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RARE, VANISHING, AND LOST
BRITISH BIRDS

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OSPREY (*Pandion haliaëtus*)

One-fifth natural size

RARE VANISHING & LOST BRITISH BIRDS

COMPILED FROM NOTES BY
W. H. HUDSON

BY
LINDA GARDINER

WITH 25 COLOURED PLATES BY
H. GRONVOLD

229986

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FOREWORD

FOR some years before his death Mr. Hudson had been anxious to prepare an enlarged edition of the pamphlet *Lost British Birds* which he wrote in 1894 for the Society (now the Royal Society) for the Protection of Birds. In the midst of much other work that he also hoped to accomplish, held back by weariness and ill-health, but constantly urged on by the sharpest and saddest of all goads—the consciousness that but little time remained to him for the completion of any task,—this book seemed to be rarely absent from his thoughts. He referred to it the last time I saw him, deploring that the progress he had made was not greater, owing to his absence from his books during the winter and spring spent in Cornwall, and to his pre-occupation with *A Hind in Richmond Park*. He spoke then of the increased need for such a book and of the birds to be included in it.

In the early pamphlet he had written of thirteen birds which he held to be practically lost to Britain as breeding species. More than a quarter of a century had passed; a greatly increased body of ornithologists and naturalists had arisen; further laws had been made for the preservation and protection of wild birds: but with what result? One bird, the little St. Kilda Wren, which had been added by way of appendix to the pamphlet, had been rescued by a special Act of Parliament from extermination at the hands of collectors. In the "Conclusion" to *Lost British Birds* Mr. Hudson had written: "No sooner had the news gone abroad that lone St. Kilda's Isle possessed one little song bird of her own—a Wren that differed somewhat from the familiar Wren—than it was invaded by the noble army of collectors, who did not mind its loneliness and distance from the mainland so long as they secured something for their cabinets, and the

result of their invasion is that the St. Kilda Wren no longer exists." This last sentence was happily not quite true; it was written in a hasty note when statements were put forth that the bird was extinct. The little Wren was found still to survive, and the Act obtained by Sir Herbert Maxwell, a vice-president of the Society for the Protection of Birds, gave it a new lease of life. In the case of one of the lost species, the Bittern, there was also, after twenty-five years, a gleam of hope. The Bittern continues indeed to be "no sooner seen than shot" in every part of England where it appears, with the exception of a single district, but in that district, under the most zealous protection, it has once again nested.

On the other side of the account had to be named at least as many species again as those on the original list. Mr. Hudson had commissioned the artist to paint pictures of twenty-five birds for the new work, but it is by no means certain that these comprise the full number of which he intended to write. He wished to include this time not only those species which were once more or less abundant in Britain and had been exterminated or brought to the verge of extermination, but also species less common which were becoming excessively scarce through persecution, and rare species which had proved themselves ready to increase and multiply in this country but are invariably harried and done to death when attempting to do so. "Have you," he wrote to me in 1921, "any notes of the Quail? Hoopoe? Golden Oriole? Roseate Tern? Red-necked Phalarope? Kite—has he quite gone?" It will be seen that he decided to include four of these birds. Hoopoe and Phalarope were apparently discarded, or possibly left for further consideration, with one or two other suggested species, such as the Dartford Warbler and the Chough.

The twenty-five birds in this book are fairly typical. One of them is wholly extinct; others are entirely lost to Great Britain; others again exist in such small numbers as to be

unknown to all except the men who seek them in small and scattered areas; and these seekers are for the most part bent on further reducing the number in order to add specimens to private collections. In the concluding lines of *Lost British Birds* Mr. Hudson summed up the case as follows:

It is very difficult to determine which of the following three inveterate bird-destroyers have done and are doing the most to alter, and, from the nature-lover's point of view, to degrade, the character of our bird population—The Cockney sportsman, who kills for killing's sake; the gamekeeper, who has set down the five-and-twenty most interesting indigenous species as "vermin" to be extirpated; or, third and last, the greedy collector, whose methods are as discreditable as his action is injurious.

In later years he came more and more to the conviction that the collector is by far the greatest and most dangerous bird-enemy of the three. True, the hawks and harriers had been and were being done to death by gamekeepers, who still set their merciless gins for the torture and death of owls and falcons, and aimed their guns at any large bird their prejudiced zeal imagined inimical to big bags of game. I think there was no sentence uttered by a public speaker which Mr. Hudson more loved to quote than that spoken with sonorous emphasis by Mr. R. Bosworth Smith at one of the annual meetings of the Society (and incorporated in one of the chapters of his book *Bird Life and Bird Lore*) about the soullessness of the shooting tenant or shooting syndicate, by whom the animal world is divided into game and vermin and the keeper is bidden, in the words of poor old brain-stricken King Lear, to "kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill."

True, also, the cockney sportsman—cockney in his supreme ignorance, but as often as not a countryman—still fires at any bird for sheer love of killing and thinks of nothing but his gun should any strange-looking winged creature appear. But education and laws together can affect, and to a considerable extent have affected, these two classes. Neither law nor education has so far touched the third class, whose number,

sheltered under the ægis of science, has been steadily growing since 1894. Thirty years ago collecting, beyond the needs of the student, was a delight with those ornithologists to whom ornithology meant mainly the study and classification of dead objects or the setting up of avian remains in forms and attitudes to imitate life. To-day the hunt for rare birds and their eggs has become a craze of an infinitely more dangerous character than ever before, a craze compared with which the desire for "something pretty in a glass case" was a small childish folly. Mr. Hudson watched the development of this so-called science with something like despair and with the loathing natural to one whose whole passion centred in the mystery and beauty of life. Upon it he poured his wrath and his contempt, and for it he saw but one remedy. The law as it stood appeared to him utterly futile, ignored or mocked at by men who broke it at their pleasure, administered by their friends and neighbours, and powerless to touch offenders shielded at every turn by the only persons fully cognisant of their doings. Lists of protected birds and eggs were so much waste paper, deceptive shams and known to be shams. If one man in a hundred was dropped upon the fine was nothing to him, of the disgrace he was unconscious; even if the law demanded his specimen the law did not always get what it asked for.

As a means of preserving rare birds Mr. Hudson considered the methods of the Watchers Committee of the R.S.P.B. more adequate than any law, and he was a member of it from its formation. To the efforts of this Committee is due the rescue of certain species from extinction; but he believed that more drastic laws were essential to its success. His knowledge of the strenuous work involved, the constant difficulties to be contended against, and the extraordinary craft of the class of collector to be dealt with; together with the hopelessness of preserving our rare species in general when even this fence of artificial protection does not always avail, convinced him that one thing only would be effectual.

There is really only one way out of the difficulty—one remedy for an evil which grows in spite of penalties and public opinion—namely, a law to forbid the making of collections of British birds by private persons. If all that has been done in and out of Parliament since 1868 to preserve our wild birds—not merely the common abundant species, which are not regarded by collectors, but *all* birds—is not to be so much labour wasted, such a law must sooner or later be made.

So Mr. Hudson wrote in the first edition of *Birds and Man* in 1901; in the edition of 1915 he added a note to strengthen his argument; in 1922 his opinion remained the same.

Just now we have a committee appointed by the Government to consider the whole question of bird protection with a view to further legislation. Will this Committee recommend the one and only way to put a stop to the continuous destruction of our rare birds? I don't think so. For such a law would be aimed at those of their own class, at their friends, at themselves.

Failing such a law he wished by letter to urge all landowners in Great Britain to unite in keeping collectors off their land. By the publication of an enlarged edition of *Lost British Birds* he hoped to arouse public attention and public feeling in regard to the passing of the birds—birds lost to our country, birds threatened, and birds becoming scarce, seeing behind these a dim vista of yet others, and others again, growing fewer and still more few under the combined attack of acquisitiveness and cunning, with science heedlessly looking on, interested only in dealing the final death-blow.

On one page of his note-book he wrote:

I quote a sentence from a letter on bird protection in America, by one of its champions, James Henry Rice:

"It seems to me that England ought to furnish a small army of trained men and women, able to handle the bird subject anywhere; but it may not be so. You may lack them. They are not plentiful in this country by any means—not exceeding half a dozen in all North America. We have thousands of ornithologists who spend their time collecting bird skins and revising species."

We can say the same.

