falcon.

This species is reported as well known not only throughout Europe, but also in almost all parts of the Old World except the extreme south, and it has a wide range on both sides of the continent of N. America.

We found very large numbers in May on the great marshes of the lower Guadalquivir, and it was also very abundant at that season on the muds in the harbour of Santander. Mr. Abel Chapman had the good fortune in the former of these localities to find a nest containing four eggs which he, and other experts in ornithology, attribute to this species. This is the only instance of the Dunlin's breeding in Spain that has come to my knowledge.

The ordinary note of the Dunlin is a clear somewhat shrill piping whistle. I have been told by a Highland gamekeeper that in the summer these little birds "sing" on the wing like Larks, and I find it stated in Yarrell that in the pairing-season they soar to a moderate height, and utter a prolonged and somewhat monotonous "*dwee*."

## 149. LITTLE STINT.

*Tringa minuta.*

I admit this species to a place in these Notes solely on the authority of Mr. A. G. Elliot, of Stamford, who, by letter in 1876, and subsequently by word of mouth, assured me that he had received several for preservation that had been killed on the Welland. There is nothing in any way improbable in this account, and Mr. Elliot convinced me that his identification was correct.

This bird is one with which I have but little acquaintance, having only occasionally met with it in Southern Europe. It is well known as a bird of double passage on our eastern coasts, and in habits and appearance closely resembles the Dunlin, but does not acquire the black breast-feathers of that species in summer, and averages two inches less in total length. For most interesting and authentic information on the breeding-habits, nest, and eggs of this bird I refer my readers to the personal observations of Mr. Seebohm in his work entitled 'Siberia in Europe.'

## 150. CURLEW SANDPIPER.

*Tringa subarquata.*

The only Northamptonshire specimen of this bird that I have ever seen or heard of is a male in immature plumage that was killed by my neighbour Mr. George Hunt from a passing flock of a dozen or fifteen whilst he was Partridge-shooting on Pilton on the

9th September, 1887, and is now in my collection at Lilford. This species is a tolerably common visitor to our coasts and tidal estuaries in autumn and spring, but seldom occurs at any great distance from salt water. Its numbers are, as stated in Yarrell, "extremely variable," and it seems that in the autumn to which I have just referred, these birds were very unusually abundant on the shores of our eastern and southern counties.

Although the nest and eggs of the Curlew Sandpiper are still unknown to ornithologists, specimens in full summer plumage are met with by no means uncommonly on our coasts in late spring, and we found it in large numbers in summer dress as late as the second week of May in the extreme south of Spain.

In general habits the Curlew Sandpiper, or, as it is frequently called, the Pigmy Curlew, much resembles the Dunlin, but may at all times be distinguished from that bird by the white feathers of the rump and the slightly arched bill from which it takes its name. In summer plumage no mistake can be made between the two species, as at that season this bird assumes a bright red chestnut hue on the breast and belly, whilst in the Dunlin those parts become more or less black.

The Curlew Sandpiper is generally very tame and easy of approach, unless, as often occurs, the flock is put upon the "qui vive!" by some individual of a less confiding species.

The note of this bird is a low purring whistle that somewhat resembles and yet is easily to be distinguished from the usual call of the Dunlin.

Mr. W. Tomalin informed me by letter, that whilst

fishing near Ringstead on July 3rd, 1891, he twice saw, and distinctly identified, four Curlew Sandpipers. This is a most unusually early record for this species, especially in an inland locality; but my correspondent is perfectly well acquainted with the Common Sandpiper, and I know of no other bird of the family that is in the least likely to be met with on the banks of the Nen in early July, except possibly the Green Sandpiper, and this I consider to be out of the question in the circumstance above mentioned.

#### 151. KNOT.

*Tringa canutus.*

This species, although common enough on many parts of our eastern coasts, rarely finds its way to any great distance up the valley of the Nen from the sea, and I have only two records of its occurrence actually within the political boundaries of Northamptonshire, one of which is that of a bird brought to me by Mr. A. G. Elliot in 1876, with the information that it had been killed at the Lake or Pond in Blatherwycke Park during the early autumn of 1875. The other occurrence above alluded to stands recorded in our Nat. Hist. Journal, on the authority of Mr. H. F. Tomalin, as having taken place at Pattishall in the month of February 1885. In the latter part of March and the early weeks of April 1853 our valley near Lilford was alive with wading-birds of many species, and I am convinced that Knots were amongst them, but as I did not obtain a specimen, and was not then so well acquainted with the bird as I subsequently became,



I do not quote my private conviction as a verified fact.

The Knot certainly breeds in the circumpolar regions, as young birds that could only have been a few days hatched were met with by Major Feilden, who was attached as naturalist to H.M.S. 'Alert,' and Mr. Chichester Hart, who occupied a similar position aboard of the 'Discovery,' on the Arctic Expedition in 1876, in latitudes  $82^{\circ}$  and  $81^{\circ}$  N., during the month of July; and records of the finding of eggs by previous Arctic explorers are in existence, but it seems that none of these eggs reached England, and that well-identified specimens of these "shells" stand first in the lists of the desiderata of collectors, alongside of those of the Curlew Sandpiper.

The Knot arrives on our eastern coasts as a rule about the beginning of August, and fresh arrivals from the north keep dropping in throughout that and the following month, and the vast flocks that have congregated in favourite localities remain till the weather becomes very severe, or they are exterminated by shore gunners.

My personal acquaintance with this species was first made at the mouth of the Dovey in Merionethshire in August 1851. A small flock frequented the sand bar at low water, and were at first stupidly tame, but we soon discovered the excellence of these birds for the table, and they equally soon discovered our intentions and took very good care of themselves; the few that we killed were evidently young birds of the year. With this exception I have seen but little of the Knot on our own coasts, but in the first fortnight of May 1872, after a very rainy winter and early spring, we found countless myriads of this

species on the great mud-flats near the mouth of the Guadalquivir; many waders of other species were there in thousands, *e. g.* Dunlins, Curlew Sandpipers, Avocets, Stilt Plovers, and Pratincoles, besides many Whimbrels, Greenshanks, and other species; but in the course of my bird-seeking existence I never met with any feathered fowl in such numbers as these Knots in any part of the world that I have visited. I have seen vast clouds of Starlings circling over, and plunging down into, their favourite roosting-places in various localities, I have witnessed marvellous congregations of Sparrows at sunset in the orange-groves of Sicily, and I have seen the sky dark with wild-fowl in south-eastern Europe, but all these were literally as nothing compared with the present species in the Andalucian Marisma at the season above mentioned.

Posted on a point of the drier land that here and there ran out into the marsh, we sent two or three of our companions on horseback to make a circuit of two or three miles on the open, and put the birds to us, and truly the result was wonderful; the Curlews and Greenshanks rose first, as soon as the horses' heads were turned towards us, and fled, shrieking wildly, to all points of the compass, but as our drivers approached the earth seemed to rise before them, and a continuous stream of Knots kept coming towards us, thousands often alighting within a few yards, the brilliant summer tints of their plumage varied by the companionship of Grey Plovers, Turnstones, Avocets, and many other species.

On the first day we contented ourselves with shooting about a dozen Knots as specimens, and after that day put in a right and left for the pot

when we found ourselves in the locality, the two barrels, if well timed, generally producing from twenty to thirty birds. The flesh of the Knot is notoriously excellent, and as we had to depend principally upon our guns for food, I had no scruple in taking toll of these succulent millions. The birds killed were without exception in full summer dress and very plump. About the 10th of May their numbers began to decrease very perceptibly, and on the 15th, the last day of our stay, I do not think that we saw more than two or three hundreds in a ride across the most favourite portion of the vast marsh.

In May 1876 my yacht was lying in the harbour of Santander and a flock of some dozen Knots appeared on the muds on the 9th of that month; their numbers gradually increased to perhaps 150. On the 22nd I put in four barrels and secured thirty-six. On our return to the yacht after about three weeks' absence we were surprised to find a few of these birds still lingering in the harbour, and my companion, Colonel Irby, shot one of them on June 17th.

The Knot thrives well in captivity, and the aviaries at Lilford have for many years past never been without more or less of these cheerful and pretty birds. A good many, perhaps the majority, of these captives acquire their full summer dress in early May; but, on the other hand, a good many have not acquired it during three or four years' captivity. We feed them principally upon broken bread, meat chopped up fine, milk, and meal, and I may, I think, challenge England to produce finer birds of their species.

The note of the Knot is a short low whistle, constantly uttered at all seasons of the year, both on the ground and on wing, and the conversation of a great flock of these birds heard at a distance has some resemblance to the chatter of children, though not varied by the yells with which the youth of our species so often express delight and other emotions. Where a little rill of fresh water trickles to the sea through tidal muds at low-water time, the Knots congregate in force, and retire at high-water to sand-bars and rocks, upon which latter they sometimes crowd so closely as to give the impression that a well-known black mass of stone has suddenly changed its colour and become red or grey according to the season.

The name of Knot is by some authors supposed to have been bestowed on account of the predilection of King Knut (Canute) for these birds as a delicacy for the table, but I cannot help thinking that if there is any connection between the bird and the Danish King it is more probably founded on the well-known legend of the rising tide having wetted the feet of the Dane with as little respect as it daily does those of the birds that frequent our shores. It is of course not only possible, but very probable, that this bird may often occur within our limits, for I consider the whole valley of the Nen as coming within the scope of these Notes, but to most gamekeepers any bird with a long beak that is not a Woodcock or a Snipe is "some sort of a Sandpiper," whose identity is of no consequence, and who, if killed, is as likely to figure on the "vermin tree," or in the Ferret-hutch, as in the window of the local bird-stuffing barber.

In January 1891 I received an apparently fresh skin

of a Knot from Mr. H. Field of Kettering, who informed me that the bird had been picked up dead, close to that town, on December 8th, 1890.

## 152. SANDERLING.

*Calidris arenaria.*

Only one occurrence of this bird in Northamptonshire has come to my knowledge. In a letter from Mr. A. G. Elliot, written to me in February 1876, I find—"Sanderling (*Calidris arenaria*) by T. C. Knapp, Esq., Tixover Hall, Rutland, stuffed by me." No date or locality is given, but as Mr. Elliot was at the time furnishing me with a list of the birds of our county and its immediate neighbourhood, and was well acquainted with this species, I presume that the bird in question was killed at or near Tixover, and have therefore no hesitation in according it a place in these Notes.

The Sanderling may be distinguished at a glance from all the other members of its family by the absence of a hind toe, and on that account was formerly classed by naturalists amongst the Plovers. My personal acquaintance with this bird is but small, though I have met with it generally in what appeared to be family parties of five or six, on various parts of the English, Welsh, and Irish coasts, and in larger numbers on those of the Bay of Biscay and the Mediterranean. I have never met this bird on the mud-flats so dear to most of the Sandpipers, but have always found it frequenting hard sea sands, and I imagine that its occurrence at any considerable distance from salt water is accidental and unusual.



The Sanderling has a wide range in Europe, Asia, and N. America, and has been recorded as occurring as far to the south as Ceylon, Madagascar, and Chili. For full details as to the northern breeding-localities of this bird, its eggs, and nest, I must refer my readers to the well-condensed account given in the 4th edition of Yarrell, from which work I have so frequently quoted in writing these Notes.

In my small experience I have found the Sanderling almost as tame as the Knot, running before one at a short distance, with frequent halts, noddings of the head, and a clear short whistle. I never found it actually in company with birds of another species.

### 153. RUFF.

*Machetes pugnax.*

This remarkable bird, which was formerly common and a regular spring visitor to and breeder in many of the fen districts of England, especially those of our bordering counties of Lincoln, Cambridge, and Huntingdon, has now, from the drainage and cultivation of its favourite haunts, and the constant persecution to which it was, and is still exposed, become a comparatively rare bird in our Islands, and although a few pairs still resort annually in the spring to some special localities, they are seldom if ever allowed to rear a brood, as collectors offer rewards for British specimens of the eggs of this species, which the fenmen can hardly be expected to decline. During the subsidence of the great floods in the valley of the Nen in the early spring of 1853 our meadows between Lilford and Thrapston were

visited by great numbers of Waders of various species not usually to be met with in the district, amongst which I identified a small number of Ruffs, generally in company with an immense flock of Peewits; from the fact of this association I was unable to get a shot, but there was no difficulty in identification of the present species from their companions, not only by the obvious differences in size and manner of flight, but also by the peculiar double note in which the second syllable is sharply accented; this cry may be represented as *tu whìt, tu whìt*, repeated quickly three or four times in succession. I found and shot a young male of this species on August 21, 1872, in a swampy meadow at a short distance below Thrapston, and another of the same sex was killed almost on the same spot by one of our gamekeepers on November 2, 1881; this latter specimen is now in my Northamptonshire collection at Lilford. Mr. William Tomalin, in a letter recently received, informs me that he killed two "Reeves," *i. e.* females of this species, at one shot out of a flock of eight in a meadow near Ringstead in August 1877, after a high flood, and that these birds sent up by him to London for preservation, were unfortunately cooked and eaten. The above mentioned are the only Northamptonshire occurrences of this bird that I find recorded in my note-books with specific details of date and locality, but I have heard many more or less vague rumours of Ruffs and Reeves from various parts of the county, in one case the so-called Ruff turning out to be a Bittern. As I have never had the good fortune to be in the haunts of these birds during the breeding-season, I must refer my readers to the full and most interesting details of their habits,

and the methods formerly employed for catching and fattening them for market in the Lincolnshire fens, given by Colonel Montagu in his 'Ornithological Dictionary' (1813), and quoted in the 4th edition of Yarrell; it appears from this account that even in the early part of the present century Ruff-catching "hardly repaid the trouble and the expense of nets," although the fattened birds seem always to have commanded long prices. The late Lord Exeter informed me that on the occasion of Her Majesty's visit to Burghley in 1844, he had very great difficulty in procuring any of these birds from Crowland, and believed that the few sent thence for the table were birds that had been kept as decoys; on the other hand I have been assured by a friend whose mother was a native of Lincolnshire, that so well known were the habits of this bird in that county that he well remembers in his early boyhood the frequent maternal reproof for infantine family squabbles having been conveyed in the words "you children must not fight like Ruffs." These birds made their appearance on our eastern coasts early in April in small flocks, the males always arriving before the females; in a short time they resorted to their breeding-haunts, and for some days constant battles raged between the male birds on what were locally known as "hills," slight elevations or mounds in the marsh, frequented year after year and well known to the fenmen. I copy from the 4th edition of Yarrell the following account of nest and eggs of this species: "The nest is placed in a tussock, generally in the wettest part of a swamp, and the eggs are three or four in number; of a pale green or olive colour, blotched and spotted with brown; the average measurements are 1.8 by

1.2 in." As soon as the young birds are strong on the wing they wander in search of food to a considerable distance, but, as I have been assured, generally return with more or less regularity for several weeks to the marsh in which they were reared; about the end of September or before that time, they assemble in flocks on the sea-coast, and the great majority shortly depart on their southward migration. A good many of this species still breed in the marshes of the Netherlands, from which country considerable numbers were formerly sent alive in April to the London markets, and becoming fat in a very short time on bread and milk and boiled grain, found a ready sale at a good price; these birds, as far as my experience goes, were mostly males; in fact, although I have occasionally bought a few Reeves alive in the London markets, I should say that the proportion of females to the males thus sent to this country did not average more than one in ten; this is, no doubt, to be accounted for by the fact that the Ruff was not only more easy to catch than the Reeve, but in his natural condition, or fattened for the table, would average from three to five ounces heavier than his mate. The curious ruff or tippet of long feathers, from which our bird takes its common English name, begins to appear in March, and has generally entirely disappeared before the middle of July; it varies so much in different individuals that, as has been frequently stated, hardly two are to be found exactly alike. This species, according to Yarrell, has a wide range in the Old World, extending from Scandinavia and Siberia to Ceylon and the Cape of Good Hope; it has also, on the same authority, been occasionally found in the United States and

once recorded from South America. My personal acquaintance with the Ruff is confined, with a few British exceptions, to Southern Europe; in Andalusia it occurs in March in small flocks in the great marshes of the Guadalquivir, and is met with in these localities also on the return passage in August and September; I found some Ruffs in early spring at a swampy spot near Algiers, near Tunis also, in November; it occurs commonly on the double passage on the coasts of the Ionian Islands and the adjacent mainland, and I have several specimens from Cyprus. In my experience these birds, unless they are keeping company with some more wary species, are by no means difficult of approach; they are very inquisitive, and will sometimes hover over a dog, or fly round any unusually bright-coloured object such as a red or yellow handkerchief fluttering flagwise in the wind. In the spring, even long before the assumption of the protective shield of feathers, the males seem to be always ready for a fight amongst themselves, or with an intruder of some other species; but from my observations of Ruffs in captivity, even in the height of the amorous season and in presence of the Reeves, these hostilities seldom, if ever, have any serious consequences. I have kept many of both sexes in the aviaries at Lilford; in the case of three pairs sent thither from London during my absence from home in the spring of 1888, the man in charge of my collection assured me that although the birds had plenty of room, the Ruffs would not allow their ladies to feed at all, and drove them about to such an extent, that he was obliged to put them into a separate compartment of the aviary. When we returned to Lilford early in June, I found the three



male birds with their ruffs in full beauty, very tame, but continually "squaring up" to one another with heads lowered, and expanded ruffs, without ever coming to an actual encounter, they also made hostile demonstrations to many other birds that shared their captivity, but I never saw anything like a genuine fight. The natural food of the Ruff consists principally of earthworms, slugs, and small snails, but in captivity they "train off" very readily upon soaked grain, bread, and finely chopped meat, either raw or boiled.

#### 154. COMMON SANDPIPER.

*Tringa hypoleucus.*

This bird, though well known in Northamptonshire by the name of Summer Snipe, is by no means abundant in that part of the county with which I am most intimately acquainted, in fact in the immediate neighbourhood of Lilford a few only put in an appearance in April about the banks of our river and remain for a very few days; on the return passage we are generally visited by three or four of these pretty little birds in July and August, they then haunt the most gravelly spots that they can find on the river and the tributary brooks, and occasionally remain with us for a week or two. I have not so far been able to discover any record of the finding of a Sandpiper's nest in our county, though Mr. H. F. Tomalin, writing in the 4th vol. of our 'Natural History Journal,' p. 9, states that he observed a brood of this species during the summer of 1885, and adds, "They breed here"; this statement refers,

as I presume, to the neighbourhood of Northampton, and is no doubt perfectly to be depended upon.

Since the above paragraph was first sent to the press I have received more than one authentic report of very young Sandpipers from the neighbourhood of Northampton.

As a general rule the Common Sandpiper visits our Islands early in April, and breeds in many counties of the three kingdoms, generally preferring the vicinity of rapid streams or lakes with shingly margins for its nesting-place; as soon as the young are well able to take care of themselves, the family parties work their way, with frequent halts, down the course of the streams to the coast, and generally leave the country altogether about the beginning of October, although I have more than once met with a solitary loiterer about the harbours of the south coast of England as late as the middle of November. The nest is generally well concealed amongst heather or rushes and is composed of dried stalks of coarse grass or rush, with a little moss, and occasionally a few dead leaves of birch or willow. I found several pairs of this species breeding near a lonely mountain "llyn," in North Wales; most of the eggs were hatched, and the old birds tried all manner of devices to lead me and my dog away from their downy broods; the young birds, although very recently hatched, had the instinct of concealment already very perfectly developed, and had it not been for the sagacity and good nose of my four-footed companion, I very much doubt if I should have found even one of them, but he paid no attention whatever to the tricks and clamour of the parent birds, and very soon found a nest containing one

rotten egg, and two very minute Sandpipers crouching close in the strong heather that surrounded and effectually concealed the nest. The agony of anxiety of the parents was quite painful to witness as they screamed and twittered about us, occasionally almost touching the dog, and often alighting within a few feet of us, with feigned lameness, or injury to their wings; and even after I had put the young birds into their nest, this pair followed and flew around us, till we approached closely to another nest containing four eggs on the point of hatching, from which my dog disturbed the sitting bird. In this instance the parent birds, although they hovered and flew restlessly about at a short distance, did not pay us such close attention as the first pair. The eggs, of which the usual complement is four, are very pear-shaped in form, of a yellowish creamy ground-colour, and more or less spotted and blotched with dark brown. I have never in Northamptonshire or, to the best of my recollection, elsewhere met with the Common Sandpiper at any of our very frequent muddy-edged ponds, which are the favourite haunts of the Green Sandpiper during its erratic visits to our locality, and although I have sometimes met with the present species in considerable numbers on the tidal muds of coasts and estuaries at home and abroad, it has seemed to me that it prefers rocky and broken beaches to the open flats which afford such great attractions to most of our waders. I have often seen this species perch on stone walls and wooden rail fences, and once or twice on a dead bough overhanging a stream. When suddenly flushed, the Common Sandpiper shoots off with a darting flight close to the surface of the water, with a shrill piping

whistle three or four times repeated, but it is naturally fearless of man, and I have often passed a bird or two almost within oar's length of our boat without their taking any notice of us as they ran picking about the gravel banks with constant motion of the tail and bowings of the head. I have found this little bird at various times of year in all parts of Europe that I have visited; in the often quoted 4th edition of Yarrell I find it stated that "it is in fact distributed over the whole of the Old World." This is one of the few common British birds that I have never been able to obtain alive, but I should think that in an aviary with a constant supply of running water, and plenty of fine gravel, it would be likely to thrive.

#### 155. GREEN SANDPIPER.

*Totanus ochropus.*

A few of these birds appear pretty regularly at certain ponds in the neighbourhood of Lilford in July and August, and whether some of these early arrivals remain with us or pass on, giving place to other individuals, I cannot say, but I have certainly met with the Green Sandpiper in our district in every month of the year except June, and, indeed, do not feel *quite* positive about the correctness of this exception, as in my years of boyhood I kept no notes or diary of observations in ornithology. I do not remember to have ever seen more than two of this species together in Northamptonshire except on one occasion, when I put up six at once from a muddy spot on the bank of the Nen between Lilford and Oundle; this was on August 23rd, 1880.

As a rule (in our neighbourhood at least) these birds do not frequent the river-sides, but during open weather are to be met with at particular ponds in our pastures, where the cattle have trodden their drinking-places into more or less bare mud; at such spots a Green Sandpiper or two may frequently be found from the middle of July till the first severe frosts compel them to seek the margins of unfrozen brooks, and eventually send them down to the sea-shores. Few of our neighbours are ornithologists,



Green Sandpiper.

and some of them, having seen a bird with a longish bill rise alone from a soft place with a loud and striking whistle, have at various times obligingly, and in all good faith, assured me that they had seen a Solitary Snipe; on these occasions I have almost invariably satisfied my mind, and saved myself a fruitless quest, by obtaining an affirmative answer to the question "Had the bird a white patch on its its back?" as the white of the upper tail-coverts and



upper portion of the tail-feathers of this bird are, when the wings are spread in flight, so conspicuous as to strike anyone who keeps his eyes open. This Sandpiper, instead of usually nesting upon the ground, as is the common habit of birds of this family, generally selects an old nest of some other species, sometimes at a considerable height in a tree; it appears from the account given in the 4th edition of Yarrell that this singular habit in a *Totanus* was not recorded till 1851; to quote the particulars given *loc. supr. cit.*, it seems that in Pomerania "the eggs have been found in old nests of the Song-Thrush, Jay, Blackbird, Missel Thrush, Wood Pigeon, once in that of the Red-backed Shrike; often in squirrels' dreys; sometimes on the ground; on the moss on old stumps; in broken-down trees where other birds have previously nested; on branches of an old pine-tree where the pines were heaped together; at elevations varying from 3 to 35 feet; but always in proximity to ponds." The eggs are four in number, but it is supposed that two females occasionally lay in the same nest, as seven eggs are said to have been found in one. There is no positive proof of this Sandpiper having bred in Great Britain, but very strong evidence in favour of its doing so will be found adduced in the article in Yarrell from which I have so freely borrowed above, and I am quite convinced that it formerly bred in the neighbourhood of Lilford, and that the reason that the eggs were not discovered was, that neither I nor anyone else about the place had, at the period to which I refer, any idea of looking for them in trees, or, indeed, elsewhere than on the ground; be the fact as it may, two Green Sandpipers throughout the month of April constantly frequented the

banks of a somewhat secluded cattle-pond with old pollard willows growing around it, and a coppice of ash and oak, in which there was a small rookery which still exists, within a very short distance; and my belief now is that these birds had eggs either in an old nest in this coppice, or perhaps, more probably, in the crown of one of the pollards; but, I may ask, what English birds'-nesting boy in the early eighteenth century would have thought of looking for Sandpiper's eggs in a tree? The Green Sandpiper is, in my experience, a very wary bird, and a very great nuisance to the Snipe-shooter, as rising wildly, it darts up into the air, with a shrill trisyllabic whistle, which puts all the Snipes within hearing on the alert; in common with most of our waders, however, it soon becomes reconciled to captivity, and feeds readily upon small worms and chopped meat; it is a good swimmer, but I have never seen one of this species attempt to dive as the Common Sandpiper often does when wounded and fallen into water and chased by a dog. Various authors have mentioned the unpleasant musky smell of the Green Sandpiper, which I have sometimes, but not always, observed; the dried skin occasionally retains this odour for a considerable time.

#### 156. WOOD SANDPIPER.

*Totanus glareola.*

This bird is an irregular summer visitor to England and Scotland, seldom recorded as occurring at any very considerable distance from the sea-shore in our country, but very probably more common than is generally supposed, as in habits and appearance it

has a great resemblance to the Green Sandpiper, but is smaller than that bird, and has a very distinct alarm-note. Two Wood Sandpipers appeared on the banks of a pond in our park at Lilford, within 200 yards of the house, in the early part of August 1875, and I found them there occasionally from that time till the middle of September; from constantly seeing people about they became comparatively tame, and towards the end of their stay with us, on being disturbed, would fly round the pond two or three times with a sharp double whistle, and alighting again on the bank opposite to the spectator, ran about the mud unconcernedly with constant motion of their tails, picking and probing for food. The Rev. H. H. Slater of Irchester Vicarage informed me that he identified a partially plucked Wood Sandpiper in the autumn of 1885 that had been shot a short time previously at the spot where the Irchester brook joins our main river; my friend Lieut.-Col. Irby told me that in July 1886 he saw a Sandpiper on Wadenhoe mill-stream that was neither of the Green or Common species, and therefore probably one of the birds of which I am now treating; these instances are all that I find in my note-books as to the Wood Sandpiper in Northamptonshire. There is, I believe, only one authentic record of this bird nesting in England, and fairly good evidence of its having done so in Scotland; on the continent it is known to breed in all the northern countries of Europe, and is to be met with at various seasons virtually all over Asia and a great part of Africa. I have met with the Wood Sandpiper in great abundance in Andalusia, and in lesser numbers on almost all parts of the Mediterranean shores that I

have visited, from Malaga to Cyprus; I have some reason to believe, but no tangible proof, that it breeds in this last-named island. For an account of the nest and eggs I must again refer my readers to Yarrell. In habits the Wood Sandpiper resembles the bird last described, but in my experience is more given to perching on bushes and rails than even the Common Sandpiper, though I cannot look upon its English name otherwise than as a fantastic misnomer.

#### 157. COMMON REDSHANK.

*Totanus calidris.*

This well-known bird appears singly, or in small numbers, in our valley at both seasons of migration, more commonly perhaps in August than any other month, a few always visit our meadows in March and early in April, and I am acquainted with one instance of its occurrence near Lilford in January. I am not aware that the Redshank now breeds along the course of the Nen above Peterborough, though it is more than probable that this may be the case; that it did so formerly I was assured by the Rev. M. Berkeley, who in a letter addressed to me in February 1876, wrote as follows:—"The Redshank *builds* at Apethorpe occasionally"; in a letter written a few days subsequently, he stated, "The Redshank *built* in one of the wild fields between Apethorpe and old Sulehay: I have seen tame specimens running about at Apethorpe, taken from the nest."

Since the writing of the above paragraph I have been assured, on excellent authority, that Redshanks still frequent the meadows in the neighbourhood of

Apethorpe, Cottesock, and Warmington, in March, April, and May, and no doubt nest therein. My informants attribute not finding the eggs of this bird to the fact of being forestalled in their research by matutinal robbers of "Plover's" eggs.

Three or four Redshanks have at this time of writing—May 29, 1895—either eggs or young in a large meadow near Aldwinckle. Four of these birds have been haunting the locality since March last; and two days ago I saw three in the greatest anxiety on being disturbed by the Bucks Otter-hounds. This is the first instance that has come to my knowledge of the Redshank's breeding on my own shootings in Northamptonshire.

Many Redshanks still breed in England, not only in unreclaimed fens and marshes, but often in drained pasture-lands and now and then on heathery moors; the few nests that I have personally found in Norfolk, Ireland, and Spain were placed in the centre of tufts of the common rush, and consisted of a few stalks of dried rush or grass, generally well hidden from sight; the complement of eggs is four, their ground-colour is a greenish-yellow, with blotches of red, brown, and dark grey; the young birds can generally fly in the first week of June, occasionally some days earlier. In its breeding-localities the Redshank may be found from early spring till real winter sets in, when the birds congregate in great numbers on the sea-coasts, especially where there happens to be any extent of soft mud left by the ebbing tides. In its habits this bird resembles the other Sandpipers, feeding principally upon worms, small snails, and aquatic insects, and running briskly about with continued movements of head and tail. I



watched a solitary Redshank for a considerable time as I and my companion lay concealed within a few yards of the low spit of gravel upon which it stood; this individual had apparently satisfied its hunger, as it remained on the same spot, but we were amused by its continual nods of the head, flirts of the tail, and apparent absorption of observation of some object in the shallow water within a few inches of its "stand"; at length my friend suggested that the bird must have a bowing acquaintance with a small grey mullet, and was probably communicating its ideas to the fish by signs, of which it was impossible for us to learn the meaning, so we moved on towards our vessel at anchor, and the Redshank sprang into the air with a loud outcry; that there *was* some meaning in these nods, I have not a doubt, as the bird was very wideawake during our watch, but I must confess much as I should have liked to prolong it, I could not disagree with my unornithological companion in his opinion as to the probable result. The Redshank is very noisy when disturbed or suddenly alarmed, and although its note is by no means unmusical, and is connected in my mind with many pleasant memories of rambles in the marshes, I have very often wished that the bird was congenitally mute, for it is a more efficient and more abundant sentinel on a Snipe-marsh than the Green Sandpiper, which generally goes right away, whilst the present bird flies around with a clamour that arouses the most plethoric of Snipes to wariness, and often clears the swamp of all but a few "Jacks." The Redshank is common in all suitable localities in Europe, and besides the sort of places above mentioned, may often be found at the times of

migration on the banks of rocky mountain streams and lakes ; it is well versed in all the usual Plovers' and Sandpipers' devices to draw off attention from its nest and young, and will follow and buffet at marauding birds, such as Gulls, Crows, and Harriers. Although, as I have said, the Redshank is a noxious bird from the Snipe-shooter's point of view, it is a very great ornament to the marsh-lands, and as it is really perfectly harmless, and in my opinion almost uneatable, I trust that it may be very long before it figures in catalogues under the heading of "Rare British Birds," with the Avocet, Bittern, Ruff, and many other harmless and ornamental species whose extinction and banishment is due to the advancement of civilization and the ruthless greed of man. The Redshank thrives well in captivity if allowed plenty of room for exercise ; it feeds readily on the food mentioned as suiting the Ruff, and during the hot months will feed itself to a great extent on house-flies, gnats, and the small worms that are always to be found in well-watered plots of grass. In common with many waders the Redshank often washes its morsels of food before swallowing them ; but this does not appear to be such an invariable custom with this species as with the Oyster-catcher.

#### 158. SPOTTED REDSHANK.

*Totanus fuscus.*

The only occurrence of this bird in Northamptonshire with which I am acquainted was brought to my knowledge by a letter from Mr. Oliver Aplin, who, writing from Bloxham, Banbury, on September

14th, 1888, informed me that he had recently examined a Spotted Redshank in the plumage of the first year which was shot at Canon's Ashby on August 28th ult. Through the courtesy of Sir Henry Dryden this specimen has come into my possession stuffed and very fairly mounted, and is I think without doubt a young male. In Baker's 'History of the County of Northampton,' vol. i. p. 377, I find "Spotted Redshank, *Scolopax totanus*," recorded as having been met with at or near Fawsley; but it is more than likely that this may really refer to the Common Redshank, which certainly deserves the epithet "Spotted" as much as the present species. This bird, never abundant in any part of our Islands, generally appears on our coasts at the seasons of migration in spring and autumn, and a few have been obtained in the winter months, but these latter cases are exceptional, and as a rule the great majority pass on southwards in September. My personal acquaintance with the Spotted Redshank is very small, and almost entirely confined to the shores of the Mediterranean; I never had the good fortune to meet with one of this species alive in the very remarkable black plumage of summer, but it has occurred in that dress to my knowledge in England on two or three occasions. From the little that I have seen of this bird I am disposed to consider it less gregarious in its habits than its commoner congener, and certainly less noisy, although it appears, from Mr. Wolley's most interesting account of its breeding-habits quoted in Dresser's 'Birds of Europe,' that it can be clamorous enough when its nest is approached; this account is also quoted in the 4th ed. of Yarrell, and in the 3rd edition

of Hewitson's 'Eggs of British Birds,' so that it is unnecessary that I should here copy or borrow from it. I presume that the food of this species is of the same character as that of others of the family of waders to which it belongs: in the case of a specimen shot by me near Larnaca in the spring of 1875, the stomach contained many small shells and a considerable quantity of insect-matter reduced to pulp. The flesh of this bird, though, to my taste, rather more palatable than that of the Common Redshank, has generally an unpleasant flavour of mud.

#### 159. GREENSHANK.

*Totanus glottis.*

I can only record one instance of having myself seen a Greenshank in our county; this occurred on October 21st, 1875, on the morning of which day a solitary bird of this species flew over my head at a considerable height whilst I was partridge-shooting with a party on the Duke of Buccleuch's property not far from Barnwell Station, L. N. W. Railway. The bird was too far off for certain identification by sight, and I very probably might not have noticed it, had it not been for its remarkable loud double whistle with which I had become well acquainted in Spain. Mr. A. G. Elliot, formerly of Stamford, assured me that a Greenshank was killed by a Mr. Julian at Blackmore Thick on May 20th, 1874, and preserved for that gentleman by him, and I have notices of occurrences of this bird in various localities on the lower course of the Nen and the Welland

below Peterborough and Stamford. In England the Greenshank may be considered as a bird of double passage, never very abundant; its autumnal visits are by no means confined to our sea-coasts, in fact it may be met with occasionally almost anywhere in the neighbourhood of water, fresh or salt. In Scotland and some of its adjacent islands a certain number of Greenshanks annually breed on the open moorlands and the shingly borders of lochs and streams; for details I must refer my readers to my standard and frequently quoted authority, the 4th edition of Yarrell. I have been informed by a friend that our bird very frequently nests close to a boulder or block of grey granite, no doubt for the protection afforded by the similarity of the colour of the stone to that of its own dorsal plumage. On the lower Guadalquivir I have often met with this species, in pairs, in April and the early part of May, feeding on the soft mud left bare by the ebbing tide; they are very swift of foot and have the balancing movement of the body more fully developed than any other bird of my acquaintance. The Greenshank is very wary and difficult of approach at most times, although it is, in common with many other usually shy birds, reported to be extremely bold in attacking those who approach its nest or young; it is a clamorous bird when startled, or on its travels; it seldom, in my experience, associates with other species or assembles in large flocks of its own. The flesh of this bird in autumn is infinitely superior, in my opinion, to that of most Sandpipers. Baker, in his 'History of Northamptonshire,' vol. i. p. 304, records the Cinereous Godwit, *Scolopax canescens* (Montagu), as having occurred in the neighbourhood of Daventry; I find



on enquiry, that this name refers to the Greenshank, so that there is, I think, fairly good evidence of at least one occurrence of this species in our county besides that which I have recorded on my own authority.