The material for this work, beyond the pamphlet of 1894, consisted of notes in pen and pencil, contained in note-books and on many loose sheets of paper. In a few cases the matter was fairly complete; in some, references and extracts were indicated only; in others the notes were rough, disconnected, and unfinished. Many were jotted down in an abbreviated form and were extremely difficult to decipher, even for those intimately acquainted with the handwriting. In putting them together I have transcribed every note with the greatest care, and every reference has been looked up and completed. Though the composition was obviously hurried and uncorrected I have left it as it stood rather than alter a word or the form of a sentence. Where it was too broken and incomplete to admit of this I have collated, interpreted, and interpolated, leaving untouched all that had been set down, and adding what I believed the writer would have wished added and meant to add, in order to complete the work as nearly as possible on the lines and in the words he intended. The imperfections are, I need scarcely say, due to faults of knowledge or skill on my part. If there are any mistakes they must necessarily be mine. The extracts added in smaller type are my own selection.

My only excuse for venturing to undertake the task of completing and editing the unfinished MS. is that Mr. Hudson often talked over his purpose and opinions with me; that I probably knew more of his mind in regard to this particular subject than anyone else knew; that I had many letters of his to refer to; and that few if any other persons could have read the handwriting on many of the pages. I knew at least that no one could endeavour more earnestly to carry out his wishes and fulfil his intentions, or could be inspired by a more intense desire to honour his memory.

LINDA GARDINER.

82 VICTORIA STREET, S.W.

Aug. 22nd, 1923.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

(1894)

THE species described as *lost* in this paper, are those which were summer residents and breeders, or inhabitants all the year round, of some part of Great Britain, but which no longer breed in this country and visit our shores only as rare stragglers, or, bi-annually, in their migrations to and from their breeding areas on the continent of Europe. In other words, if the British *race* be extinct the species is here regarded as lost, however abundant it may be elsewhere. Perhaps it would be safer to say *if practically extinct*; since I have included species of which one or two pairs are still known to breed within the kingdom. In the case of the Ruff and Reeve, for instance, Professor Newton is inclined to think that I have been a "little premature." Taking the word "lost" in this restricted sense, I do not think that ornithologists will find that I am very much out in my list, which I have been assisted in making by two friends, both authorities in questions of this kind—Mr. J. E. Harting and Professor Newton himself. It is certainly difficult to know where to draw the line, and having once determined to include species that are practically extinct, like the Hen-harrier and the Ruff and Reeve, there were others like the Osprey and Sea-eagle, which it seemed unreasonable to omit. But it was necessary to draw the line somewhere, and it was thought best to leave out any species represented by at least three or four pairs that have some measure of protection afforded to them when breeding.

The statement is often made that the total disappearance of some species of birds, and the extreme rarity of others, once common in this country, is due to the draining of the

marshes, an improved system of cultivation, and kindred causes; and there is no doubt that some aquatic birds that breed in communities would suffer greatly from the breaking up of their ancestral nesting-places. But when we look into the facts relating to the disappearance of the species noticed in this paper, we find that most of them were lost through the direct action of man. Fowlers, gamekeepers, collectors, cockney sportsmen, and louts with guns, pursued them to the death, even as they are now pursuing all our rarer species.

We know that birds are exceedingly tenacious of their breeding-places, and that when not too much persecuted, they rapidly adapt themselves to altered conditions.

In remote, savage and scarcely habitable regions of the earth, the White Egrets have been almost exterminated by feather-hunters, to provide suitable ornaments for the ladies of Paris and London. On the other hand, close to our shores, in Holland—a populous and highly-cultivated country—the large White Stork is abundant, and so fearless of man that it builds its nests and rears its young on the roofs of houses. But we need not go so far as Holland, nor indeed out of London, for evidence of the fact that birds will thrive in conditions apparently most unsuited to them so long as man refrains from their persecution. To Rooks, Magpies, Moor-hens, Dabchicks, and shy Wood-pigeons, all at once grown strangely tame and breeding in parks and squares and gardens, may now be added troops of Gulls of three species that spend the winter on our ornamental waters, and grow familiar with the human form.

To come now to the question which most nearly concerns us—namely, What do our losses in bird life really amount to, or, in other words, what proportion does this list of thirteen bear to the whole number of British species?

The number of the lost may not seem large to those who are not ornithologists, and who have on their shelves a costly work on “British Birds,” in, say, six or eight splendidly illustrated volumes. If any reader, possessing such a work,

really wishes to know just how we stand in this matter, and does not mind sacrificing his book in the process of the inquiry, he may get the desired knowledge by adopting the following simple plan:

To begin with, he will find that his work contains life-histories and coloured figures of about 400 species, possibly more—a large number, considering the smallness of the country and its climatic conditions. But alas! he must learn that our island is “an inn for the wayfaring of birds”; that many of these species are nothing but stragglers and waifs, blown, some of them hundreds, others thousands of miles out of their course; and that they are in no true sense British Birds, and are only called so because a few individuals have alighted to rest on our shores, just as a lost bird at sea alights on a ship. Let him then begin by tearing out the plates of, and the letterpress relating to, these wanderers from the distant parts of Europe, from Africa, Asia and America—the Great Black Woodpecker, Cream-coloured Courser, Flamingo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and many more—about 150 in all. His work will have then lost much of its beauty; it will have an attenuated and rather sorry appearance; but it will require more rough handling yet. On going further into the matter he will find that about twenty of the remaining species are only occasional visitors: the Great Grey Shrike, Woodchat, Golden Oriole, Wax-wing, Lapland Bunting, Rose-coloured Pastor, Hoopoe, Roller, Bee-Eater, and so on to the end of the list—beautiful birds, large and small. These must be got rid of in the same summary way: one’s regret at losing them is all the keener for the knowledge that some of them are summer visitors that have tried to breed and colonise in our country and have not been allowed to do so.

The weeding-out process has now brought us down to the species that are actually extinct, and to those whose extinction is imminent—probably thirty in number. It is useless to keep any of these: some are lost, and the others are so reduced in numbers that it is well-nigh impossible to get a sight of

them even by travelling long distances and spending many days in waiting and watching. The Eagles and Buzzards and Kite; the Raven, Chough, Grey-Lag Goose, Great Skua, Roseate Tern, Dotterel, Bearded Tit, Dartford Warbler—what are the lives of such species as these really worth? It would be idle to retain them in a work on British birds which is not intended to be out of date one or two decades hence. This done, a couple of hundreds of species will remain in the work, which, in its sadly mutilated condition, will better deserve its title; and the conviction will by this time have forced itself on its owner, that we have a very magnificent bird population on paper, but a very poor one in reality. It should be added that of this reduced number (200), a large proportion are never seen by those whose life is confined to land: they are pelagic, and only to be met with out at sea, or in the neighbourhood of those “naked melancholy isles” which so few of us, however great our love of birds may be, are ever able to visit.

The saddest feature in the case is that invariably the finest species are the first doomed: they have indeed been and are being selected for slaughter “for the handsomeness of the same.” By placing side by side two sets of drawings, representing, in the one case, species that are gone and are going, and, in the other, such as are common, an excellent object-lesson can be had. The greatly reduced black and white drawings in this pamphlet give but a faint idea of the wonderful beauty of the types represented. Let the reader turn rather to the magnificent coloured illustrations in Lord Lilford’s work on *British Birds*, and look out these thirteen lost types, and as many others representing species on the verge of extinction—twenty-six in all; then compare them with the drawings of twenty-six predominant species, that are in no danger of extirpation. He will realise, as he never realised before, the greatness of the change which is going on in the character of our bird population. He will see that the noblest and most beautiful forms, all those which

gave greatest lustre to our wild bird life, were first singled out for destruction; that the next in order of merit followed; and so on progressively; leaving only the forms that had no distinguishing mark, that attracted less attention on account of their smaller size, and their inferiority in beauty of shape or colour.

W. H. HUDSON.

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RARE, VANISHING, AND LOST BRITISH BIRDS

I. PELICAN

(*Pelicanus onocrotalus*)

OF birds which have ceased to rank as British species, the Pelican and Common Crane come first in order of time. Judging from bones found at Glastonbury both were common birds in the Romano-British period. Beyond this we have no record of the Pelican's existence in Great Britain, and when it vanished we do not know. It inhabits South and East Europe, and has occurred in Denmark and France, ranging further north than the other European Pelican, *P. crispus*. A great white bird, frequenting the sea-coast and the marshes, it was probably killed for food by the men of the lake villages and of other marshy districts, and disappeared before the days of civilisation.

With Drayton's picture in my mind and many old memories of immense congregations of Wild Fowl in the lakes and marshes of a distant region, witnessed in my early years but nevermore to be seen, I could reconstruct the past. . . . It was early morning in early spring; at all events the geese had not gone yet, but were continually flying by overhead, flock succeeding flock, filling the world with their clangor. I watched the sky rather than the earth, feasting my eyes on the spectacle of great soaring birds. Buzzard and Kite and Marsh Harrier soared in

wide circles above me, raining down their wild shrill cries. Other and greater birds were there as well, and greatest of all the Pelican, one of the large birds on which the marshmen lived, but doomed to vanish and be forgotten as a British species long ages before Drayton lived. . . . Then a new sound was heard from some distant spot, perhaps a mile away—a great chorus of wild ringing jubilant cries, echoing and re-echoing all over the illimitable watery expanse; and I knew it was the Crane—the Giant Crane that hath a trumpet sound.—*Adventures Among Birds*, Chap. XX., "The Lake Village."

ROSEATE PELICAN (*Pelicanus Onacrotalus*)

One-tenth natural size

II. CRANE

(Grus cinerea)

THE Crane remained with us down to the time when people wrote about British Birds—the times of Turner, Willughby, and others. Turner (1544) says, “Cranes breed in England in marshy places, I myself have very often seen their pipers,” pipers being the name given to the young birds. It was once common, and continued to resort to our shores in considerable numbers down to nearly the end of the seventeenth century. It was abundant in Ireland, we know, in the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. When it ceased to breed is not certain. In the sixteenth century it was, with other large game birds—Heron, Bittern, Spoonbill, Bustard, etc.,—protected by Act of Parliament. This was a wise law, that gave protection to egg as well as bird, but in the case of this species it was of no avail.

Sir Thomas Browne, in his *Account of the Birds found in Norfolk*, tells us that “Cranes are often found here in hard winters, especially about the champain and fieldy parts. . . . It seems they have been more plentiful, for in a bill of fare when the Mayor entertained the Duke of Norfolk I meet with Cranes in a dish.” This feast is supposed to be one which was given in June 1663.

Willughby, in 1676, says: “They come to us

often in England, and in the fen counties, in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, there are great flocks of them." As to whether or no they bred at that time he says, "I cannot certainly determine, either from my own knowledge or from the relation of any credible person."

At the present day the Crane is a rare visitor—a lost wanderer from happier realms. The resonant, far-sounding cry of this noble bird—one of the most fascinating sounds of wild nature, especially when several individuals, as their custom is, unite their voices in a chorus—will probably never be heard again in England, except from rare stragglers or from captives in an enclosure. Occasional visitations we have; there was a great and notable one in the spring of 1869; but the birds are always shot on appearance. Mr. H. E. Forrest records in his *Fauna of Shropshire* that one was shot on the Herefordshire border in 1859 by a farmer who, finding it described in the books as a "common" Crane, gave the body to his waggoner, who cooked and ate it. A writer in *British Birds* (Vol. II.) states that a female bird shot in Anglesey by a gamekeeper in May 1908, showed no sign of having been in captivity and was stuffed and placed in Chester Museum where "it forms an extremely interesting addition to the local collection." The shooting of a rare visitor or of an escaped bird from a private aviary, represents the only way in which additions are made to the British avi-fauna to-day.

With the Crane's figure we are perhaps more

CRANE (*Grus cinerea*)

One-twelfth natural size

familiar than with that of any other large species, and will be so as long as we continue to import decorative hangings, screens and pictures by the million from Japan. To that artistic people the Crane is pre-eminent among birds for its beauty and stately grace as is the chrysanthemum among flowers.

An Act passed in 1534 fixed a close time from May 31st to August 1st, during which wild fowl might be taken by certain methods, and by certain persons, under a penalty of a year's imprisonment and a fine of 4d. A heavier fine was imposed on stealers of eggs, amounting to as much as 8d. for the eggs of Shoveller Duck, Heron, or Bittern, and 20d. for that of Bustard or Crane.

Mr. T. Southwell, writing in *Archæologia*, Vol. XXXVI., quotes from the sixteenth-century list of presents sent to William More of Loseley by Mr. Bolan out of Marshland in Norfolk, nine cranes, nine swans, and six bitterns, with a large number of other wild fowl.

Notwithstanding the protection afforded it by sundry Acts of Parliament it has long since ceased from breeding in this country. Sir. T. Browne (*ob.* 1682) speaks of it as being found in the open parts of Norfolk in winter. In Ray's time it was only known as occurring in the same season in large flocks in the fens of Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire; and though mention is made of Cranes' eggs and young in the fen-laws passed by a court held at Revesby in 1780, this was most likely but the formal repetition of an older edict, for in 1768 Pennant wrote that after the strictest inquiry he found the inhabitants of those counties to be wholly unacquainted with the bird, and hence concluded that it had forsaken our island. The Crane, however, no doubt then appeared in Britain, as it does now, at uncertain intervals and in unwonted places, showing that the examples occurring here (which usually meet with the hostile reception commonly accorded to strange visitors) have strayed from the migrating band whose movements have been remarked from almost the earliest ages.—NEWTON, *Dictionary of Birds*.

III. WHITE SPOONBILL

(Platalea leucorodia)

OF this strikingly handsome species, Sir Thomas Browne has the following notice in his *Account of the Birds found in Norfolk*: "The Platea, or Shovelard, which build on the tops of high trees. They formerly built in the hernery at Claxton and Reedham, now at Trimley in Suffolk. They come in March, and are shot by fowlers, not for their meat, but for the handsomeness of the same; remarkable in their white colour, copped crown, and spoon- or spatule-like bill."

The date of this record is 1678, and shows that the passion for killing things, merely because they are beautiful when alive, is not a growth of the present time. Probably the bird continued to breed a few years longer in England—perhaps to the end of the seventeenth century.

It is possible that some readers of this paper who are unacquainted with ornithological literature, will be surprised to learn that the Spoonbill—this beautiful bird of an unfamiliar and exotic appearance—was ever a veritable member of the British fauna; and it is true that, with the exception of the passage quoted, no mention is made of the Spoonbill by any of the old English writers whose works have come down to us. Some naturalists have even expressed

SPOONBILL (*Platalea leucorodia*)

One-fifth natural size

the belief that the "Platea or Shovelard" of Sir Thomas Browne was the Shoveller Duck. This point has now been cleared up, and Mr. J. E. Harting has found accounts in old records of breeding-places of the Spoonbill in other parts of England. In the *Zoologist*, 1877, p. 425, he tells us of one which existed in the woods at East Dean, near Chichester, in 1570. He made the still more interesting discovery that Spoonbills had a breeding-place, or heronry, in the Bishop of London's park, or grounds, at Fulham. It appears that in the 14th year of the reign of Henry VIII., the bishop brought an action of trespass against a grazier for taking Herons and Spoonbills from the trees, which had been reserved. An account of the trial of the case, in which the grazier was happily worsted, is given in the *Zoologist*, 1886, p. 81.

Harting adds that Norden, who himself lived at Fulham, tells us in his *Speculum Britannicæ* (1593), that "the name of the place was anciently written Fullenham, or Fullonham, which (as Master Camden taketh it) signifyeth *volucrum domus*, the habitacle of birdes, or the place of fowles, *Fullon* and *Fuglas* in the Saxon toong do signifie fowles, and *ham* or *hame* as much as home in our toong."

Fulham keeps its name, also its Bishop's Palace, but it is no longer the "habitable of birdes."

Selby (1837) mentions that a pair of Spoonbills were sent to him which had been shot in May in Norfolk, and remarks that they would probably have bred in the county if they had been left alive. Doubtless the

Spoonbill would have bred a hundred times since its extinction as a British species if the stray visitors that remain till early summer had been spared. Two, for example, were shot in May 1889 on the Kentish coast, where they continue to appear now and again; one was sold to a collector for £7, and the second was added to another collection. It was of no account that the law forbade such killing and such possession. A third is mentioned in Mr. Ticehurst's *Birds of Kent*, as shot on Romney Marsh in June 1891. He adds that one of the Watchers of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds sees three or four Spoonbills almost every spring. "One day in the spring of 1897 he saw two adult birds on the sands at Littlestone, where, owing to his friendly presence, they were safe from molestation." If Dungeness and the marshes could be protected for a sufficiently long period, possibly Spoonbills might not only be seen, but might even remain to breed.

An effort has been made of late years to protect them in the districts where they were last known to breed and which they revisit every spring.