Since the original publication of the above article, I purchased from Mr. W. Bazeley, of Northampton, a very bad specimen of the present species, stuffed by him, and, as he assured me, killed at Whilton in December 1885. In August 1892 I received several reports from two persons, well acquainted with all our common river-side birds, of a large Sandpiper seen about Lilford Locks, and higher up the river, that left no doubt in my mind that the unknown was a Greenshank.

#### 160. BAR-TAILED GODWIT.

*Limosa lapponica.*

The only notice of the occurrence of this species in Northamptonshire that has come to my knowledge was communicated to me by the Rev. H. Slater, of Irchester, who, in a letter dated December 2nd, 1885, informed me that he had recently seen a specimen "in full winter dress" at the shop of Mr. Field, of Kettering, who told him that it had been shot in the neighbourhood of that town, but could not give the date of capture. I have no doubt that this species is not uncommon at the period of migration on the lower course of our river and the shores of the Wash, but with the exception of a reference to its occasional occurrence in the neighbourhood of Wisbeach, I have no exact particulars to relate with regard to it in the district compre-

hended in these Notes. The Bar-tailed Godwit breeds in the extreme north-east of Europe; in the British Islands it is a bird of double passage, appearing on our coasts with more or less regularity and occasionally in very large numbers in April and May, and again in August on its return to its southern winter quarters; a few linger on our shores throughout the summer, though there is no evidence of their ever having nested in our country; in winter the Godwit is only exceptionally to be met with at its British halting-places, though more or less of this species may be found in the cold season on the south-west coast of Ireland: a small flock frequented the shores of the Shannon below Kilrush in the very severe weather of December 1854. My principal acquaintance with the present species was formed during several weeks' residence on the coast of Merioneth in August 1851; a flock of perhaps fifty or sixty then used to assemble within sight from our windows, on the sand-banks at the mouth of a considerable river, as soon as the tide began to ebb, and with a good telescope it was easy to observe their movements as they ran to and fro probing the soft sand for food, or stood awhile on one leg with heads and necks drawn in close upon their shoulders; in this flock we did not detect a single individual with any trace of the conspicuous red summer plumage of the adults (in which dress many are to be met with on our eastern coasts in May); these Godwits were naturally very tame, and on the rare occasions that we found them unattended by other species, would allow us to run down upon them under sail to within half-gunshot range; but as there were generally two or three Curlews or

Redshanks in their company, they had early and full warning of approaching danger, and their ranks were not materially damaged by us. The flesh of the Bar-tail is very good in August and September, and by no means bad in spring, though not, in my opinion, at any time to compare with that of its congener the Black-tailed Godwit, *Limosa melanura*, a species that I have not admitted into these Notes, as I never handled a Northamptonshire specimen, though I feel convinced that a few frequented our swampy meadows in the spring of 1853, to which I have previously referred in treating of the Ruff. I have met with the subject of the present article on many parts of the Mediterranean shores, and killed one in the harbour of Santander, in full nuptial plumage, in May 1876; but it was not abundant on the great plains of the Guadalquivir at the same season of 1872, where summer-plumaged Knots were in countless thousands, and other northern breeders also in very great numbers. I have kept Bar-tailed Godwits frequently in the aviaries at Lilford; they thrive fairly well, as a rule, but are more restless in captivity than most of our Waders, and have never, in my possession, assumed more than a few red feathers in the summer.

#### 161. COMMON CURLEW.

*Numenius arquata.*

A few Curlews pass southwards along the Nen valley in the neighbourhood of Lilford in July, August, and September, and I generally hear of two or three in the spring months, but they seldom

alight in our district, in fact I have only seen one on the ground near Lilford, and am only acquainted with one capture of this species in the vicinity, though several have been recorded from other parts of Northamptonshire. My attention has often been attracted in the three above-mentioned months by the well-known cry of the Curlew passing overhead, but I have never seen more than three together in our county, and in the great majority of cases have found that the said cry proceeded from a solitary bird. The Curlew nests on open moorlands in several of the English, and most of the Scotch counties, as well as on all the great bogs of Ireland and the uncultivated districts of Wales; the nest is very slight, generally composed of a few dry stems of rushes and coarse grass, and almost always well concealed; the eggs are generally four in number, very large for the size of the bird, of a dingy green with brown blotches and spots; the young birds leave the nest about the end of May, and may often be found almost full-grown, but unable to fly, in July and sometimes even as late as the beginning of August. The parents, at other seasons the most wary of birds, will occasionally make direct attacks on man or dog who may intrude upon their nurseries, but generally content themselves with flying screaming around at a safe distance. In my early shooting-days it happened that I was staying, in July, in a village in South Wales near which a single pair of Grouse had hatched their brood on a wide stretch of unpreserved and much-poached mountain moorland; with a view to finding these Grouse early on the 12th August, I was in the habit of going up to the spot where they had been hatched, once or

twice a week, contenting myself with springing one or other, sometimes both of the old birds by the aid of my retriever; on one occasion I failed to find any Grouse on the accustomed ground, and so stretched myself at full length in the heather to watch and listen; in this particular spot I had previously seen no birds except the Grouse, a pair of Meadow-Pipits, and now and then one or two Ring-Ouzels; but on this occasion I had not been long in in my "*cache*" before a Curlew coming up from behind me stooped close to my head with a scream so startling and uncanny that, although I had been quite awake and keeping a sharp look-out, for a second or two I felt as if I had been bewitched, and can well understand the superstitious dislike entertained for these birds in many parts of Scotland; our long-billed friend, recovering from her first stoop, turned sharply and repeated the operation several times, once actually brushing my cap with a stroke of her wing, she also made several fierce dashes at the dog; as long as we sat still the bird was never out of gunshot, but on my rising to my feet she retired to a safe distance, and was soon joined by her mate. I very soon found the nest within a few yards of my hiding-place, but it was empty, and my dog, though possessed of an excellent nose, was only a puppy, and so bewildered by the clamour of the old Curlews that he would not hunt for the young, which were no doubt keeping close in the long heather and cotton-grass that surrounded us; at all events I could not discover even one of them, and on my next visit did not see so much as a feather of a Curlew. In Scotland the young Curlews come down from the moors about the beginning of the



grouse-shooting season, and may then be found for a short time in small parties, frequenting the meadows and grass pastures on the moor edges; at this time of year these birds are well worth powder and shot, and I have now and then got in both barrels with effect by stalking up under cover of the rough stone walls that divide the fields, or by having the Curlews driven over me. The greater part of our home-bred Curlews find their way to the coast by September, some are to be found there throughout the summer, many come to us across the North Sea, and in many favourite spots in the three Kingdoms more or less of these well-known birds can be found at all seasons. As I have previously stated, no bird is more difficult to approach in ordinary circumstances than the Curlew, and although a few shots may now and then be obtained at the long strings of these birds, by hiding up in their line of flight to and from the muds and sands that form their favourite feeding-ground during low-water time, they soon learn to avoid any spot from which they have been fired at, and once on their feeding-ground bid defiance to all their enemies except experienced managers of punts and big guns; and even these artists often find that working up to a flock of Curlews is, to use a vulgar expression, by no means "everybody's money," more especially as when the birds are feeding on the sea-shores or saltings, their flesh is barely eatable. According to Yarrell our Curlew, or some very closely allied form of *Numenius*, is to be found in suitable localities according to the season from Scandinavia to S. Africa, and from Lisbon to Japan; I do not find any record of its having been known to breed further to the south than Brittany, but I have

good reason to believe that it does so on some of the wastes of the north-western provinces of Spain, although I have no positive proof of this. I have met with our bird in winter and early spring throughout the Mediterranean coasts; and in the Ionian Islands especially noticed a very remarkable difference in the length of the bills of the few individuals that passed through my hands. The principal food of the Curlew consists of worms, slugs, snails, small crabs, and insects of all kinds, but on the moors they feast to some extent upon various berries. I have kept many of this species in captivity, and although the young birds taken before they can fly are somewhat difficult to rear, I never had any trouble with adult birds in the aviaries at Lilford; they are virtually omnivorous, but in my experience large earth-worms are the most irresistible delicacies to them, they are also very fond of small fishes, either whole or cut up into pieces. Without having actually seen the performance repeatedly, I certainly could not have believed that the Curlew is a most adroit flycatcher; but they do catch and devour great numbers of house-flies, picking them off the walls and the gravel of the aviaries with the unerring accuracy of aim of the smaller Herons. The ordinary call of the Curlew is fairly well represented by its English name with the first syllable dwelt upon and prolonged, but it has a variety of other notes of considerable power, and the weird clamour of a large flock of these birds when suddenly alarmed at night, or in foggy weather, is one of the most startling concerted pieces of bird-music to be heard in this country. As I have already stated, four is the usual complement of eggs for the Curlew, but a friend sent

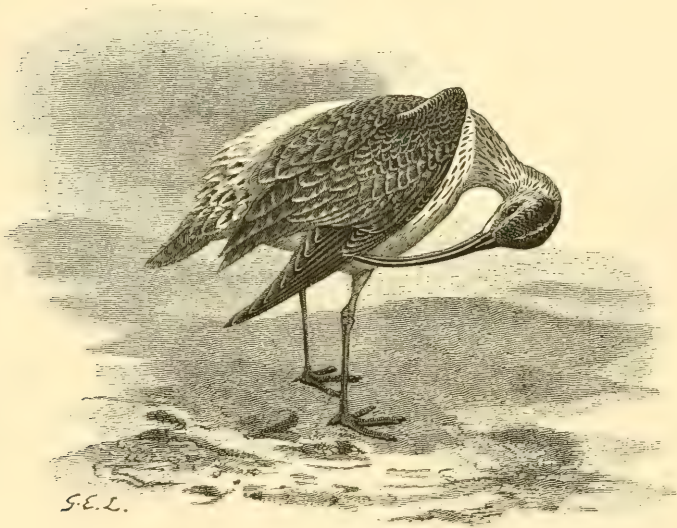
me two in 1888 from the Cornish moors, which, as he assured me, formed part of a laying of six; very possibly the produce of two females.

## 162. WHIMBREL.

*Numenius phaeopus.*

A considerable number of Whimbrels pass southwards along the valley of the Nen towards the end of summer in the neighbourhood of Lilford; the earliest date at this season that I find recorded in my notebooks is August 23rd, the latest September 17th. During the first fortnight of May a few of these birds appear in our district bound northwards; but on this passage I never heard of more than six in a flock, whereas in August and September I have once seen, and several times heard of, flocks of from sixty to eighty or more passing over high in air. In my experience I never saw a Whimbrel on the ground in our county, and am convinced that on the southward migration they hardly ever alight near Lilford, but on the other hand I have been assured of a few instances of their doing so in May. The only record of the capture of one of these birds in Northamptonshire in my possession was published in the 'Midland Naturalist' by Mr. O. V. Aplin, and refers to a specimen obtained near Thorpe Mandeville on May 16th, 1881. In general appearance and habits the Whimbrel closely resembles the Curlew, but, as stated in Yarrell, is so much smaller than that bird as to be known in many parts of the country by the epithets of Half-, or Jack-Curlew. It appears that this bird has not been discovered as breeding in

any part of our Islands with the exception of the Orkneys and Shetlands. In its autumn and winter quarters the Whimbrel is generally to be met with in small flocks, and although not so wary as the Curlew, is not easy of approach, but on the vernal migration, when it often travels singly, it is by no means difficult to shoot, and may often be called within gunshot by an imitation of its usual cry, consisting, if I may be allowed the term, of seven



Whimbrel.

syllables, which have in many parts of England gained the name of "Seven Whistlers" for the birds, although perhaps they are more generally known on our coasts as "May Birds," from their regular appearance thereon in the early part of that month; the name of "Titterel" is also mentioned by Yarrell as applied to the Whimbrel in Sussex, but the only occasion



on which I have heard that name, it was used by a Highland gamekeeper. In Andalusia we found small flights of from half a dozen to twenty individuals of this species feeding on the muddy banks of the Guadalquivir at low-water, and resorting at other times to some swampy grass savannahs with which the neighbouring pine-forest was interspersed; here the birds were easy to shoot by stalking and driving, and it was here that I shot, in May 1872, a specimen of the American Whimbrel, *Numenius hudsonicus*, a very rare straggler to Europe, which very closely resembles our bird in most respects, but has rufous axillary feathers; this bird was alone, and rose like a Snipe within easy shot from a rushy nook amongst some sand-hills. Our Whimbrel is a good bird for the table at most seasons of the year; but of course a lengthened residence on the sea-shore does not improve the flavour of its flesh.

### 163. COMMON HERON.

*Ardea cinerea.*

Before relating any notes of my personal acquaintance with this fine bird, it may be well to state what I have been able to discover with regard to the Heronries still existing in our county at Althorp and Milton. Lord Spencer has been most obliging in kindly furnishing me with many details concerning the Althorp Herons, and in lending me a work entitled 'The Washingtons,' by the Rev. J. Nassau Simpkinson (sometime Rector of Brington), which contains copious extracts from the very interesting



Althorp Household Books of the 16th and 17th centuries, amongst which are many references to the Herons, their nests and young. It appears from Lord Spencer's letters that the Herons originally nested in an unenclosed oak-wood planted in 1567-68, and still known as the Heronry, and that a lodge (known as the Old Falconry) was built in 1603 to commemorate the visit of Anne of Denmark, wife of James I., to Althorp. This lodge had an open



Common Herons.

gallery round the first floor, whence ladies and gentlemen used to watch the flights of the trained Falcons at the Herons. Between 1840 and 1850 six of the oaks in the Heronry were felled, as Lord Spencer informs me, at the rate of two per annum for three years; the birds took offence at this, and shifted their quarters to a wood on the borders of the Holdenby estate, and to another wood in the neighbourhood. They were intentionally driven from

these woods by climbing to their nests, firing of pistols, and other means, at no very distant date, and are now established in an oak-wood in the park, known as Sir John's Wood, planted in 1589, and situated to the north-west of their original haunt. In 1842 the late Lord Spencer sent three young Herons, taken from the nest by one of his game-keepers, as a present to Her Majesty at Buckingham Palace, where they lived for many years: in a letter written by this keeper to the present Lord Spencer (in reply to an enquiry made by the latter on my behalf), he states that, at the date of taking these young birds for the Queen, there were one hundred nests in the Heronry; he adds that their numbers had greatly decreased by wanton destruction upon the adjoining streams, and Lord Spencer, in a letter bearing date May 29th, 1889, writes:—"The Herons this year have about the usual number of nests, ten, all occupied." To sum up shortly the information given to me about the present denizens of the Heronry at Althorp, I may say that February is the earliest month in which they begin to build; that it is not positively ascertained whether they rear more than one brood or not, but the keeper assured Lord Spencer at the end of May that the young would not leave the nests for two months, and that if the nestlings fall from the branches, or are blown out of their nests, the old birds do not feed or take any notice of them. I shall refer further on to the frequent entries in the Althorp Household Books above mentioned regarding the taking and fattening of young Herons for the table. With reference to the Heronry at Milton, my information is principally derived from Lady Lyveden, Lord Fitzwilliam,

Mr. T. W. Fitzwilliam, and Colonel C. I. Strong, of Thorpe Hall, near Peterborough. There has for many years existed a tradition that the Herons first nested at Milton in the year that Sir Robert Heron was first elected to Parliament as Member for Peterborough, in reply to my enquiries into the authenticity of this story, both Lady Lyveden and Lord Fitzwilliam informed me that they have reasons for believing that it is perfectly true, and that the year of Sir Robert's return for Peterborough was 1819; in that year one pair nested on an island in a piece of water in the pleasure-grounds, at no great distance from the house at Milton, and that they have steadily increased in numbers in the immediate neighbourhood, though they have left their original quarters for many years past, owing to the death of the firs and other trees on the island. They are now established in a wood at about a mile from the first head-quarters, and Lord Fitzwilliam informs me that this is the third location since their first advent to Milton. Mr. T. W. Fitzwilliam, writing to me on March 18, 1887, states:—"The Herons are about as numerous as usual, about 93 nests, but I do not think that all have built yet": in 1889 I heard from Colonel Strong that there were about 120 "serviceable" nests; this is confirmed to a certain extent by Lord Fitzwilliam, who told me that he was informed that there were then "as many as 160 nests, probably not all occupied." Another Heronry formerly existed in our county on the property of the late Mr. Thomas Tryon, of Bulwick, whose son, Mr. Richard Tryon, tells me that here again the Herons shifted their quarters from a covert known as the Lodge Coppice, in the parish of Harringworth, to Mavis Wood, in the

parish of Bulwick, that the greatest number of nests in any one year was about 60, and that the Herons finally gave up nesting in that district about 1873-74. I have good reason to know that the Heronries at Althorp and Milton are well protected and much valued, as they well deserve to be, and I trust that it may be very long before the "old Heronshaw," as the bird is still commonly called by our country-people, becomes a thing of the past. The reaches of our river from Thrapston to Oundle will generally show a Heron or two on any given day in the year, often a score or more, but we have no established Heronry in the immediate neighbourhood of Lilford; and as the Milton Herons can probably find an abundant supply of food for their broods nearer home, I presume that the few that are to be met with during the nesting-season near our house are old bachelors or widows. The Heron is an early breeder, frequently commencing to lay in February, and as a rule sitting hard by the middle of March. A populous Heronry very closely resembles a Rookery in the materials of the nests, the usual, but by no means invariable, height of the selected trees, and the incessant clamour of the birds, the principal difference being the larger size of the Herons' nests and the overwhelming aroma of rotten fish-remains; the eggs, of which four is the average complement, are of a fine greenish blue. A second brood is said to be often reared (*cf.* Yarrell, 4th ed. vol. iv. p. 164); by the end of April the young of the first brood are well on the wing, and in June are often to be met with on independent fishing-expeditions at long distances from home. With us at Lilford certain trees are selected year after year as the

roosting-places and look-out stations of these wandering youths, but it is not often that any considerable number of old birds visit us before August; from that season till the breeding-time one or two Herons may be found at almost every shallow on the Nen, and at our ponds and brooks. In the winter it is by no means uncommon to see a dozen or more congregated in our open meadows at some "splashy" spot or, in a frost, at an open spring-head. Few birds are more wary than an experienced old Heron, their eye-sight and hearing being remarkably acute; the young birds, however, may sometimes with caution be closely approached, and I hardly know a more laughable exhibition than that of a party of these long-legged fishers suddenly startled by the intrusion of a human being—besides the natural alarm there is a sort of shame-facedness and hesitation about what is the right thing to do, the right way to go, and how best to dispose of necks and legs, that *mutatis mutandis* remind one of bashful youths of our own species at a "small and early" evening party or suddenly discovered in some petty social delinquency. Where four or five young Herons are thus abruptly startled it is not unusual for one to blunder against another, and flap off with loud expostulations, probably something of the nature of "Now then, stupid!" or "It's all *your* fault."

Hérons travel and certainly feed to a great extent by night; but their digestion is very rapid, and their nocturnal repasts are entirely "without prejudice" to diurnal meals whenever a favourable opportunity occurs; very few small animals come amiss to them—rats, moles, voles, mice, small birds, fishes of every kind, frogs, and earth-worms are indiscriminately



seized and swallowed, head foremost if the devourer is at his ease, but anyhow rather than relinquished. A young Heron was caught, apparently unable to fly, in a church-yard near Lilford some years ago, and taken by its captor to the Rector, who, being a merciful man, examined the captive and discovered that it was choking from a large lump of organic matter sticking in his throat: with the aid, I believe, of a corkscrew he succeeded in extracting the substance, which proved to be a mole; he then liberated his patient, who, in recognition, I suppose, of service rendered, remained in his immediate neighbourhood for a considerable time without any call upon him for further surgical treatment. It appears that in former days young Herons were highly valued as articles of diet, at Althorp at all events—the nests were regularly robbed, and the birds fattened up in sheds upon liver, and (as Lord Spencer assures me) also upon oatmeal! In the extracts from the Household Books above-mentioned, I find amongst others the following entries relating to our birds:—

“April 12, 1623. Hearnnes rec<sup>d</sup> from Newbottle 27, from Wicken 9.”

“*Id.* 19, 1623. To Creaton for clyming 9 heron’s nestes. 00. 03. 00.”

“May 3, 1623. Hearnnes sent to Wormleighton 14.”

“November 1, 1623. To Phipp 2 daies theshing heron houses. 00. 01. 02.”

“April 24, 1634. To Tarlington 1 day ffishing long ditch and climbing 13 Hearnnes neastes. 00. 05. 06.”

“June 18–26, 1634. 25 Heron’s nests climbed within the week.”

I also find in these entries mention of an official

designated as the "Cram mayde," whose duties would appear to have chiefly consisted in feeding up poultry and Herons—in this latter case rather a work of supererogation I should imagine, unless indeed oatmeal really formed a considerable portion of the diet forcibly administered.

Hérons, when watching for small fishes, will stand perfectly motionless for very long spaces of time, with necks slightly drawn in towards the body in the curve most convenient for the unerring dart at the prey, but in very shallow waters they wade actively about in pursuit. One often hears and reads of fishes "*transfixed*" by the beak of a Heron, but in many years' close observation of these birds, both in a wild state and in captivity, I have only once known of such an occurrence, and feel convinced that it was unintentional; the victim is, as a rule, seized between the points of the mandibles, and even in striking in self-defence the bird always slightly opens them. The Heron was the most highly esteemed quarry for falconry in this and most of the countries of Europe before enclosures put an end to the possibility of following up the flight on horseback, but at present this most noble branch of the most noble of all sports is virtually at an end so far as England is concerned, although till a comparatively recent date successfully carried on by the Loo Hawking Club on the extensive heaths in the neighbourhood of that village in Gelderland, under the patronage of the Royal House of Orange, and with the support and concurrence of many of our countrymen. The current stories of Falcons speared by the beak of the Heron in the air are simply fables. I believe that I may say that this quarry never used the beak at all in the air as a means of defence, but once on the ground, the

Falcons required prompt human succour to protect them not only from this formidable weapon, but also from the feet of the Herons, who generally trusted to their powers of wing for escape, or, if hard pressed, would plunge into the nearest water or thickly overgrown marsh, where the Falcons, if they ventured upon attack, would, of course, be at very serious disadvantage. Our Herons are very fair swimmers, and I have been assured on excellent authority of birds of this species having on several occasions been observed to make a plunge, or semi-dive, into deep water and emerge with small fishes. I once saw an old pinioned Heron attempt this feat, which in this instance resulted in discomfiture and a ludicrous scramble to regain the steep-sided causeway from which the plunge was made.

The note of the Heron when alarmed is well expressed in Yarrell by the words "frank, frank"; and the bird in certain parts of Essex, and I believe of Kent, is generally called "Frank" or "Frank Heron." Though these birds nest in large congregations, their temper is eminently unsociable, and even when replete and apparently dozing they will strike viciously at each other or any other bird that ventures to approach them. A Heron that I kept in the court-yard at Lilford caught many rats, mice, and Sparrows that incautiously came near him as he stood on one leg in the same enclosure with a pair of Emeus, several Gulls, and other birds.

The subject of this article is known as a resident or migrant throughout Europe, I might almost say throughout the Old World; and is recorded in Yarrell (4th edition) to have occurred in Java and Australia.

As this species generally nests in colonies, it is

perhaps worthy of record that in April 1895, an isolated pair built and completed a nest in a small spinney near Aldwinckle. This nest was disturbed (probably robbed of its contents), and the old birds quitted the locality, before the middle of May. This departure from their usual habits is probably to be accounted for by the destruction of many of the trees and nests in the heronry at Milton by the disastrous tornado of March 24.

#### 164. GREAT WHITE HERON.

*Ardea alba.*

A fine specimen of this rare visitor to our Islands was shot in the early summer of 1849 in Thorney fen, within a very few miles of the boundary line of our county and Cambridgeshire, and well within the district that I have assigned to myself to treat of in these Notes; this bird is preserved in the collection formed by the late Dr. Strong of Thorpe Hall, Peterborough, and is now the property of his son, Colonel C. Isham Strong, who has most obligingly furnished me with the following particulars with regard to the specimen in question:—"It was shot by Mr. Miller Wigginton of Thorney on his farm there, as he believes, in the first week of May, 1849; he sold it to Holeywell, of Peterborough, to whom my father gave £2 2s. for it. It has the dorsal plumes and dark bill, both of which, I suppose, would go to corroborate the date of its death, being, according to Gould, the summer dress. I am sorry that I can give you no information as to sex." About fifteen occurrences of this very beautiful species have been recorded

in England, but some of these are open to doubt, and it is possible that some may refer in reality to the Little Egret, *Ardea garzetta*.

The great marshes of the Lower Danube appear to be the principal nesting-quarters of this Heron, but it is not uncommon at various seasons on many parts of the Mediterranean coasts; I cannot positively state that I have met with it in Spain, but it occasionally occurs on the eastern shores of that kingdom. I have seen it in Sardinia and Sicily, but my principal acquaintance with it was formed in shooting rambles in Epirus and Albania in the winters of 1856-57 and 1857-58. It could not be fairly called *very* common there, but certain spots on the Epirus coast-marshes were, especially during the first winter above mentioned, always tenanted by a few of these conspicuous birds. In general habits our bird resembles the Common Heron, but is more frequently to be closely approached than that very wary fisher, as, although I have never known it to keep close or crouch for concealment, it was often to be found amongst dense jungle of reeds and other covert where it was not difficult to stalk up to within shooting distance.

The Great White Heron is said to nest in colonies of its own and other species, the nests being generally placed on trees or bushes surrounded by water, but not uncommonly also amongst thick reeds, on broken stems of those plants. The eggs are of a dull greyish-blue green, and four are said to be the usual complement; but for details I must refer my readers to other authors, as I never, to my knowledge, had the good fortune to find myself within "measurable distance" of a Great White Heronry.

I had at the time of writing as above, August 1889,



four of these birds alive at Lilford, one of which I obtained in the previous autumn, the other three were birds of the year; they were all very tame and fed greedily upon small fishes and raw meat, but their favourite dainty was a frog. They occasionally struck at each other in a sort of schoolboy fashion, but were most certainly very much less vicious and crabbed in temperament than our Common Heron. These were not the first of their species that I have kept at Lilford, and my experience is that they are very hardy birds, and well able to bear the ordinary amenities of our English winters, but, in common with most birds, suffer more during a long continuance of strong cold winds than from any amount of frost, snow, or rain.

#### 165. LITTLE EGRET.

*Ardea garzetta.*

Colonel Strong, above mentioned, in writing to me in the spring of 1889, informed me that he had an idea that two of this species had been killed near Whittlesea many years ago, and had found their way through the late Mr. Holeywell, who shot them, into the hands of Mr. John Evans, the well-known taxidermist of Bourn, on application to whom, I learned that they certainly belonged to this species, and that he had sold them to Dr. Pilcher of Boston, Lincs. I at once wrote to that gentleman, who wrote in reply:—"Mr. Evans showed these birds to Mr. I. Pilcher on July 31st, 1879, and gave their history as having been shot on Whittlesea nearly 30 years before by Holeywell of Peterborough, who gave

them to Mr. Evans. They were sent up to Mr. I. Pilcher on Dec. 4, 1879." I am not aware that this occurrence has been previously made public, and am glad to have the opportunity of adding this rare bird to our district list, for I think that, although I unadvisedly began these Notes in the Northamptonshire Nat. Hist. Journal under the title of 'Birds of Northamptonshire,' my critical readers will hardly find fault with me for treating of the country lying between the Welland and the Ouse from Huntingdon down to the point where it enters Norfolk,—in fact the extreme south-western corner of that county would, in my opinion, be fairly included in notes relating to our Naseby watershed; but the Birds of Norfolk have been treated of by abler pens than mine, as I hope those of Huntingdon and Cambridgeshire may before long be.

This species is a very rare visitor to our country, and it appears from Yarrell, 4th edition, that "some of the records of its reported occurrence are far from being satisfactory."

This bird is locally abundant in many parts of southern and south-eastern Europe; I found it breeding in large numbers in Andalucia in company with Buff-backed Egrets, and Night Herons, in wooded swamps. The nests are very slight, and often so crowded in a favourite bush or tree with those of the two species just mentioned, that it is only by the difference of the eggs that it is possible to ascertain to which of the three they belong. The Little Egret lays about the end of May; the usual complement of eggs is four, but more are occasionally laid. They are of a pale blue-green, but have more colour and are considerably larger than those of the

Buff-back, whilst those of the Night Heron are larger, and very decidedly more blue than those of the present species.

The uproar made by these Herons on being disturbed from their nests is impossible to describe as they soar in a feathery cloud high above their nesting-place. All three species are gifted with most discordant and very harsh voices, and although perhaps that of the Night Heron is the most unpleasant to an ear "attuned to harmony," the strident croak of the Little Egret is almost equally disagreeable.

I found this bird very common in winter on the great lagoon between Tunis and the port of Goletta, and have met with it in abundance on most parts of the Turkish coast of the Adriatic, as well as in Sardinia, Sicily, the Ionian Islands, Crete, and Cyprus. It is usually to be seen in small flocks, wading in shallow water, or stalking about the marshes, and often perched on low bushes. Its food is of the same nature as that of the other Herons, but beetles and flies are favourite morsels, and the latter taken with an adroitness only surpassed by its buff-backed congener, which, by the way, I consider as the most insectivorous of the European Herons.

The Little Egret, in my experience, is impatient of captivity, and very delicate in constitution. With every possible care and attention we never could manage to keep one alive in the Lilford aviaries for more than a few months, although the Buff-backed Egret thrives, with some protection from winter weather, for years therein.

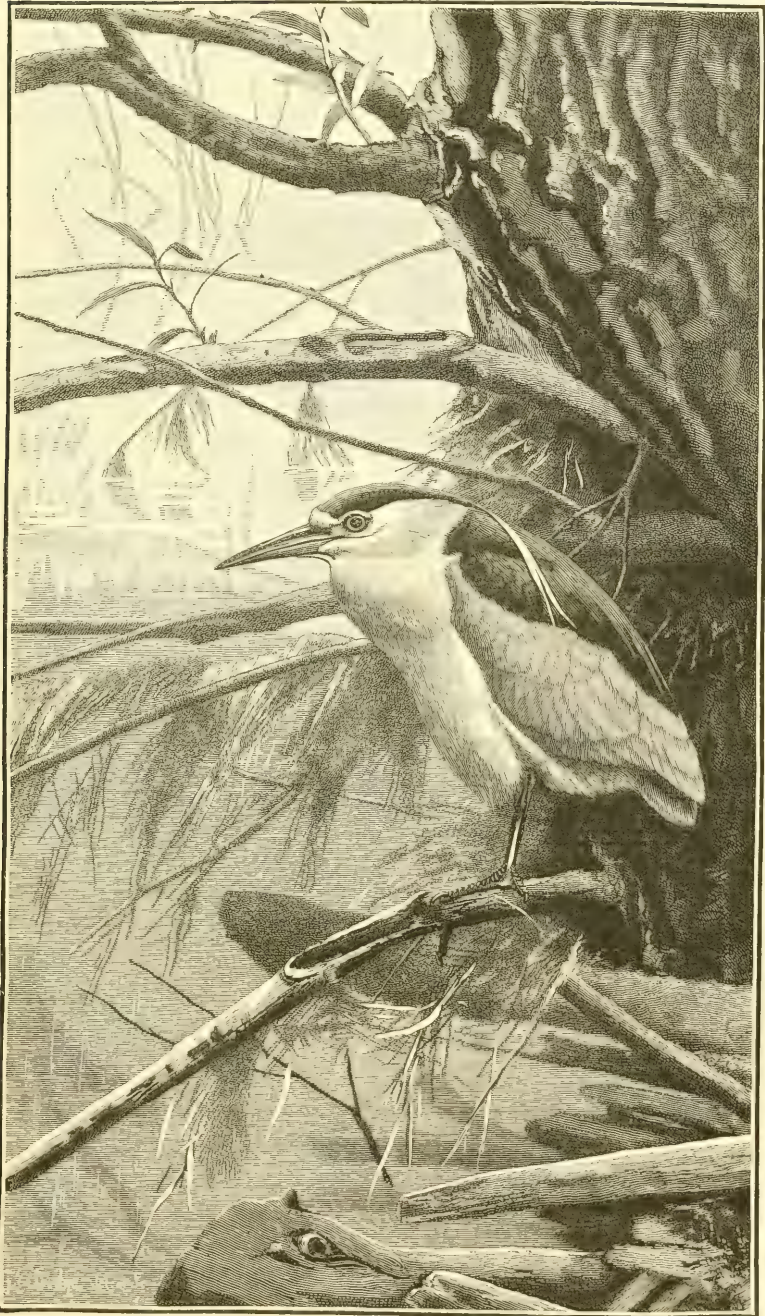
## 166. NIGHT HERON.

*Nycticorax griseus.*

I grieve to say that I am guilty of the blood of the only one of this species that has, so far as I am aware, fallen a victim to the greed of man in our county. I have no valid excuse whatever to offer in extenuation of my offence, but will ask my readers to defer their sentence upon it till they have finished this article. We were trying for an otter on July 4, 1868, with a few couples of the Fitzwilliam hounds, and drawing down stream from below Aldwincle in the direction of Wadenhoe, the hounds and huntsman on the proper left, and several friends with me on the other bank of the river, when, as the hounds crashed into a coppice of tall alders, I was suddenly aware that one of several Herons that flew from these trees was not of our common species. I kept my eyes upon the stranger, who settled on a dead bough in another riverside coppice at a short distance. I stopped the hounds and hunters, and, making a detour, approached sufficiently close to make certain that the bird in question was an adult Night Heron; here this story ought to have come to an end, but alas! I was a *British* bird-collector, and the Night Heron having flown back to the covert from which it was originally disturbed, I sent to Wadenhoe for a gun, despatched a man to put the bird out towards me, and ruthlessly shot it. The specimen proved to be a female in very fair plumage, and with evident signs of having been engaged in incubation. In spite of subsequent diligent search in every likely and many unlikely spots, we failed to find the nest or any trace of

young birds ; but a report reached me that another bird closely resembling my victim was more than once seen shortly after the event above recorded, on the shallows below Tichmarsh Mill about sunset. I did not again hear of a Night Heron's having been seen in Northamptonshire till July 13th, 1886, when my friend Lieut.-Col. Irby, who was then living at Wadenhoe, and had been calling at Lilford in the afternoon, sent word to me that on reaching home he was informed by Mrs. Irby (who had been boating on the river) that she had seen a curious bird, which flew for short distances from tree to tree by the riverside as the boat approached it. Colonel Irby immediately went in search, and soon discovered that the strange fowl was an adult Night Heron. This bird was first seen at a very short distance from the spot where I slew the specimen above alluded to, but I did my best to atone for my former misdeed by issuing strict orders to prevent the destruction or molestation of this one, which remained in the neighbourhood of Wadenhoe till the first week of September, and when last reported to me by the manager of Wadenhoe Mill, who had frequently seen the bird hunting the shallows of the mill "tail," was said to have had a companion of its own species. In this connection I must add that Sir Rainald Knightley, writing to me from Fawsley on November 6, 1886, stated:—"Last year we had a Night Heron—at least it was exactly like the picture of that bird in Gould's work ; it remained here nearly all the autumn, some two or three months, but left us when the frost and snow came. But, to my surprise, on my return from Scotland a few days ago, I found it (or another bird exactly like it) here again. I do not know how long it has been here, as I have been away from home for about five weeks."





Night Heron at rest.

Encouraged by the late stay of this bird in our county, and in the hope of atoning in some measure for my offence, I turned out two young Night Herons at Lilford in the summer of 1887, but though they were seen on several occasions shortly after their liberation, I have no evidence to prove that they remained in the neighbourhood for any length of time. The above is all that I have to relate with regard to this species in Northamptonshire, and I fear that, owing to the migratory habits of this very beautiful and interesting bird, all attempts to establish it in our country, even in the most favourable circumstance, must result in failure, as the Night Heron is, *probably*, incapable of withstanding the rigour of an average English winter.