Probably visitors to Breydon for centuries; records go back to 1774. Indeed there is nothing impossible in the supposition that at the beginning of the eighteenth century they were still breeders in its vicinity and came there for their daily food to this large tidal Broad.—J. H. GURNEY, *British Birds*, X. 239.

The Spoonbill was formerly a regular summer visitor to this country, and bred in the marshes of Norfolk and Suffolk. They were exterminated at the close of the seventeenth century. The last records of their breeding in England may be found in Sir Thomas Browne's *Notes on the Birds of Norfolk*, who described them as breeding about 1670 in Trimley in Suffolk, and as formerly having bred at Claxton, near Norwich, and Reedham, near Yarmouth.

In spite of the persecution which caused them to cease to breed in this country two hundred years ago, the hereditary instinct which leads these birds to migrate to our country in spring does not appear to have wholly died out, and scarcely a year passes without a few birds being seen, most of which, the Birds Protection Act notwithstanding, fall victims to the insatiable desire to acquire specimens of rare British birds.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

Now that the Breydon tidal mud is under the eye of a watcher, Spoonbills wisely halt on this safe water when their migration route carries them over East Anglia; if they wander further afield the protection laws seldom save them from the "sportsman."—T. A. COWARD'S *Birds of the British Isles*.

Formerly bred in East Anglia, Sussex, Middlesex, Pembroke and elsewhere. Passage migrant in Norfolk and Kent, vagrant elsewhere. A few visit Norfolk annually. To south coast, especially Hants and Devon, fairly frequent, usually in autumn.—WITHERBY'S *Handbook*, II. 194.

IV. CAPERCAILLIE

(Tetrao urogallus)

THIS noble bird of the pines became totally extinct in Scotland as long ago as 1760, and in Ireland its final extinction occurred about the same time. There is, however, evidence to show that for a century and a half before that date the bird was very scarce in Scotland, and that, on account of its rarity and the esteem it was held in for the table, it was very much sought after. The large male bird, in his magnificent black and green glossed plumage, formed indeed a suitable present to princes and nobles in former days. Its departure was thus hastened; but Mr. Harvie-Browne attributes its extinction to the destruction of great forests by fire, the cutting down of the same by man as late as the days of Cromwell, and the wasting away of the forests from other natural causes. He further says: "If we accept the above as the most probable causes, and come to examine into the details of the testimony, we find that it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that any large extent of young wood was planted nor until the end of the eighteenth century that arboriculture became general in Scotland. The latter would appear to have been too late to afford any fresh sustenance to the indigenous Capercaillies, but it yielded an abundant supply by the date of the

CAPERCAILLIE (*Tetrao urogallus*)

One-eighth natural size

restoration of the species in 1837-38 for the reintroduced birds."

Here, then, with its evanishment, ends the first part of the Capercaillie's history in Great Britain. Vanished indeed! The historian of the Great Auk has used the seemingly strange expression, "The living Garefowl is extinct!" which might well call up a smile in the uninformed reader, who does not know the value attached to preserved specimens of a lost species. So long as specimens exist the dead bird is not regarded as wholly and for ever lost; but rather as having a kind of post-mortem existence, highly advantageous to science—a quiet immortality aloof from the perturbations of nature. When the Capercaillie, after a long and gradual decline, had finally gone out, it was found that not one preserved example existed; consequently, we do not know just what the bird was like. Probably it differed somewhat from the Capercaillie of Northern Europe; and we may be certain of this—that the British race had existed apart from the Continental races from exceedingly remote times, that its isolation must have been brought about by geologic changes, which severed this country from the mainland. Consequently, the Capercaillie, which now happily ranks as a member of the British avi-fauna, is not an indigenous bird, but introduced, and, like the Red-legged Partridge and the Pheasant, an exotic.

With the second part of its history—namely, the restoration of the species, I have no business to deal in this paper; but no reader will grudge me the

pleasure of saying something on the subject, since this forms the one bright and pleasant chapter in a story which is otherwise altogether dark and disastrous. And here I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Harvie-Browne's volume on the *Capercaillie in Scotland*, which contains a full account of the reintroduction of that fine bird, and its subsequent progress down to the present time.

In 1827, and again in 1829, some attempts to introduce the Capercaillie were made, but were not successful. The late Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton then took the matter up. He had been staying at Taymouth Castle on the Tay, and "influenced by a desire to introduce these noble birds into Scotland, coupled with that of making Lord Breadalbane some return for his recent kindness," he sent out to Sweden and procured some birds—one lot in 1837, a second in 1838, in all forty-eight individuals. From this centre (Taymouth) the birds have spread, and formed numberless fresh colonies during the last half-century.

"The area now occupied by them," says Mr. Harvie-Browne, "comprises Perthshire—the headquarters of the species—Forfar, Fife, Kinross, Clackmannan, Stirling, and Dumbarton; and also the neighbouring portions of Argyle, Inverness, Aberdeen, and Kincardine, in the west and north; and the Lothians and south shore of the Firth of Forth in the south."

The book I quote from contains a map to illustrate the Capercaillie's extension of range in Scotland; it

is spotted and blotched with red colour to show the localities where the birds have colonised; and I do not think that anyone who admires a bird, and laments the impoverishment of our wild bird life, can look on a more beautiful map than this, which teaches so hopeful a lesson. It encourages us to think that others will arise in the future to emulate Sir Fowell Buxton and Lord Breadalbane's example. There are wealthy men among us who spend vast sums of money and much time and energy in the pursuit (and extermination) of the big game of Africa. Surely it would be a nobler task to bring back to their country some of the fine types that have been lost! The Great Bustard, for instance, which is now thriving and even breeding in England in the unnatural conditions of captivity; it would perhaps cost no more to restore this bird to our country than to slaughter a hundred elephants. It is true that the amusement of slaying a century of elephants with explosive bullets would be greater while it lasted; but it should afford a man a more enduring satisfaction to be able to think that he has accomplished, or even only attempted, some task for which posterity will bless rather than execrate his memory.

This chieftain Grouse, the pride of the northern forests, has long since disappeared from the scene where his race for ages dwelt; the gallant Capercaillie of Scotland is no more. The year '45 was a memorable one in the records of the clan, for then he was last seen in Strathspey, though he held on in Strath Glass and Glen Moriston till 1769. Still he claims a place in my *History of British Birds*, and though the native branch of his family is extinct, collateral ones continue to hold sway in other lands, and individuals from them have several times

been introduced with a view to their re-naturalisation here.—
REV. F. O. MORRIS, *History of British Birds*.

In the British Isles the Capercaillie, Capercaillie, or Wood-Grouse, as it is variously called, appears to be confined to the counties of Perth and Forfar, in Scotland, and a few adjoining districts. These birds were introduced into this locality in the year 1837 by Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton. They appear to have been previously exterminated, both in Scotland and Ireland, towards the end of the last century. The only evidence of their ever having inhabited England is to be found in the occurrence of the bones of this species in the caves of Teesdale and amongst the Roman remains at Settle in North Yorkshire.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

V. AVOCET

(Recurvirostra avocetta)

A HANDSOME black and white bird to which the long, slender, upturned bill gives a somewhat singular appearance. On account of this form of bill it was locally called "Shoe-awl," and "Shoeing-horn"; also it was known as the *Yelper*, *Barker*, *Clinker*, in allusion to its shrill barking note. In habits it is social, lively and playful, and feeds in a curious way, the birds moving on in an even row, swaying their bodies from side to side, with bills immersed in the shallow water; the action reminding one of a row of mowers mowing a field of grass.

It used to breed in considerable numbers on the sandy flats of the east coast from Yorkshire to Sussex, and especially in Norfolk. It practically ceased to breed in England between the years 1822 and 1825, but one or two later records are given on local authority.

In Plomley's time, says Ticehurst's *History of the Birds of Kent* (1909) the bird was fast disappearing as a breeding species, though still not uncommon (meaning, probably, as a migrant). Plomley had four birds in his collection and could have procured many more. A nest of young was found, he adds, in 1842, and in the succeeding year he killed two

young birds on the wing. Two of the birds in Plomley's collection, adds Dr. Ticehurst, were shot in April 1841, and "are of special interest as being probably the only representatives still in existence of the original Romney Marsh Avocets." They are in Dover Museum. The 1844 record "contains the final mention of a nest in the county of Kent, and by the spring of 1849 we find the first reference to the breeding Avocet as a thing of the past." It is still a visitor to the Kentish coast.