Although the Night Heron cannot be accurately called common in our country, it would be equally incorrect to write of it as very rare, as few years pass without a record of its occurrence, and although, so far as I am aware, no nest of this bird has been actually discovered in Great Britain, there is very strong presumptive evidence of its having bred in Devonshire. For details on this subject I must refer my readers to Yarrell, 4th edition, vol. iv. p. 196, and add that I am the present possessor of a very fine adult male, one of the eight there mentioned as killed by the late Rev. C. I. Bulteel and his friend Mr. Julian in 1849 on the river Erme, the former of these gentlemen having presented me with the finest bird of the group.

The Night Heron is a very common summer visitor to many parts of Southern and Central Europe, and formerly bred in considerable numbers in some of the marshes of Holland. That some of these birds still

frequent these latter localities in the summer is proved by the fact that old birds and nestlings are annually received thence in Leadenhall Market; but their comparative present scarcity is also proved by the prices asked for them, which are more than double the amount at which I frequently procured them between 1846 and 1851.

This species commences to nest about the middle of May, sometimes in congregations composed entirely of its own species, but, in my experience, most frequently in company with other members of the Heron family. The nests are slightly but solidly built of twigs and reed-stalks, and usually situated in low-growing bushes in marshy jungles, but occasionally in trees at a considerable height, and now and then amongst canes and reeds only a few inches above the ground or water. The eggs are generally four in number, and in colour are of the usual greenish blue that prevails amongst the Herons. The usual note of the Night Heron is a plaintive "sqauk," but when the birds are quarrelling amongst themselves, as is constantly the case, a very guttural croak, somewhat resembling the bark of an angry Raven, is their usual way of expressing their feelings; in fact, I never have heard the natural note above mentioned from any of the many birds of this species that I have kept in confinement, till after sunset.

The habits of these beautiful birds, as implied by their name, are strictly nocturnal. In the daytime they generally remain perched on one leg for hours on a bough in deep shade; their flight is as noiseless as that of the Owls, but as soon as the sun is low, the small fishes and reptiles in their neighbourhood have a very bad time, as the Night Heron is as



voracious and active in pursuit of prey as any fish-eater of my acquaintance.

In captivity I hardly know a more interesting bird than the present, picturesque and beautiful in repose, and most quaint and peculiar in action, easily reconciled to confinement, and affording, as it does, most favourable opportunities to the draughtsman and photographer.

Although I have frequently kept Night Herons for several years in the aviaries at Lilford, I never knew of their laying eggs therein till the summer of 1889, when two of my oldest birds laid some three or four eggs apiece, but neither made any nest. One did not attempt to sit upon her produce, and the other, though she sat assiduously on a hole in the ground in which we had placed some of her eggs, always studiously avoided covering them, and sat on the gravel with her eggs around her. She was very jealous of the approach of other birds, but did not appear in any way to resent, or attempt to avoid, human observation.

The fine occipital plumes of the Night Heron vary in number. I observe that in the article in Yarrell, from which I have above quoted, it is stated that the usual complement is three, and that Mr. Rodd and others have counted as many as ten; but I should put the usual number at five, and have never found more than seven in any one individual. I am writing of fully-adult birds, and amongst them, even in full nuptial plumage, I have more than once been unable to discover more than two of these most ornamental appendages.

I notice that the Night Herons in my aviaries dislike the close company of more than one of their

own species, and their evident indignation if a bird of another species ventures to alight, even at a distance of several feet, on the perch occupied by them, is very remarkable. They are, however, somewhat shy of interference with the Australian Laughing Kingfisher, who, though he seldom asserts his power, is undoubtedly master of his compartment.

## 167. BITTERN.

*Botaurus stellaris.*

I presume that in the time of Morton the Bittern was so frequently met with in our county, that he did not consider it as worthy of special record, as at the end of his list of Northamptonshire birds, p. 431, he states that those therein included “are all I can fitly mention as more uncommon Birds”; the opposite inference, that he was not acquainted with an occurrence of this species in the county, is of course possible, but, I think, much less probable than that which I deduce from his words. Although this most interesting bird can no longer be called common in any part of the three kingdoms, it was formerly abundant, and more or less resident, in almost all the extensive marshes and fens of England, especially so perhaps in the great reed-jungles that encircled Whittlesea Mere. With reference to this locality, Mr. John Heathcote, of Conington Castle, in 1876 stated in writing to me:—“Common Bittern or Butter-Bump, 7 or 8 shot in a day by W. Coles, who formerly rented Whittlesea Mere,—two taken alive by getting their feet entangled in a bow-net,” and in the same letter he adds:—“My brother and myself (about 1825) shot 7 Bitterns in a



field of Holme Fen, two or three hundred yards from New River." I have myself only once met with a Bittern in Northamptonshire. This bird rose from a brook-side near Aldwinckle, at the report of my gun fired at a Snipe, on January 5, 1855. I gave him my second barrel, but he was fully 70 yards from me, and flew apparently uninjured across two broad meadows and the river, finally settling in a fence near Tichmarsh Mill; we followed him up, and he is now the only Northamptonshire specimen of his species in my collection. I am acquainted with about twenty occurrences of the Bittern in our county besides that just recorded, and may mention amongst the most recent of them, one shot near Ashton in 1884, and presented by me to the Northampton Museum, one near Faxton in 1888, reported to me by Mr. William Bazeley, and one shot at Blatherwycke on New Year's day 1890, reported by Mr. H. O'Brien. The Bittern may now be looked upon as an irregular and rather uncommon winter visitor to the United Kingdom; the records of its breeding of late years have been very few and far between, even in districts so well adapted to its habits as the "Broad" country of Norfolk and Suffolk, and it is a somewhat singular coincidence that my brother-in-law shot his only Bittern in the former county on the same day that I killed my bird in ours. The favourite haunts of the Bittern are reed-fens, or extensive stretches of rough sedge interspersed with patches of reeds, amongst which our bird passes the day in an apparently drowsy state, though always ready to seize and devour any small animal that may come within reach—beasts, birds, reptiles, fishes, and certain insects, are all welcome to him if not too large; I am inclined to



W. A. ...



think that his line of capacity would be drawn at a full-grown water-rat and a half-grown water-hen. In the reed-beds Bitterns will allow of a very close approach; on the first suspicious sound they draw themselves out to their full length with their feathers tightly compressed and beaks pointing straight to the sky, so as to present as small a front as possible, and, as I firmly believe, with a view to the chance of remaining undiscovered from the similarity of their plumage to the brown and yellow vegetation that surrounds them. On the very close approach of man, these birds, if they believe they are not observed, turn their bodies gradually and cautiously, so as always to present their front to the enemy, but if once the human eye meets theirs, they either rise by climbing "hand over hand" for a second or two up the reed-stems before spreading their wings, or lowering their necks, vanish into the jungle with the ease and speed of a Water-Rail. I once, in the above circumstance, came so close upon a Bittern, who evidently thought that I had not seen him, that I made a back-handed clutch at his extended neck, and actually touched the feathers, but failed to grasp it from a broken reed-stem running into my palm, my friend stole quietly off to a more swampy and inaccessible part of the jungle. In Epirus, where this occurrence took place, the Bittern is common during the winter months, but I never met with this species anywhere in such abundance as in the great reed-marshes of Eastern Sicily in the neighbourhood of Catania and Syracuse, where its extraordinary love-song was frequently to be heard in March from our yacht's anchorage. This note has a distant resemblance to the lowing of a bull, and is generally preceded by three or four

monosyllabic grunts or coughs; in this connection I may state that I was informed by a lady that when she first went down after her marriage to her husband's house in East Norfolk, she was constantly prevented from sleeping at night by the booming of the Bitterns in the neighbouring marshes. This would be probably about 1840-45, but although the Bittern is still occasionally met with in the locality, I am strongly of opinion that no human slumbers there have been disturbed by these birds for at least thirty years past. The nest of the Bittern is composed of dry reeds and sedge, and generally situated on the ground in the most dense parts of the reed-beds; the eggs are of a drab olive-colour, in this particular somewhat resembling those of the Pheasant, but rather darker, and of a different shape, the usual complement is four. Certain authors have stated that this bird occasionally perches in trees, but except in captivity I have never known of such a case, and I only once met with a Bittern away from thick covert of aquatic vegetation. There is something about the remarkable attitudes of this bird, its peculiar colouring, its perfectly noiseless flight, its note, and nocturnal habits, that conveys a sense of wildness and solitude, and is to me very fascinating. Often, when standing for flight-shooting in the marshes of Epirus at the hour of "gloaming," has a Bittern startled me by almost brushing me with its silent wing, and settled within a few feet of my position, only to rise at my next shot at passing ducks, and I have seen more than one English companion in those regions astounded by the rising of one of these great birds almost at his feet without a sound, when he was expecting nothing larger than a Snipe. In



captivity, the extraordinary movements of the Bittern, when it will allow itself to be observed, are most interesting, but the few that I have ever possessed alive were very shy, and during the daytime remained at a short distance from the ground in the thickest bush that they could find in their compartment of the aviary. On being pulled out of this retreat and placed for inspection on the top of the bush, they very seldom attempted to fly, but with outspread wings, ruffled neck-feathers, and lowered heads, struck viciously for the eyes of the disturber, and when he retired, either delved into the bush from which they had been extracted, or assumed the attitude which I have attempted to describe in the early part of the present article. In proof of the former abundance of the Bittern in the English fen-country, I give the following entries from the Althorp Household Books, from which I quoted freely in my article on the Common Heron:—“August 14, 1634, Bitters 11 . 01 . 00 . 00,” and again in the same month without mention of day, “To Gifford of Whittlesey for 6 bitters . 00 . 09 . 00.” I may add that in my opinion the flesh of this bird is excellent.

#### 168. LITTLE BITTERN.

*Ardetta minuta.*

My only authority for including this very singular bird in these notes is the fact that in Baker's ‘History of Northamptonshire,’ vol. ii. p. 42, I find the following record with regard to Maidford:—“The Little Bittern was shot in this Lordship about

twenty years since, 1798." It is not likely that any other bird can have been mistaken for one of this species, and although the above statement leaves a great deal to be desired, I cannot think that there can be any reasonable doubt as to correct identification. The Little Bittern is an irregular and uncommon visitor to our country, but is by no means exceedingly rare; Mr. H. Saunders in his excellent 'Manual of British Birds,' says that there can be little doubt that it has "even recently" bred in Norfolk, and formerly did so in other localities. I am glad to say that I have good reason to believe that it has bred very recently in a southern county with which I have some acquaintance. This bird is a common summer visitor to most parts of Central and Southern Europe, as well as to North Africa, I have met with it from Seville to Cyprus, as well as in the interior of Spain and in Switzerland; in haunts, habits, and attitudes it much resembles the Common Bittern, but it is very much more arboreal, and in the island of Corfu at the season of vernal migration, I several times detected one of these quaint birds perched in an olive-tree at a considerable height from the ground. In the marshes they are very averse to taking wing, and glide through the aquatic vegetation almost as rapidly as a Crake, but are easily to be caught by hand, or by a dog. The only occupied nest of this species that I have met with was placed between the stems of a tamarisk at a few inches above the water, and was built of dead twigs of that plant, dry pieces of reed, and sedge; the usual complement of eggs is six, they are of a dull white, with occasionally a faint tinge of green. In my school days a good many

Little Bitterns, for the most part adult birds snared at their nests, were annually sent alive from Holland to Leadenhall Market in May and June. These birds were invariably more or less injured about their heads and eyes, and in my experience seldom lived for any length of time, but I have succeeded fairly well in keeping young birds in good condition; they are, however, delicate, and very restless at night; their actions are most peculiar and interesting, but although they often become very tame, they are very shy of observation. I have a fine adult male of this species preserved at Lilford that was killed many years ago in the breeding-season in East Norfolk, and I have very little doubt that if a price was not set upon these birds, they would nest annually in many parts of our country. The presence of my Norfolk specimen was made known to the marshman who shot it by its note, which he had heard previously many years before this occurrence, and compared very aptly to the grunt given by a paviour in ramming down stones or wooden piles. I can only describe this note in words by "woogh, woogh," with very guttural final sound.

#### 169. WHITE STORK.

*Ciconia alba.*

I give this bird a place in these Notes without any hesitation on the authority of Sir Hereward Wake, who, if my memory serves me correctly, originally told me in 1876 of the occurrence, and on my request for further details, wrote on July 11, 1887,

in the following words:—"As to the Storks, I can only repeat what I told you at the time; one summer evening I caught sight of a small flock of very large birds flying over my Park (at Courteenhall), whose flight was quite strange to me; I forget the exact number at this distance of time, but there were either seven, or eleven, not more anyhow; they were some 500 yards away, flying across; presently they turned up over some trees, and the sun caught them, with a background of dark cloud, I then distinctly saw that their plumage was black and white, and I caught a glint of red beaks and legs, their size was larger than that of our Common Heron, and by a process of exhaustion I rapidly arrived at the conclusion that they must be Storks; in fact, I called the attention of the people with me to them by saying 'Look! look! there is a flock of Storks!' and no one suggested that there was any doubt about it." Mr. W. Tomalin in a letter bearing date December 2, 1888, writes:—"In the summer of, I believe, 1875, I saw six White Storks high up in the air one evening, flying in the direction of Courteenhall from Northampton. I told Sir H. Wake, Bart., of the circumstance a day or two afterwards, and he told me that he happened to be standing in the front of his house, looking towards Northampton, when he saw them, and he was certain they were not Herons, of that I am also certain." The above is the only approximate date given by either of my correspondents, "the time" mentioned by Sir Herewald referring only to that of his first mention of the occurrence to me. There is no evidence to prove that the Stork ever bred in our country, though there is no doubt that before firearms and bird-collecting

were so common as they now are, the visits of this handsome bird were more frequent and more prolonged than they are at present. It cannot, however, be called a *very* rare bird with us, and few years pass without one or more records of the murder of a Stork in England, generally on or near our eastern coasts. The White Stork is a common but very local summer visitor to most parts of Europe, and is generally protected and encouraged, but I have recently heard that the game-preservers of Germany are beginning to look upon our bird as an enemy on account of its destruction of young Partridges, and I greatly fear that as the Stork is a very promiscuous feeder, there may be good grounds for the accusation; its usual food, however, consists of frogs and other small reptiles, mice, fishes, and worms, and in hot climates it renders invaluable service to man by devouring the myriads of locusts and grasshoppers that often invade the green crops. These birds generally nest upon buildings, more rarely on high trees, in Holland often upon cart-wheels erected upon poles for the express purpose, and in Spain they often select farm-stacks in the open country; the same nest is used year after year, and its bulk increased by annual additions of sticks till the structure becomes a "stack" in itself. Whilst one of the parent birds is on the nest, the other is generally to be seen perched close by, or stalking about the fields in the immediate neighbourhood in search of food; where unmolested, these birds become perfectly fearless of man, and in Turkey and Spain I have often passed the hot hours of the day within a few feet of a nesting pair of Storks who took no notice of us. The only sound that I ever heard from these birds is



a loud clattering of the bill ; this is, I think, their love-song, as although I have frequently witnessed savage combats between male Storks, I never heard them make this noise on such occasions. A pair or two of Storks nest annually on the cathedral of Seville, and several other churches of that beautiful city are similarly occupied. I have frequently been amused whilst taking the sun in the squares and open places in sight of the famous tower of the Giralda, at seeing one or two of these great slow-flying birds passing to and fro amongst the circling Kestrels, Swifts, and Pigeons, with which Seville swarms in the spring and summer months. On May 1, 1872, whilst on our voyage by steamer from Seville to San Lucar de Barrameda, we fell in with an enormous number of Storks, all busily engaged in feeding on the open marsh-land ; on no other occasion have I ever seen such a congregation as this, and conspicuous amongst these birds was a single Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*), a bird by no means very common, so far as my experience goes, in that or any other part of Spain. The White Stork lays four or five pure white eggs. In Southern Spain the young birds are generally to be seen standing upright in their nests about the third week of May, but in cold seasons I have seen fresh eggs as late as the first week of June. In captivity our bird becomes very tame, but I have found it impossible to keep two males in the same compartment of my aviary at Lilford, and although the conjugal affection of a mated pair of Storks is very justly proverbial, I do not consider them as good neighbours or companions to smaller or more defenceless birds of other species. In the Althorp Household accounts, I find

this entry dated August 16, 1634, "4 Storkes at 20s. the Storke." Of the edible qualities of this bird I can say nothing from personal experience.

## 170. GLOSSY IBIS.

*Ibis falcinellus.*

The late Rev. M. Berkeley in a letter to me with date of February 25, 1876, wrote:—" '*Falcinellus*' has been taken near Stilton; Mr. Vyse had a very fine specimen at Stilton, probably shot in the fens." Colonel C. I. Strong writing on 29th of same month, says:—"I have in adult plumage (at Thorpe Hall) a Glossy Ibis female, procured in the neighbourhood of Whittlesey Mere, date written inside case, May 31, 1825." Colonel Strong has since informed me through a mutual friend that this bird was killed near Yaxley, which is within a very short distance of Stilton, and I am disposed to think that Mr. Berkeley's note bears reference to Colonel Strong's specimen. This is the only occurrence of this species in the near neighbourhood of our county with which I am acquainted. It seems from the accounts given by various authors that this bird was formerly sufficiently well known to the fen-men of Norfolk, to have gained the name of "Black Curlew," but I cannot believe that it was ever a common or regular visitor to our country, and I am convinced that in the old Suffolk proverb quoted by Willughby,—to the effect that

"A Curlew, be she white, be she *black*,  
She carries twelve pence on her back,"—

the word "black" does not refer to this bird, but

besides being introduced possibly for the sake of rhyme as suggested by the editor of the 4th edition of 'Yarrell,' was intended to affirm the fact that a real Curlew in any state of plumage would always command a shilling in the market ; at all events, the Glossy Ibis is now a very casual and uncommon visitor to our Islands. My own acquaintance with this bird is limited to the island of Corfu and Spain, in the former locality a few of this species were often to be observed on the so-called race-course, a swampy flat near the town, during the months of March, April, and May. In Andalucia, although it occasionally breeds in small numbers, I have not seen it in any abundance, and I saw a solitary individual on the muds of the harbour of Santander in May 1876. In flight at some distance the Glossy Ibis somewhat resembles the Cormorant, when searching for food its manners remind me much more of the Herons and Storks than of the Curlews, though I have generally found it quite as wary as the latter birds. On one occasion, when posted in a dry ditch for a Bustard-drive in the corn-lands at a short distance below Seville in April 1864, I was suddenly aware of a small string of dark-coloured birds coming in my direction at a considerable height, I imagined them to be Cormorants, and was puzzled to know what could have brought them at that season of the year to such a distance from the sea ; however, before coming within shot of me, they gave me a broadside view by turning to the right of their previous course, and I at once recognized them as Glossy Ibises ; they passed within range of the ambush of one of my companions, who, being neither an ornithologist or a keen sportsman, was fast asleep with his mouth

open, as we discovered after a flock of Bustards had passed within a very few yards of his post without any hostile attention on his part; there were some nine or ten Ibises in this string, and with that exception I do not remember to have seen more than four or five together anywhere. I have received several of the unmistakable richly coloured and roughly grained eggs of this species from the marshes of the Guadalquivir, but never had the good fortune to meet with a nest myself. I gather from the accounts of those who in this respect have been more lucky than me, that the Glossy Ibis generally nests on the surface of the water or mud in reedy jungles, sometimes on low bushes, that the nest is constructed of reeds, sticks, and coarse sedge, that these birds usually breed in large colonies of their own and other species, and that the eggs are from three to four in number; their colour is a very rich greenish blue. I had a Glossy Ibis roasted at Corfu as a culinary experiment, and found its flesh tough, and flavoured with a rank taste of mud. In concluding my notes upon this group of birds, I may mention that in the 'Field' of May 15, 1875, I noticed the record of an occurrence of the Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) on the 5th inst. at Great Gransden, Hunts, signed Frank Wallis, but as this village is situated close to the Cambridgeshire frontier of Huntingdonshire, I am not justified in including it even as a bird of our "neighbourhood."

The Glossy Ibis thrives admirably in this country, if allowed plenty of room to exercise its wings.

## 171. GREY LAG-GOOSE.

*Anser cinereus.*

I am not aware of an instance of the capture of this Goose in our district, although I have a very strong impression that a solitary Wild Goose that I shot on the Nen near Wadenhoe in my boyhood belonged to this species, but I can speak positively as to the occasional passage of flocks of Grey Lags over the neighbourhood of Lilford in September and October, from my intimate knowledge of their cries, which exactly resemble those of our farmyard and stubble Geese, who are no doubt lineally descended from this species; these cries differ greatly from those of the three other species of "grey" Geese that occasionally visit us later in the season. Of late years I have neither seen or heard the note of a Wild Goose in Northamptonshire, but many reports of their passage near home annually reach me, and although I am well aware that the present species is considered to be rare in our part of England, I am nevertheless inclined to think that such reports in August, September, and the first half of October are generally referable to the Grey Lag. In this connection I may mention a flock of twenty Geese passing southerly over Tichmarsh on September 7, 1888, reported to me by one of our gamekeepers, and fifty-five Grey Geese flying south-westerly on August 6, 1889, over the manor of Wadenhoe, reported by Mr. G. E. Hunt. I have only one record of Wild Geese seen *on the ground* in our neighbourhood before the middle of October,



and I think that these early autumnal flights of Geese very seldom alight near Lilford; my view of the matter is that these birds on their southward migration pass without halting up the valleys of the Nen and the Welland, and eventually strike off across country to that of the Severn. A few of this species still breed in certain parts of the north of Scotland, as many formerly did in the fens of some of our eastern counties, but it is certainly now the rarest of our four British species of "grey" Geese throughout the three kingdoms. The principal breeding-haunts of the Grey Lag in Europe are said to be Denmark, Southern Sweden, Finland, Russia, and North Germany. I have met with this bird in enormous numbers in February and March on the marshes of the Guadalquivir, where it is the only species of Goose that is in any way common. Its flesh is worthless where better is to be had. Authors are divided in opinion as to the origin of the term "lag" as applied to this bird. Yarrell was inclined to believe that it is either a modification of our word *lake*, the latin *lacus*, or an abbreviation of the Italian equivalent *lago*, but Professor Skeat considers that *lag* means late, last, or slow, and was applied to this Goose on account of its being the only species of its genus that *lagged* behind to breed in our fens; this suggestion appeared in 'The Ibis' for 1870, but I quote from the 4th edition of Yarrell; it is at all events pretty certain that the word *lag* can hardly be a corruption of *leg*, as has been suggested, as the legs and feet of ninety-nine out of a hundred of these birds are pale pink, in very old specimens occasionally showing a tinge of orange. This is the largest of our British Geese, and may always be distinguished

from the Bean-Goose, which most nearly approaches it in size, by the colour of the nail on the beak, which is black in the latter, and white in the Grey Lag and White-fronted Goose. The present species is, comparatively speaking, seldom found upon the sea-coast, its favourite feeding-haunts being open green pasture-lands and the grassy margins of fresh-water lakes and rivers, and as it leaves the regions of frost and snow before the winter sets in, it is seldom forced by nature to the tidal mud. In captivity I can perceive no difference between the habits of this and our domestic Goose. The Grey Lag is very noisy and pugnacious, and a very bad neighbour for the young of other aquatic birds.

## 172. WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE.

*Anser albifrons.*

This species visits us occasionally in small numbers, generally in the depth of winter or in the very early spring. In December 1860 I found seven of this species upon one of our meadows near Aldwinckle, and vainly attempted to get a shot at them. The day was one of sharp frost and brilliant sunshine, and the bars on the breasts of these Geese were very conspicuous. My friend and neighbour, Mr. G. E. Hunt of Wadenhoe, found and shot a very fine adult male near Achurch on January 6, 1880. This bird was alone, and is now in my Northamptonshire collection. Mr. W. Tomalin recorded in the 'Field' of January 10, 1880, that his son killed one of this species near Northampton on the 3rd of that month, and that another was killed by Mr. E. Butlin, of Welling-

borough, at Dodford in the same week. A solitary White-fronted Goose was clearly identified by my friend Lieut.-Colonel L. H. Irby (very near the spot upon which Mr. Hunt shot the bird above mentioned) on December 18, 1885. Richard Skelton, my decoyman, wrote to me on January 17, 1888, that on the 12th of that month he saw four "Brant" Geese; on my writing for further details he wrote:—"The four Geese that I saw were not the black Geese (*i. e.* Brent), they were what I call the Scotch Brant Geese, they have two or three black spots on the breast the size of a penny piece." This left very little doubt in my mind as to the species of these four birds, and Skelton on seeing my stuffed specimen of White-fronted Goose immediately recognized it as being of the "same sort" as his "Scotch Brant." I have heard of the occurrence of this species in a flock of seven or eight near Kettering many years ago, but have no record of precise date. The principal breeding-haunts of this species are the vast morasses of Northern Asia, whence it migrates in autumn all over Europe, Asia, and North Africa, as far southwards as India and Nubia. In the British Islands this Goose is curiously local in its winter visits, always more common in Ireland and some of the western Scottish isles than on our eastern coasts. This bird has been not inaptly named Laughing Goose from its remarkable cry, which is in itself sufficient to distinguish it from its British congeners. In my experience of this species in captivity, I have found that it is less inclined to take habitually to the water than other Geese, and that it seems to prefer growing grasses to corn in grain or meal. Some of my pinioned birds

have nested and laid at Lilford, but never succeeded in rearing their young to maturity. The White-fronted Goose becomes easily reconciled to captivity, and is by far the most tame of any of our grey Geese. I met with this species in considerable abundance on the Ionian coasts of Turkey and Greece, and have seen one or two in Andalucia, where, however, it is by no means common.

In the three successive seasons of 1892, 1893, and 1894 a female of this species mated with a male Bean-Goose, layed eggs, and reared several young birds on our aviary-pond at Lilford. This is the more remarkable, as there have been males and females of both species upon this pond during the whole of the period above referred to.

### 173. BEAN-GOOSE.

*Anser segetum.*

From my earliest recollection till about the year 1856 our stubbles and water-meadows near Lilford were always visited and frequented by wild Geese, sometimes in very large numbers, from about the end of harvest till the following April, and with three or four exceptions the few that were obtained by ourselves before the year mentioned were of the present species. Since that time the wild Geese that visit our district have very remarkably decreased in number, and very seldom alight in the neighbourhood; and although I constantly hear of small flocks seen passing over high in air, these birds are now to be counted by units or at most by tens, instead of by hundreds, as was frequently the case in years gone by. I believe that the valley of the

Welland was formerly even more abundantly frequented by Geese in the autumn and winter than that of the Nen, and I am assured that on certain pasture-lands near Gretton, boys were regularly employed to scare these birds, on account of the damage done to the grass by their appetites and excrement. In appearance on wing, note, and habits, —in fact, in almost every particular except that of size, and a few slight differences that are imperceptible at a distance, the Bean-Goose so closely resembles the Pink-footed that I could never be quite certain of distinguishing between them except when “in hand,” and even in the latter case I have found that some of the external characters quoted by authors as distinctive are by no means constant. As a rule, I think that the Bean-Goose on its travels adheres more strictly to the single file or horizontal formation than other species; but of course the method of advance or retreat is guided by convenience and circumstance, and not, as in the case of the British soldier, by Her Majesty’s regulations. The Bean-Goose breeds in Northern Europe and Asia, and in autumn and winter is to be met with over almost the whole of the former continent, with regard to Asia, it is stated that this species has not been met with in India.

This Goose thrives well in captivity, but in my experience never becomes really tame unless reared by hand from the nest. I believe this to be the most coast-frequenting of our grey Geese, but as long as any acceptable food is to be found on cultivated ground or pasture-land, I am inclined to think that salt-water and sea-shores are only resorted to for rest and security.



## 174. PINK-FOOTED GOOSE.

*Anser brachyrhynchus.*

For an account of the original scientific separation of this species from that last described, I refer my readers to the 4th edition of Yarrell, and will only say on this subject that one of the differences there alluded to—"the pink colour of legs and feet" in the present bird—is not constant or to be certainly depended upon. I am now disposed to think that many of the Geese that formerly visited the valley of the Nen, and were considered by us to be Bean-Geese, were of this species. I can speak with certainty as to two captures, at least, of the Pink-footed Goose near Lilford—one shot by myself in March 1853 as it arose alone from the river near Achurch, and another killed by a gamekeeper from a flock near Tichmarsh in December 1860; but several wild Geese have been killed by our keepers at various times in my absence from home before I devoted much attention specially to the birds of our county, and, of course, to the mind of the average gamekeeper a wild Goose was a wild Goose and nothing more. I have seen many hundreds of Geese in West Norfolk that I have very little doubt belonged to this species, which is certainly more abundant in East Anglia than elsewhere in our country, but I must confess that, if I had not been aware of this fact, having of course no means of comparison at hand, I should have taken these Norfolk birds for Bean-Geese from their cries and general appearance. Spitzbergen and Iceland are the only two breeding-places of this Goose mentioned

with any certainty by Mr. H. Saunders, our latest authority, in his 'Manual of British Birds.' I have kept several of these birds at Lilford; they are constantly on the water, and keep together apart from the other species of water-fowl on our ponds. I have kept no exact records of the colour of legs and feet, but feel no hesitation in stating that I have seen quite as many with orange-coloured as with pink legs. The most constant and certain external distinction between this species and the Bean-Goose is the proportionate shortness of the bill of the former: the Pink-footed also averages considerably less in total length than the Bean-Goose; but very little value is, in my opinion, to be placed on the relative size of very closely-allied species. I consider that Pink-footed is a bad name for this species, and would suggest 'Short-billed' as a more appropriate one. I do not remember to have met with this bird anywhere except in England, but I have very recently heard, on excellent authority, that it has lately been obtained in Andalusia. I need hardly add that during their stay in England all our four species of grey Goose are very wary by day, but at night they lose their natural caution, and many may be shot at fighting-time by waiting about their feeding-places without any concealment but what is afforded by the dusky light. The flesh of all our grey Geese, with the exception of the White-fronted, is in winter coarse and indifferent, but no doubt a course of stubble-feeding would, in the case of young birds, make a very considerable difference in the edible qualities of the other species.

## 175. BERNACLE GOOSE.

*Bernicla leucopsis.*

The only occurrence of this species in our county that has as yet come to my knowledge was communicated to me by Mr. G. Hunt, of Wadenhoe, who, in a letter dated April 13, 1883, wrote as follows:— “I was roach-fishing at Starnel Corner (a bend of the Nen, near Achurch) on March 28, without a fowling-piece, and had just given up, about 5.30 P.M., when on looking up, I saw six Geese coming flying towards me down the broad reach from the mouth of Braunsea Brook. They flopped past me a few feet above the water in the centre of the river, and I was much surprised to see that they were all Bernacles; I could see their eyes, white cheeks, and every feather on them, as they were not more than twenty yards from me. They ‘lit’ near Chapman’s osiers in Achurch meadow, and I returned to Wadenhoe and was down again with punt and gun within an hour; but they had all gone.” The Bernacle Goose is so frequently kept in semi-captivity on lakes and ponds in this country that, in the case of the appearance of one or two individuals on our river, I should have put them down as “escapes,” but I think that my readers will admit that it is at least very improbable that six of these comparatively speaking valuable birds should have been left unpinioned by their owner and left their home in a flock: on these grounds I consider that these six birds were genuine *wild* Geese that, for some unknown reason, had strayed far out of their usual route of northward migration. The Bernacle Goose is a species of

which I know absolutely nothing in a wild state from personal observation; but I gather from recent authors that its breeding-haunts are as yet unknown, that it is a winter visitor to our Islands, by no means common on the eastern coasts, but very much more so on the north-west, especially in certain localities in the Hebrides and in Ireland; it is essentially a sea-Goose, and finds its provend on mud-flats and salt-marshes, rarely coming inland to any considerable distance from salt-water. This Goose thrives and breeds freely in captivity, and either on land or water is a most ornamental bird. I may mention here that the great majority of the so-called "Wexford Bernacles," so renowned for their culinary excellence in the Irish markets, is certainly composed of Brent Geese.

## 176. BRENT GOOSE.

*Bernicla brenta?*

I place this species with a mark of interrogation in these Notes, as the bird seldom voluntarily leaves the salt-water, and my only authority for its occurrence in Northamptonshire is vague and unsatisfactory. I quote the very little that has reached me on the subject of this occurrence, from letters written to me by the late Mr. M. Berkeley, of Benefield, in February 1876:—"Davis, who was keeper to the late Mr. Watts Russell, of Biggin, between thirty and forty years, told me that he well remembered Freeman, who succeeded him as keeper some twenty years ago, shooting a Brent Goose at the Oundle end of Biggin Lake." This,

as far as it goes, is explicit enough, but in a subsequent letter Mr. Berkeley wrote:—"The bird which Davis saw, and called a Brent Goose, Freeman killed on a farm at the upper village [of Benefield]. It attracted his attention by a peculiar call when flying; he marked it down at a pond, and, approaching cautiously, secured it. It was a brown bird, *and carried its neck so close to its body when flying that nothing of it was seen*; when dead, it was fully half a yard long. It is not certain what became of it." I must confess that, from the fact of the occurrence of an Osprey at Biggin Lake being very much mixed up in Mr. Berkeley's letters with that of this Goose, I am extremely puzzled, and record the Brent Goose as a Northamptonshire bird with very considerable doubt. The present species, of whose natural habits I am very nearly as ignorant as of those of the Bernacle, is known to breed in "Spitzbergen, Novaya Zemlya, and the coasts and islands of Arctic Siberia," and in winter visits the eastern coasts of England and certain parts of Ireland, occasionally in enormous numbers—in fact, the bird is more or less well known on most parts of the shores of the three kingdoms, though locally comparatively scarce. The Brent Goose is said to feed principally by day, but its feeding-times are no doubt mainly influenced by the tide, as it does not dive for its victual, which consists of various marine grasses and other plants. The flesh of this Goose is superlatively good for the table, in my opinion no other Goose-flesh is at all to be compared with it, and a heavy shot at Brent is the *summum bonum* of professional punt-gunners. In my own experience this species has only done fairly well in captivity, and has never nested or laid eggs



at Lilford. The Canada Goose (*Bernicla canadensis*), the Egyptian Goose (*Chenalopea aegyptiaca*), and the Black-backed Tree-Goose (*Sarcidiornis melanonota*) have all occurred to my knowledge in the neighbourhood of Lilford, without any signs of having been in captivity, but were all of course waifs and strays from some private owner's domains; the first-named of the three, however, breeds and thrives so well in a state of semi-captivity that it is almost as much entitled to a place in the British list as the Red-legged Partridge.

177. WHOOPER, WILD SWAN,  
WHISTLING SWAN.

*Cygnus musicus.*

I have a large number of records and reports of the occurrence of 'Wild Swans' in our county, but must confess that I never handled or saw one of the present species that was said to have met its death in Northamptonshire, and although I am quite prepared to prove that the Whooper has appeared of its own will on several occasions in our district, I am convinced that a majority of the reports of Swans that have reached me refer really to wandering specimens of the so-called 'Tame,' more properly 'Mute' Swan, *Cygnus olor*. A tenant farmer on our property near Aldwinckle, who died about 1871, at nearly 80 years of age, and had always been a very keen pursuer of wildfowl, recorded in a note-book that he had killed several Wild Swans on a sheet of water known at the time as the Wær Pond; this fact, if indeed it is a fact, was communi-

cated by the son of this fowler to the late Rev. H. Ward of Aldwincle St. Peters, who gave me information of it, but I have not been able to obtain a sight of the notes, or in any way to fix the date of the occurrence; the site of the pond above-mentioned has been a productive meadow for as long as I can remember. The first certain record regarding this species in Northamptonshire that I find in my journals was communicated to me by Mr. G. Hunt, of Wadenhoe, by letter of December 18, 1882, and has reference to a day shortly before the date of the letter; it runs thus:—"Four Whoopers came high over me at 3 P.M. and settled on the flood at Snipe-corner (near Tichmarsh), but before I could organize a drive, a train put them up and they passed me within 150 yards; I identified them as Whoopers by their note; all of them were white. They disappeared over Thrapston." I consider that this is conclusive as to correct identification, for although Bewick's Swan also has a loud trumpeting note, Mr. Hunt, as I shall show when treating of that species, had formed a pretty intimate acquaintance with it, and was well aware of the differences between it and the Whooper. In the early part of the month of February 1889, I received several accounts from Lilford of three Swans having been seen flying up and down our valley in the neighbourhood of the house, and on the 13th my falconer wrote:—"This afternoon, when I went to the Park aviary to lock up for the night, I was surprised at the sight of two Wild Swans which got off the Pond and went away down the river; just as I caught sight of them they were close by the pinioned ones; as they were going away all of them kept calling; there is no doubt but they *were* wild, as

they took their departure directly they caught sight of me." This concluding sentence certainly proves that the visitors were not tame in the primary sense of the word, but is not conclusive as to their species; on this subject, however, I consider that the fact of their 'calling' is sufficient proof that they were not Mute Swans, and my informant has given me details as to size that render me equally sure that they were not Bewick's Swans. My personal acquaintance with the Whooper in freedom is of the very smallest, but I have kept a few of these birds on the ponds at Lilford; in general habits they resemble the better known Mute Swan, but, so far as I know, they do not sail about the water with their wings raised as the latter bird so frequently does, and generally carry their heads without any bend of the neck. Two of these birds now (1890) in my possession, last year made two large platforms in the sweet sedge that grows around their pond, and became exceedingly savage with the other waterfowl, but did not finish a nest, or, as far as we could discover, lay any egg. The Whooper breeds in Iceland, certain localities in Scandinavia, and Northern Asia, and in the winter is to be met with irregularly on all parts of the European coasts of the Atlantic as well as throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea. In Asia it is said to be "common in cold weather in Japan and China, and to have occurred in Nepal." In the situation and construction of its nest this species seems to differ little from the Mute Swan, but the eggs are said seldom to exceed 6 or 7 in number, and have not the green tinge of those of that species.