Nelson in his *Birds of Yorkshire* (1907) claims the last known nest for his own district. "The latest known instance of the Avocet nesting in Britain was in the mouth of the Trent, about the year 1837. Hugh Reid of Doncaster informed A. G. More in a letter dated 1st January, 1861, that eggs were taken on a sand island at the mouth of the River Trent about twenty-four years before. There was at the time a spring tide which nearly covered the island and the eggs were floating on the water. The man who took them shot one of the parent birds at the same time. . . . The county boundary being at this place drawn in the centre of the river, Yorkshire will share with Lincolnshire the honour of possessing the last British breeding station of the Avocet." The honour of exterminating the British species is therefore grasped at by both counties. The most recent record of the bird in Yorkshire at the time Nelson wrote was April, 1839, when two were seen at Flamborough Lighthouse and were duly "procured" and stuffed.

AVOCET (*Recurvirostra avocetta*)

About one-fourth natural size

Stevenson (*Birds of Norfolk*) says:

At Salthouse, long prior to the drainage of the marshes and the erection of a raised sea-bank, the Avocets had become exterminated by the same wanton destruction of both birds and eggs as is yearly diminishing the numbers of Lesser Terns and Ringed Plover of the adjacent banks.

Of former times Stevenson writes:

I have conversed with an octogenarian fowler and marshman, named Pigott, who remembered the "Clinkers" (as the Avocet was there called) breeding in the marshes by the hundreds, and used constantly to gather their eggs. Mr. Dowell, also, was informed by the late Harry Overton, a well-known gunner in that neighbourhood, that in his young time he used to gather the Avocets' eggs, filling his cap, coat-pockets, and even his stockings; and the poor people thereabouts made puddings and pancakes of them. The birds were also as recklessly destroyed, for the gunners, to unload their punt guns, would sometimes fire at and kill ten or twelve at a shot. No wonder, then, if the Avocets, thus constantly persecuted, gradually became scarce.

In his handbook of *The Birds of the British Isles* (1920) Mr. Coward comments: "The too conspicuous Avocet is indeed a 'lost British bird,' " having been once a regular summer visitor and become now a rare spring and autumn migrant; but he adds that some of these spring visitors might even now remain and breed if allowed. "But the bird is slain whenever it is seen. For instance, a party of seven were seen at St. Leonards and within a few hours four were taken to a taxidermist's." Only where they are protected, he adds, are there any records of the birds seen and not shot. Protected by an active and agile Watcher, is, of course, implied. The fact that the species is fully protected by the Wild Birds Protection Act no doubt increases the satisfaction of those who have

succeeded in adding the slain birds to their collections. People who take pleasure in the possession of such remains as birds' feathers, bones, and egg-shells, are always glad to secure an Avocet.

Some years ago I was told that more than twenty specimens were received at Leadenhall Market for sale, within one month. But now scarcely an example appears in a year.—YARRELL'S *British Birds*.

This remarkable bird was formerly a regular summer visitor to our shores, breeding in considerable numbers in such suitable localities as the coast and estuaries of the Humber district, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk. Reclamation of fenland gradually circumscribed its haunts; a large colony at Salthouse was destroyed, as Mr. J. H. Gurney was informed, in consequence of the demand (especially from Newcastle) for Avocet's feathers for dressing artificial flies; and egg-collectors also contributed to the decrease of the species, which by 1824 had probably ceased to nest in England. Small flocks still arrive in May, and occasionally in autumn, but the former are never allowed to breed, for the amasser of British-killed specimens offers to British gunners inducements which far exceed the amount of any fine and costs that could be imposed, even in the problematical event of the offender's conviction. On the south coast the Avocet used to nest on the flat shores of Kent, and Sussex, to which it is now only a visitor.—SAUNDERS'S *Manual*.

This species was of old time plentiful in England, though doubtless always restricted to certain localities. Charleton in 1668 says that when a boy he had shot not a few on the Severn, and Plot mentions it so as to lead one to suppose that in his time (1686) it bred in Staffordshire, while Willughby (1676) knew of it as being in winter on the east coast, and Pennant in 1769 found it in great numbers opposite to Fosdyke Wash in Lincolnshire, and described the birds as hovering over the sportsman's head like Lapwings. In this district they were called "yelpers" from their cry; but whether that name was elsewhere applied is uncertain. At the end of the last century they frequented Romney Marsh in Kent, and in the first quarter of the present century they bred in various suitable spots in Suffolk and Norfolk—the last place known to have been inhabited

being Salthouse, where the people made pudding of their eggs, while the birds were killed for the sake of their feathers, which were used in making artificial flies for fishing. The extirpation of this settlement took place between 1822 and 1825. There is some evidence of their having bred so recently as about 1840 at the mouth of the Trent.—NEWTON'S *Dictionary of Birds*.

VI. GREAT BUSTARD

(Otis tarda)

THE Great Bustard is the largest of all the birds ever recorded as residents of Great Britain. Its wing measurement is seven to eight feet, and the male weighs as much as thirty pounds. The first mention of it as an inhabitant of this country occurs in the *History of Scotia* by Hector Boethius (1526), where it is called the Gustard and is said to breed in the lowlands of Merse in Berwickshire. It was last shot in Scotland in 1830. Other early references are mainly to its use for the table, as in the Earl of Northumberland's regulations for his household at Wressil and Lekinfield in Yorkshire, where they are ordered to be dished "for my Lordes owne Mees at Pryncipall Feestes"; and in the Household Books of the L'Estranges of Hunstanton, where there is an item of "viij malards a bustard and j heresewe kyllled wt ye crosbowe."

About the best history we have of the Great Bustard, as a British species, is contained in Stevenson's *Birds of Norfolk*, and occupies the first forty pages of the second volume of that excellent work. Of the Bustard itself not much is to be learnt from this, or from any other book on British birds.

GREAT BUSTARD (*Otis tarda*)

One-tenth natural size

Strange to say, that when this grand bird inhabited our country, it was never discovered whither it betook itself on its annual disappearances from its favourite breeding resorts; whether to Spain or Africa, or only to some other part of Great Britain. The fact that it punctually reappeared in many of its haunts as early as January each year, shows that it did not go very far afield. Stevenson does not concern himself much about the bird as an individual—its manners and customs; his account is rather like a history of a people, or race, which is apt to be a chronology and record of principal events—stratagems and spoils, manœuvres, massacres, pursuit of fugitives, etc., etc. His account opens solemnly: “With almost kindred feelings to those with which one contemplates in the human race, the extinction of some great historic name, the naturalist, at least, regards the extermination amongst us of this noble indigenous species.” That so noble a figure was ever indigenous, a member of an avi-fauna now composed of comparatively mean forms, reads almost like a tale of fancy. Yet this grand bird was once quite common in all open localities suited to its habits throughout the country—the moors of Haddingtonshire and Berwickshire; Newmarket and Royston heaths; the downs of Berkshire, Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Hampshire and Sussex. In all these localities, Stevenson states, it had ceased to exist before the last of the race of British Bustards fell victims to the advancement of agriculture in its last haunt in Norfolk and Suffolk. It was, in other words,

deliberately extirpated. In Wiltshire it ceased to exist about 1820; in Yorkshire about 1825, when a pair were killed at Malton, and a female bird was taken alive and tethered on a lawn as a curiosity; in the open parts of Norfolk and Suffolk it lingered on to 1832 and 1833. But for many years before that date it had been pursued in that ruthless manner which seems to indicate on the part of the persecutors a fixed relentless determination to wipe the species out—the spirit of the gamekeeper with regard to Hawks, Owls, the Magpie, Jay, and other species that still exist to give variety and lustre to our wild bird life, and redeem it from that oppressive sameness which is fast becoming its most prominent characteristic. As long back as 1812 one Turner of Wrotham conceived an ingenious plan for the quick dispatch of Bustards, which won him the title of *otidicide*, and some substantial benefits.

Of the landowners in the district where the last Bustards continued to breed, Stevenson says: “Not a thought of the extermination of the species seems to have passed through their minds. Either they were entirely indifferent about the matter, or else they believed that since, as long as they could remember, there had always been Bustards on their brecks, therefore, Bustards there would always be.”

In his work (1837) Selby expressed the hope that no endeavour would be spared to prevent the total extinction of so noble a native bird. Alas, the forces of Philistinism and brutality were too strong in that day to admit any such hope. As they are

ten times more powerful now, unless the people of England will awake to the fact all that is yet left of their finest wild bird life will go the way of the Great Bustard.