As I never had the opportunity of acquiring much knowledge of the manners and customs of the

Whooper during its winter visits to our Islands, my readers will perhaps forgive me for summarizing here the details that I find given on this part of its history in the 4th edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds.' I gather that although a few pairs of this species formerly bred in the Orkney Isles, they have long ceased to do so, but that these islands are still annually frequented in autumn by large numbers of Swans, that our eastern and western coasts are pretty regularly visited by these birds, their numbers depending principally upon the severity of the weather, that they usually adopt the same sort of formation in flying as Wild Geese; that they are not particularly difficult of approach till they have been persecuted, that on the bays and estuaries of our southern coast they have of late years become comparatively scarce, and that, in Ireland, Bewick's Swan is more common than the Whooper. The note of this species consists of a loud single note frequently repeated; to my ears it much resembles the sound first elicited from a bugle by persons unacquainted with that instrument; but the Swan's notes, when produced in chorus by a flock, are by no means unmusical. Mr. Hunt, who shot some Whoopers in Orkney in March 1881, assured me that he found their flesh excellent, but on this particular point I am unable to speak from personal experience.

In the months of January, February, and March, 1893, the valley of the Nen, in the neighbourhood of Lilford, was haunted by a considerable number of Wild Swans, and numerous reports of their appearance reached me. As I have given full details of these occurrences in the 'Zoologist' of 1893, I will only here state that I am convinced that we were visited

by all three of our British species, of which Bewick's Swan appears to have been the most numerous. The only capture of Swans that came to my knowledge at this time was communicated to me by Captain J. A. M. Vipan of Stibbington, as follows:—"February 12.93. On January 24th ult. I observed fourteen Swans on the flood near Water Newton; I went down after them with punt and big gun, and found nineteen, in two lots of eleven and eight respectively; the eleven would not let me get within 200 yards, but I could see that they were all certainly Bewick's Swans. I got a long shot at the other lot (amongst which I could detect some Mute Swans), and eventually secured two Whoopers and one Mute; one of the Whoopers weighed nearly 20 lbs. I was told that there were about 20 Swans at the same spot yesterday morning, 11th inst." The latest report of Swans that reached me during the months above mentioned was that of two Whoopers, clearly identified by my falconer, on March 9th, on the river near Barnwell Mill. On December 11, 1893, the same individual reported having seen two Swans passing over Lilford in a southerly direction, "loudly trumpeting as they flew."

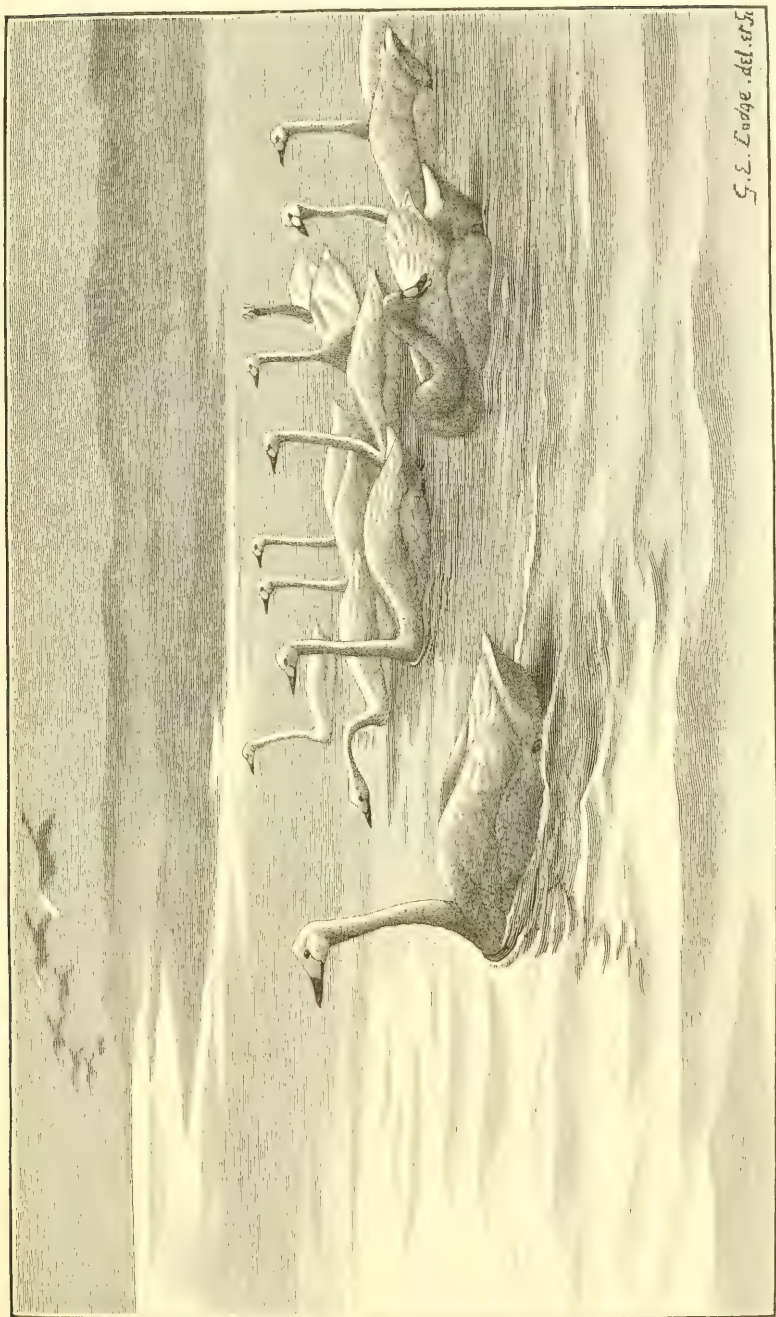
Whilst engaged on this revision of my "Notes," on March 16th and 17th, 1895, we were visited by a flock of eight adult Whoopers, that remained in the close neighbourhood of Lilford during those two days, and were seen and clearly identified from their 'music,' by most of our guests and many other persons.



## 178. BEWICK'S SWAN.

*Cygnus bewicki.*

This Swan was first distinguished and specifically separated from the Whooper by Yarrell, who bestowed its English name in honour of the famous engraver and author, Thomas Bewick, whose life-like portraits of British Birds are as perfect as human genius could produce, and in my humble opinion have never been equalled. The first occurrence of this species in our district of which I find any record is not a very positive one, and has reference to Whittlesea Mere; it occurs in Yarrell, 4th edition, vol. iv. p. 316, where I find it stated that "during the severe weather of December 1827, Wild Swans were unusually numerous; more than fifty were counted in one flock at Whittlesea Mere." Here is a full stop, but the next paragraph runs thus:—"From a considerable number which had been forwarded to the London markets for sale the author selected five examples of this new species, of different ages": I leave it to my reader's discernment to decide whether or not I am justified in considering that it was the intention of the writer from whom I quote to convey the inference that some of the present species were sent to London from Whittlesea; however, my next record is positive enough, although it refers to a locality outside of our county, and has been published by Mr. M. Browne in his 'Vertebrates of Leicestershire and Rutland.' My excuse in this instance for intruding upon Mr. Browne's adopted district is not only that the locality of the occurrence is within a few yards of our Northamptonshire frontier, but also that I have been in possession



Bewick's Swan.

of the record for more than fourteen years; it was originally communicated to me by Mr. A. G. Elliot, of Stamford, in the following words:—"A beautiful specimen of Bewick's Swan was shot by I. O. C. Knapp, Esq., Tixover Hall; I saw this bird shot, and fetched it out of the Welland; I stuffed it, and he has it still in his possession." The date of Mr. Elliot's letter to me is March 4, 1876, and I observe that Mr. Browne, on the authority of Lord Gainsborough, who obtained his information also from Mr. Elliot, adds that the bird weighed 17 lbs., was killed in April 1870, and is now preserved at Chentrey, Bucks. On January 25, 1879, Mr. G. Hunt, of Wadenhoe, met with a flock of sixteen Bewick's Swans, during a spell of very severe frost and snow, in the meadows above Oundle, and secured two of them with a lucky 'right and left': one of these birds fell on to its destroyer and knocked him down upon the frozen snow. This flock remained about the neighbourhood for several days, and on the 28th Mr. Hunt got close up to the birds as they swam on the Nen very near the north-western corner of the deer-park at Lilford, and again secured a very beautiful pair, which I presented to the Northampton Museum; the two first mentioned are preserved at Wadenhoe. Mr. Hunt, in many conversations with me on these events, informed me that all the members of this flock were pure white, and that they kept up an incessant loud 'trumpeting' when on wing; the surviving twelve were last seen in our neighbourhood on January 29, the day after the shooting of the second pair. The most noticeable external differences between this species and the Whooper are those of dimension, in which respect

the latter bird exceeds Bewick's Swan by nearly a foot in total length, and by seven or eight pounds in weight; there is also a difference in the distribution of the lemon-yellow colour on the beaks of the two species\*, but this is subject to variation; the more important diversity of internal structure is fully and very clearly set forth in the 4th edition of Yarrell, where I find that the eggs of Bewick's Swan obtained by Mr. Seebohm on the river Petchora are the first identified specimens on record. I must refer my readers for the little that is known concerning the nesting-haunts and habits of this species to the very interesting works of the gentleman last named. It is, of course, impossible to say how many of the vague reports of Wild Swans seen on our coasts during the winter may refer to the present species, my own impression is that it is far more common in our Islands than is generally supposed; Sir R. Payne Gallwey, than whom no better practical authority exists on all matters connected with the pursuit of Wildfowl, tells us that in Ireland Bewick's Swan is very much more abundant than the Whooper, and this statement is fully confirmed by many other competent observers.

\* I am assured by Mr. A. Trevor-Battye that the Bewick's Swans observed by him on the Island of Kolguev in the breeding-season of 1894 had yellow on the upper portion of their beaks.

## 179. MUTE SWAN.

*Cygnus olor.*

This bird, which is generally known as the Tame or Common Swan, requires little description at my hands. I am not aware of the existence of what could justly be termed a 'Swannery' in our county, though a few pairs of Swans are kept upon many of our larger sheets of water and on ornamental ponds, but at Lilford we are annually visited by a few of these birds at various seasons; these visitors are, for the most part, as wary as any genuinely *wild* fowl, and I cannot see any reason why they should not possess a just claim to that title, as this species breeds "in a perfectly wild state" in Denmark and the south of Sweden, although I am perfectly willing to admit that the probability of their being English bred is greater than that of their foreign extraction; this, however, is a matter of very small importance, as the Mute Swan has at all events as good a claim to rank as a British bird as the Pheasant or the Red-legged Partridge. The habits of this bird are probably well-known to all my readers, so I will only point out the constant differences by which the Mute Swan may be distinguished from the Whooper and Bewick's Swan: in the adult of the present species the black knob or tubercle at the base of the bill, the orange-red of that implement, with its black edges and terminal nail, at once distinguish it from the two other British Swans, which have no tubercle, and whose bills are usually brilliant lemon-yellow and black. In the immature Whooper the bill is of a dull pinkish white, in the Mute Swan of a greenish grey.



A fourth species of Swan has occurred in England, and was originally distinguished by Yarrell from the present bird under the name of Polish Swan, *Cygnus immutabilis*. This species when adult is hardly to be separated from the Mute Swan by any external characters, but the young birds on leaving the egg are covered with light buff-coloured down which rapidly becomes white, and is succeeded by plumage very nearly of as pure a white as that of the parent birds, though occasionally interspersed with a few reddish-buff feathers. I have kept several of these Polish Swans at Lilford, where they have bred, and I much regret that, not being aware at the time that any special interest attached to these birds, I did not record, or take any very detailed notes of the occurrences; however, from the fact that a pair of the first bred, nested, and produced Cygnets of exactly the same type as themselves at Lilford, I am fully disposed to consider the Polish Swan to be a good species. I have heard of several instances of one or more white Cygnets appearing amongst a brood of the ordinary colour, and have little doubt that this departure from the normal type of Mute Swan was due to a strain of the so-called 'Polish' blood. I became tired of my Swans, as they bullied and drove about the other pinioned water-fowl on our ponds, so that I gradually disposed of them as presents to friends, but some years ago I invested in a new pair of (so-called) Polish Swans, which, in 1884, for the first time nested and laid four or five eggs, all of which proved to be infertile; and as this pair of birds carried on this profitless performance annually with the same result, and in the meantime made themselves in every way objectionable, I gave them away

in 1889 to a relation in the county, who required them chiefly to assist in clearing an ornamental piece of water of weeds.

#### 180. SHELDRAKE.

*Tadorna cornuta.*

This handsome bird is a rare straggler to the valley of the Nen above Peterborough, and I do not feel sure of having ever seen it in a wild state in our county, but I have good reason to believe that a very fine specimen now stuffed in my possession was killed near Peterborough in the winter of 1856-57. Mr. A. G. Elliot informed me that a Sheldrake was shot near Warmington, in 1867, and at the time of his writing to me was in the possession of a Mr. A. Bell, of Peterborough. My friend Mr. G. Hunt, on August 1, 1881, saw a Sheldrake alight in a grass field near Tichmarsh, and made an ineffectual attempt to stalk and shoot it; I heard from my head gamekeeper that his son saw a bird of this species on a flooded meadow near Thorpe Waterville, on March 14, 1888; and, lastly, I have recently seen a stuffed specimen that was killed (as I am informed by Mr. E. C. Burton) on Daventry Reservoir many years ago. The Sheldrake breeds in holes in the sand-hills on various parts of the coasts of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. My personal acquaintance with it in British dominions is almost entirely confined to a sandy reach of shore on the coast of Merioneth, where, in August 1851, I frequently observed three or four family-parties, consisting respectively of from 7 to 12 individuals,

which kept swimming at low-water time in fine weather within a short distance of the flat shore, and were to be seen at high-water scattered about the sands in groups; on a subsequent visit to this locality in the month of June, 1860, I saw perhaps half a dozen old birds during a week's exploration, and with considerable labour dug out eight hard-set glossy white eggs from a rabbit-burrow in a large sand mound thickly overgrown with marram-grass; I had watched the parent bird fly from the sea to this hill, but could not from my post of observation actually see into which of the many rabbit-holes she disappeared, and was only guided by finding a solitary wing-feather at the entrance of the burrow upon which we commenced operations, as the whole hill was covered with the footmarks of Sheldrakes and other birds. As far as I was able to ascertain, these birds, at the seasons that I have mentioned, were feeding principally upon sand-hoppers and lug-worms, but they are very fond of molluscs of all sorts; their flesh is coarse and worthless for the table. I have met with this species sparingly in the Mediterranean during the winter months, it seldom goes far from salt-water, and is a very wary bird. In captivity its beauty is its only recommendation, as it is extremely pugnacious, and from its strength and activity can easily master any of the other British Ducks. Mr. H. Saunders mentions Northamptonshire, in his 'Manual of British Birds,' as one of the English counties in which the Ruddy Sheldrake, *Tadorna casarca*, has been shot, and is perfectly correct in this statement, for an unfortunate bird of this species born and reared upon one of our ponds at Lilford, after having enjoyed more than four years

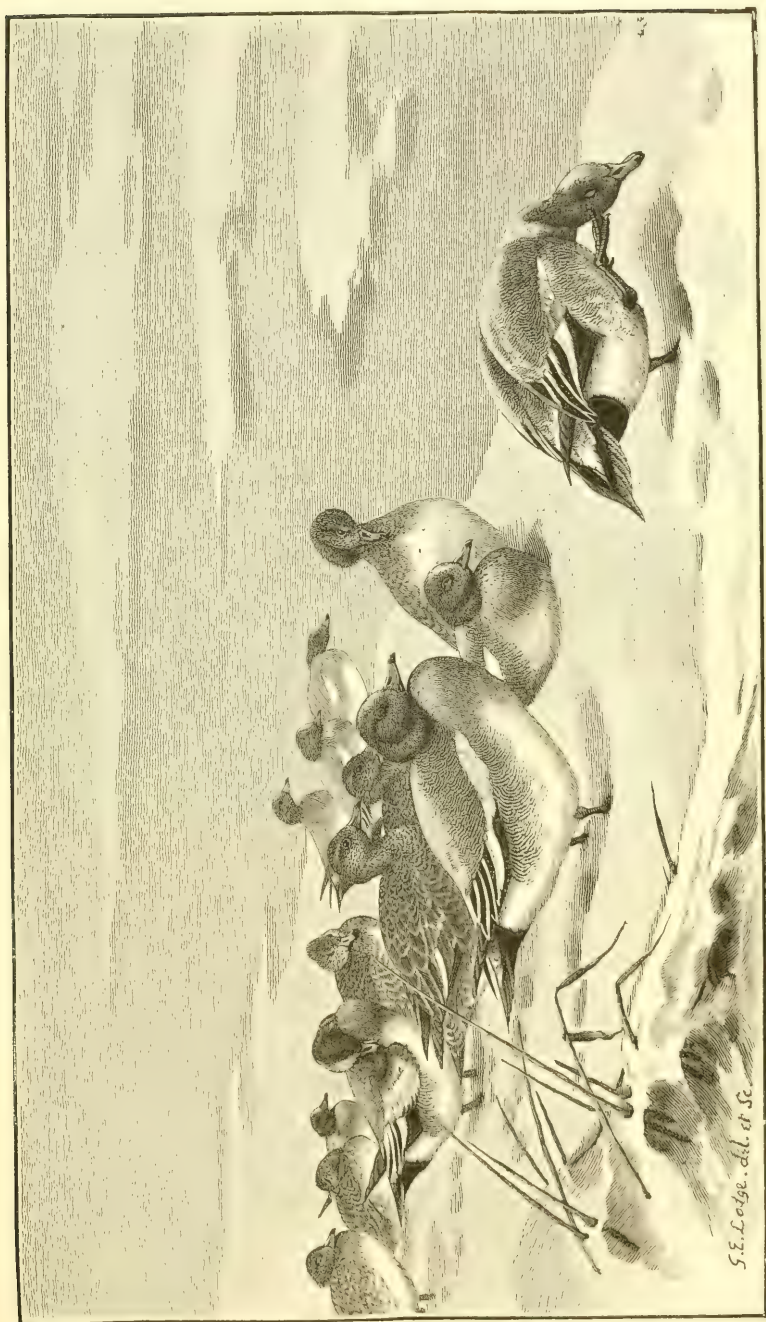
of complete freedom, was shot down in my presence by a person who had seen the poor bird on wing repeatedly, and excused his misdeed by saying that the "sun was in his eyes!" This bird roamed up and down our river to considerable distances unmolested during the period above-mentioned, and sometimes remained away from home for two or three days together; it was certainly a cruel fate that led to his destruction at the hands of an old friend and one of the most merciful of men, within a few yards of the spot where he, the victim, first saw the light of the Orb that was alleged as the cause of his massacre.

## 181. WIGEON.

*Mareca penelope.*

The Wigeon is a regular autumnal visitor to the valley of Nen; the earliest date of appearance of which I find a record in my journals is September 8, but at Lilford we are seldom visited by any very large flocks of Wigeon, except in the first three months of the year, and of late these visits have been very exceptional; as a general rule these birds appear about the middle or end of September, either singly or in small parties of from four to six individuals. Last year (1889), however, thirty-five dropped suddenly on to our decoy-pool (on which two or three had been constantly since September 8) on October 23; twenty-three were immediately caught, and were without exception birds of the year. In August, 1874, I shot an old male Wigeon in full moult, on a reedy backwater near Lilford; this bird had, no doubt, from some cause been left behind by his companions on their northward vernal





Wigeon on the Snow.



migration, and had spent the summer in the neighbourhood of the spot in which I found him. On the northward migration some flights of Wigeon generally visit us early in March, a few birds occasionally remaining till late in April; but with the solitary exception to which I have alluded, I never met with one of this species between the end of that month and the beginning of September in the neighbourhood of Lilford. The Wigeon breeds in considerable numbers in certain districts of Scotland and in Ireland, and very rarely in England; I never had the good fortune to see a nest of this bird, and none of my pinioned birds at Lilford have ever laid to my knowledge; the eggs are said to average from seven to ten in number, and are of a rich buff-colour. The favourite food of the Wigeon on fresh water is decidedly the common willow-weed, but many other aquatic plants and land-grasses are eagerly devoured by this species when haunting inland waters, and I have seen a group of Wigeon more than once engaged in grazing like Geese on a drained meadow. When haunting the coast, as they frequently do in thousands during the winter and early spring, the Wigeons feed principally on the various marine grasses that are exposed by the ebb of the tide; these birds do not habitually procure their food by diving, although they are very expert in that art, and they seem to feed as much by day as by night. The Wigeon is a lively, active bird, both on the water and on land, and the bright plumage of the males with their shrill whistle, the constant chuckle of the females, and the rapid flight and wheelings of the flocks, which, except in the finest sunny weather, are constantly on the move, very much enliven our coasts. This bird is much

sought after by punt-gunners, as it offers more frequent chances of "heavy" shots than perhaps any other of our British wild-fowl, and though its flesh is, in my opinion, by no means pre-eminent for excellence, it will always command a certain price in the market. In captivity the Wigeon thrives remarkably well, and occasionally breeds; it is certainly one of the most ornamental of water-fowl and becomes exceedingly tame. I have met with this species in every part of Europe and N. Africa that I have visited in the winter season, and once noticed three Wigeons on the Guadalquivir as late as May 1. In a decoy, Wigeon will generally "work well to the dog," especially in fine weather, and very large numbers are annually taken in such of these establishments as are situated near the sea. This species, as far as my own observation extends, prefers shallow open waters to the overgrown marshes and narrow streams which constitute the favourite haunts of many of the true Ducks and Pochards, and many of its habits more resemble those of the Geese than of the genuine family of *Anas*; amongst others, I may especially mention its active and easy carriage on land as contrasted with the shuffling gait of the Ducks and the ungainly waddle of the Pochards.

## 182. MALLARD.

*Anas boschas.*

Common and more or less resident throughout our county, this well-known bird breeds in considerable numbers in all suitable localities, but we do not now hear of the vast congregations that used to frequent

the lower valley of the Nen in former years during the winter-floods, though 200 or 300 may now and then be seen together in such circumstance in the neighbourhood of Lilford. Since the completion of my decoy near Tichmarsh in 1885, I have seldom heard of more than 100 together on the decoy-pond, and fifty-three is the largest number that has ever been taken there in one "drive"; this, however, is not to be taken as any true indication of the number of these birds frequenting the neighbourhood, as we always have more Wild Ducks in flood-times than under any other conditions, and during these floods the decoy is unworkable, and the "fowl" finding themselves perfectly secure on the open meadows, naturally avoid crowding on to a small pool for the rest and food that attract them when the unfortunately navigable Nen is at its normal level. Of late years we have reared Wild Ducks by hand in some numbers at Lilford, from eggs collected in the district and in Lancashire, and the majority now captured at the decoy or shot in our neighbourhood show signs of semi-domestic origin in their weight, the shortness of their wings, the width and irregularity of the white collar of the drakes, and a tendency to variety in plumage. These birds commence laying earlier than genuine wild-bred Ducks, and are often sitting hard on full complements of eggs by the first week of March; a very large percentage of these early eggs are stolen by Rooks and Carrion-Crows, or destroyed by spring-floods, so that the broods hatched and reared by the parent birds are comparatively few, but in many cases experience has taught the old birds caution, and I am acquainted with many instances of Ducks' nests near Lilford situated in hollow trees, at







a considerable height from the ground, and pretty safe from all but human enemies. One of the most remarkable of these cases that has come to my knowledge was that of a Duck, who, towards the end of April 1886, laid thirteen eggs in a cavity of an elm tree, at about 20 feet from the ground, from which recess three young Tawny Owls had taken their first flight about a week before this Duck took possession; she hatched out the whole of her laying, and took off her brood safely before the end of May. The nest is generally made of coarse grasses, and lined with a profusion of down from the breast of the parent bird; the eggs vary in number from 8 or 9 to 14. The young birds soon follow their mother to quiet and sheltered spots near water, where she tends them with the greatest care, and leads them out to feed in the early morning and at dusk; the young broods are seldom really strong on the wing till towards the end of July, often not till considerably later. In May the old drakes begin to change their brilliant plumage for a dingy dress much resembling, but generally darker than, that of the females; at this season of the year the male birds congregate together in the most secluded and overgrown marshy places, and as the quill or flight-feathers of their wings are dropped within a very short time, they remain totally incapable of flight for some weeks during the height of summer, and do not regain their full beauty till October; before this, however, they have rejoined their families, and resort regularly with them about sunset to the corn-fields and other localities, for the adult Wild Duck is strictly nocturnal in its feeding-habits. At the first streak of daylight the flocks leave their pasturage for the lakes and open waters,

and spend the day in washing, sleeping, and preening their feathers, either on the water or on its banks. When severe frost has turned the surface of the lakes into ice, the Ducks resort in great numbers to our sea-coasts, and, indeed, may be found wherever they can meet with quiet, shelter, and open water. No bird is more naturally wary than the Mallard, but a very severe frost, or a sudden rainy thaw, seems to a great extent to paralyse their sense of danger, and such seasons are the harvest-time of the wild-fowler, or perhaps more correctly of the gunner; for in the first case the decoys are frozen over and temporarily useless, and in the second, the fowl are uneasy and restless, constantly flying from place to place, and will seldom pay any attention to the decoy-ducks or dog. In sharp bright frosts, some thirty or more years ago, a walk with gun and retriever along the banks of the Nen and its tributary brooks was by no means an unattractive or profitless pastime, and although we seldom came home overladen with spoil, we still more seldom returned without something more to show than a fine appetite and a keen sense of having spent a pleasant day; the variety and uncertain nature of the sport, and the chances of observation afforded by these rambles, constituted to me at least an invincible charm. The marking down and stalking up to a cunning old Mallard or a bunch of Teal, a few snap shots at Snipes, the occasional appearance of some comparatively uncommon wild-fowl, the generally fruitless scheming for a shot at Wild Geese, the frequent treat of seeing the stoop of a wild Falcon, the rare opportunity of a successful right and left at Golden Plovers, the solemn conclave of Herons gathered at a soft place, and a hundred

other glimpses of bird-life now, alas! quite impossible to me, are still amongst the brightest home memories of my younger days. I have met with the Mallard in vast numbers in many parts of the south and east of Europe during the winter, especially in the marshes of Epirus, where we occasionally made heavy bags of these birds and other wild-fowl, principally by waiting for them at sunset or "fighting-time." Although the Mallard undoubtedly pairs with the choice of his heart, and remains in her company till she begins to sit, at the commencement of the pairing-season his amours are very promiscuous. I notice that Mr. Saunders, in his 'Manual of British Birds,' says that the "domestic forms" that have sprung from this species are all polygamous, although the Mallard in the wild state is monogamous; but I can assure my readers, from pretty close observation of perfectly wild birds, that the Mallard allows himself a wide latitude of very close attention to the softer sex before finally deciding upon his bride for the year.

There is a long established decoy in the north-eastern corner of our county near Peakirk; this is mentioned by Morton as Sir John Shaw's Decoy, and is, I believe, still worked to considerable advantage. At Lilford our semi-tame Mallards breed freely with the Australian Wild Duck, *Anas superciliosa*, whose habits are identical with their own; the hybrids thus obtained are fertile for at least some two or three generations.

Almost all experienced decoy-men credit the Mallard and other wild-fowl with a keen power of scent, and generally think it necessary to carry a piece of smouldering turf to drown the effluvium of humanity when accompanying visitors, or working

about the decoy-enclosure; far be it from me to laugh at a practice so time-honoured by a class of men whose chief interest is not to alarm the fowl, but with regard to the present species, I can only say that I have repeatedly approached to within a very short distance of Mallards, both on land and on water, with a strong breeze at my back, and very often with a lighted pipe in my mouth, and more than once, when well concealed, have seen birds of this and other species swim straight up wind towards me till within half gunshot-range. I have always been extremely sceptical about the powers of scent attributed to various birds, and can safely aver that in endless cases in my own experience, my presence and that of other persons has remained undetected, or at least unnoticed, by Mallards and many other birds in the most favourable circumstance (to them) of discovery by scent. I am quite ready to confess, after years of study and observation, that the science of scent in birds and beasts is still a very great mystery to me, but as the most remarkable facts that I have personally learned on this subject refer to the *Mammalia*, they would be out of place here, and I will only add that whatever may be the powers of the olfactory nerves in birds, they are decidedly far inferior to those of warm-blooded quadrupeds; I am, of course, writing of birds generally, for of course the probability is that the power of scent is stronger in certain families than in others; on the other hand, I feel sure that sight is more fully developed in birds than in any other animals, and Wild Ducks are certainly possessed of very quick ears and the shrewdest instinct of self-preservation, but, fortunately for the owners of decoys, are frequently victims to an insatiable curiosity.

## 183. GADWALL.

*Anas strepera.*

This species is mentioned by Morton, 'Nat. History of Northamptonshire,' p. 431, as having been occasionally taken on Sir John Shaw's decoy, to which I have alluded in the previous article. I cannot say with complete certainty that I ever met with the Gadwall in a wild state in our county, I certainly never had a shot at one therein; but of late years a few, probably stragglers from the Meres of West Norfolk, have been obtained in the neighbourhood of Lilford. About December 15, 1884, my falconer reported to me that two Gadwalls were frequenting our home ponds, and on December 29 one of these birds, a fine adult male, was shot near the house by my cousin, who mistook it for a common Wild Duck. On January 12, 1889, our decoy-man reported one male Gadwall on the decoy-pond, and a young female of the year was caught there, pinioned, and transferred to our park-pond on February 18 of the same year, and on November 12, 1889, a fine pair were caught at the decoy, and treated in the same manner as the February bird. I consider it as more than probable that some Gadwalls may have been seen, and possibly even shot, in our county without having been recognized or recorded, as the females and young birds closely resemble those of the Wild Duck, and few of our game-keepers would take any particular notice of their smaller dimensions, and the white *speculum*, or bar on the wings, by which the present species may be distinguished at all ages. The Gadwall was



formerly looked upon as a rare bird in England, and can hardly be called very common at present, but from the original introduction upon one of the meres in West Norfolk of a pair of pinioned birds some thirty-five years ago, and the protection afforded to them and their descendants by their owner and adjoining proprietors, aided no doubt by the attractions of the locality to wild Gadwalls, the species has become well established there and breeds in very considerable numbers. I quote these details from Mr. H. Saunders's 'Manual,' but they have in effect been confirmed to me by Lord Walsingham, on whose Norfolk property more Gadwalls are probably annually bred than in the whole of the remainder of Great Britain. In Ireland the Gadwall is tolerably common, and it is not infrequent, as I am informed by my friend Col. Irby, in certain islands of the Hebrides. My personal acquaintance with this species is chiefly confined to Southern Europe during the winter months, but we found it nesting in the marshes of the lower Guadalquivir in small numbers in May. We used to shoot a good many Gadwalls in the winter months in Epirus, and it is also very common during cold weather in Sardinia, Sicily, and Tunis; we generally found it in freshwater pools and swamps, often in flooded woods and thickets. It is certainly specially addicted to thick covert, and therefore one of the easiest to approach of the Duck family. I never met with it in large flocks till the end of February, when the scattered parties had no doubt gathered together for their northward migration; we often came upon small parties in the low-lying coverts of Epirus that we were beating for Woodcocks, but the majority of those that I killed in that country were obtained by

flight-shooting. I noticed a peculiarity in the habits of this species at the sunset flight,—whilst the Mallards would circle cautiously several times around their feeding-place before settling, the Teal come dashing in over the tops of the reeds, and the Shovellers drop in quietly in small parties, the Gadwalls came straight over us at a considerable height, and without any preliminary circumvolution, always turned suddenly and came pouring in from the direction opposite to that of their first approach. At the feeding-hour the Gadwall is very noisy, the call of the male being a sharp shrill rattling note continually repeated, whilst the female responds with a “quack” resembling that of the Wild Duck. The nest of this bird is always placed on dry ground, and is composed of dead sedge and flags, thickly lined with grey down; the average complement of eggs is about eleven. I always looked upon the Gadwall as one of the best Ducks in Europe for the table, but I have been told that it is held in low estimation by British sportsmen in India, where it is locally common during the cold season. A considerable number of these birds are sent alive to the London markets from the Dutch decoys in the first three months of the year, but I am not aware that many are bred in Holland. The Gadwall is easily reconciled to captivity and breeds freely in the circumstances of that condition.

Whilst employed in the revision of these notes for the present issue an adult male Gadwall was brought to me alive, taken upon our decoy on December 13, 1894.

## 184. SHOVELLER.

*Anas clypeata.*

This singular bird is by no means common as a visitor to our county, though it can hardly be considered to be extremely rare; it is mentioned by Morton as one of the species that was taken on Sir John Shaw's decoy. A very fine pair are stuffed at Bulwick Park which were killed there certainly before 1850. One male was obtained on Naseby Reservoir on January 6, 1867; I shot a solitary female in September of that year near Aldwinckle. Another of the same sex, of which more anon, appeared upon our park-pond at Lilford towards the end of February 1870. Several Shovellers have been shot at Blatherwycke at various times of the year; a pair was seen on the Nen, near Wansford, on March 17, 1886, and a pair appeared on my decoy-pool on April 3, 1888, but only remained for two days. On October 22 of the same year a female dropped into the decoy, and towards the end of the following November a pair frequented our home-ponds for about ten days. On June 8, 1889, three adult males dropped into the decoy at daylight, and were followed by a fourth at the same hour on the 10th of the same month. With reference to the female of this species above mentioned as having appeared on our park-pond at the end of February 1870, I find the following notes in my Journal for that year:—"April 27, 1870. The female Shoveller still haunts the park-pond and river near the house"; and "July 28, 1870. The wild Shoveller before mentioned has paired with a pinioned drake (the

only one of his species) upon the park-pond, nested, laid eggs, and hatched out a brood of five young, which latter I saw with her there to-day." This is the only instance that has come to my knowledge of the breeding of a wild Shoveller in Northamptonshire, but from the date of some of the occurrences above quoted, I cannot suppose that it is a solitary case. This bird is very common on the marshes of the Guadalquivir in winter and early spring, at which season I have also met with it in all the Mediterranean countries that I have visited, and I was formerly acquainted with a certain district in Ireland where it was common in winter, and a few pairs were said to breed; this latter statement is now a well ascertained fact, and the Shoveller breeds regularly in many other parts of Ireland and Great Britain. In favourite haunts and some of its habits this species resembles the Gadwall, but it is a much more silent bird; in fact, except in the spring-time, I have seldom heard any note uttered by the Shoveller; at that season the drakes have a low croak, to a certain degree resembling that of the Mallard. This bird travels at very great speed, and, unless alarmed, seldom at any very great height; it consorts freely with other wild-fowl during the day, but at the 'fighting-hour' arrives in small parties or in couples, often singly. When flying alone and unalarmed, the Shoveller may be observed to turn its head constantly as if looking for an acquaintance or some other special object; this habit is also common with the Pintail, and very probably more or less so with other Ducks, but from the curious shape of the bill is peculiarly noticeable in the present species. The nest of the Shoveller is placed in the same sort of

situation as those of the other true Ducks, and composed of materials of the same character; the eggs average from ten to twelve, or thirteen in number. I do not find it easy to keep this species in captivity at Lilford through the winter; for some reason as yet unknown to us hard corn and meal do not seem to suit the birds, or indeed to present any great attraction to them. In the summer they seldom come to be fed with the other 'fowl,' and appear to find abundant sustenance not only on the surface of the water and its banks, but also about the interstices of the masonry of an old stone causeway that divides my pond; from this it would appear that small insects and molluscs form the favourite diet of the Shoveller; but it is nevertheless, in my opinion, an excellent bird for the table.

Since the above article was written, many occurrences, and three captures, of this species in the neighbourhood of Lilford have come to my knowledge; all of these have been recorded by me in the 'Zoologist.'

### 185. PINTAIL.

*Anas acuta.*

Morton, in his list of the wild-fowl occasionally taken on Sir John Shaw's decoy, mentions:—"The *Sea Pheasant* (Willughby, Ornith. p. 376), which is the *Pintail* of our Decoy-men, and by the Poulterers of London is sometimes called the *Easterling*; which feeds as much or more in Fresh Water, as in Salt, so is improperly call'd the *Sea Pheasant*." In this special connection I may mention that in an interview with the present lessees of this decoy in 1889,



I found that they spoke of the present species as "Pheasant Teal." I do not think that the Pintail has ever been abundant in our district during the last fifty years, as I only once met with it in my wild-fowling days near Lilford. The first record of its occurrence in that neighbourhood that I find in my journals is that of a pair reported to me by the Rev. F. M. Stopford, who noticed them near Tichmarsh on December 28, 1875; I find no other record till November 3, 1885, when my falconer wrote informing me that our aviary-pond was haunted by a female Pintail that was becoming quite tame, and was joined by a male on December 4; these two birds remained about our ponds till driven away by the severe frosts of the following month.

Captain J. A. M. Vipan informed me by letter that there were a fair number of Pintails on the Wash near Sutton Bridge at the latter end of January 1887. Our decoyman, in writing to me on March 4, 1887, told me that there was a male Pintail on the decoy, adding, in a letter dated 10th, "the Pintail has took to a Wild Duck"; on the 17th he wrote "the Pintail and Duck keep together as usual"; but on April 1st he informed me that the former left the decoy on March 25 and had not returned. Four of this species were seen by several persons on the flooded meadows near Lilford in the first week of March, 1888, and one or two, probably of this lot, dropped into the decoy and upon our home-ponds at this time, but had all moved on before March 10. A female Pintail was taken, with a few Teal, on our decoy on November 20, 1888, and a young male caught there with nine Mallard on December 19, 1889, and now alive on our park-pond at Lilford,

completes my list of Pintail records up to date of present writing. Although I have met with this species in great numbers in Ireland and various parts of Southern Europe, I can hardly claim more than a distant acquaintance with it in a wild state, for I have always found it to be one of the most wary of birds, and its predilection for open expanses of water renders it specially difficult of approach. The few that I have shot were obtained by chance shots, generally at the morning flight-time; but in Epirus, where the Pintail abounded in winter, I never got an evening shot at this species at the warm swamp in which I repeatedly made good bags of other wild-fowl. I feel sure that this Duck feeds to a great extent *by day* in shallow open waters. I never, to the best of my recollection, flushed a Pintail within gunshot from covert of any sort. On the sea-coast these birds consort much with Wigeon, but on the vast marshes of the lower Guadalquivir which are frequented by thousands of Pintails, the flocks seemed to keep apart from those of other species. Although, as I have already said, the Pintail is generally exceedingly wary, it is easily taken on the decoys, and I am acquainted with one instance in which seventy-two of these Ducks were killed by one shot from a heavy shoulder-gun fired from behind a trained horse; this last atrocity, however, was committed upon a mass of freshly arrived and probably wearied birds. Very few Pintails remain to breed in the British Islands; I am personally acquainted with only one locality in which they are supposed to do so with any regularity, and certainly have done so occasionally. A large number of these birds are sent to London alive from the Dutch decoys in February

and March, but their principal breeding-grounds in Europe are in the extreme north. I only once heard any note from Pintails either in a wild state or in captivity; the instance in my mind was that of a lot of five or six which came over my head at early dawn with a low cackling noise resembling the undisturbed and familiar conversation of Mallard at flighting-time. In captivity these birds thrive well and are said to breed freely; but in this latter respect we have had no better luck with this species than with the many others on our wild-fowl ponds at Lilford. I attribute this want of success in former years to over-crowding on a very small piece of water in a small enclosure, and the consequent laying of many eggs by different species of Duck in the same nests; but this would hardly account for the many deaths of various young fowl after hatching. I have now given my pinioned wild-fowl a considerably larger range of both land and water, and hope for better results. The flesh of the Pintail is as good as that of any Duck that flies and feeds in Europe.

Several more occurrences of this species near Lilford have come to my knowledge since this article was written.

#### 186. GARGANEY. SUMMER TEAL.

*Anas circia.*

In concluding his list of Northamptonshire birds, Morton writes:—"I had almost forgot the Summer Teal: *Anas circia*, Gesn., the smallest of all the Duck kind, which altho' so rare Mr. Willughby had never seen it, is often found upon the Weland in the

latter end of the year, and now and then upon our Brooks ; particularly Harper's Brook by Great Oakly." I must say that although our old naturalist mentions the Teal in another place, and particularly tells us that the birds of his list "are all that I can fitly mention here as more uncommon Birds," I am inclined to look with some doubt on his accuracy of identification in some of the supposed occurrences of the Garganey, for this species is not "the smallest of the Duck-kind," but is considerably larger than the Teal, and very rarely remains in England till "the latter end of the year." At all events the Garganey is now anything but a common visitor to our county, and my records of its appearance are few and far between.

Captain J. A. M. Vipan informs me that one of these birds was killed at Stibbington on March 30, 1870, and I have seen an adult male stuffed at Thrapston that was shot near that place in April of the same year. I was told that this bird had several companions of its own species at the time of its capture, and that others of the flock had fallen to the gun, but I was unable to verify this part of the story ; one of our gamekeepers, however, assured me that he saw a small lot of what he called curious-looking Teal at some little distance below Thrapston in the month last named. Two Garganeys were seen, and an adult male secured on Naseby Reservoir on April 11, 1883 ; this bird was stuffed by J. Shaw of Shrewsbury, and formed part of the collection of Mr. G. Ashby Ashby, to whom I am indebted for this and other notes on the birds of the Naseby district. A solitary male Garganey dropped into our decoy on April 2, 1888, and left it the same evening. Lord

Huntly informs me that a male Garganey was taken about March 18th, 1895, at Boro' Fen decoy (frequently alluded to in previous articles as "Sir John Shaw's decoy"), and received alive by him at Orton Longueville on 20th inst. The Garganey is a vernal migrant to our Islands, but is not abundant in them at any season; it nests pretty regularly in certain parts of Norfolk, where I have met with it in July and August. My principal acquaintance with this bird in a wild state was formed in Turkey and Andalucia; it arrived in the former country in very large flocks about the end of February and remained throughout March in the tamarisk and willow-swamps. A flock of Garganeys twisting among trees presents a very remarkable appearance, from the simultaneous flashing in the sun of the blue-grey wing-coverts of the male birds amidst the pale green of the early spring foliage; the birds are very restless, and perpetually dashing from place to place with a curious harsh rattling note, which in Southern Spain has gained for them the name of 'Carrañaca.' In this connection I may mention that the Garganey visits the marshes of Andalucia in small flocks about the end of April, and that a few pairs remain to breed there. I received for the first and only time a nest of this species with eleven eggs from the neighbourhood of Seville, in 1888; this nest was a loose mass of fragments of sedge and water-flags thickly lined with grey down; the eggs are slightly larger and of a lighter creamy white than those of the Common Teal. The Garganey thrives well in captivity during the summer, but is not a very hardy bird. The flesh of this little Duck is very dry and ill-flavoured; but I must state that I never tasted it at the best season,



that is between August and March; and in the spring and summer all the true Ducks feed principally upon insects, and are, of course, inferior to grain-fed birds. I do not esteem young Mallard to be worth powder and shot till they have been gleaning amongst the ripe barley, and consider that the close-time for them might be advantageously extended at least to August 15; this extension should also apply to the Shoveller, Gadwall, Pintail, Teal, and the present species.

## 187. TEAL.

*Anas crecca.*

Although this beautiful little Duck is still by no means an uncommon autumnal visitor to our county, it has greatly diminished in numbers at all events in the neighbourhood of Lilford, for whereas in my boyhood it was by no means exceptional to find flocks of forty or fifty, occasionally of many more, between the beginning of October and the end of March, I very seldom now hear of more than a dozen or twenty as seen together on our river or brooks. Many Teal are bred in the rough fen below Peterborough, and no doubt in other localities in our district. I have authentic information of the nesting of this bird at no great distance from Northampton, but in the interest of the birds abstain from giving particulars. I have kept a regular record of first annual reports of appearance of Teal near Lilford from 1880 to 1889, and find that they range from July 21 to October 19; the first-named of these two dates is the only one for July, and refers to a solitary young bird.

In wet summers a few Teal drop in upon our



Teal "put in" by Tiercel Peregrine.

swampy meadows in early August, but I should fix the last week of that month as about the average time of their first autumnal visits to us. A few remain till they are frozen out, and we have a small but pretty regular return passage in March. The Teal may roughly be said to breed locally almost all over England, and abundantly in Scotland and Ireland; the nest is always built on dry ground, sometimes on dry heaths at a considerable distance from water; but I think that the most favourite place is a dry patch of heathery peat-ground surrounded by channels and pools of water; the eggs are greenish white, and average from 9 to 12 in number. I have frequently found young Teal unable to fly in the Highlands of Scotland as late as the last week of August, but as a rule they are well able to take care of themselves before the 12th. From its love of thick covert this bird is comparatively easy of approach, and I have known several instances in which wild Teal that have dropped in amongst pinioned wild-fowl on a pond have in a few days become as tame as their captive companions and come with them to the whistle of the feeder, although, curiously enough, I have found that if caught and pinioned they are about the most shy of wild-fowl, and generally remain concealed in any covert that they can find. As these birds come into their nocturnal feeding-places very fast and flying low, they are very difficult to kill at flight-time, but from their habit of sitting and flying close together, very productive shots may sometimes be 'put in' during the daytime, and I have had some excellent sport with Teal in England, Ireland, and Epirus; the usual call-note of the Teal is a short, somewhat guttural whistle, but in the pairing-season

the male has a low, but decided 'quack.' I need hardly say that in its proper season, and away from salt-water, the flesh of the Teal is super-excellent. I consider this bird to be the favourite quarry of the Peregrine, and at Lilford I have always found that the first appearance of Teal is immediately followed by that of this Falcon. A very beautiful male hybrid of this species and Mallard was taken on our decoy on December 21, 1894, and unfortunately killed by the decoyman, who did not recognize its peculiarities till after he had broken its neck. It had dropped in at morning flight with a small bunch of Teal, of which six and eight Mallard were taken in the same 'drive.' I never handled a specimen of this cross before, and have not a doubt that we have here the "Bimaculated Duck" of Latham and other authors.

#### 188. POCHARD.

*Fuligula ferina.*

An irregular and not very abundant visitor to the valley of the Nen. During protracted winter and early spring-floods, when our meadows are covered by several inches of water, small flocks of Pochards may frequently be seen consorting with the other wild-fowl that are attracted by the perfect security afforded by these temporary lakes, and a few of these "Dunbirds," as they are locally called, are generally to be found on our river, singly or in companies of from five to ten, during severe frosts. In my former rambles along the river between 1850 and 1870, a Pochard or two often helped to swell our bag, but of late years I have only heard of a few as seen on the



decoy or elsewhere in the neighbourhood of Lilford; this fact is somewhat remarkable, as many more of this species now breed in England than was the case between the years above mentioned. In common with most, if not all, of the genus *Fuligula* or lobed-toed *Anatidæ*, the food of the Pochard is obtained by diving, and consists principally of various aquatic plants and mollusca. On narrow streams or small ponds this bird is easy to obtain by watching it dive and "making in" whilst it is under water; and as when frequenting rivers it generally follows the course of the stream for some distance, when forced to take wing a second gunner in ambush can often put in a satisfactory double shot at the birds that have escaped from the first attack. On first rising from the water these birds scutter along the surface for a few yards, and afford the easiest of shots, but when once well launched into the air, their flight is swift and well sustained, and on open waters they are wide-awake, and though perhaps not so wary as some others of their family, are very well able to take care of themselves. On one occasion in company with a friend, I discovered a party of seven Pochards diving in a shallow bend of our river near Thorpe Waterville; the ground was covered with several inches of snow, and the river frozen over in many places. We were both arrayed in white for concealment's sake, and our garments so well answered their intended purpose, that the Pochards (of whose number two or three were always on the surface whilst the others were under water) allowed us to walk up to within fifteen yards of them; we secured five of them as they at last rose, and before we had retrieved the fifth, the other two came back over our



heads as if to see what had become of their companions, and were both brought to bag. When feeding in fresh water, the Pochard is good food, but, of course, the flesh deteriorates in quality by a residence on the sea-coast or tidal estuaries. The call of the Pochard is a low guttural whistle, but they have also a rattling croak, generally, in my experience, uttered not on rising alarmed from the water, but as a warning to their companions when travelling in the air. I have occasionally seen considerable numbers of this species on the Broads of East Norfolk, and in some marshes in Queen's County; the Pochard is in fact a well-known bird throughout the United Kingdom, and is more or less common at certain seasons in most of the countries of Europe and in North Africa; I met with it in abundance on the Tagus near Lisbon, rarely in Andalusia, commonly in Sardinia, Sicily, and Tunis, and I have received specimens from Cyprus. Never having seen a nest of wild Pochards *in situ*, I leave the description of it to other authors; in captivity the eggs are generally from 6 to 9 in number, they are of a greenish tinge, and large for the size of the bird. This species thrives well in semi-domestication, but the young are very difficult to rear.

## 189. SCAUP.

*Fuligula marila.*

This species, although much less common with us than the Pochard, cannot be called very rare on the Nen. I have many records of its occurrence in various parts of our valley between Peterborough and Northampton, and five or six have been obtained,

and several others seen, in the immediate neighbourhood of Lilford in my recollection. I have an adult male stuffed in my Northamptonshire collection, killed by myself about 1850; with this and one other exception, all the county specimens that I have seen in hand have been birds of the year. The Scaup generally visits our locality singly, I never met with more than two together; the earliest seasonal occurrence near Lilford with which I am acquainted was that of a solitary young male shot by Mr. G. Hunt, on October 8, 1880, during one of the highest floods that I ever remember in the Nen valley. During the later months of autumn, and throughout the winter, many parts of our coasts are visited by large numbers of Scaups, the habits of this species being more exclusively marine than those of any other of the British members of the genus *Fuligula*. The natural food of the Scaup consists almost entirely during the winter months of marine mollusca and certain sea-weeds obtained by diving. This bird can remain under water longer than the Pochard or the Tufted Duck, and is a swift and powerful flyer, though rather averse to taking wing unless hard pressed. The flesh of this species is very coarse and rank in flavour. Whilst writing this article, I am informed by my decoyman that a pair of Scaups in adult plumage dropped into the decoy with four Pochards, in the early morning of October 22, 1890, but the whole party left the pool at evening flight-time, and did not re-appear there. Although one or more records of the nesting of the Scaup in Scotland have been published on good authority, considerable doubt exists as to the correct identification of the birds, and I think that I am justified in stating that no such

occurrence has been actually proved to have taken place in any part of Great Britain or Ireland. In general habits this species much resembles the Pochard, but from the nature of its favourite food, it is, as I have previously mentioned, comparatively seldom to be met with on fresh waters at any great distance from the sea. In fine or moderate weather during the winter months, large flocks of Scaups may be found "riding head to windward" far out at sea, only coming in shore to feed on the mussel-beds at low-water time. This species very soon becomes reconciled to captivity, and thrives well in that condition; a very fine old male captured by some snowballing boys in a hole in the ice which nearly covered the Liffey in the centre of Dublin in January 1855, lived contentedly, if not happily, in my barrack-room for several weeks, and became perfectly tame and on friendly terms with my dog: at Lilford I have kept several of these birds pinioned on my ponds for a considerable number of years; they "train off" readily upon meal and grain, but prefer fish, meat, and snails to any other food with which we can readily supply them. I never heard any note uttered by my captive birds; the ordinary cry is a harsh croak, or caw, that would come very appropriately from the throat of a Raven. This species visits the Mediterranean during the winter, but is never abundant in the western portion of that sea; in fact, I never met with it in any abundance thereon, except in the neighbourhood of Tunis, and there its numbers were small in comparison with those of other species of *Anatidæ*. The Scaup breeds in abundance on the shores and islands of some of the freshwater lakes of Iceland; the eggs are of a clay-

buff colour, and, according to Mr. H. Saunders, usually from six to eleven in number. I am not aware of any record of the nesting, or even of the laying, of this species in the semidomestic condition in which it is frequently kept.

#### 190. TUFTED POCHARD.

*Fuligula cristata.*

Never met with by me in any considerable numbers in our county, yet by no means an uncommon casual winter visitor to the Nen Valley. Few seasons pass without the occurrence of a few of these ducks in the neighbourhood of Lilford; the majority of my records refer to immature birds, but we have several times obtained specimens in adult plumage; on one occasion I found five of these birds diving in a shallow reach of the river near Lilford, but this is the only instance recorded in my note-books of my having met with more than two of this species together in Northamptonshire; but during the severe weather of February 1895, a bunch of ten appeared on the Nen near Tichmarsh, and paid heavy toll to our gunners. In this part of the country I never found these birds in the company of other wild-fowl. I consider the flesh of the Tufted Duck when living on fresh water as far superior in flavour to that of the Common Pochard, though the latter is by no means to be despised. In habits, this pretty little fowl much resembles its congeners, seeking its food almost entirely at the bottom of the water, but from my own experience, I am inclined to think it feeds whenever favourable opportunities occur, by day as







well as by night, in fact, that it is less strictly nocturnal in its feeding-habits than the other species of its genus. I have noticed on large open sheets of water in Southern Europe that whilst the Common Pochards and Scaups floated lazily about in the bright sunshine, with many of their number apparently asleep, the Tufted Ducks were constantly diving, and flying from place to place in quest of food. This bird is now known to nest annually in several counties of England, as well as in Scotland and Ireland, and under the protection afforded by law in the breeding-season, as well as by many owners of the lakes and meres in which it delights, seems to be rapidly increasing in numbers as a resident in our Islands. Nottinghamshire appears to be one of the counties most favoured by the Tufted Duck in the summer season. In the state of semi-captivity produced by pinioning and fox-proof fences, I have found that this species thrives well, though it is certainly less hardy than the Pochard or Scaup. Several broods have been hatched off, and a few young birds reared, about my ponds at Lilford, which are, I fear, too limited in extent, and probably too crowded, to induce young wild-fowl, if left free, to remain and permanently establish themselves; the immediate neighbourhood of the river is also, of course, a strong incentive to this class of birds to wander from their home. The ordinary call-note of the Tufted Duck is well rendered by Mr. Whitaker of Rainworth, Notts, by the words "currugh, currugh," and has probably given rise to the name "Black and White Curre," by which the bird is known to the Hampshire gunners. "Blue-billed Curre" is another common name for this species; but I must admit

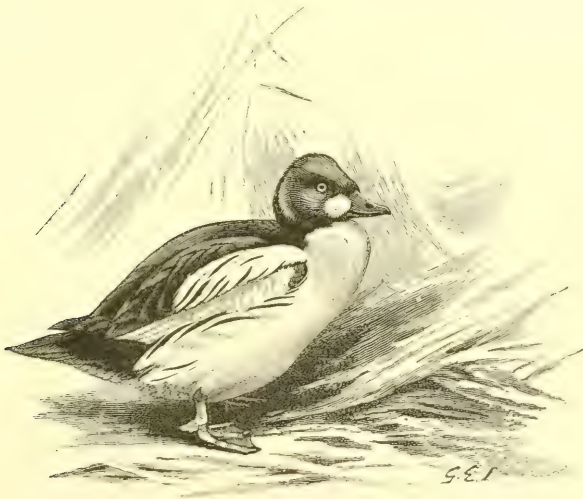
that the word "Curre" is applied locally to other birds of the genus *Fuligula*, and I may be mistaken as to the derivation of the name. I have met with this species in many parts of the Mediterranean countries; it was abundant on the great lagoon of Tunis in November, and I have seen large numbers on the brackish lakes of the island of Sardinia. The eggs, which are of a dull green colour, average in number from seven to ten; the young, when recently hatched, are very remarkable objects, their long smoky-coloured down, their squat shape, and their brilliant golden-yellow irides producing a combination that is grotesque in the extreme. This bird is by no means shy in comparison with many other wild-fowl, and shares with the Pochard the propensity for flying along the course of a stream, to which I have alluded in my article on that species. These diving-fowl are seldom taken in ordinary decoys, but the subject of duck-decoys has been so fully and so admirably treated of by Yarrell, Lubbock, Sir R. Payne Gallwey, and other writers, that I refrain from going into any details on a matter with which I have little personal acquaintance.

#### 191. GOLDEN-EYE.

*Fuligula clangula*.

Few autumns pass without a visit from some of this species to the Nen in the neighbourhood of Lilford; these visitors are generally immature birds which drop in singly, or in small companies; five is the greatest number that I have seen together on our river. The adult Golden-Eyes seldom favour us

with their presence, and although I have met with several fine old males, I never saw or heard of one in this state of plumage near Lilford, except during the months of January, February, and March. I possess a very fine specimen stuffed, that was killed close to the house as long ago as January 4, 1837, and I find in my note-book that an adult pair frequented the same locality for more than a fortnight in March 1870. My memory recalls other occurrences of male Golden-Eyes in the unmistakable



Golden-Eye (adult male).

dress of maturity, but, unfortunately, does not enable me to fix the dates of their appearance, as I regret to say that in my early shooting-days my game-books were far better kept than my notes on birds. I look upon the immature Golden-Eye as a more or less regular autumnal migrant through our county, whilst the adult can only be considered as an accidental and strictly winter straggler, that rarely appears except

in hard weather. The young birds do not seem to be much influenced in the time of their visits to us by the state of the weather, and are as often to be met with in an open October as during our first sharp frosts. The old Golden-Eye is generally exceedingly wary and difficult to approach, but the young are the most confiding of wild-fowl till they have been harassed and shot at, and as they are extremely ornamental, and perfectly worthless from a culinary point of view, by far the best line of conduct to adopt with them is that of friendly observation. This bird is, in my experience, the most rapid diver of its genus, but I do not think that it can remain beneath the water for so long a time as the Scaup. The flight of the Golden-Eye is very swift and vigorous, and is accompanied by a peculiar swishing noise of the wings, which has gained for this bird the nicknames of "Rattlewing" and "Whistle-Duck." This species has a curious habit of throwing back its head, at the same time uttering a low mewling note, with the bill pointed straight upwards; till the summer of 1890, I had always considered that this action and note were peculiar to the males in the courting-season, but in that year I several times saw and heard two females on my wild-fowl pond at Lilford engaged in these performances. I may mention that, with the exception above mentioned, I never heard any sort of call or cry produced by a Golden-Eye. These birds thrive well in semi-captivity, and are naturally very hardy, but require an occasional supply of other than vegetable food, small fishes (whole or cut-up), shrimps, and raw meat are greedily devoured, and my birds seem to find a certain amount of food for themselves in the mud at the bottom of the pond,



where, however, I fear that the supply of freshwater molluscs must, if not entirely exhausted, be very scanty, owing to the number of diving-fowl that we keep in a comparatively limited area. A male Golden-Eye was, during the whole of one summer, the absolute master of all the diving-birds on this pond. What he did beneath the water we were unable to see, but from the abrupt emergence of the other divers when he had "gone below," and the manner that he "went for them" with lowered head immediately on reaching the surface, I have no doubt that he made himself exceedingly unpleasant; the only birds that seemed to be able to get out of his way and took little notice of his "cussedness" were the Smews. There is no authentic record of the nesting of this species in the British Islands, either in a wild or semi-domestic state; it breeds commonly in various parts of Northern Europe, making its nest in the holes of trees, or, as we are told by travellers, in boxes or hollowed logs placed by the natives for the purpose of easily obtaining the eggs. The eggs are said to vary in number from ten or twelve to as many as nineteen, the latter number being exceptional; they are very large for the size of the bird, and when fresh, of a more brilliant green than is usual amongst Ducks' eggs. The difference of the plumage of the adult males from that of the females and young of the Golden-Eye, as well as the very remarkable difference in size and weight of individuals of both sexes *inter se*, caused some naturalists to consider that two distinct species were included under one name, and I know that this opinion is still maintained by certain experienced sportsmen and professional gunners, who distinguish the

young birds as “Morillons,” a name that has certainly been applied to more than one species in days gone by; ornithologists, however, are now well satisfied that with regard to the present bird the name “Morillon” is a distinction without any difference of species.

## 192. COMMON SCOTER.

### *Edemia nigra.*

Although many reports of the occurrence of the Scoter in our county and its immediate neighbourhood have reached me at various times, I can only give the following details regarding three of such occurrences, viz.:—One killed on Blatherwycke Pond on July 24, 1873, and reported to me in 1876, by Mr. de Stafford; another shot by a gamekeeper in the employ of Mrs. Stopford Sackville, of Drayton, near Woodford Mill, about August 18, 1879, and sent to me in an almost putrid condition; this bird was an adult female, and I presented the skin to our Natural History Society in June 1880. The third was shot by Mr. G. Hunt, of Wadenhoe, on our meadows near Aldwinkle, during one of the heaviest floods that I can remember on the Nen, on October 8, 1880; this was a young female in very poor plumage. It is a remarkable fact that many, I think I might say the majority, of the recorded occurrences of this *sea-fowl* inland in England have taken place in summer or early autumn. My own acquaintance with the Scoter is confined to the sight of many in the Channel at all times of the year, and the pursuit of small flocks that frequented the harbour of Santander in November and December 1878; but the species is exceedingly

common, especially on our eastern coasts, in autumn, winter, and early spring. The principal breeding-resorts of the Scoter in Europe are the northern portions of Scandinavia and Russia; it also breeds in Iceland, and in small numbers in the north of Scotland. The nests are said to be usually placed on islands of freshwater lakes or the boggy moors in their neighbourhood; the eggs vary from 6 to 9 in number, and are of a dull yellowish white. This bird feeds entirely by diving; its food consists of molluscs, and its flesh is dark and coarse, but in the hands of a skilful cook, can be rendered tolerably palatable. Mr. F. S. Mitchell, in his interesting work 'The Birds of Lancashire,' informs us that great numbers of Scoters are occasionally taken on the shores of Furness, in what are commonly known as "Douker-nets"; he writes:—"These nets are of various lengths, but mostly about four feet wide, with a mesh of four inches. They are set on the sands near where the birds have been feeding the previous tide, this being evidenced by the droppings they leave, and the holes bored by them in their search for cockles and other small molluscs. Four small stakes are driven into the sand, leaving about fifteen inches visible, and the net is hung loosely between them, one stake at each corner. When the tide rises, and the Ducks come with it, whether they dive head foremost into the nets, or get fast in them from beneath, they are rapidly drowned, and half a cart-load is not considered a very extraordinary day's catch." I must add, however, that many Scaups are also taken in these nets, and probably in most cases help considerably towards filling the Duck-carts. I have had a few pinioned Scoters on my wild-fowl

pond at Lilford, but always found them difficult to keep alive for any length of time. A female in the Zoological Gardens was kept alive for some time entirely upon small living fishes.

### 193. VELVET SCOTER.

*Ædemia fusca.*

I have no positive record of a capture of this species in Northamptonshire, but have no doubt as to one occurrence at least in the county, from the information given to me by my brother, who told me that on November 24, 1877, he saw a large bird which, for a moment, he took to be a Blackcock, rise from a thick bed of flags and sedge at the lower end of our Bridge-Island, at a very short distance from the house at Lilford; as soon as the bird was well on the wing, he saw that it was a Duck of a species that he had never before seen alive, and as he described it as being entirely black with the exception of a white bar on each wing, I think that my readers will agree with me that I am justified in recording an old male Velvet Scoter as a visitor to Northamptonshire. This species, although well known on our coasts, is very much rarer than the Common Scoter, my own acquaintance with it on British waters is entirely confined to the northern shores of the Firth of Forth during the month of January 1856. I spent many hours in watching small flocks of these Ducks diving and playing, well out of gunshot range, off the rocks in the neighbourhood of Wemyss Castle, where I was a guest at the time of which I write. By great luck I managed to send a rifle-ball through

the neck of a very fine old male, and by still greater luck to rescue my bird out of a rough tumbling sea. I found a few of this species haunting the harbour of Santander in the winter of 1878, and secured two or three. I saw one pair in the Gulf of Foz near the mouth of the Rhone, in the winter of 1874, but the Velvet Scoter is, in my experience, an exceedingly rare bird in any part of the Mediterranean. As far as I have been able to judge, this species exactly resembles the Common Scoter in habits and food, but it is perhaps rather less difficult of approach on smooth water than that bird. It is said to be common during summer in Scandinavia and Northern Russia, but, according to Mr. H. Saunders, has not been met with in Iceland.

I must add that Lady Mary Thompson informed me that this species had occurred near Milton many years before the date of her letter, 1876; but from collateral statements I have reason to doubt whether the identification in this case was entirely satisfactory, and rather suspect that the Common Scoter was in fact the species alluded to by my correspondent, though I hereby give the Velvet Scoter the benefit of the doubt.

#### 194. GOOSANDER.

*Mergus merganser.*

This handsome species occasionally appears upon the Nen and the large reservoirs of our county during severe weather, and I have several records of the capture of female and immature birds, amongst which I may mention two or three upon Naseby Reservoir, one at Fawsley, and three in the neigh-



bourhood of Lilford. Of these last three, two were killed by my brother in January 1876 from a flock of eight or ten, and presented by me to the Northampton Museum. I have no record of the capture of a male Goosander in the adult plumage in Northamptonshire, but a very fine bird in this dress haunted the river close to Lilford in company with a female of his species and a Golden-Eye for some days in February 1870, and I have several other records of the appearance of old males upon the Nen, amongst them the following very interesting note communicated by my friend Mr. G. M. Edmonds, of Oundle; in a letter dated February 29, 1876, he writes:—"Here I have seen Goosanders, Mergansers, and Smews. In November 1868 I was returning from shooting over my farm in the 'Herne' (below Oundle), and saw my meadow (in which Ashton Lock is), a field of 23 acres, literally overspread, to my great surprise, with these birds; it was blowing hard at the time. The nearest Goosander was 80 yards from me. The sun was shining on his beautiful dark green neck and salmon-coloured breast; there were between 40 and 50 of them dispersed about the field with the Mergansers and Smews. I don't think I ever was more pleased than in recognizing my old Caithness friends near Oundle; the Mergansers I had also often seen flying close to me in Caithness; the Smews puzzled me. I started off to try and stalk them, but a shot fired at some distance off caused the sudden flight of the whole lot, and great mortification to me. The next morning, going into the town, a Peterborough gunner-man who had shot three birds at Warmington brought them to me; these were beautiful specimens of the three birds."





I have very little personal acquaintance with the present species in life, although I have watched Goosanders at a respectful distance on several occasions in various parts of the world, and I certainly never enjoyed such an opportunity for the observation of the three very beautiful and interesting species of *Mergus* at the same moment as that above related.

The Goosander is now known to breed in several counties of Scotland, as well as in Iceland, Denmark, Northern Germany, Norway, Finland, and Northern Russia. The nest is said to be usually placed in a hollow tree, "sometimes on a ledge of rock, but almost invariably under some kind of shelter" (Yarrell, 4th ed. vol. iv. p. 492); the eggs are of a rich creamy white. The food of this species consists entirely of small fishes obtained by diving; it is hardly necessary to add that its flesh is worthless for the table. In the winter it visits the Mediterranean, where, however, I never noticed it in any considerable numbers. In my opinion the old male Goosander is the most beautiful of British birds.

Whilst employed on these Notes, I received as a gift from Mr. John Eunson a very fine female Goosander that was killed by the keeper at Ravensthorpe Reservoir, on February 14, 1891. In a letter that accompanied this most acceptable present, Mr. Eunson was good enough to inform me that on March 27 a pair of these birds were frequenting this same sheet of water, and that he was doing his best to prevent their being destroyed or in any way molested.

## 195. RED-BREASTED MERGANSER.

*Mergus serrator.*

Although this species is very much more abundant in our Islands, both as a resident in certain districts, and a winter visitor to our shores, than the Goosander, its visits to our inland waters seem to be less frequent than those of that species, and my records of its occurrence in our county are very few and far between, though from the fact that the females and immature birds of both species are frequently spoken of as "Dundivers," it is in many instances difficult to arrive at definite identification. For the benefit of the unlearned I may here say that a female of the present species seldom attains to more than 20 or 21 inches in extreme length, whilst the female Goosander not infrequently reaches to 26 inches, and the general colour of the latter bird is very much lighter than that of the former.

In addition to the mention of this species by Mr. Edmonds, to which I have referred in the previous article, I well remember seeing three Mergansers busily engaged in fishing in a broad bend of our river Nen just below Tichmarsh Mill, but I regret to say that I have no record of the exact date of this event, which must, however, to the best of my recollection, have occurred in the winter of 1853-54. I was accompanied by my brother, and when we first noticed the birds we were perhaps 150 yards distant from them. We made a detour to come in upon them, I rather above, and my brother a little below, the spot where we first perceived them; the water was low, and the bank on our side quite high enough



to allow of a close approach unseen, but on coming to the waterside no bird was visible. We both stood ready for quite a minute, under the impression that the birds were under water, as was indeed the case, as they rose together within a few yards of the spot whence we had first seen them, and of course far out of shot. All three of these birds were in the dull plumage of youth, at least, there was certainly not an adult male amongst them. My readers will readily believe that we felt considerably "sold," and we never met with our three deceivers again.

I have a pair of this species in my local collection, the female shot by my brother on the river above Tichmarsh Mill on December 24, 1858, and the male purchased in skin of Mr. H. Field, of Kettering, who informs me that it was shot near that town early in April 1890.

The Merganser breeds in considerable numbers about many of the larger lakes of the Highlands of Scotland and Ireland. I found it in abundance amongst the stony islands of Lough Corrib in early summer. In that locality the bird is, or was, known by the name "Skeld Duck," whilst in the north of Ireland I found that the usual appellation for it was "Scale Duck." On those parts of our English coasts where the Merganser is a more or less common winter visitor, I think that it is generally known as "Saw-bill"; I have also heard it called "Jack-awake." The nests of this species are generally well concealed amongst masses of rock or boulder-stones overgrown with heather, brambles, and other low and vigorous vegetation; I have heard of the finding of eggs in a rabbit's burrow. The eggs are generally seven or eight in number, and some-

thing of the same colour as those of the Common Wild Duck, perhaps rather less green and more buff than the average production of that species. From the comparatively small number of males in their brilliant full plumage that we noticed on Lough Corrib in June, I am disposed to think that the change takes place in this species later than in most of the true Ducks and Pochards, but I have as yet had no opportunity of verifying this supposition from personal observation.

Although Mergansers will occasionally allow a pretty close approach during the summer months, I have generally found them very wary at other times, and their speed under water and on wing is very great. This species is common during the winter in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, and was very abundant during the cold weather of 1850-51 on the Lake of Geneva, on whose shores I was assured, but do not believe, that it breeds.