From time to time Bustards have straggled to England since their extermination as a breeding species. Thus, many were seen and shot in 1870 and in 1879-80, and single birds have been shot in Hampshire and Wilts in more recent years. A definite attempt to re-establish the Bustard has also been made, but without the success which has attended the re-introduction of the capercaillie. At the beginning of the present century Lord Walsingham, one of the few naturalists who, instead of spending time and means in seeking to exterminate rare species, endeavoured to enrich our avi-fauna by adding to the list—made an effort at great expense to re-introduce the Great Bustard. He imported seventeen from Spain, and these were placed on Lord Iveagh's estate at Elvedon, Norfolk, where they had the freedom of some 800 acres of suitable country which might, it was hoped, become the nursery of a new British race. But in the following year, when they began to go beyond the boundaries of their Elvedon sanctuary, the fate which might have been anticipated befell them, in spite of attempts made to ensure their safety at the hands of neighbouring landowners. They appear to have spread themselves over the country, and it was not long before records of the shooting of them showed that the experiment was doomed. In June 1901 a gamekeeper was fined

for killing two of these the most splendid of game-birds, and their skins were given to the Ipswich Museum. Doubtless they were two of the Elvedon birds. By the end of the following year only two of the seventeen remained, and these reared no young and disappeared.

All that remains of the Great Bustard in England is the mention of its name in the lists of birds scheduled for special protection in some half-dozen counties. It is hardly likely that there will ever again be English Bustards to protect.

The "droves" which roamed over the Yorkshire wolds, Salisbury Plain, and similar uncultivated areas were often immense, but the bird was too big and edible to survive. Spread of cultivation, increase of population, and perhaps more than either, improvement of sporting guns, swept them away.—T. A. COWARD, *Birds of the British Isles*.

It passed away unrecorded, from Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, the wolds of Lincolnshire, and the downs of Sussex, while the first ten years of this century saw the extinction of the birds indigenous to Salisbury Plain. On the Eastern Wolds of Yorkshire the survivor of former droves was trapped in 1832-33; and in Norfolk and Suffolk the last fertile eggs were taken about 1838, though a few birds lingered to a somewhat later date. The Bustard is now only an irregular wanderer to Great Britain.—SAUNDERS'S *Manual*.

The last examples of the native race were probably two killed at Swaffham, in Norfolk, a district in which for some years previously a few hen-birds of the species, the remnant of a plentiful stock, had maintained their existence. In Suffolk, where the neighbourhood of Icklingham formed its chief haunt, an end came to the race in 1832; on the wolds of Yorkshire about 1826, or perhaps a little later; and on those of Lincolnshire about the same time. Of Wiltshire, Montagu, writing in 1813, says that none had been seen in their favourite haunts on Salisbury Plain for the last two or three years. From other British counties, as Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, and Berk-

shire, it disappeared without note being taken of the event.—
NEWTON'S *Dictionary of Birds*.

Knox, writing in 1850, says that a Bustard's egg "has for many years been worth a guinea to him who was fortunate enough to find it"; and to this he largely attributed its "almost" total extinction in England.

VII. BLACK-TAILED GODWIT

(Limosa belgica)

THIS fine game-bird, like the Avocet that preceded it by a few years in that last sad migration, is an inhabitant of the waste and solitary fens and meres. As Robert Mudie so well says, "They give life to the places which men neglect"; and it is most curious to note that all these waders and denizens of the sandy shore and marshy flats—Plover, Curlew, Whimbrel, Godwit, Sandpiper, and Stilt—which, as Mudie again says, "are associated with wildness and infertility," are of a loquacious disposition, with wild, clear, penetrating voices of such an indescribable quality, that he who hears them is exhilarated and lifted above himself more than by all the melody and laughter-like cries of woods and groves.

Lubbock in his *Fauna* (1845) says:

Whilst the Redshank in the breeding season flew dashing round the head of the intruder on her territories, and endeavoured, like the Lapwing, to mislead the stranger from the nest, higher in the air, and flying in bolder circles, uttering a louder cry, was the Blacktailed Godwit, called provincially the "Shrieker" from its piercing cries. The bird is now almost extinct in this part of Norfolk; it used to breed at Buckenham, Thyrne, Horsey, and one or two other places.

This species, although so highly esteemed for the table, was in one way more favoured by nature than the conspicuous Avocet; the russet-brown and

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa belgica*)

About one-fourth natural size

mottled plumage of the male and dun colour of the female, were in a measure protective, while the bird was of a shy, retiring disposition and semi-nocturnal in its feeding habits. According to Stevenson, its extermination in Norfolk may be said to have occurred between the years 1829 and 1835, and at the time when Lubbock wrote it had no doubt become an irregular migrant only. He adds: "It seems probable, however, that during the next twenty years a pair or two occasionally returned to the old haunts in the spring, though only to be robbed of their eggs or shot down for their rarity."

Formerly summer residents, breeding from south Yorkshire to Norfolk; last, Norfolk 1847, and possibly Lincolnshire 1885. No proof of more recent breeding.—WITHERBY'S *Handbook*.

In England it is generally distributed though by no means abundant. It breeds occasionally, though sparingly, in the Cambridgeshire and Norfolk fens, near Buckenham and Oby. It is common about Breydon, in Norfolk; it belongs also to the Northumbrian, Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire coasts. In Suffolk two in full summer plumage were shot in a fen near Wisbech, 4th May, 1850.—MORRIS'S *History of British Birds*.

[When these words were published the Godwit, as a British breeding species, was already extinct.]

VIII. GREAT AUK

(Alca impennis)

THE Great Auk, or Garefowl, as it was called in the Western Islands of Scotland, is the only species in this obituary which has not only ceased to be a British bird, but is altogether extinct. There is a large amount of literature about it, which is not strange considering the great size of the bird, exceeding that of the goose, its wide range in the North Atlantic, and its importance, while it lasted, as an article of food, first to barbarous tribes, and afterwards to Europeans, who were also, in a sense, barbarians. On the hither side of the ocean it once inhabited the coast from Finisterre to the North Cape, but in historical times it was most abundant on the other side of the Atlantic. Its fate in that region may be briefly narrated—it is not a pleasant story. As long ago as the middle of the sixteenth century the sailors who visited Newfoundland to fish on the banks there, began the stupid war of destruction. In their breeding-places the birds were quite tame—tamer, in fact, than our tamest domestic animals—and could be slaughtered without trouble by the crews. But eventually it was found to be too troublesome a task to go on shore, knock the birds

GREAT AUK (*Alca impennis*)

One-sixth natural size

down with clubs, then carry their carcasses to the ships. Cartwright in his *Journal* (1785), says:

The poor inhabitants of Fogo Island make voyages there to load with birds and eggs. When the water is smooth they make their shallops fast by the shore, lay their gangboards from the gunwale of the boat to the rocks, and then drive as many Penguins on board as she will hold, for the wings of these birds being remarkably short they cannot fly. But it has been customary for several crews of men to live all summer on that island for the sole purpose of killing birds for the sake of their feathers. The destruction they have made is incredible. If a stop be not soon put to this practice the whole breed will be diminished to almost nothing, particularly the Penguins, for this is now the only island they have left to breed upon.

It was quite time in 1785 to predict the speedy end of that stupendous yearly massacre. As long back as 1540 one of the early voyagers mentions the loading of his two vessels with dead Penguins in less than half an hour, and states that besides what were eaten fresh there were four or five tons of them put in salt. At a later period, when they were slaughtered for their feathers, the fat carcasses of the birds were used as fuel. These, and other horrible and loathsome details about the manner in which the poor birds were tortured to death by thousands to make sport for the crews when no profit was to be made by killing them, may be found in Mr. Symington Grieve's elaborate quarto monograph, *The Great Auk* (1885).

Here we are mainly concerned with the bird as a British species. Its principal stations in recent times were St. Kilda, Iceland, the Faroe and Orkney Islands. "From similar causes to those which operated elsewhere," writes the historian of this vanished species, "it gradually was killed off, until

in 1844, or possibly 1845, the last was heard of the living Garefowl."