196. S M E W.

*Mergus albellus.*

Besides the occurrence of this bird in company with Goosanders and Mergansers, as quoted from Mr. Edmonds's letter in my article on the Goosander, I can only find three records of the appearance of Smews on the Nen in my journals: the first of these was a beautiful adult male at which I fired a harmless shot at an easy distance, as it rose from a hole in the ice about half a mile below Lilford in January 1850. This bird was accompanied by a Duck that puzzled me very much at the time, but have now very little

doubt was a Gadwall. The next record that I find is of a pair that frequented the river near Lilford for a few days between February 18 and 25, 1870; and, lastly, an adult female was shot by my son not far from Barnwell Mills on January 3, 1890. Although, as I have already stated, these are the only records that I can find, I have several times seen immature or female Smews on the Nen on other occasions without, as it seems, recording the fact. One case is, however, very clearly impressed upon my memory of identifying a young Smew diving in the river near Aldwinckle, and as it could not be approached from the side upon which my brother and I were, I told the gamekeeper who was upon the other side to "make in" for the nearest spot on his bank; this he did, and the bird rose within ten yards of him, and fled intact, as he had left his gun loaded for several days, as was too commonly the fashion of his class in old times, and both caps missed fire. Out of our own Islands the only locality in which I have met with this species is the eastern shore of the Ionian Sea, where it was not uncommon, although never very abundant, during the two winter-seasons that I spent in that part of the world: these birds principally frequented the salt creeks and bays of the coast, and were by no means specially wary or difficult of approach; we met with very few males in adult plumage.

The Smew is a wonderfully active and vigorous diver, and is also very swift on wing. The few of these birds that I have kept pinioned on the pond at Lilford soon became reconciled to captivity, and those now in my possession are as tame as any "fowl" on our waters.

The late Mr. John Wolley has given a most interesting account of the discovery of the first authenticated eggs of this species on record in 'The Ibis' for 1859, of which account those who take an interest in the subject will find a copious extract in the 4th edition of Yarrell, vol. iv.; these eggs were found in Finnish Lapland in June 1857, and to a certain extent resembled those of the Wigeon; the nest was in a hollow birch-stump. The only note that I have ever heard uttered by the Smew is a short hissing whistle produced by the males. My living birds of this species naturally prefer fish to any other food, but will also greedily devour raw meat, and have no objection to a share in the vegetable food provided for the other water-fowl to whom it is more strictly suitable.

Whilst the present issue of my 'Notes' was in the press, during January 1895, I was assured by the falconer at Lilford that he saw an adult male and two other Smeus on the Nen below the house on the 12th and 14th of the month above named.

#### 197. COMMON CORMORANT.

*Phalacrocorax carbo.*

I have but few records of the occurrence of the Cormorant in our district; Morton alludes to it in the following words—"The Cormorant: *Corvus aquaticus*. This, as I am told, has been shot in *Fawsley* Lordship." There was a young specimen preserved at Burghley when I paid my first visit there in 1855, which, as I was informed by the late Marquess of Exeter, had been killed many years

previously at Whitewater : two Cormorants have, to my knowledge, been shot on the lake at Blatherwycke, one of them certainly before 1855, and the other on November 4, 1871 ; and Captain Ashby recorded the occurrence of an immature specimen on Naseby Reservoir on January 10, 1877, in the 'Field.' Another occurrence of a Cormorant in Northamptonshire, with which I am acquainted, is that of a young bird killed at Cherry Orchard, near Brigstock, early in September 1883, and brought to me most villainously badly stuffed, on approval, on October 31 ; this bird was first reported to me by Lady Lyveden as having for some days haunted the garden-ponds at Farming Woods, and I should have been glad to add it to my local collection, but the abominable mounting and the ridiculous price asked for it prevented me from doing so. I have vague reports of other occurrences, but I know that in some of these cases the bird reported as a "Cormorant" was in fact a Shag (*P. graculus*), of which species I propose to treat in my next article.

The Common Cormorant, which is also known as "Great" and "Black" Cormorant, is locally abundant in many parts of the coasts of the three kingdoms, and is to be met with at all seasons wherever it can find either salt- or fresh-water fishes in sufficient numbers to supply its constantly ravenous appetite. The Cormorant generally nests in colonies on the ledges of sea-cliffs, but also by no means infrequently on high trees, and on the continent of Europe often in reed-beds and willow-swamps. The nests that I have examined on our own coasts were principally composed of sea-weed, with fragments of drift-wood, and in some instances were lined with



rushes or sedge. The eggs are generally three or four in number, of the same shape at both ends, and are generally covered with a coating of white chalky material, which is easily removed with a knife, the true shell being of a delicate pale green-blue; I have, however, more than once found eggs without any of this chalky layer upon them. The young are born blind and naked, but are very soon covered with black down, and are taken down to the water by the old birds (on their backs, *vide* 4th Edition of Yarrell) long before they can fly; I cannot personally vouch for this, or, indeed, for any other method of conveyance, but I have very frequently chased young Cormorants that, although perfectly at home upon and under the water, were totally incapable of flight. A very excellent account of the changes of plumage in this species, as observed in the Zoological Gardens of London, will be found in Vol. iv. of the work from which I have just quoted, but with reference to the statement there made to the effect that "the adult plumage is not acquired until nearly the end of the third year," I must say that, from my own experience, I consider that in captivity it is rarely fully acquired during the first five years, and from the number of birds to be seen at the breeding-places in early summer with hardly any white about them, I am disposed to think that even in a wild state the Cormorant takes more than three years to attain fully adult plumage. The diving-powers of this species are marvellous, and its capacity for food almost equally astonishing; as in the case of most very ravenous birds, the Cormorant is easily tamed, and may be trained to a certain extent to take fishes for the benefit of its master; this method of fishing

is still commonly practised in China and Japan, and my good friend Captain F. H. Salvin, well known as a Falconer, has tried his hand at training Cormorants to fish for him in this country with very considerable success. A considerable number of Cormorants frequent the coast near Dartmouth in July and August, though I am not aware of the existence of any large nesting-colony in that immediate neighbourhood; the favourite haunt and roosting-places of these individuals are two or three isolated rocks lying at a short distance to the eastward of the entrance of Dartmouth Harbour, whence they sally to fish, principally, I think, in Torbay; a few, however, regularly frequent the Dart, and also visit the renowned Slapton Lea, but from observations made at the season above-mentioned during four successive years, I am convinced that, for some unknown reason, very few of these Cormorants habitually go to the westward for food or pleasure; at all events from about 5 P.M. till dark the birds kept streaming from the eastward either singly or in small parties, till every pinnacle of these islets was crowned with a Cormorant, and from certain points the fringe of these fishers sitting bolt upright, often with outspread wings, with every cranny of the black rocks below them occupied by Kittiwakes, presented a most grotesque but very interesting "marine view." My belief is that these Cormorants were, with few exceptions, bred upon the coast of Dorset and the Isle of Wight, and that the Start was the extreme westward limit of their summer fishing-range. This bird frequently travels up the course of rivers to a considerable distance, but is not a regular migrant, to my knowledge, in any part of Europe, as the Shag

or Green Cormorant to a certain extent undoubtedly is. The Cormorant, when not molested, becomes very fearless and careless of the neighbourhood of man, but is naturally a very wary and cunning bird. In captivity the tameness of this species is often troublesome, and his greedy and morose nature render him a nuisance amongst pinioned water-fowl of milder temperament; one that I kept for some time at Lilford, constantly amused himself by seizing the feet of Swans, Geese, and, I believe, Pelicans under water, thereby laming them seriously, and, besides this crime, devoured all the ducklings that he could find. I have very recently received a letter from Mr. W. Bazeley, of Sheep Street, Northampton, in which he informs me that a bird of this species, killed at Naseby on August 27, 1891, had been sent to him for preservation.

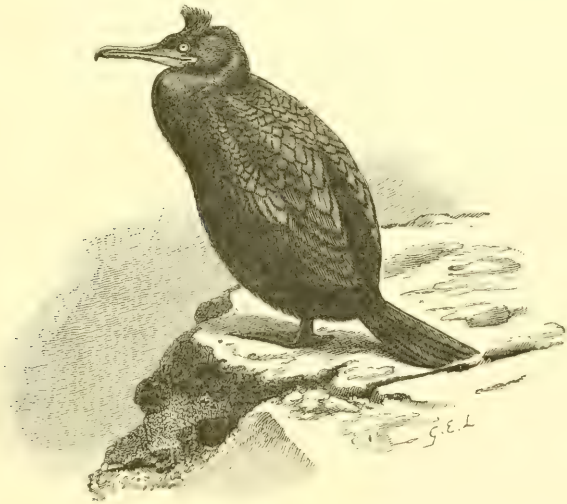
Since the above article was in print, Mr. E. C. Burton, of The Lodge, Daventry, has most kindly presented to me an immature specimen of this species, stuffed, with the information that it was shot by his son on Daventry Reservoir on March 31st, 1891.

198. SHAG, CRESTED OR GREEN  
CORMORANT.

*Phalacrocorax graeculus.*

It is a somewhat remarkable fact that this species, which is not a common bird at any season of the year on our eastern coasts, and certainly much more strictly maritime in its haunts and habits than the Common Cormorant, should have occurred so frequently in our county as to almost entitle it to rank

as an irregular, but not uncommon, autumnal visitor. Amongst the more recent occurrences of the Shag in Northamptonshire that have come to my knowledge I note the following from my journals:—an immature bird caught upon the tower of Arthingworth Church on August 31, 1879, and sent to me alive shortly afterwards; another shot from the chimney (175 feet high) of the Gayton Brick-works on December 2 of the same year, recorded by Mr. W.



Tomalin in the 'Field'; a third brought down with a broken wing from a great height by Mr. Birch near Cranford late in August 1884, and brought to me alive by Mr. Wirley Birch on September 1st; this bird lived on our ponds here till December 14, 1888, when it was found drowned under the ice with a large roach in its gullet; the poor bird was in moult at the time of its death, but had nearly acquired its full adult dress, and is now one of the most

interesting specimens in my Northamptonshire collection.

In January 1888 I was informed by a letter from Mr. C. F. Dyer, formerly resident in Irthlingborough, of the occurrence of a "Cormorant" in that neighbourhood in the previous autumn; at my request the Rev. H. H. Slater, of Irchester Vicarage, was kind enough to make enquiries concerning this bird, and on February 21, 1888, wrote to me thus:—"I went to Rushden and hunted up Mrs. Allen, who allowed me to examine the bird as far as possible, considering that it was in a case. It is a young Shag, the top of the head and neck, and especially the primaries, having in some degree their bottle-green sheen. . . . Mrs. Allen informed me that she thought another was caught at the same time, and after some enquiries I came upon the owner, who had an exactly similar specimen; his wife informed me that it was on a Sunday about the middle of August last, probably the 21st, as they were standing at their door (which is in a new street) watching some Pigeons, when two curious birds came flopping down between two of the unfinished houses opposite; he went and collared one, and young Allen the other; he kept his for three days and fed it upon worms, the former one was stuffed at Irthlingborough." This occurrence is only one of several that have been communicated to me as of "Cormorant," and proved to refer to the present species. On September 3rd, 1892, I received an immature Shag alive from Mr. Shelton of Higham Ferrers, who informed me that it had been picked up a day or two previously near that place; another young bird of this species was caught at Stanground, near Peterborough, on



August 3rd, 1894, and brought to Lilford alive on 6th, but only lived for a few days.

In general habits the Shag much resembles the Cormorant, and there is a certain similarity in the plumage of the immature birds of the two species; but the present bird is always to be distinguished from the Cormorant by its smaller size, and the fact of wearing only twelve tail-feathers, whilst the Cormorant sports fourteen of these steering appendages. The adult plumage of the two species differs sufficiently to prevent any possibility of confusion, and the crests borne by both (as a rule) for a few weeks in spring and early summer are entirely different in form and position, that of the Cormorant consisting merely of an elongation of the feathers of the occiput, whilst the Shag wears a veritable "top-knot" of feathers springing from the forehead and curving forward. I am much more intimately acquainted with the present species in its native haunts than with the Cormorant, though I can claim a certain amount of familiarity with the latter bird; the Shag being by far the most abundant of the two in the Mediterranean, where most of my "sea-faring" has been done. For breeding purposes the present bird, in my experience, certainly seems to prefer dark caverns and crevices in sea-cliffs to the open ledges on the cliff-face so frequently occupied by the Cormorant, although I have occasionally found a nest or two of Shag in these latter localities. On firing a shot from a boat at the entrance of one of these Shag-haunted sea-caves, during the breeding-season, it is no uncommon thing to see several dozens of the birds drop head foremost from the recesses of the cave into the water, and dive out to sea under

the boat. I well remember, in my early shooting days, firing at a Shag as it sat erect just within a high and narrow, but deep cleft in the promontory of the Lizard; my bird fell dead, but my first impression was that I had killed at least a dozen or more, as the other tenants of this cleft dropped simultaneously into the water at my shot, and were next seen by us swimming out to sea well beyond gunshot range. In many parts of the Mediterranean coasts the same sort of event has occurred to us, but was generally accompanied by a rush out of Rock-Doves, Alpine Swifts, Crag-Martins, and occasionally by the plunge of a Hooded Seal. The Shag makes a nest of sea-weed, which soon rots and becomes saturated with the excrements of the birds; as may well be imagined, the odour proceeding from these nurseries defies description, and I can only compare it to that of some of the Jewish quarters of certain cities on what are, as I have been assured, known as "frizzling Fridays." In the Mediterranean the Shag is a very early breeder; in the Straits of Bonifacio, where it swarms, the young birds had all left the nests in the first week of May 1882, and, in fact, out of many hundreds seen by us at that season, we only found two that were unable to fly well. I have never found more than four eggs in a nest of this species, but five or even more are sometimes laid, these eggs are of course smaller than those of the Cormorant, but otherwise very closely resemble them. I never remember to have seen a crest-bearing Shag at any time of the year in Mediterranean waters, but, on the other hand, I shot several with a few crest-feathers remaining, in August, on the south coast of Cornwall; on that coast the present species

appeared to me, in 1852, to be much more abundant than the Cormorant, as was certainly the case in my experience some years later on the coasts of Kerry, Clare, and Mayo. Naturalists are divided in opinion as to whether or not the birds of this family use their wings under water: the editor of the 4th ed. of Yarrell quotes Macgillivray in favour of their doing so, and confirms this from his own experience; I never recollect to have seen a Shag under water with "*outspread* wings," but have never seen one in the act of diving that did not use its wings to a certain extent: my opportunities for observing the Cormorant's mode of procedure have been more rare, and I should be sorry to affirm positively that I ever saw one of these birds under water with wings entirely closed, whereas I can distinctly affirm the contrary.

## 199. GANNET, SOLAN GOOSE.

*Sula bassana.*

The only positive record of the occurrence of the Gannet within the present political boundaries of Northamptonshire that I have been able to find occurs in Morton's 'Natural History' of our county, chap. 7, p. 429, and runs thus:—"The Soland Goose, *Anser Bassanus*, because it breeds in great numbers in the Bass Island in Scotland. I never heard of it here but at Thengford, where it was shot, and shew'd to Dr. Charlton who then happened to be there and acquainted them with the name of it; which else had remain'd unknown." I find in my journal for 1849 the following entry:—"Gannet, *Sula bassana*, killed at (or near) Bulwick," no date or authority;

but when I first set about putting these Notes together in 1876, remembering that the late Mr. Thomas Tryon was my authority for this occurrence, and had told me that the bird in question had been found in a wood by the Pytchley hounds whilst cub-hunting, and also mindful of the fact that the celebrated Charles Payne was probably huntsman to that pack at the time of the occurrence, I requested Mr. G. M. Edmonds, of Oundle, to make enquiry of Payne for me, and very shortly after doing so received from Mr. Edmonds the following letter addressed to himself:—

“Wynnstay Park, March 3, 1876.

“Sir,—It is true that I did, some thirty years ago, pick up a large Foreign Bird, the size of our English Goose, but longer in the neck, a beautiful slate-colour speckled Bird. I never heard the proper name of it. George Payne, Esq., was the master of the hounds at the time; he had it stuffed and gave it to some one in the neighbourhood; I quite forget to whom, but it is somewhere in the district. I had some difficulty in catching it; it lived about three days afterwards at the kennels at Brigstock. Mr. George Payne would know what bird it was, as I think I heard him name it.

“Your obedient Servant,

“CHAS. PAYNE.”

Upon this I wrote to Mr. George Payne, who, in his reply dated March 15, 1876, stated:—“Although I have some indistinct recollection of some bird having been given to me by Charles Payne, I cannot at all remember what became of it.” Mr. George

Payne promised to make search and enquiry for this specimen, but as I never heard any more of it, and Mr. Payne was one of the most courteous and obliging of men, I presume that he failed to discover any facts connected with it that he considered worth communicating to me, and except from this vague memorandum the bird is "lost to history," as is probably the case with many other interesting animals in this county and elsewhere.

Although Charles Payne's description might apply to an immature Red-throated or Great Northern Diver, I think that the evidence, such as it is, is in favour of Mr. Tryon's original statement to me that the bird really was a Gannet; in the first place the occurrence was fresh in his mind, the hounds being at Brigstock at the time points to the cub-hunting season (August, September, or October), at which season the inland appearance of a Gannet is much more probable than that of a Diver (*Colymbus*), and Charles Payne's description applies roughly well to the immature speckled stage of the Gannet's plumage.

My friend, Mr. F. Rooper, of Huntingdon, informed me that a Gannet, "very much starved," was killed at Ramsey in May 1883, and brought to him; and whilst engaged on this article, October 1891, I hear from Mr. Richard Tryon that he had a share in the capture of one of the present species a few days ago, not far from Oakham, in Rutland, during the prevalence of the strong S.W. gales from which we are still suffering. I merely mention this last occurrence as one of many of the Gannet at a considerable distance from the sea, though not quite within my assigned limits.



The breeding-places of this fine bird in the United Kingdom are confined to the well-known Bass Rock, in the Firth of Forth, some four islands lying to the west of Scotland, one or two off the south-west coast of Ireland, and one or two in the Bristol Channel. As I know but very little of the present species at its breeding-haunts, and it is very certain that it is not likely to breed in our district, I must refer those of my readers who are interested in this branch of the Gannet's history to the often-quoted work to which I constantly turn for information on British birds, the 4th edition of Yarrell.

In the late summer, autumn, and winter the Gannet ranges far and wide over the North Atlantic; I have seen a good many off the coasts of our southern counties, all over the Bay of Biscay, and the coasts of Spain and Portugal at all seasons between May and February, but very few in the Mediterranean, except close to the eastern side of the Rock of Gibraltar, at any time of year. A horde of Gannets in pursuit of a "school" of pilchards, sardines, or mackerel is a most interesting sight, the great birds wheeling at a considerable height, and plunging head foremost after their prey. The last occasion on which I had the pleasure of witnessing a scene of this sort was in the early part of 1879, whilst steaming in my yacht round Cape St. Vincent, on a perfectly calm and cloudless day, the rocks below and about the monastery on the Cape were literally swarming with Gannets and Gulls; we were close inshore, the long westerly swell breaking high against the cliffs, the glittering spray constantly sent flying by the plunges of the great white birds, the glorious sunshine and deep blue sky, made an impression upon my mind

that I can never forget, my only regret being that I was incapable of any attempt to transfer the happy chance to paper in colours. I do not, from my own experience, consider the Gannet as capable of protracted submarine pursuit; at all events, out of the hundreds of these birds that I have observed engaged in fishing, I never remember to have known one to remain submerged for more than a few seconds, and I certainly never saw a Gannet "go below" from a sitting position on the surface of the water. Many of these birds were plunging around us throughout a fine moonlight night in August 1856, as we lay becalmed at a short distance to the north of Ferrol.

It is stated in the work to which I have above referred that from 2000 to 3000 Gannets are sometimes taken in one season upon the island of North Barra, and that the average Gannet-harvest on the Bass Rock amounts to about 800 birds. The editor was informed in this latter locality that the taste for these birds as food was dying out (I can speak from personal experience as to their extreme nastiness); the price ranged from eightpence to a shilling each; the fat is boiled down into oil, and the feathers, after being baked, are used for stuffing beds. The Gannet passes through many changes of plumage before attaining the full adult dress in the sixth year of its existence; these changes are admirably illustrated by Mr. Ed. Neale in 'Rough Notes,' by the late E. T. Booth, in whose garden, at Brighton, a pair of these birds nested in 1879 and 1880, and, in the latter year, hatched out and reared a solitary young one.

Before sending this article to the printers, I received a note from Mr. Richard Tryon referring

to the finding of the Gannet by the Pytchley hounds, which throws some additional light upon the approximate date of the occurrence; and will not, I think, as the personal reminiscence of an eye-witness, be lacking in interest to my readers: Mr. Tryon, under date of October 25, 1891, writes thus:—"Your letter reminds me, I believe, of the whole incident of the Gannet in Northamptonshire; I was out with my father with the Pytchley, when C. Payne was putting the hounds into a wood (I believe near Benefield). I recollect that it was a grassfield on the side where the hounds were put in, a large white bird flopped along the ditch for about 20 yards, when the whip got off and killed it with the stock of his whip, and carried it under his arm all day; . . . whether the bird went to the kennels or the house I do not know for certain, although I recollect them talking about it. I believe this was the Gannet."

In reply to further enquiry from me, Mr. R. Tryon wrote on October 27, 1891:—"In addition I can only recollect that the bird had very long wings. I should say that the event must have been in 1847 or 1848. The master was not Mr. Villiers; no doubt George Payne."

I will only add that the date given coincides with the second term of Mr. G. Payne's mastership of the Pytchley hounds, and that in my opinion there can be no reasonable doubt that this is the bird mentioned to me by Mr. Thomas Tryon in 1849, and referred to in the letters from Mr. George Payne and Charles Payne, from which I have above quoted.

A very fine adult Gannet was picked up alive near Warmington on April 25th, 1892, by Mr. John

Crisp; this bird did not survive the night, and at the request of Miss F. Wickham was most courteously confided to her as a gift to me. Miss Wickham was kind enough to come over to Lilford on the 26th, bringing with her the Gannet, fresh, and in fine condition—a most welcome addition to my collection of county-birds. On March 4th, 1893, another Gannet in beautiful adult plumage was caught by a dog on the roadside near Stanion; this bird was brought to me by its owner on May 6th, 1893, and added to my collection, by purchase.

## 200. BLACK TERN.

*Hydrochelidon fissipes.*

Morton, in his 'Natural History of Northamptonshire' (chap. 7, p. 431), after stating that "the Sea Swallow is seen not unfrequently in summer flying up and down the Chanel of the Nyne, above Peterborough; sometimes as high upward as Thrapston," goes on:—"As is also the Brown Tern, *Larus cinereus minor*, Aldrov. Which in the Fens is usually called the Stern." The Sea-Swallow in this passage undoubtedly refers to the Common Tern (*Sterna fluviatilis*), and although I consider that our old author is mistaken in his reference to Aldrovandus, I feel certain that the present species is that indicated by him as "Brown Tern"; at all events his note, which still holds good with regard to the Common Tern, and in lesser degree as to frequency to the Black Tern, could hardly, in my opinion, have ever been applicable to any other member of the Tern family. Although from the

draining and reclamation of its former breeding-haunts in the fens of East Anglia, this species is becoming comparatively rare, I remember to have frequently noticed it about our river in my boyhood, and it is still an occasional visitor to our county.

I was informed by the late John Hancock, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, that several eggs of this species were collected in 1843 at Whittlesea Mere, and sent to him by his friend H. W. Wheelwright ("Old Bushman," of the 'Field' newspaper), who, if I am not mistaken, was a Northamptonshire man by residence at the time, if not by birth. Whittlesea knows the Black Tern, alas! no more as a nesting-bird; but it may be that a hereditary instinct still prompts the visits of these migrants to their ancestral haunts, whither and whence they wander along the courses of our river and others in the spring and autumn months.

Mr. H. S. O'Brien informs me that his lake at Blatherwycke is occasionally visited by small parties of this species, and specially mentioned 1869, 1870, and April 3, 1874, as dates of these visitations. I have six specimens of the Black Tern in my collection, of which number two immature birds were shot by me near Thrapston on October 3, 1853, three in perfect adult plumage by one of our gamekeepers, from a flock of thirty or more, below Lilford, on April 23, 1886, and another in moult, shot by a friend near Aldwinckle on July 19, 1888.

Several other authentic records of the appearance of this species in Northamptonshire have reached me, and many more of "Terns" without any specification, some of which very probably referred to this bird;



but I think that I have sufficiently proved that the Black Tern is not by any means a very rare visitor to our county. This species formerly bred abundantly in several counties of England—Somerset, Kent, Norfolk, Cambridge, and Lincoln, to wit; but it is very doubtful if it still continues to do so in any part of the United Kingdom; though within ten or twelve years of the present date (1891) I have occasionally seen its eggs in some numbers in Leadenhall Market, sent over from Holland, with those of many other species of marsh-breeding birds. I found a large colony of these Terns nesting around and upon some small freshwater lakes in Southern Spain in the early summer of 1872. The nests were for the most part built amongst the low-growing water-weeds that nearly covered the surface of the water; in some instances upon the rushy margins of the ponds, but always in the latter case within a very few inches of the water. These nests were artless platforms of broken pieces of dry reeds and rushes, always sodden with moisture, and very frequently swarming with leeches.

The eggs are three in number, of a very dark olive-green, blotched, streaked, and spotted with dark reddish brown and black, and are very readily to be distinguished from those of the Whiskered Tern (*Hydrochelidon hybrida*), whose nests were promiscuously interspersed amongst those of the present bird, and of two or three species of Grebe, in the locality to which I have just referred. The cries of the Terns were deafening as they dashed around us in hundreds, occasionally varying their demonstrations by dashes at flying, or dips at swimming or skipping insects or leeches, or the occasional chase of one of

the inquisitive Harriers, of which family two species were very abundant, and both of them extremely addicted to egg-stealing.

From my own observation of the present species and its close congeners I am convinced that a very great part of their food consists of winged insects taken in the air, but leeches are also very favourite, and in Spain, at least, very abundant "tit-bits"; whilst, no doubt, heavy contribution is also levied on the minute fry of fishes and frogs. The cry of the Black Tern is a shrill creaking monosyllable constantly repeated. This bird was formerly well enough known in some English counties to gain the somewhat rare distinction of a local name, such as "Blue Darr" in Norfolk, "Car-Swallow" in Lincolnshire, and "Starn," "Dare," and "Skelper" in other places. Out of England and Spain I never met with this species in any considerable numbers; but it is by no means uncommon on passage throughout the western basin of the Mediterranean, and I met with it in spring on the lake of Geneva.

## 201. COMMON TERN.

*Sterna fluviatilis.*

As I have stated at the commencement of the previous article, Morton's note concerning this species ("the Sea-Swallow") is still applicable with regard to its visits to our neighbourhood, but I believe that it is very frequently to be seen very much further up the Nen valley than Thrapston, the highest limit assigned to it by our old naturalist. At all events, I have myself seen a few of these birds from the

trains on the London and North-Western Railway, whilst travelling between Wellingborough and Northampton, and was on one occasion much shocked at seeing three Terns in adult beauty nailed to a barn near Ringstead Station. I consider this species as a regular visitor to our valley in small numbers on the double passage, generally appearing during the first fortnight of May, rarely in April, and returning southwards singly or in small straggling parties from the middle of August till the third week in September. In saying this, I would remark that I am constantly told of the seeing of "Sea-Swallows" near Lilford in the spring and autumn, but cannot, of course, be certain that the birds thus referred to are always of this species. I have a young bird of the year stuffed at Lilford, that was picked up badly injured by the telegraph-wires between Thorpe and Achurch, with this exception, all the Terns of this species that I can remember to have seen in our county were in the pure grey and white plumage of maturity.

On September 18th, 1891, as we were fishing from our boat at a short distance below Lilford, I suddenly heard the well-known cry of a Tern, and, looking up, was aware of one of this species beating up against a fresh S.W. breeze, hotly pursued by a Rook. The Tern mounted high into the air, but the Rook, in spite of his comparative slowness of flight, persistently stuck to the chase, till he succeeded in forcing the stranger to turn down-wind, and both birds went out of sight in the direction of Oundle. Shortly afterwards a Tern passed us within gunshot to windward unmolested, and hovered about the river close to the house for some time. After a lapse

of perhaps a quarter of an hour, back came (as I believe) our first-seen Tern, with a Rook in full chase, and the same result ensued, except that in this second case we saw the Rook abandon the pursuit after having obliged the Tern to go down-wind for a considerable distance. This same Tern soon afterwards returned, followed and surrounded by a number of Swallows and Martins, and again turned down-wind, but soon came back again and flew past us up-wind, this time with three Wood-Pigeons in close attendance. This is by far the most abundant species of the Tern family on the coasts of England generally speaking, but, as Mr. H. Saunders says, it is difficult to define its northern summer-range exactly, owing to the fact that this overlaps the southerly limits of the Arctic Tern, *Sterna macrura*,—the prevalent species of the Scottish coasts and islands. The present species arrives on our coasts early in May, and from the second week of that month till autumn has fairly set in may be met with in considerable numbers not only about the sandy, shingly, and muddy districts of our coast-line, but frequently also about freshwater lakes and reservoirs at a great distance from the sea, although, with the exception of one small sheet of water in Ireland, I have not personally found it breeding away from the sea-coast. The eggs of the Common Tern, generally three in number, are laid with little or no attempt at a nest, amongst shingle, on short turf just above the high-water line, and very frequently on the masses of rubbish,—sea-bleached twigs, fragments of seaweed, rushes, and other refuse,—that indicate the highest wash of the waves in ordinary summer weather on our shelving sandy shores. The flight of the Tern,

although to my mind it conveys a certain sense of labour, is very graceful and buoyant, and a flock of these birds engaged in fishing is one of the most attractive of the many interesting sights that are to be commonly met with "at the seaside." I well remember the time when many pairs of this species might be seen, and their eggs occasionally found, on the coast between Folkestone and Hythe; but I understand that this locality is now so frequented by featherless bipeds and their four-footed companions and slaves, that the Terns have no chance of peace, and of course as soon as the close season is ended, they, in common with almost every other sea-bird, are done to death by every loafer who can procure a gun; this species has the special disadvantage of being a favourite object with feather-dealers for the supposed ornamentation of feminine head-gear; I am glad to believe, however, that this class of atrocity has recently met with a severe check from the action of the Ladies' "Society for the Protection of Birds," an association that cannot be too highly commended or too widely made known.

The Common Tern is found throughout the European region; I have observed it at various seasons on all parts of the Mediterranean shores, and on several of the lakes of Switzerland and Northern Italy, and found it breeding on the islets of the great lagoons of Sardinia in the neighbourhood of Cagliari; it was frequent also in the Straits of Bonifacio during the first fortnight of May, but we could not discover that it nested in that locality.



## 202. ARCTIC TERN.

*Sterna macrura.*

The Rev. H. H. Slater, in a letter bearing the date of November 28, 1885, informed me that he had recently seen an adult specimen of this Tern in a bird-stuffer's shop at Wellingborough, and was assured that it had been killed in the previous month of August near Sharnbrook, a village in Beds, within three or four miles of our county frontier, and therefore well within my district; this is the only instance of the occurrence of the Arctic Tern in our neighbourhood that has hitherto come to my knowledge, though it is very probable that some of the many "Terns" and "Sea-Swallows" reported to me without special identification may have belonged to this species. My personal acquaintance with the present bird is so slight that I do not feel qualified to state more with regard to it than that it is the most abundant species of Tern throughout the extreme north of our Islands and of the continent of Europe; in food and general habits it closely resembles the Common Tern, but appears more exclusively to affect salt-water than that species. To enable any of my readers who are not acquainted with the principal differences between this bird and the Common Tern to distinguish one from the other, I quote from the article on the present species in the 4th edition of Yarrell:—"It is characterized by its more slender form, longer tail-feathers, a coral-red bill without any appreciable amount of black at the tip, very short tarsi, and the french-grey of the underparts is as dark as that of the back and wings. The young

birds may always be recognized by the shorter tarsus, and by the narrowness of the dark line which runs along the shaft on the inner webs of the primaries. This line is both darker and much more extensive in the Common Tern." The present species appears irregularly on our coasts during the double migration, but, with the exception of the Scilly Isles, is not known to breed regularly to the south of the Humber.

### 203. LESSER OR LITTLE TERN.

*Sterna minuta.*

This very beautiful little bird, although by no means an uncommon summer visitor to many parts of our coasts, does not, as far as I am aware, very frequently wander far inland in this country, and I have only two positive records of its occurrence in the Nen valley; the first of these refers to a solitary specimen that flew past us within ten yards as we were fishing from a boat at a short distance below Lilford during the last week of July 1872, and the second to a specimen shot from a party of four near Wansford Station in the late summer of 1876, stuffed by Holeywell of Peterborough, and now in my collection; both these specimens were in full adult plumage. The present species frequents the same sort of localities as the Common Tern, and, except in its extraordinary fearlessness of man, very much resembles that species in its habits. I never, however, met with this bird in large colonies at its breeding-quarters, and on the expanse of sandy coast of from four to five miles in extent, where I first made its intimate acquaintance, I found that two or

three pairs were breeding in close vicinity, then perhaps as many more at the distance of a quarter of a mile, the whole breeding-range being occupied by some twenty-five or thirty pairs. No nest is made, and the eggs are not easy to find without close search, from their resemblance in colour to the sand and shingle upon which they lie; in many cases I only discovered the eggs by seeing the birds waddle off, they seldom flew from their sittings, or if they did take the trouble to rise, settled again within a few yards without showing any signs of alarm, or indeed of agitation, beyond the frequent utterance of their shrill "skirl," contrasting greatly in this respect with the many Oyster-catchers and Ringed Plovers that were breeding in the locality, whose anxiety and restlessness were really painful to witness. The stretch of sea-shore to which I allude was, at the time of my visit, remote from railways and roads, and being very little frequented formed a paradise for birds of many species, but I have in Spain found the Little Tern breeding within a few yards of a much frequented footway, and quite close to a canal up and down which boats were constantly passing. I have said that the eggs are not easy to find, but the downy young are even more difficult to detect upon their breeding-places, and, in common with many other shore-frequenting species, have an inborn instinct for "keeping small" that has often baffled me. In one instance I found two young Ringed Plovers that could not have been hatched many hours cowering upon three eggs of the Little Tern. I have met with this species throughout the Mediterranean from the Straits of Gibraltar to Cyprus, but nowhere in great abundance.