In the Orkneys the last scene was played out on the Holm of Papa Westray, an islet in the north of the group, off the larger island of Westray. An "animal preserver" who wrote an *Ornithological Guide to Shetland and Orkney* in 1837, alludes to his disappointment in not being able to secure any survivor of the species. Others of his kind had been there before him. "I have never seen a living specimen. I made inquiries at every place I visited, but no one knew it. During my stay at Orkney, at Papa Westray I was informed by Mr. Traill that a pair were constantly seen there for several years, and were christened the King and Queen of the Auks. Mr. Bullock made several attempts to obtain one, and about a fortnight after his departure one was shot and sent to him, and the other forsook the place." As a matter of fact both birds were killed. Professor Newton gives an account in the *Ibis* (1898) of the manner in which the slaying of the pair was compassed by Bullock. One was stoned by some boys and young men, and some time afterwards was washed ashore. The other was chased in a rowing boat by Bullock, but its speed was so great that the pursuit had to be abandoned. It was, however, afterwards captured by fishermen and killed and sent to him. At Bullock's death the stuffed skin was sold for £15 5s. and placed in the Natural History Museum. The capture was in 1813.

The extermination of the St. Kilda birds took place

somewhat later and has been variously described. The first one to be taken was surrounded by men on land and boys in the water, and thus between the devil and the deep sea was caught alive, and came into the hands of the Rev. Dr. Fleming, who was in a yacht belonging to the Northern Lighthouse Commissioners. It was, says Grieve, partially released from its captivity for an occasional swim, while still tethered to the yacht, and one day it broke away and escaped, and its body was afterwards cast ashore at Gourock, no longer in a condition to be sent to the Edinburgh University Museum, for which the skin is said to have been intended. Apparently it was in a too much injured or exhausted condition to make good its escape. Fleming, in his *Story of British Animals*, remarks that he had the opportunity of observing the living Great Auk which was brought from St. Kilda in 1822.

The second and last bird, the last of the British race, was destroyed eighteen years later. Messrs. Harvie-Browne and Buckley in *The Vertebrate Fauna of the Outer Hebrides* (1888) give the tale as told in a letter written by Professor Newton. It seems, he says, from Mr. Henry Evans's information, that another Great Auk was caught on Stack-an-Armine (an outer island off St. Kilda) in or about 1840 by some five men who were stopping there for a few days. Lauchlan McKinnon (one of the five) told Evans that they found the bird on a ledge of rock, that they caught it asleep, tied its legs together, took it up to their bothy and kept it alive for three

days, and then killed it with a stick, thinking it might be a witch. . . . A storm arose, and that, together with the size of the bird and the noise it made, caused them to think the bird was a witch. It was killed on the third day after it was caught, and McKinnon declares they were beating it for an hour with two large sticks before it was dead; he was the most frightened of all the men and advised the killing of it. The capture took place in July.

The story is worth recording at length to illustrate the state of mind possible in a civilised community: a strange mingling of terror and superstition which reads like a tale of barbarians living in the dark, or savage, age of man.

With the opening words of Mr. Grieve's work this brief note may fitly end:

The whole history of the Great Auk is a sad one—the continued slaughter of the helpless victims, culminating in the final destruction of the race in the skerry, named Eldey, off the coast of Iceland, excites to pity. The last of the Great Auks has lived and died. The race was blotted out, before naturalists, when too late, discovered it was gone. Regrets are now useless—the living Garefowl is extinct.

The passing of the Great Auk occurred some eighty years ago; probably the last was killed in Iceland in 1844. Mr. H. Evans has evidence that one was captured in St. Kilda four years earlier, and, as a storm followed, was done to death as a witch. A bird preserved in Dublin was caught at Waterford in 1834, and one in the British Museum in Orkney in 1813. It has been proved that it bred in Iceland, the Faroes, Orkneys, Outer Hebrides, especially St. Kilda, Greenland, Funk Island, and other stations off the Newfoundland and Labrador coasts. It perished like other unadaptable species because it failed to compete with predacious man, who wiped it out at its breeding stations, killing it for food.—COWARD'S *British Birds*.

In Iceland there is the testimony of a score of witnesses that the latest survivors of the species were caught and killed by expeditions expressly organised with a view of supplying the demands of caterers to the various museums of Europe. In like manner the fact is incontestable that its breeding stations in the western part of the Atlantic were for three centuries visited and devastated with the combined objects of furnishing food or bait to the fishermen, and its final extinction was due, according to Sir Richard Bonnycastle (*Newfoundland in 1842*) to "the ruthless trade in its eggs and skins." — NEWTON'S *Dictionary*.

Professor Newton contributed to the *Ibis* (1898) an account of the "Orcadian Home of the Garefowl," concluding that the Holm of Papa Westray was the "true home of the species whose extirpation, so far as Orkney is concerned, was compassed in 1813 by Bullock."

IX. GOSHAWK

(Astur palumbarius)

THOUGH probably never abundant, this bird was nevertheless an indigenous species in this country and was the noblest of our Hawks properly so-called, as distinct from the Falcons. In form and colour it resembles the Sparrowhawk, but in size is considerably larger, and it flew at bigger game. In old laws the taking of its eggs was prohibited in company with those of the Peregrine Falcon, so that in certain districts it was perhaps fairly common, and we know that it bred in Scotland down to the first half of the nineteenth century. At the time when falconry was the sport of the landed classes it was known also as the "Falcon Gentil," and was much valued for pursuing such quarry as Mallard, Wild Goose, hare, and rabbit. Goshawks from the north of Ireland were the best in the world, according to Sir James Ware, who lived in the first half of the seventeenth century. The Tyrone Goshawks are also cited in Richard Blome's *The Gentleman's Recreation* (1686), as, with those from Muscovy and Norway, the best for sport.

Coming to later times, Dr. James Hill in his *History of Animals* (1752) speaks of the Goshawk nesting in Northumberland, and Colonel Thornton (1804) found it breeding in the forests of Glenmore and Rothiemurchus, where Selby also records it thirty

GOSHAWK (*Astur palumbarius*)

One-sixth natural size

years later, remarking that it had then disappeared from the country south of the Tweed, but still bred in the forest of Rothiemurchus, on the banks of the Dee, and on rocks in the Orkney Islands. There is no evidence later than Thornton's of the use of the bird in falconry. Its extinction was due to the destruction of forests and the growing passion for game preserving. On one Highland estate, as Knox relates in his *Game Birds and Wild Fowl*, the gamekeepers in the course of three years, 1837-40, destroyed 63 Goshawks and 275 Kites. In 1847 St. John speaks of the Goshawk as "now nearly extinct in this country, whereas a few years ago it bred regularly"; and Robert Gray in his *Birds of West Scotland* (1871) writes: "Within a comparatively recent period I have known the Goshawk breed in Kirkcudbrightshire"; and he adds that a pair of Ravens were driven from their nest by Goshawks, who appropriated it to their own use.

The deadly persecution of birds of prey which, beginning in the 18th century, has continued down to our own time, and has led to the disappearance of all large birds but the few now left to us, sealed the fate of this the largest of our Hawks. It lingered a little longer as a regular breeder after St. John wrote, and then vanished, re-appearing occasionally, but only to be shot. I was one day conversing with a great landowner and nobleman in his park, about birds, when he invited me to go to his library in order that he might show me the birds he most admired. I followed him, though not expecting to

see the bird which most won his admiration: and was shown a drawing of a Goshawk. "This," I said, "is a picture of a Goshawk, but where is the bird?" He replied that it no longer existed in Britain. "Is not that," I returned, "because the men who own the land and the woods of Britain have exterminated it?" He answered: "I suppose so"; and added, "You see we could not very well have so many pheasants as we require for sport if we allowed birds like the Goshawk to live."

This is the spirit in which landowners and their keepers have for many years been engaged in trying to exterminate first the Goshawk and after it the Sparrowhawk, but in the case of the latter they have not quite succeeded yet, so that we still have one representative of a magnificent type of the rapacious bird.

Even in the present century the Goshawk has made attempts to breed in this country. It has been urged that the birds in these cases had escaped from captivity, but no evidence has been found for such a supposition. The fact of a nest having been found in Yorkshire three-quarters of a century after the last record came out by a curious chance. In May 1878 a passing reference to the extinction of the Goshawk as a British species caught the eye of a resident in Yorkshire, and particulars of an instance known of a breeding bird were made public by Mr. T. Southwell in the *Zoologist* in 1899. The nest, containing four eggs, was found in a wood in Westerdale in Cleveland, placed on the branch of a spruce

fir about twenty feet from the ground. "It was very large and flat, and the bird was wild and difficult to get a shot at. Eventually she was enticed by an imitation of her cry." She was shot and the eggs taken.