## 204. BROWN-HEADED GULL.

*Larus ridibundus.*

I have adopted the above designation for this well-known bird in preference to the obvious misnomer of "Black-headed," which is generally applied to it, for the sufficient reason that at no period of its existence does it assume any *black* on or about its head. In our county this Gull is an irregular but tolerably common visitor, a few generally appearing in the valley of the Nen in March, April, and May, whilst in early autumn, especially in times of flood, we are frequently visited by very large flocks of this species in company with other Gulls. With reference to England as apart from Scotland and Ireland, I think that I am justified in saying that the Brown-headed is the most abundant of the family of Gulls, breeding as it does in numerous colonies in several of our English counties, often at a considerable distance from salt-water, and haunting our coasts and estuaries in vast numbers during the months of autumn and winter; in fact, I consider that the present bird is much more entitled to the title of "Common" than the species to which that epithet is usually applied. Although many of the marshy spots formerly frequented by the Brown-headed Gull during the summer have been drained and reclaimed, several colonies still exist under strict protection, of which the best known is perhaps Scoulton Mere, in West Norfolk. As full details relating to this breeding-place are given in the 4th edition of Yarrell, and also, from personal experience, by Mr. H. Seebohm

in his 'History of British Birds,' vol. iii. pp. 311-313, I will only here state that the latter author computes the number of birds, at the time of his visit to Scoulton in May 1885, at about 8000, but says that forty years before that date the colony was estimated at upwards of 20,000. In the edition of Yarrell to which I have above referred I find that Mr. Stevenson is quoted to the effect that at Scoulton the eggs of these Gulls were systematically gathered for sale three days a week, and that between 3000 and 4000 had been taken in one day . . . "in this manner from 10,000 to 20,000 eggs have been obtained in different seasons. In 1825 they fetched 4*d.* a score; in 1870, according to Mr. Stevenson, they sold on the spot at 9*d.* to 1*s.* a score." My personal acquaintance with this species during its breeding-season is confined to another Norfolk locality where the birds have steadily increased in numbers during the last forty years, and are, as I am glad to hear, still well protected; at the time of my visit most of the eggs—usually three to each nest—were either just hatched or on the point of hatching; in many cases the young birds took to the water on the close approach of our boat, with fragments of egg-shell still adhering to their down, and in spite of their infancy seemed to be perfectly at their ease, and able to swim rapidly and strongly; the parent birds kept up an incessant clamour as they stooped around, or hovered over us. The nests were flattened heaps of broken reeds, sedge, and flag-leaves, most of them were piled up in shallow water, a few high and dry on *terra firma*. The usual note of this Gull is a harsh monosyllable, much resembling that of the Common Tern, but when excited they utter a sort



of hoarse laugh, and often go so far as a scream. In Norfolk numbers of this species may be seen following the plough and greedily devouring the worms and grubs that are turned up, and in summer they seem to feed to a considerable extent on flying insects; I have seen more than one dragon-fly taken in fair flight by these Gulls. A few pairs of young Brown-headed Gulls were sent to me some years ago as a present from the owner of a famous "Gullery" in Lincolnshire, and two pairs of these birds nested and reared young in the aviaries at Lilford; I gave some of these last their liberty in the hope that they would remain about our ponds, but they strayed off to the river, and eventually disappeared entirely.

## 205. COMMON GULL.

*Larus canus.*

In the neighbourhood of Lilford this Gull frequently appears in August and September, at that season usually singly and in immature plumage; in the winter months we are occasionally visited by small flocks of a dozen or twenty individuals in company with other species, but as I have stated in the preceding article, the epithet of "Common" is wrongly applied to this Gull in England generally, and very certainly it is by no means the *common* Gull of Northamptonshire. I have more than once found single birds of this species in September, haunting the small ponds of our pasture-fields at a distance from the river—a habit that I have not observed with regard to any of the other Gulls that visit

us, and in my experience this bird suffers more from stress of weather and severe cold than any other of its congeners with which I am acquainted. This Gull breeds in large numbers in Scotland, and also in Ireland; but the editor of the 4th edition of 'Yarrell' states that during the twenty years previous to the writing of his article on this species, he had failed to obtain any proof whatever of its nesting on any part of the English coast. The only breeding-place of this Gull that has come under my own observation was the boggy moor surrounding a small freshwater lake; the nests were built of twigs and heather and coarse grass, and lined with dry fragments of rushes; the usual complement of eggs is three. It appears that the Common Gull seldom, if ever, nests on what can fairly be called cliffs, preferring low shores and the grassy summits of islands; it has been known to nest in low trees and bushes. In late autumn and winter this bird is to be met with in abundance on almost every low-lying coast district of our Islands, and very often frequents arable lands, especially those on which refuse-fish has been used as manure, but in common with all other Gulls it is a greedy devourer of earth-worms, slugs, and grubs of all kinds, and is most useful in a kitchen-garden. On November 22, 1890, I had a letter from a person at Woodford informing me that he was in possession of a bird (recently captured near that village) that he believed to be a "Sea Egale," and enquiring if it had escaped from Lilford. As no bird had been lost from our aviaries, and the designation was somewhat mysterious, I telegraphed to request that the bird might be sent to me, and in the afternoon of the day above-mentioned

my correspondent brought his "Sea Egal" to Lilford; my readers will appreciate my disappointment on discovering that this was nothing more or less than a Common Gull in adult plumage, when I say that, although I had hardly expected to see a Sea-Eagle, I thought that the bird was probably some large and comparatively uncommon *Raptor*, as I believed that Gulls are generally known in our district as "Mollymucks" or "Collymoddies."

## 206. HERRING-GULL.

*Larus argentatus.*

A considerable number of this species pass up the Nen in a westerly or south-westerly direction during the months of July, August, and September, but at that season generally maintain a great elevation, and in my experience very seldom alight in our neighbourhood. I have constantly observed that these, and indeed almost all Gulls, travel as "near the wind as possible, and often seem to steer straight in the wind's eye." A long continuance of strong south-westerly winds, especially in autumn or winter, if accompanied, as is usually the case, by heavy rains and a flood on our meadows, almost invariably brings large flocks of Herring-Gulls up the Nen: on such occasions I have certainly seen hundreds of this species together near Lilford, and my neighbour Mr. G. Hunt of Wadenhoe informed me that in January and February, 1883, some thousands frequented the meadows between Thrapston and Oundle for several weeks, finding ample sustenance on the earth-worms drowned out by a long flood. This is

certainly the most common of the Gull family during the breeding-season on the south coast of England, and is to be found nesting in suitable localities from the South Foreland to the Land's End; the nests are generally composed of coarse grass, and placed upon the ledges of cliffs. The young birds leave the nest, as a rule, early in July, very often before they are able to fly up again from the water to the nesting-ledges. We used often to catch as many as we cared about by tiring them down in a rowing boat on the south coast of Devon in the latter half of July or early part of August; these youngsters soon become perfectly tame, and thrive for years in captivity if allowed a good range. At Lilford a male of this species paired with a female of a dark-mantled species from the South seas, which, for want of a better English name, I must call the Dominican Gull, *Larus dominicanus*; for several years these birds annually reared one or two, and sometimes three young birds, which in their adult dress resemble their male parent very closely, though their mantles are somewhat darker, and their beaks of a rather less brilliant yellow than those of the average adult Herring-Gull. In the Mediterranean the Herring-Gull is represented by a race that only differs from our British bird by being possessed of yellow legs and feet and an orange-red ring round the outside of the eye. The cry of our bird is a very harsh monosyllabic scream, so rapidly repeated when the bird is excited as to amount to a menacing chatter. In the Highlands of Scotland gamekeepers hold this species in detestation as a determined and audacious egg-stealer; in fact, I know that some of these guardians of Grouse-moors consider the larger Gulls as worse

“vermin” even than the Grey Crow; and certainly in my own experience of the present species both in a state of nature and in captivity, nothing in the way of food seems to come amiss; many of my Herring-Gulls at Lilford have been adroit catchers of Sparrows, rats, and mice.

## 207. LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL.

### *Larus fuscus.*

As most of the large Gulls that visit our valley in the autumn and winter are in immature plumage, and very few of them are shot, or even shot *at*, in our neighbourhood, and as in this plumage it is virtually impossible to distinguish the present species on wing from the Herring-Gull, it is of course very difficult to pronounce positively on the scarcity or abundance of the present bird in our county; but from my own experience, I am inclined to consider the Lesser Black-backed Gull in adult plumage as the least common of the six species of *Larus* that habitually frequent what I may call the *mid* Nendistrict. On looking through my journals I can only find the following records of the capture of adult birds of this species:—One shot from a small flock flying over the Lilford Lynches in January 1849; a second (of which I was informed by the Rev. H. H. Slater of Irchester Vicarage) killed at Knuston on April 28, 1888, and recorded by me in the ‘Zoologist’ for December of that year; and lastly a female in beautiful plumage shot from a flock of four flying over Lilford Wood on August 4, 1891, and now preserved here. I may take this



opportunity of correcting an oversight made in my communication to the 'Zoologist,' *temp. supra cit.*, where I find that, oblivious of the first specimen above recorded, I wrote that I had "never handled an adult Northamptonshire specimen." Besides these captures, I may perhaps have identified this species in adult plumage in the neighbourhood of Lilford on three or four occasions.

In comparison with the Herring-Gull the present species is uncommon in my experience on the south coast of England during the summer months to the eastward of Torbay; on the bank of shingle and sand that separates Slapton Lea from the sea I frequently noticed adult birds during July and August in a proportion (roughly speaking) of about three to twenty Herring-Gulls; on the coast of Cornwall the numbers of this species increase, and if my memory serves me rightly, we found it to be common and breeding on some islets of the Scilly group in 1852; I found it in abundance during the summer on the coast of North Wales, but have never visited any of the large breeding colonies that exist in various parts of Great Britain, not by any means only on the sea-coasts, but also frequently upon islands in freshwater lakes, and on open boggy moss-lands and moors. In the Mediterranean I found this bird abundant in certain localities and extremely scarce in others; I am acquainted with two breeding-stations of the Lesser Black-back in that sea, but believe that it is much more abundant therein during the winter than in the breeding-season. For some reason that I am hitherto unable to discover, I never have succeeded in keeping this species alive at Lilford for any considerable length

of time; it is certainly remarkable that it should not thrive in circumstances that agree perfectly with the Herring-Gull.

## 208. GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL.

*Larus marinus.*

A few of these fine birds annually pass over our district in early autumn bound for the south; they may of course be easily distinguished from all other Gulls at a moderate distance by their size, but their note, frequently repeated as they wing their way on their travels, in single file, or a wedge-shaped, Wild-Goose like formation, generally at an immense height, is a still more infallible means of identification. These great Gulls, so far as my own observation goes, appear to travel up the valley of the Nen in parties of from five or six to twenty individuals; in the few instances in which I have made out a solitary bird of this species in the neighbourhood of Lilford, it has invariably been an adult specimen, but in the early autumn it is exceptional with us to see a Great Black-back near enough to identify it by its plumage. In the winter months, however, a few of this species may sometimes be seen frequenting our meadows, especially after heavy floods, with other Gulls; in fact although never to my knowledge numerous in our valley, I consider it as much more common than the Lesser Black-back. The note or cry of the present species is a sharp hoarse bark, and has a peculiar character about it that, as I have before stated, distinguishes this from all other British Gulls. I have never met

this Gull nesting in any numbers together, as it is said to do in certain localities on the coast, and on the islands of certain freshwater lakes : the few nests that I have seen were built upon some of the islets of the Scilly group, generally on their grassy summits ; three nests were the greatest number that we met with upon any one of these isolated rocks, and only two of these had been occupied in the breeding-season, which was just over at the time of our visit. These nests were evidently the accumulation of several years, and were composed of piles of withered "marram" and other grasses, with a few sticks and some fragments of rabbit-skin : although the young birds could fly and take very good care of themselves, their parents were very savage and swooped at us, barking angrily, as we clambered about the rocks ; in fact they appeared to be perfectly fearless of man, although I have generally found them very wide awake during the winter months. The Great Black-back fears no other bird, and, as I am assured on good authority, holds even the Great Skua, the terror of all other Gulls, at defiance. I am not aware that this species is held in more abhorrence on the Grouse-moors than the two species last treated of, but its tastes are certainly just as indiscriminate and its aggressive powers much greater. In my experience this is a rare bird in the Mediterranean ; I have occasionally seen solitary adults upon the Guadalquivir nearly as high up that river as Seville.

## 209. KITTIWAKE.

*Rissa tridactyla.*

The term 'Kittiwake' is so vaguely and commonly applied by inland dwellers to the various smaller species of Gull, that it is impossible for me to ascertain whether or not the frequent reports that reach me of the occurrence of birds thus designated by my informants in the neighbourhood of Lilford really apply to this species, to the Brown-headed, or to the Common Gull. In my own personal experience the Kittiwake is a casual straggler to our district; in fact, I have only handled some three or four Northamptonshire specimens, one of which was picked up dead near Clapton on February 10, 1885, and sent to me by the Rev. E. Freeman, this is an immature bird; another was found alive, but much emaciated, in the garden of Tichmarsh Rectory on November 25, 1890, and lived at Lilford for about a month; it is somewhat remarkable that this bird, who rapidly recovered strength and flesh in our aviary upon a diet solely consisting of earthworms, declined to feed altogether when the supply of these delicacies failed owing to the severe frost, and actually died of starvation though plentifully supplied with fish and other food; this specimen was fully adult. This pretty Gull is more or less common on all parts of the British coasts in the autumn and winter, but for breeding purposes it confines itself, as a rule, to lofty cliffs, and never to my knowledge nests on flat open ground or in the neighbourhood of fresh water as most of our other Gulls either occasionally or

habitually do. There was a considerable breeding colony of Kittiwakes in Scilly at the time of my visit in 1852, and, if I remember rightly, there were some breeding-places on the south coast of Cornwall at that time; but I never met with this species anywhere in such immense numbers as in Clew Bay, on the coast of Mayo, in the summer of 1854, when the sea and air between Westport harbour and Clare Island were alive with Kittiwakes from dawn till dusk; a vast number of these birds breed on the island just named, and, I believe, also on the stupendous cliffs of Achill. A great number of Kittiwakes frequent the coast of Devon between Torbay and the Start Point in July and August, but with a solitary exception I could not discover that they breed in that locality; towards the end of June 1876, however, we found a nest on a ledge of an isolated pinnacle known as the Cod Rock, at a very short distance from Berry Head; this nest contained three young birds nearly ready to fly, as, indeed, they did, within a few days after we discovered them. I was constantly about this locality in the late summers of 1880, 1881, 1882, and 1883, but although, as I have above stated, there were a great many Kittiwakes about, there was no sign of any of them having nested, and the local fishermen all assured me not only that they had never known of an instance of a nest of this bird in the neighbourhood, but also that I must have been mistaken in 1876. However, as we could almost reach the young birds in their nest with a boat-hook, and the parent birds flew anxiously about uttering their unmistakable cry of *kittiweek*, I had no doubt whatever on the subject, especially as a



colony of Herring-Gulls were nesting on the cliffs almost within gunshot of the Cod Rock, and afforded us every opportunity for comparing their flight, cries, and general habits with those of the present species. The Kittiwakes roosted in hundreds on some small rocks just to the westward of the entrance to Dartmouth harbour, occupying every ledge and cranny, whilst the summits were fringed with rows of Cormorants. The editor of the 4th edition of 'Yarrell' gives a most lamentable account of the slaughter of Kittiwakes at and about Lundy Island (where they breed in great numbers) to supply the demand for feathers for the hats of women; I have good reason to hope and believe that the craze that caused this butchery of perfectly innocent and beautiful birds is now on the wane, although, as the writer remarks, any season may see it revived. I can only strongly recommend to any ladies who may honour me by reading these notes a careful perusal of page 653 of the 3rd volume of the edition above mentioned, that they may form some idea of the hideous barbarities that are committed in the cause of "Fashion." The Kittiwake abounds on the northern and western coasts of Spain during the winter, but in my experience is uncommon in the Mediterranean.

#### 210. ? COMMON SKUA.

*Stercorarius catarrhactes?*

In the 'Zoologist' for 1879 at p. 490, Mr. O. V. Aplin records the capture of a 'Common' Skua at Eydon about Oct. 15 of the year above referred to; but this gentleman has recently informed me that he

now does not feel sure about the correct identification of this bird, and has not been able to trace it. Mr. Aplin has some reason to suspect that the specimen recorded by him was in fact a Pomarine Skua, *S. pomarinus*,—a species that from its frequent appearance on our coasts, and not very rare occurrence inland, is certainly better entitled to be called 'Common' than the Great Skua, to whom the term is generally applied. To whichever of these two species the record above quoted may in reality refer, it is the only one that has come to my knowledge of the occurrence of either in our county. I have no personal acquaintance with either the Great or the Pomarine Skua in a wild state, so will content myself with stating that the only localities in Great Britain in which the former species is known to breed are certain islands of the Shetland group; a few wander along our coasts in autumn and winter. The only Great Skua that I ever saw on wing was off Cape Finisterre; it rarely, if ever, visits the Mediterranean. The Pomarine Skua is not recorded to have been found breeding anywhere in Europe, its summer haunts being apparently confined to the most northern regions of Asia and America; great numbers of this species occasionally visit our eastern coasts in the late autumn and winter, and many of them are often driven inland by stress of weather. The month of October, 1879, was remarkable for the multitude of this species which visited the coast of Yorkshire and other parts of England.

## 211. RICHARDSON'S SKUA.

*Stercorarius crepidatus.*

A specimen of this bird, in what I take to be the plumage of the second year, was killed by Mr. Robert Whitworth in a meadow near Houghton Mills, Northampton, on October 14th, 1890, and most courteously presented by him to me in January 1891; this is the only occurrence of this species in our county that has hitherto come to my knowledge. As my personal acquaintance with this Skua is confined to having met with it occasionally in the Mediterranean off the coasts of Spain and Italy, I make no excuse for "cribbing" from the 4th edition of Yarrell as to its habits and breeding-haunts: it is there stated that this bird breeds in societies on several islands of the Hebrides, the Orkneys, and the Shetland groups, making little or no nest, and generally selecting slight eminences on open unfrequented moorlands; any intrusion upon the breeding-ground is resented by swoops, directed from behind or sideways; for although the bird will actually strike with its wing, the editor has never seen it make the front-attack so characteristic of the Great Skua. "This species feeds principally upon fish, obtained by robbing the smaller Gulls, but it preys upon any wounded or disabled birds that are not too big for it." This Skua has two distinct styles of plumage, one form being entirely sooty, and the other having light underparts; these two forms interbreed and the consequence is a very great variety of shades of colour and of markings in their produce. All the Skuas seem to subsist chiefly by

robbing other Gulls of their food by attacking them in the air, and forcing them to disgorge their recently swallowed meals of fish or carrion; but the Great Skuas, as I am positively assured by a native of one of the Shetland Isles, frequently pursue, capture, and devour Kittiwakes and other birds, and the present species no doubt also assaults such birds as it can master in the same manner, and with the same purpose. I observed about a dozen of this species from my yacht as we lay becalmed in the Gulf of Gaeta in January 1874, hanging about a large flock of the Black-headed Gull, *Larus melanocephalus*, and continually robbing them of their food in the way that I have described; these Skuas were varied in plumage from the white-breasted, yellow-necked form, to a uniform very dark brown; I shot one of these sombre-coloured birds from the deck of the yacht. The flight of these birds is very swift and Hawk-like, and their claws are much curved and very sharp, in fact the name of "Sea-Hawk," which is applied to them on some parts of our coasts, is very appropriate. A pair of Great Skuas sent to me in 1891 from a nest in Shetland habitually stand upon and tear up their food in a truly raptorial fashion.

## 212. BUFFON'S SKUA.

*Stercorarius parasiticus.*

This is the smallest of the European Skuas and is considered to be the least common of the family in the British Islands, but it is the only species of its genus that has, to my knowledge, occurred more than once in Northamptonshire; I quote the first

record in my possession verbatim from the 'Field' newspaper of November 15, 1879 :—"Buffon's Skua near Northampton. I send by rail rather a high specimen of a Skua that was shot on a ploughed farm called Moulton Park, about two and a half miles from this town. It was shot on the 20th of last month by a servant on the farm ; he informed me that he had seen it sitting about the ploughed land for a day or two previously. I am not quite certain what it is. Will you please tell me in your next paper ? William Tomalin (24 York Parade, Northampton, Nov. 5). [The bird was a Buffon's Skua. Having been killed nearly three weeks, it was, as our correspondent says, 'rather high.'—ED.]" An immature stuffed bird of this species was sent to me on August 24, 1891, by Mr. J. P. Cox, of the Rectory Farm, Overstone, with the information that it had been picked up dead there on October 12, 1883. The last occurrence of this Skua in our county that has come to my knowledge is thus recorded by me in the 'Zoologist' for 1889, under the date of November 1 :—"An immature male Buffon's Skua was picked up alive, but with a thigh broken, close to the L. & N. W. Railway, not far from Thorpe Station. My cousin, the Rev. W. Powys, who met the finder of the bird a few minutes after the capture, was of opinion that the injury had been caused by shot, but he bought, killed, and forwarded the specimen to me at Bournemouth, where I received it on the 4th inst., and I have no doubt that the fracture was caused by the bird's flying against the telegraph wires." In general habits this bird is said to resemble closely the species last treated of, but its breeding-haunts appear to be confined to the arctic regions of Asia



and America. It is an irregular and somewhat uncommon autumnal visitor to our Islands, more frequently met with on the eastern coast than elsewhere.

### 213. MANX SHEARWATER.

*Puffinus anglorum.*

This oceanic species occasionally wanders up the valley of our river Nen to a considerable distance from the sea, generally during, or soon after, the prevalence of strong westerly gales in the early autumn. I give the details of several occurrences that have come to my knowledge, but I have received several bare statements of the killing or picking up of Shearwaters in Northamptonshire besides those here recorded. Mr. J. Hensman was good enough to inform me in a letter bearing date of February 22, 1876, that a Manx Shearwater in the Northampton Museum was caught feeding with some fowls in Northampton in September 1866. My friend the late Mr. G. E. Hunt sent me a specimen of this bird, that he shot as it was flying over the river near Tichmarsh on the evening of September 4, 1879; Mr. Hunt informed me that he shot this specimen in the twilight, without having an idea as to what it might be, and that it had a companion, probably of its own species. With reference to this occurrence, I find in my note-book for 1879, that on the 28th and 29th of August we had a strong gale from the south-west, and very high wind from the same quarter on 2nd and 3rd of September. The next record relating to this species that I find in my

journals, refers to a specimen picked up alive in a field of mangold wurzel on August 24, 1882, near Cranford, and sent off to me at once by Mr. S. Soames, who was living at Cranford at the time; here, again, I find in my notes—Aug. 23rd, 1882, “Heavy rain and furious westerly gale.” This bird reached me alive, but in a wretchedly emaciated condition; it refused all food, and died a few days after I received it. This species is to be seen at all seasons of the year off our coasts, the western coasts of France, Spain, and Portugal, and throughout the Mediterranean from Gibraltar to Cyprus. The only British breeding locality of the Manx Shearwater that I ever searched is the isle of Annet, one of the Scilly group, where these birds lay, or used to lay, their eggs in the numerous rabbit-burrows on the low sandy and fern-clad portion of the island; a very graphic account of this spot and its feathered inhabitants was communicated to Yarrell by the late Mr. D. W. Mitchell, and is quoted at length by that author, whose experiences coincide to the letter with my own, except that I never, in Scilly, had the good fortune to encounter such a ‘gathering’ of Shearwaters as that mentioned by Mr. Mitchell in ‘Smith’s Sound.’ The Manx Shearwater lays one egg only, of large size, and of a pure white. During our stay in Scilly we seldom saw more than one or two Shearwaters on wing before sunset, but away from their breeding localities I have frequently seen them at all times of day, although I believe that many only leave their hiding-places after dark; I have often noticed them gliding past our vessel by moonlight. No birds ever received a more thoroughly appropriate English name than the Shearwaters, who generally skim rapidly

close to the water, rough or smooth, with no visible motion of the wings beyond a few occasional flaps on changing their course; these birds have frequently reminded me, *mutatis mutandis*, of accomplished skaters, from the speed and apparent absence of exertion in their progress and evolutions. This Shearwater breeds on many parts of the mainland coasts and islands of the Mediterranean, but, in my experience, is not so abundant in that sea as the larger but very closely allied Kuhl's Shearwater, *Puffinus kuhli*; the largest assemblage that I ever saw was in March 1882, just as we cleared the harbour of Port Mahon, bound for La Spezia: we must have seen many hundreds of the present species, and that just named; they were all busily engaged in washing and preening their feathers. The breeding-places of the Shearwater that I have visited in various parts of the Mediterranean have generally been amongst masses of rocks fallen from the cliffs; occasionally the egg may be seen from outside the hollow or recess amongst the stones in which the nest is placed, but more often is at least at arm's length from the entrance, and very frequently entirely out of reach. It is said that this bird very generally makes burrows for itself, and I have every reason to believe the statement, but in my own experience I cannot say that I ever took either bird or egg from a burrow that I could positively consider as made by the occupants, although I have frequently noticed small quantities of sand or gravel scraped out from under large blocks of stone, with a view, no doubt, to enlargement of the already existing cavity or passage. The nests that I saw were simply a handful of dried grass, but the egg is often laid on the bare

ground without nest of any sort. The young Shearwaters on leaving the egg are covered with grey down and are assiduously tended by their parents, who feed them on fish-oil from their own stomachs, mixed with sorrel, and occasionally other vegetable remains. Both old and young, on being handled, almost invariably throw up a considerable quantity of oily matter of greenish colour, foul odour, and remarkable tenacity; in fact both its smell and stain are exceedingly difficult to eradicate from clothing of wool, cotton, or linen. The clamour produced by a colony of Shearwaters from their nesting-places about nightfall is indescribable, but I must confess that most of the concerts of this sort, that I have listened to, have been produced by more than one species. I do not remember to have heard any sound from a Shearwater on wing. On certain parts of our own coasts and throughout the Mediterranean the young of this and the other species of Shearwater are highly esteemed as articles of food, but, having made trial of them in that way, I cannot conscientiously recommend them, except to those persons who may be endowed with a natural taste for cod-liver or castor-oil.

#### 214. FULMAR PETREL.

*Fulmarus glacialis.*

The only record that I can discover of the occurrence of this species in our county was sent to me by Mr. A. G. Elliot, formerly of Stamford, who, under date of April 9 and 13, 1881, informed me that a Fulmar was caught by a dog belonging to one

Matthew Tipping, on a piece of fallow-land near Bainton on April 4 of the year above quoted, and brought to him for preservation. Mr. Elliot had much more than an average acquaintance with British Birds, and could certainly hardly mistake a fresh specimen of this for any other species. I have only once to my knowledge probably seen a Fulmar on wing, and therefore quote from standard authorities in the following remarks as to its habits and distribution. From the 4th edition of Yarrell I learn that the Fulmar breeds in vast numbers on the cliffs of St. Kilda and its adjacent islets; the nests are formed of herbage, seldom bulky, generally a shallow excavation in the turf of the ledges on the face of the highest precipices, and lined with dried grass and withered tufts of the sea-pink; only one egg is laid, generally pure white, but sometimes minutely freckled with rusty red; these eggs are esteemed above all others by the natives, and Fulmar oil is among the most valuable productions of St. Kilda. This oil is of a clear amber-colour, and Mr. John Macgillivray, from whom the above notes as quoted, *op. supr. cit.*, are taken, says that it is vomited in quantities by the birds when handled, imparting to all their belongings, and even to the rocks they frequent, a peculiar and very disagreeable odour. The Fulmar now also nests in large numbers on the island of Foula, in the Shetland group; but it appears that it was unknown there as a breeding species before the summer of 1878. In this connection I may mention that I was assured by a native of Foula, who was sent to Lilford in charge of two young Great Skuas in 1891, that the first appearance of the Fulmar on his island in summer



was caused by the stranding of a dead whale, which was accompanied by a small flock of these birds, who remained to breed. He could not fix the exact date of this occurrence, but, although he said that it took place more than twenty years before his visit to us, there can be little doubt that June 1878, as above quoted from Yarrell, is the correct date. This species breeds in abundance in Iceland, and in smaller numbers in the Færoe Islands. In the winter months it is to be met with, occasionally in considerable numbers, in the North Sea, on the fishing banks off our eastern coasts, and has been met with as far to the southward as Cette, in S. France. The occurrences of the Fulmar inland are of course irregular and exceptional, and only caused by stress of weather. There appear to be two distinct phases of plumage in this species; for details I must refer my readers to the authority from whom I have quoted almost the whole of this article. In the month of January, 1880, two Fulmars were sent alive to me in London from Leadenhall Market. I deposited them in the Zoological Gardens, where they lived for a few weeks. These birds were captured off the coast of Suffolk by a fishing-smack, and are the only living specimens that I have ever *certainly* seen.

## 215. FORKED-TAILED PETREL.

*Procellaria leucorrhoa.*

Several vague notices of the occurrence of "Stormy Petrels" in our county have reached me, but I can write with certainty of at least four instances in which the present species has been met with in

Northamptonshire. One was picked up alive in Grimshaw Wood on December 30, 1878, and reported to me by Captain J. A. M. Vipan, of Stibbington. I am rather perplexed about this occurrence, as, although the above-mentioned date was given me by Captain Vipan in October 1886, I find in my note-book a record on his authority of an occurrence of the same species in the same wood under date of February 21, 1876. This specimen was first mentioned to me by Mr. C. W. Fitzwilliam in a letter dated February 16, 1876, as a "Stormy Petrel," but Captain Vipan, under the date above mentioned, informed me that the bird belonged to the present species, and was, at the time of writing, preserved in his collection, so that I presume that the date of 1878 as above given was an error of memory on the part of my informant. My next record of this Petrel is that of one caught by a cat at Weston Favell on December 3, 1889, purchased by me from Mr. Wm. Bazeley in 1891, and now preserved in my collection. Another of these birds was picked up alive near Pitsford on October 14, 1891, and brought to me "in the flesh" on the following day by Mr. Bazeley, who most courteously made me a present of it. This specimen is also preserved in my collection. October and November 1891 will long be memorable amongst British ornithologists on account of the numbers of this species found throughout our Islands, in many cases at long distances from the sea. I have only seen a few of these Petrels on different occasions in the "chops of the Channel" and in the Bay of Biscay, so that I can say nothing of their nesting-habits from personal experience; I therefore quote from my standard authorities that it breeds in burrows on two

at least of the isles off the west coast of Scotland, that it lays one egg only,—white, freckled and zoned with rust-coloured spots. In most of its habits it appears to resemble the other members of the group of birds to which it belongs, spending its existence principally either in roaming over the surface of the ocean in search of food, or concealed in its burrows. Audubon, who was well acquainted with the Forked-tailed Petrel, states that it is comparatively shy, and that he never saw it fly close around a vessel as the Storm-Petrel so frequently does; the same author tells us that notes of this bird resemble the syllables *pewr-wit, pewr-wit*. On what I may call the Old World side of the Atlantic, this bird has been recorded from as far south as the island of Madeira; it has an extended range on both sides of the American continent, and has been met with in Japan. I think that I may safely assert that away from the sea, and out of its natural haunts, it is of more frequent occurrence in England than the Storm-Petrel; I write this only from my own experience and recollection.

## 216. STORM-PETREL.

*Procellaria pelagica.*

Although, as I stated in the preceding article, various rumours of “Stormy Petrels” have reached me, I can only personally vouch for one occurrence of this species in our county. This bird was originally reported to me, in 1876, by the Rev. H. N. Rokeby, of Arthingworth, who informed me that it had been picked up near that place by a person who saw it

drop, "about forty years ago," and that the specimen was, at the time of writing, stuffed, and in the possession of my correspondent. In a letter dated February 5, 1890, Mr. Rokeby, referred to this occurrence, and informed me that the specimen was still at Arthingworth, and he was good enough to send it to me, at my request, for identification; I found that the moth-eaten remains, in an old cigar-box, were those of a veritable Storm-Petrel. As this was the only Northamptonshire specimen that I had seen, I asked Mr. Rokeby to allow me to send it to the best restorer of dilapidated birds with whom I was acquainted—Mr. J. Cullingford, of the University Museum, Durham, who sent it back to me most marvellously renovated, in fact, as good a specimen as a bird that has lost about half its feathers and the greater part of its feet possibly could be; at all events it is good for another 100 years if kept dry and out of a strong light, as I trust that it may be at Arthingworth. The next most probably correct record was communicated to me by Lord Knightley, who, writing in February 1876, informed me that a "Stormy Petrel was found dead near Fawsley more than six years ago." This little sea-rover may be seen at all times of the year in British waters, in the Bay of Biscay, and off the coast of Portugal, as well as throughout the Mediterranean. Although perfectly at home amongst the wildest broken "rollers" driven by an Atlantic gale, the old ideas that the Storm-Petrel is the herald of a gale, or only to be seen at sea during rough weather, are entirely fallacious, as I have seen many of them skimming around our vessel as she lay becalmed, and once observed a small company in still, wet weather in a perfectly land-locked Spanish

harbour. This species is not known to breed on the east coast of England, but there are many Petrel-warrens on the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh islands, and some Storm-Petrels, to my personal knowledge, breed, or used to breed, upon one or more of the remote islands of Scilly; as this is the only locality in which I have found this bird at home, and as we were too late for the eggs on the occasion of our visit to Scilly, I will merely say that in almost all respects the breeding-place examined there corresponded to the description of some of those of the Forked-tailed Petrel and Manx Shearwater, as described in my articles on those species. To those specially interested in the breeding-habits of the Storm-Petrel, I most strongly recommend the perusal of the notes on this species given by the late H. D. Graham in the 'Birds of Iona and Mull' (Edinburgh, 1890). There is something weird and strange, when at sea in a stiff breeze, to find the ship suddenly surrounded or followed by these little black birds, that seem to have sprung from the water, their small size and swallow-like actions being so entirely unlike those of what we landmen generally somewhat loosely term "Sea-Birds." I never saw one of this species swimming, but they frequently touch the water with their feet whilst pausing for a few seconds to pick up food; according to Buffon, it is this habit that has gained for them from English sailors the name of Petrel, after the Apostle Peter, who attempted to walk upon the water, but most of the seafaring men whom I have met with knew them best as Mother Carey's Chickens. Many authors are agreed as to the culinary excellence of young Storm-Petrels.



## 217. LITTLE AUK.

*Mergulus alle.*

A stuffed specimen of the Little Auk was presented to me by the Rev. W. Finch-Hatton, of Weldon Rectory, in 1876, with the information that it was picked up at Weldon after a gale of wind in the winter of 1841, in the garden of the parish clerk, and that it was kept alive for a few days in a large bath at the rectory upon sticklebacks, in pursuit of which it dived frequently. Lord Knightley, writing to me in February 1876, informed me that a Little Auk was shot within a mile of Fawsley "more than six years ago"; and Mr. A. G. Elliot wrote to me that a bird of this species was picked up in the neighbourhood of Stamford in the early spring of 1881. Several other reports of the occurrence of Little Auks have reached me; but, as I shall show in another article, most of these referred in reality to another species, and the only one that strikes me as possibly authentic is that sent to me by the late Mr. Miles Berkeley, of Benefield, in 1876, of a "Little Auk, seen by one Wildash sitting erect by Biggin Lake, very many years ago." I have never seen a bird of this species alive, and can only therefore borrow from the authorities the information that it breeds in enormous numbers in and about Spitzbergen and certain other Arctic localities, and wanders irregularly during the autumn and winter to the southward, occasionally as far as the Canaries and the Azores. It is rarely seen on land except in its breeding-places, where it lays its single egg in

holes or tunnels under stones or in the cliff-faces, up to 2000 feet above sea-level. The habits of the Little Auk resemble those of its near relations the Razorbill and Puffin, the greater part of its existence being spent upon the sea; it is an expert diver, and lives upon small fishes and mollusks. Our coasts, especially those of the eastern and north-eastern counties, are occasionally, but not commonly, visited by large numbers of this species, driven by stress of weather; the autumn and winter of 1841 are mentioned in Yarrell's 'British Birds' as having been especially remarkable for the quantity of Little Auks, not only recorded from our sea-coasts, but also from many inland localities.

Since the above article was in print, we have had a considerable visitation of this species in Northamptonshire. On the 18th of October, 1894, a living specimen, picked up at Luddington on the previous day, was brought to Lilford, and another was found near Stamford within a few days of this occurrence. On January 24th, 1895, I received a fresh specimen from the Rev. H. H. Slater, of Thornhaugh, with the information that it had been picked up at Wansford bridge on 22nd inst.; another was brought to me from Brigstock, and a third was caught by a cat and taken by its captor into a cottage at Wadenhoe. On January 26th, one of our gamekeepers brought in the remains of another Little Auk that had been partially eaten by some beast near Lilford Wood. In the 'Field' of that day were many records of the occurrence of this species from various parts of the country, most of them naturally referring to the great number that had been obtained on the coast of our eastern

counties. Mr. W. Bazeley, of Northampton, received a specimen for preservation that was picked up near Brington on January 25th. On February 2nd, I received a very clean specimen from the Rev. F. M. Stopford, of Tichmarsh, with the information that it had been found alive by a labourer at a pond-side near that village. Another specimen, reported to me by Mr. H. Field of Kettering, was captured at Geddington, on February 1st; and on the 2nd of that month Mr. John Crisp brought me a good specimen that had been taken at Elton on the previous day. I believe that all the specimens that came to my hands were birds of the year, and the majority were certainly females.

## 218. PUFFIN.

### *Fratercula arctica.*

This quaint-looking sea-fowl is by no means an exceedingly rare straggler to Northamptonshire, as will be seen from the following list of the occurrences that have come to my knowledge, probably by no means a complete one even with regard to the period that it includes. The earliest of my records refers to a young Puffin, originally reported to me as a Razorbill, that was picked up in Boughton Park in the late autumn of 1869 and given to me stuffed, about ten years subsequently, by Mr. Fred. Morton Eden, who informed me that three or four more were found in the immediate neighbourhood of Boughton about the same time, during the continuance of a heavy north-easterly gale. Captain J. A. M. Vipan

informed me by letter in 1886 that a Puffin was picked up alive between Stibbington and Wansford on November 24, 1877. My next record in point of date is that of a stuffed Puffin sent to me for identification by the Rev. G. Nicholson, who informed me that the bird was brought to him alive and very lively on the morning of December 17, 1883, by Mr. Bazeley, of Sheep Street, Northampton, who told him that it came about 9 P.M. on the night of the 12th December, tapping and scratching at the door of a Mr. Facer, near Naseby Reservoir, and was easily taken with the hand. Mr. Frank B. Simson subsequently added to the above details by informing me that this bird, (which both he and Mr. Nicholson considered to be a Little Auk), was taken alive at Thornby. A fourth Puffin was picked up about November 22, 1884, in a farmyard at Yoke Hill, near Benefield, and sent alive to Lilford by my brother-in-law, Mr. Thos. H. Burroughes, on the 27th, but died on the following day. Another was sent alive to Lilford by the Rev. Sir F. Robinson on March 16, 1887, with the information that it had been found near Cranford a day or two before its despatch to us; this bird fed freely upon small fishes for awhile, but died on April 2. Another, found early in April 1888, near Pipewell Hall, Kettering, and reported to me as a Little Auk, was sent for my inspection to Lilford in October of the same year, and proved to be an immature Puffin. The last occurrence of this bird in our neighbourhood that has come to my knowledge is that of a specimen sent from Cottingham early in November 1892 to Mr. J. G. Field, of Kettering, for preservation. Mr. Field reported this bird to me as a Little Auk,

but was good enough to send it to me for examination, stuffed, on November 17.

All the specimens above mentioned were immature. To those who have given any attention to British ornithology, it is unnecessary to say that the Puffin is a strictly maritime bird, and that these inland occurrences, though by no means uncommon, are usually due to stress of weather at the seasons of migration ; but our bird is so peculiar in many of its habits, that my readers will perhaps pardon another of my frequent rambles in print beyond the boundaries of our district, with a view of describing the subject of this article in his natural haunts as observed by myself. I have only once visited a colony of Puffins during the period of incubation, and then found the birds sitting, each upon a single egg, in shallow burrows in black peaty earth on the summit and sloping turf-covered gullies and ledges of a small island of no very considerable height, but I have several times seen, from the sea, myriads of Puffins upon and about certain ranges of lofty cliffs in England and in Ireland during the summer months. The number that kept passing around and above us, and dotting the sea in every direction, on some of these occasions was perfectly astounding : the birds seemed to take little notice of us, and had we been so disposed, there would have been no difficulty in loading our boats with them. We were assured by the natives of the neighbourhood of several of these "*Puffinries*" that the birds "come up from the sea" annually, almost to a day, in early spring, about the end of March or beginning of April, and begin to lay about the end of the latter month. The young birds are at first covered with black down, and remain in



the nesting-holes for a considerable time; as soon as they are strong on the wing they leave the coasts with their parents, and it is exceptional to see more than a very few near land from the end of August till the following spring. This latter statement is certainly confirmed by my own experience. The Puffin is a strong and rapid flyer, an active swimmer, and a diver of the first class, feeding almost exclusively upon small fishes captured below the surface of the water. Notwithstanding the character of its diet, our bird is by no means bad eating when no better fowl is to be had. The horny sheath of the lower mandible, and the curious and apparently superfluous appendages of bare skin about the eyes and gape, that give such an extraordinary look to the face of the Puffin, are shed in the autumn, and this loss so completely alters the appearance of the bird that I have little doubt that it has caused the frequent mistakes in identification to which I have above alluded. In my experience this species is rare in the Mediterranean, but it occasionally visits the Straits of Gibraltar in some numbers, and has been met with as far to the eastward as Sicily in the winter. A curious occurrence of a Puffin far from its usual haunts took place on May 16, 1887, when one of these birds flew into a bedroom of No. 45 Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, W., and was picked up alive, but with a broken leg. I mention this as I had occupied this house for several months in the previous year, and because the owner, aware of my ornithological tastes, was good enough to send me the skin of this erratic Puffin, which is now stuffed at Lilford.

## 219. COMMON GUILLEMOT.

*Uria troile.*

The only occurrence of this species in Northamptonshire, of which I have positive proof, took place on November 16, 1864, at Kislingbury. Mr. Chas. I. Watts, of Kislingbury Hall, to whom the bird in question was brought alive, most courteously presented it to me stuffed by Mr. W. Bazeley, of Northampton, with the information that it was caught on the flood near Kislingbury by a shepherd, but refused all food and died after two days of captivity. It is remarkable that this species, which is the most abundant of "Rock-birds" on the coasts of England, occurs inland far less frequently than either the Puffin or the Razorbill, both of which resemble the Guillemot very closely in habits, and are generally its close neighbours during the breeding-season. This species is so exceedingly common on all the high cliffs of Great Britain and Ireland, and so well known, that I do not think it necessary to go into details concerning its habits.

## 220. GREAT NORTHERN DIVER.

*Colymbus glacialis.*

Whilst engaged on the present edition of my 'Notes' I received a letter from Mr. W. Bazeley, of Northampton, informing me that he had received a bird of this species for preservation, killed on Ravensthorpe Reservoir on November 6th, 1894. As this was the first occurrence of the Great Northern

Diver in our county that had come to my knowledge, I begged my informant to send the bird to me for inspection; he did so, and I was much pleased to find that his identification was perfectly correct, the bird proving to be an immature female of the species in question. The owner of this specimen, Mr. John Eunson, C.E., of Northampton, has been good enough to present it to me. I fondly imagined that my bird was unique as a "county specimen," but I am assured by my very obliging correspondent, Mr. W. Tomalin, that a Great Northern Diver was killed at Kingsthorpe by a Mr. Richard Dunkley, after a severe storm, to the best of my informant's recollection in November 1855. I have also received information of the occurrence of a bird of this species on a pond at Kimbolton in March 1888. Morton\* mentions the occurrence of a bird near Kibworth, in Leicestershire, that I somewhat doubtfully imagine to have belonged to this species; the whole passage is so quaint that I make no excuse for quoting it at full length:—"The Greatest Speckled *Douker* or Loon, *Mergus maximus Farrensis, sive Arcticus Clusii*. Mr. Willughby never saw above Five of them: and only Two of these appear to have been found in *England*. To which I may add a Third that was found nigh *Kibworth* in *Leicestershire*, in Winter when the ground was cover'd with Snow. Being almost famish'd it struck boldly with its pointed Bill at a Gentleman's Horse upon the *Leicester* Road who kill'd it with his Cane. In it Stomach were found nothing but stones. The Bird being now in my Possession, I take the Freedom

\* Nat. History of Northamptonshire, p. 430.

of mentioning it here; tho' not really kill'd in Northamptonshire." Kibworth is within seven or eight miles of our frontier, and I have no wish to poach upon Mr. Montagu Browne's territory, but I do not find any mention of this occurrence on record in his work—'The Vertebrate Animals of Leicestershire and Rutland.'

I have met with this bird once in considerable numbers in Weymouth Bay, in April 1876, and, so far as my memory serves me, I saw one or two in Plymouth Sound in May 1855. We found one very fine adult bird in the harbour of Santander in May 1876, and several immature birds in the same locality in the winter of 1878. The old bird set all our efforts to capture him from our rowing boats at defiance and remained about the harbour till we left Santander early in June, but with the aid of a steam-launch we secured several of the younger birds on the occasion of my second visit. I believe that there is no absolute proof of this Diver having bred in any part of Great Britain, although it has occasionally been observed and captured in the summer months on Scottish and Irish waters. It breeds on the shores of most of the lakes in Iceland. On the autumnal migration the Great Northern Diver visits our coasts in considerable numbers and is said to occur occasionally off Madeira. In my own experience it is by no means frequent in the Mediterranean, although it does occasionally occur. It is recorded as breeding commonly in N. America from about 70° N. latitude down to Connecticut. I met with a few of this species during the winter months on the Lake of Geneva, and was informed that it occurs at that season upon all the larger lakes of Switzerland.

The length and rapidity of the dives of this bird when pursued are marvellous, and I have now and then fairly exhausted the strength of four good oarsmen in smooth water in vain attempts to tire the "Master" of the Divers. So powerful are these birds that it is only when driven up into a narrow creek that I have ever seen them forced to take wing. An instance of the capture of one of this species in a trammel-net at a depth of 30 fathoms is recorded in the 4th vol. of Yarrell.

## 221. BLACK-THROATED DIVER.

*Colymbus arcticus.*

An immature bird of this species was recorded by Mr. W. Tomalin in 'The Field' of November 5, 1881, as having been shot upon Naseby Reservoir on October 25 of that year, and was sent for preservation to Mr. J. Gardner, of Oxford Street, in whose shop my friend Colonel L. H. Irby and I inspected it on November 8, and found that it had been correctly identified. This is the only occurrence of the Black-throated Diver within the political boundaries of our county that has come to my knowledge. I purchased the skin of an adult bird of this species from Mr. A. G. Elliot, which he found "in the flesh" at Peterborough, he was assured that it had been killed near Sutton Bridge about December 20, 1875; and Captain J. A. M. Vipan informed me that he killed a Black-throated Diver, the first that he had ever seen on the Wash, on November 12, 1886. Of course I cannot claim either of these latter specimens as Northamptonshire birds, but their occurrences



come well within the boundaries of our north-eastern watershed, and, in my opinion, fairly within the district that I designate as our "neighbourhood." I have very little acquaintance with this Diver in life, having only met with it in one or two instances on the south coast of England and also in the north of Spain. In my experience this is by far the least common of the three species of its genus that frequent our seas during the months of winter and early spring; but although the greed of collectors has greatly diminished its numbers, it still breeds on many of the lochs of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. I have never visited any of these localities during the breeding-season of the Divers, but I gather from the accounts given to me by friends, as well as from published histories of this bird, that the favourite sites for the laying of its eggs are grassy spots on small islands of secluded lakes, generally within a few feet of the water's edge. The eggs are laid early in May, and are of a very dark olive colour spotted with black, the young take to the water immediately on being hatched, and are assiduously watched over and tended by their parents. I have been assured by a very accurate observer, who had ample opportunities for the study of these birds, that he believes them to be incapable of any progressive motion on land except by shuffling on their bellies: without any special knowledge relating to this particular species, I am disposed not only to concur in this opinion, but to believe that the Divers (in the restricted sense of the term) rarely, if ever, assume the erect position on land (by squatting on the whole length of the tarsus) that is so characteristic of the *Alcidæ*. The food of the

Divers consists entirely of fishes taken beneath the surface of the water, and it is by diving that they seek to avoid their pursuers. This species is said to be especially reluctant to take wing, although it is capable of prolonged and rapid flight. The Black-throated Diver is stated to be abundant throughout the whole of Scandinavia during the summer months, and from its comparative scarcity on our own and more southern coasts during the winter, I presume that for the most part they spend the cold season on the nearest open water to their summer haunts.

## 222. RED-THROATED DIVER.

*Colymbus septentrionalis.*

I have several records of the occurrence of this bird in our district, but will only mention the few instances in which I feel no doubt as to correct identification. I found an immature specimen of the Red-throated Diver stuffed at Blatherwycke Hall on the occasion of my first visit in January 1855, and was informed by the late Mr. Stafford O'Brien that it had been killed on the lake in his park several years previously. I have reason to believe that this bird is now in my collection at Lilford: for the Rev. J. Holdich, who presented me with a stuffed specimen of this species in February 1876, then informed me that it was given to him by Mr. O'Brien "nearly twenty years ago." Captain J. A. M. Vipan informed me that he shot a Red-throated Diver at Sibson, near Wansford, on March 18, 1875. About November 12, 1888, one of this species was picked up near Pytchley, and taken alive to Mr. J. Field, of

Kettering, who obligingly informed me by letter of the occurrence, but called the bird a "Great Northern Diver." I was naturally anxious to be assured of a genuine occurrence of the latter bird in our county, and therefore wrote at once to the Rev. H. H. Slater, then rector of Irchester, who was good enough to visit Kettering and inspect the specimen at once, and wrote informing me that it was a fine specimen of *C. septentrionalis* in winter dress. On April 5, 1891, I heard from Mr. W. Tomalin that a male Red-throated Diver had been shot by Mr. J. Allen at Woodford Mill on March 24 of same year; I wrote to Mr. Allen about this bird, and am satisfied as to correct identification in this instance. This is by far the most common of the Diver family upon our coasts, and its visits to inland waters in England during the winter and early spring are by no means uncommon, whilst in certain parts of Scotland it breeds in considerable numbers. As regards Ireland, I find, in the 4th edition of Yarrell, that "it appears possible that a few pairs breed in Donegal," but I have reason to believe that Donegal is by no means the only county in Ireland in which this bird may at least be found throughout the summer months. I have never had the good fortune to see a nest of this bird, although I am convinced that I have been very near to one. In most respects the nesting-habits of the Red-throated are said to resemble closely those of the Black-throated Diver; but it seems that the present species is less given to select islands as breeding-places than the larger bird, and is often to be found nesting upon the banks of small pools in solitary moorlands, whence long aerial journeys are necessary to obtain daily provender. The eggs are two in number, of the same character as those

of the Black-throated Diver in shape, but lighter in ground colour and, of course, considerably smaller. From September to May, and occasionally even later, this Diver may be met with on almost all parts of the English coasts; but it prefers comparatively sheltered estuaries and creeks to the open sea, where the Great Northern Diver braves the rough weather. I have met with this species in considerable numbers in several of the harbours of the south coast of England, as well as in Ireland, on the north coast of Spain, and less commonly in the Mediterranean. In a much-frequented harbour these Divers pay very little attention to passing vessels, but soon find out when harm is intended for them, and if not "fed up" take wing readily on being pursued, but if they have dived successfully for food several times, they trust to the water for safety, and in my experience are much more easily obtained with a well-manned rowing-boat than is the Great Crested Grebe. These birds when chased, and not infrequently when entirely unmolested, swim with the whole of their bodies submerged, and constantly dip their bills into the water. The dive is performed with much less apparent exertion by this and the other Divers than by any other family of birds, not excepting even the Grebes; this Red-throated Diver especially seems often to go down, head foremost certainly, but with no effort whatever. I have frequently observed that these birds, when not pursued, and simply diving for food, generally come up with their bills pointing in the exactly opposite direction to that in which they went down—in fact, they almost always make a complete turn whilst under water. It is very common to see a Diver, when pursued, go down at a hundred yards or more

ahead of the pursuing boat and come up at more than double the distance astern of her. All the true Divers use their wings in diving, and their speed beneath the surface is astounding; but this species cannot compare in that respect, or in the length of its dives, with the Great Northern Diver. On the eastern and southern coasts of England the Red-throated Diver is generally known to the fishermen as Loon, Sprat-Loon, or Speckled Diver; but Yarrell says, "In the North it is almost universally known as 'Rain-Goose,' and its wailing cry is believed to foretell the wet and stormy weather of which it is certainly a frequent accompaniment. At such times the bird generally flies high and in irregular circles." Personally I have seldom seen this Diver take wing voluntarily before April, but at that time of year those that still linger on our southern coasts certainly become very much more restless than is the case in the winter, and are often to be seen flying high and swiftly from creek to creek. They always, however, seemed to me to avoid flying over the land, even bare tidal muds upon which the concealment of a human enemy would be well-nigh impossible; in fact, I have often obtained specimens by remaining in my boat about the mouth of a mud-creek as the tide ebbed, knowing that the bird would in all probability give me a fair shot by following the course of the creek on its return to open water, rather than fly over the "dry." The only note that I ever heard produced by a bird of this species—and that not more than once or twice—was a sort of long-drawn moan; but in the breeding-season it is said to be very noisy. In the spring of 1855 some forty or fifty of this species lingered in Plymouth Sound and up Hamoaze till late in May, about the middle



of which month I shot one of them with the red throat-patch fully developed. I cannot say from personal knowledge that the Red-throated Diver, when hotly pressed or wounded, ever resorts to the dodge so common amongst the Grebes and certain other diving species, of simply just putting the bill out of water as far as the nostrils to take breath: on one occasion I saw one of this species, knocked down with a broken wing by a long shot from a boat, on the open water off Netley Hospital; I was in another boat, and feeling sure that the bird, having lost half its diving power, would be easily captured by the other boat's crew, we did not "make in" to assist. This bird, however, although it fell with a splash at least half a mile from land, was never seen again by any of us, in spite of long waiting and close examination of both shores to a very considerable distance above and below the spot where it fell. I must add that I never saw a wounded Diver take to the shore, or even try to conceal itself by resorting to the cover of aquatic vegetation. In connection with the retention of the red throat-patch, I may mention that Captain J. A. M. Vipan (to whose kindness I am so greatly indebted for frequent information upon ornithological subjects) informed me that, whilst punting on the Wash on October 28, 1886, he shot one of the present species in full possession of that ornament.

Since this article was in the printer's hands, another specimen of this Diver has come into my possession. This bird was killed on the Nen, close to Northampton, on February 15, 1895, and was sent to me on the following day by Mr. G. Bazeley. It is, I think, adult.

## 223. GREAT CRESTED GREBE.

*Podiceps cristatus.*

I have many records of the occurrence of this very remarkable bird in Northamptonshire, including one noted by Morton as the "Grey or Ash-coloured *Loon* of Doctor Brown," of which he writes: "however it came to straggle so high into the country, was gotten into *Wapenham* Lordship, and there shot by one of Mr. Archdeacon *Hutton's* servants. The case of it I saw at the before-mentioned gentleman's house at *Wapenham*"; I must admit that our author gives a reference concerning this specimen to Willughby's 'Ornithology,' and on consulting that work I find that it is possible, though not I think probable, that the bird figured under the designation above quoted may have been of another species of Grebe. It would be tedious, and is quite unnecessary, that I should detail the many local occurrences of Great Crested Grebe that have come to my knowledge; but as there is no doubt that the species is now well established as a resident in, or regular migrant to and from our county, I will quote some of the information that has been kindly communicated to me of late years, with regard to its breeding upon Northamptonshire waters. The late Captain G. Ashby, of Naseby Woolleys, informed me that he saw ten of this species together upon Naseby Reservoir on April 4th, 1884, and two, apparently a pair, at Welford on June 3rd of the same year. Mr. O. V. Aplin wrote to me of the slaughter of a pair of Crested Grebes upon one of





the ponds at Canon's Ashby about the end of April 1886, and Mr. H. S. O'Brien, early in October of that year, wrote to me from Blatherwycke—"There have been two pairs of Great Crested Grebes on the water here all through the spring and summer; two of them are still here; I cannot, I am sorry to say, state positively that they have bred here, but my children have repeatedly told me that they have seen an old Grebe and two young ones." Lord Knightley, writing from Fawsley on November 6th, 1886, informed me that Crested Grebes had nested there that year as well as in 1885. On April 19th, 1890, I heard from Mr. O'Brien that he had five of these Grebes on his lake at Blatherwycke, and on March 24th, 1891, he informed me that four had appeared there on the previous day for the first time since the commencement of the great frost of the previous December and January. Mrs. O'Brien, writing on May 21st of the year just mentioned, told me that one pair of Grebes were then breeding on the lake, and on paying us a visit on July 29th, she added that she had recently seen three quite young birds, with their parents, thereon. On July 10th, 1891, I received for identification from Mr. I. Eunson two eggs of this Grebe taken upon Ravensthorpe Reservoir; these are the only Northamptonshire specimens of eggs of this species that I have seen up to date of this writing—January 1893. On November 4, 1891, I received from Lady Mary Thompson an immature bird of this species that had been shot on the previous day on the Nen near Milton.

During the summer of 1892 I heard more than once of the presence of Great Crested Grebes on



Byfield Reservoir from Mr. O. V. Aplin. I am glad to believe that the evident increase of the breeding numbers of this beautiful bird in our county is due not only to the enforcement of the law, but also to the growing interest taken by my fellow countymen in our birds, and to the decrease of the feather-wearing mania amongst English ladies in general. The Great Crested Grebe seldom favours our river in the neighbourhood of Lilford (although I have a few records of its appearance there), for the obvious reason that during the summer months it prefers quiet shallow sheets of water, with plenty of marginal covert of reeds, to more or less navigable water-ways, and when these inland lakes become frozen, our bird generally takes the shortest cut to the sea. The headquarters of this species in England during the summer months are the broads and meres of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Yorkshire, though the inland waters of several other English, and certainly one Welsh county, generally hold some Great Crested Grebes at their breeding-season.

Very full and interesting details relating to this bird are given in Lubbock's 'Fauna of Norfolk,' published in 1845, and a more recent account may be found in the 3rd volume of Stevenson's 'Birds of Norfolk,' edited by Mr. T. Southwell. It appears from these works that the subject of this article was in great danger of extermination on the fresh waters of our eastern counties, but has of late years, owing to the protection afforded to it by the law and by various private proprietors of "Broads," become fairly numerous again in its former favourite haunts. When I first visited the "Broad" district of Norfolk, alas! some forty years ago, in the month of March,

the "Loon," as this bird is generally called in that district, was by no means uncommon, and as at that season these Grebes are much addicted to aerial circuits on their own account, and by no means very shy, I had good opportunities for observation. In the bright cold forenoons of March, three or four of these very conspicuous birds were frequently to be seen floating on the lee side, and within a few yards of the vast reed-beds with which most of these sheets of water are fringed and interspersed: on the approach of our boats the Grebes disappeared into the reeds, but rarely dived in our sight; several times, however, when we had marked a particular spot at which a bird had been seen to enter the reeds, and rowed or punted straight to it, the Grebe would rise from the open water at some distance astern of us and fly right away. After incubation has commenced, however, the Grebes very seldom take wing, and appear to trust to their diving powers and to the aquatic vegetation for concealment. The few nests that I have seen on the Norfolk Broads were simply masses of more or less sodden and rotten vegetable matter placed near the outside edge of the reeds, and generally conspicuous enough from a boat on the open water; but in Spain, where I had more frequent opportunities from close observation of these birds during the breeding-season, I found the nests built up on the open water, if that term may be used of pools whose surface was densely covered with a low-growing water-plant that produces masses of small white flowers in May. I constantly observed that the Grebe on leaving her nest effectually covered her eggs with a pull or two at the surrounding weeds, in fact it appeared to me that a supply of

material was kept in readiness close to, or upon the sides of, the nest for this purpose. I find on reference to my Journal that on this occasion, the first fortnight of May 1872, some of the Grebes' eggs were fresh, most of them partially incubated, and a few within a day or two of hatching; the latter were of a rich cinnamon or chocolate colour, and we found specimens varying from that hue through all the gradations of light rust-colour, buff, and pale yellow, to their normal colour of greenish white. Almost all the eggs that we found in the nests were more or less wet and some of them actually lying in water; the usual complement of eggs was four, but in some nests were five, and in one instance seven. Both parents take part in incubation.

In the winter months this Grebe is common throughout the Mediterranean, but I have never seen it anywhere in such large numbers as on the Lake of Geneva; I passed a winter at Lausanne in my boyhood, and the chase of these Grebes was virtually the only sport that the locality afforded. It was no uncommon event to see from forty to sixty or more of these birds together far out on the Lake; on being approached they would disperse, and on being pressed, the great majority, sometimes all of them, would take wing, but, as a rule, one or two would dive; selecting one of these for pursuit, our rowers pulled as hard as they could for the spot where it had disappeared, slackening their speed at about the twenty-eighth stroke with a sharp look-out on all sides; the Grebe generally appeared before the thirty-third stroke, but usually far out of shot; after two or three of these long dives the bird never took wing, and its capture was merely a matter of time

and good-will on the part of our boatmen; but success in this pursuit was by no means so easy of attainment as may be imagined, as the boats in use at the time of which I am writing were very clumsy, the boatmen timid, for the most part money-grasping to a marvellous extent, and without a spark of the sporting instinct. The old proverb "No money no Swiss" was indeed most fully borne out by our experiences in Grebe-hunting, for although we paid these Ouchy boatmen an exorbitant day's wage, fed them liberally, and generally made them a present of the Grebes that we shot (the skins being at the time worth from eight to ten shillings apiece), they were as a rule sulky, lazy, and uncivil. Another difficulty was that the pursuit of the Grebe was hopeless if there was the slightest ripple upon the Lake, as when pressed these birds will regain their 'wind' by merely getting their nostrils above water for a few seconds, and a Grebe's beak may very easily be overlooked at a short distance in rippling water by the keenest of human eyes. When wounded, the Grebes would not infrequently come up close to the boat, and more than once we were entirely baffled by this dodge.

#### 224. RED-NECKED GREBE.

*Podiceps grisegena.*

My only authority for including this species amongst the Birds of Northamptonshire is a letter from the late Captain G. Ashby Ashby, who informed me that he killed a Red-necked Grebe on Naseby Reservoir on February 17, 1876. I may add that I have no doubt whatever as to correct identification

in this instance, as Captain Ashby was perfectly well acquainted with all the British Grebes, and was a keen observer and collector of local rarities. As this is a species that I have never met with alive, and with whose habits I have therefore no personal acquaintance, I will merely state that although it has never been known to nest in the United Kingdom, it is frequently met with during the winter months on our eastern coasts, and not rarely elsewhere on British waters. In habits it is said to resemble the other members of the Grebe family, with the exception that it does not, as they do, use the wings in diving. I find it stated that this species breeds locally in Denmark, Sweden, Northern Germany, and Russia; and my friend Colonel Irby has assured me that he is convinced that the Red-necked Grebe breeds in Morocco. At the seasons of migration, this bird may be met with, according to the best authorities, over the greater part of Europe and in the Mediterranean. I have proof positive of its occurrence in Ionian waters, but, as I have already stated, I never, to my knowledge, saw a living specimen.

225. LESSER CRESTED, HORNED,  
OR SCLAVONIAN GREBE.

*Podiceps auritus.*

This Grebe is not a very uncommon visitor to our county, and I feel convinced that where the Little Grebe or Dabchick is common, this bird often escapes special notice during the winter months. Two of this species were shot on the garden-pond at



Drayton House by Mr. Ianson on April 10, 1858, and are preserved there; these two birds show no sign of maturity in the way of any crest or cheek-tufts, and are in what I should call winter plumage. On the back of the case containing these birds, I found in the (to me) well-known handwriting of B. Leadbeater, who stuffed and mounted them, "*Podiceps cornutus*, ♂, Penn.," with the date above given. The late Captain Ashby Ashby sent me a note of having shot two of these Grebes at Naseby Reservoir on February 16 and 19, 1876. Two, apparently a pair, of this species were killed upon Oundle or Biggin Pond in February 1879, and most kindly presented to me, stuffed and cased, by the Rev. Edward Moore, of Benefield Rectory, in October 1883. I have several times distinctly identified this Grebe on the Nen during the prevalence of floods in the winter and early spring, and a Grebe, that I cannot attribute to any but the present species, flew round our boat close to Lilford on July 30, 1887. I have recorded this occurrence in the 'Zoologist' for that year, and will only repeat here that I am perfectly certain that the bird in question was neither a Great Crested Grebe, or a Dabchick, and I have in my own mind an almost equally strong conviction, from pretty intimate acquaintance with the Eared Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*, that it was not of that species.

With the nesting-habits of the Lesser Crested Grebe I have no personal acquaintance; there is, so far as I am aware, no authentic record of its breeding in any part of the British Islands, although it is said to be not infrequently met with in the Shetlands and other north Scottish localities as late

as the month of May. This bird breeds in Iceland, the northern portions of Norway, Sweden, and Russia, and also in Denmark, and migrates to our coasts in the autumn.

## 226. EARED GREBE.

*Podiceps nigricollis.*

A pair of this species, killed upon Daventry Reservoir in 1869, and most courteously presented to me in November 1893 by Mr. E. C. Burton, are the only specimens of the Eared Grebe that have occurred in our county to my knowledge. Many birds have been reported to me by various county correspondents as "Eared Grebes," but have, on investigation, all proved to be Great Crested Grebes. Mr. Burton could not inform me as to the time of year when his birds were obtained, but from the development of their ear-tufts I should guess that it cannot have been earlier than April. The present species is the rarest of our British Grebes; it is intermediate in size between the subject of my last article and the Little Grebe or Dabchick, and may always be distinguished when in hand by the upward bend of its bill. The Eared Grebe is very abundant in Andalusia, where it breeds, and I have found it more or less commonly about the coasts and lagoons of all the Mediterranean districts that I have visited. I have only once met with it in British waters,—in Weymouth Bay, in April 1876, when my yachting companion, Lord Clifton, killed a very fine male from one of our boats after a long chase; this bird was alone. In all its habits this Grebe so closely resembles our well-known Dabchick, that it

is unnecessary that I should go into details concerning them. The Eared Grebe has a wide range of distribution in Europe and North Africa, and has been recorded as breeding so far to the north as Jutland ; but Mr. Howard Saunders states that there is no evidence of its having ever bred in our own country.

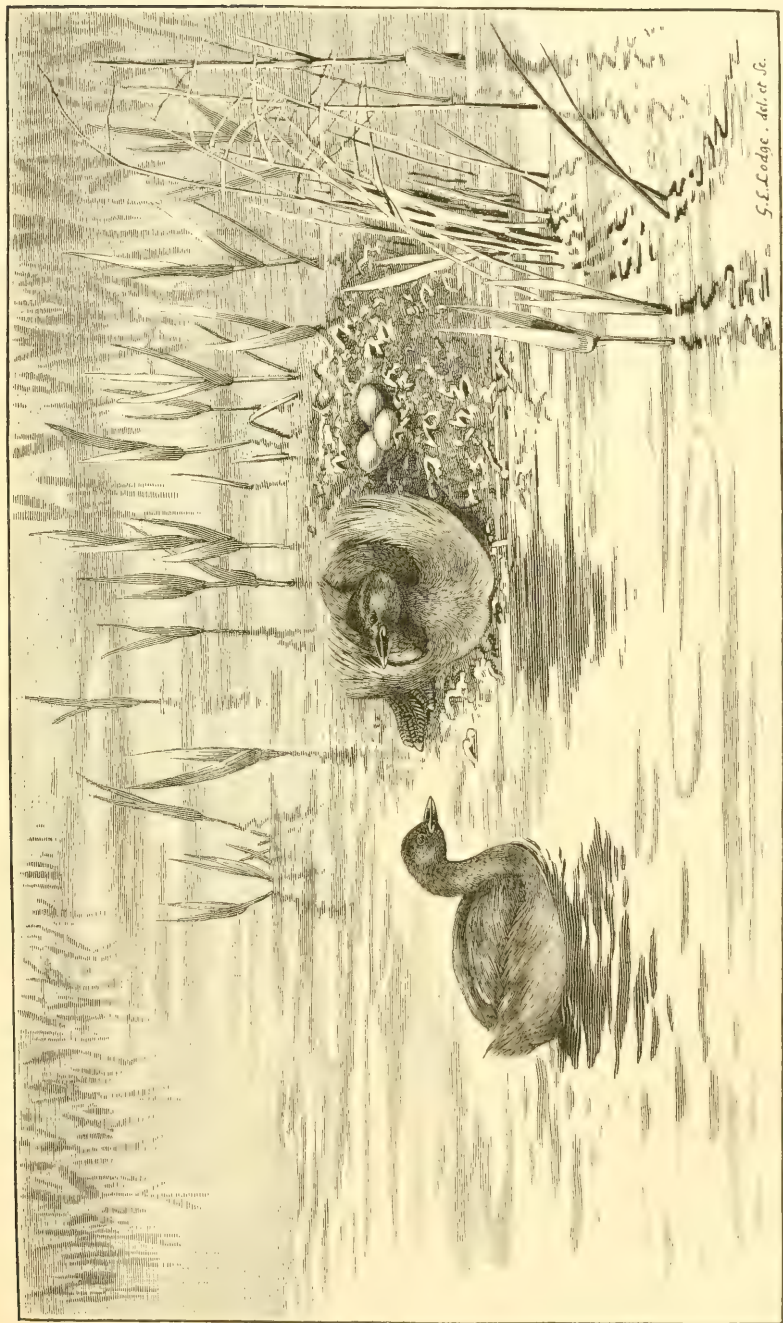
## 227. LITTLE GREBE OR DABCHICK.

*Podiceps fluvialis.*

Although we seldom see this most amusing little bird upon the Nen at Lilford during the summer months, it is common enough throughout the county in suitable localities, and in autumn, winter, and early spring, especially in severe frosts, several pairs may be seen almost every day during a riverside walk from Thrapston to Thorpe, or from the latter village to Oundle ; I only speak of that portion of our river with which I am most intimately acquainted, and have no doubt that the Dabchick is equally common throughout the whole course of the Nen from Northampton to the fens and the open sea. I never discovered a nest of this species on the Nen, probably because I never searched for it during my bird's-nesting days at the right or most likely time of the year for its discovery, as I have excellent proof that the Dabchick breeds, at all events occasionally, in the close neighbourhood of Lilford, from the fact of having once met with young birds unable to fly, one of them in the maw of a small pike. In habits the Dabchick closely resembles the other Grebes, but is often to be met with on small pools and narrow brooks, where the larger

species in this country would be sought for in vain. The nests that I have seen were composed of masses of dead weed piled up amongst growing water-plants on the borders of streams or well out on a pool. I have never noticed any attempt to conceal the nest, though the parent birds, unless suddenly startled, always pull a small bunch or two of weed over their eggs on quitting them after the full complement of four or five has been laid. Although the Little Grebe, as a rule, dives immediately when alarmed, this is not invariably the case; on one occasion in the summer one of these birds rose three or four times before our punt, from the weedy banks of the Nen, without being pressed by a dog or in any way closely followed up. The habits of the Dabchick during the nesting-season may now be closely observed by anyone passing through St. James's Park, as several pairs annually breed on the ornamental water therein, and are, as I am assured, perfectly fearless of the numerous and frequent spectators. Although, as I have already stated, this bird is apparently averse to take wing, it can, and constantly does, take long aerial journeys, as has been repeatedly proved by its sudden appearance on small isolated pools at all seasons of the year in situations that it could not possibly reach by land. I ought not, however, to omit to state that very competent observers have recorded that the Dabchick can run swiftly; this is contrary to my own experience, but certainly not to be doubted on that account, and I may mention that this is the only species of Grebe that I have ever distinctly seen standing upright upon its feet. The ordinary cry of our bird is a short squeak, but it has also a prolonged twittering and, comparatively speaking, powerful cry. The





Little Grebe.



“Didopper,” as our country people in Northamptonshire commonly call this bird, is a very great favourite of mine, and I have frequently spent time (which would have been better employed perhaps in active exercise), concealed behind a tree or bush, completely fascinated by watching a couple of Dabchicks at work on a ‘wake’ or open hole in the ice. The energy with which they dive, the sort of “can’t help it” manner in which they come to the surface like corks, their constant upturned glances at birds passing on wing, and, in fact, their whole demeanour as absolute sovereigns of the selected banqueting-place, are irresistibly amusing and have often made me regret that our Nen has not afforded me opportunities for watching these birds during their breeding-season. I have found the Little Grebe more or less commonly in all suitable localities that I have visited on the Continent, and on the shores of the Mediterranean; it breeds, to my knowledge, in considerable numbers in Spain, but from my own experience of the south-western portion of the Mediterranean, I am inclined to consider the Eared Grebe as the more abundant of the two species.

I cannot conclude these Notes without an expression of most sincere gratitude to my many correspondents, without whose friendly communications my list would have been poor indeed, as for many years past I have been debarred by physical infirmity from any but the most casual open-air observation. It is only now left to me to say that I am most fully aware of the many imperfections in these Notes, and that I shall be deeply grateful for any corrections.

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