Then comes the final story. In 1903 a pair of Goshawks built a nest close to Cheltenham, a singular and curiously interesting event in the ornithological records of Gloucestershire. Such an occurrence in a remote forest in the wilds of Inverness would still have been of great interest; that these wild and fierce Falcons, known to living men as British birds only through the testimony of museums, should return and build in the middle of populous England, close to such a place of all others as Cheltenham, might well confound the naturalist. The eggs were taken and identified at the Natural History Museum. The next year the birds returned and nested at the same spot. This time both were shot by the owner of the land and the remains sent to a local bird-stuffer for what is ironically termed preservation. "It was a dastardly act," wrote Mr. Charles Witchell, who relates the facts. "The birds were not alleged to have done any damage, and if they had there would have been persons willing to pay for it rather than that two such interesting and rare birds should have been destroyed at their breeding time."

"A dastardly act" we all echo, and this dastardly act closes the record of the British Goshawk.

The Goshawk was probably never a common bird in the British Islands; and of late years, since the forests have nearly

all been cut down and game-preserving has become so universal, this noble bird of prey has become only an accidental visitor. It is only within the last half-century that it has ceased to breed in Scotland. The Goshawk is not strictly a migratory bird, otherwise it would probably appear much more commonly in this country. Many birds of prey zealously guard their hunting-grounds from trespassers of their own species, and drive away their own young to seek new breeding-grounds. The Goshawk is no exception; and occasionally one of the young birds finds its way to our shores. They usually arrive on the east coast, and soon fall a prey to the gamekeeper or the birdstuffer.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

There can be little doubt that the Goshawk, nowadays very rare in Britain, was once common in England, and even towards the end of the last century Thornton obtained a nestling in Scotland, while Irish Goshawks were of old highly celebrated. Being strictly a woodland bird, its disappearance may be safely connected with the disappearance of our ancient forests, though its destructiveness to poultry and pigeons has doubtless contributed to its present scarcity.—NEWTON'S *Dictionary of Birds* (1896).

X. RED NIGHT-REELER (SAVI'S
WARBLER)*(Locustella luscinioides)*

THE English book-name of this small bird—Savi's Warbler—was borrowed from the Italian ornithologist who first described it as a distinct species in 1821. It had previously been taken for a variety of the Grasshopper-Warbler, as in form and song it much resembled that curious little songster, or of the Reed-Warbler or of Cetti's Warbler; but although it was not, as it were, officially recognised until Temminck published his *Manual of Ornithology* in 1835, it was probably distinguished from its fellow-reeler long before that time by dwellers in the districts it inhabited. In Norfolk and Lincolnshire, where it bred regularly, it was well known to the marshmen as the "Red Craking Reed-Wren" and the "Red Night-Reeler" or "Reel-bird," from its peculiar song, which resembles the whirring of a reel used by wool-spinners. It was also fairly common in those parts of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire which were suited to its habits. It lives in reed-beds, sings much by night, and makes a cup-shaped nest of closely-interlaced sedge-blades.

It is curious to find this small obscure warbler figuring among the extinct British birds; and when we consider that the largest, most beautiful, or

conspicuous species are almost invariably first singled out for destruction by man, one is disinclined to blame him for the disappearance of the Night-Reeler. That its extinction was caused by a system of drainage is scarcely credible. At the best of times it was a rather rare bird, occupying a very limited area; and Mr. Charles Dixon, writing of *Lost and Vanishing Birds*, compares it in this respect with the Dartford Warbler and other excessively local species which may become extinct rapidly either through the destruction of their favourite haunts or through direct persecution. As to the Dartford Warbler, he adds that the late Henry Swaysland "attributed its almost complete disappearance from the gorse coverts of Sussex" to severe winters. No doubt Swaysland would attribute it to some such cause. Yet the Dartford Warbler has survived not only very severe winters but the destruction of favourite nesting haunts by military camps, better than it survived the destruction carried on in Swaysland's time for the supply of private collections. About seventy years ago, when collectors became aware at the same time both of the existence and the rarity of the Red Night-Reeler, the usual lively scramble for specimens of the bird and its eggs took place; but it was a bird infinitely more limited in numbers and area than the Dartford Warbler, and not many examples were secured. Its extinction may be said to date back to about the year 1849. One is said to have been "obtained" in Sussex in 1916, and a singular account is given by Dr. Eagle Clarke

SAV'S WARBLER (*Locustella luscinioides*)

Seven-eighths natural size

(*Studies in Bird Migration*, 1912) of the identification of a pair in the far north of the British Isles. The birds, he says, appeared on Fair Isle, on the 14th May, 1908, and frequented the grassy sides of a burn. "They were extremely shy and for several hours baffled all attempts to secure one of them for the purpose of identification." At last, however, one, the female, was obtained, and "one of the most remarkable events in the history of British ornithology for many years" was duly recorded. It had perhaps as much connection with British ornithology as the unlucky pair of Bee-eaters which tried to nest the other day at Musselburgh. That is to say, they were accidental visitors.

Savi's Warbler has every claim to be included in a work on British Birds, though it is in all probability extinct in our islands. The marshes where it formerly bred have been to a great extent drained; and nothing has been seen of this interesting bird in its old localities during the last five and twenty years. . . . Many examples of Savi's Warbler, as well as nests and eggs, were obtained at various dates from 1843 to 1856 in the fens of Norfolk and Cambridge and in one or two other adjoining counties.—
SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

XI. BLACK TERN

(Hydrochelidon nigra)

THIS most aerial and elegant bird of the sea and inland waters was once excessively abundant in the fen country, where it bred annually, and has been lost to us as a summer resident almost within the memory of men still living. "Blue Darr" was its local name in the Norfolk Broads district; in Lincolnshire it was called "Carr-Swallow" and "Carr-Crow." Turner (*Historia Avium*, 1548) spoke of its excessive clamour during the breeding season, which was enough to deafen those who lived near the lakes and marshes it frequented. Pennant, describing the East Fen, visited by him in 1769, speaks of the Black Tern in great flocks, almost deafening one with their clamour. Richard Lubbock, about 1818, wrote, "it breeds in myriads at Upton," near Acle, Norfolk. It ceased to breed in that county about 1835, from what cause is not accurately known. In 1832 it was still breeding in immense numbers in Crowland Wash, Lincolnshire. In 1853 some birds returned, and two or three nests were found in Hockwold Fen. In 1858 a solitary pair bred at Sutton, Norfolk, laying two eggs, which were taken and the birds shot.

Thus ends the story of the Black Tern as a British resident species. Every year on its migration it

BLACK TERN (*Hydrochelidon nigra*)

One-third natural size

comes to Cheshire and to Cornwall, and is not uncommonly seen at that time on the Kentish coast; but the few that revisit our shores stay not to breed. The "great clamour" is a thing of the past. Many of us would now gladly submit to be deafened by it.

There is another small bird of this kind called Stern in local dialect, which is so like the sea *Lari* that it seems to differ from them only in size and colour; for it is a *Larus*, though smaller than the sea *Lari*, and blacker. Throughout the whole summer at which time it breeds, it makes such an unconscionable noise that by its unrestrained clamour it almost deafens those who live near lakes and marshes. This I certainly believe to be the bird whose vile garrulity gave rise to the proverb *Larus parlavit*. It is almost always flying over lakes and swamps, never at rest, but always open-mouthed for prey.—TURNER'S *Historia Avium*.

The Black Tern was a regular spring visitor to England before drainage had done away with most of the fens and wet marshes to which it used to resort for breeding purposes; but even in Norfolk the last eggs on record were taken as long ago as 1858, though early in the century the nests of the "Blue Darr," as the bird was called, might have been found in hundreds on the alder-swamps.—SAUNDERS'S *Manual*.

The pretty little Black Tern is now, alas, only a visitor to the British Islands during spring and autumn migration. Half a century ago it bred every season in considerable numbers on Romney Marsh in Kent, on many of the Norfolk Broads, and in some of the Lincolnshire fens. It is not known to have remained to build its nest in this country for the last five-and-twenty years; incessant persecution, combined with the drainage of marshes, has driven it away, though it still passes our coasts on its way to and from Denmark and Sweden.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

The Black Tern was dying out as a breeding species in Kent in the early forties and became extinct a few years later. . . In my opinion, if efficient protection could be assured, the Black Tern would once more establish itself as a breeding species, though in the present state of affairs this is highly improbable. Austin (R.S.P.B. Watcher at Dungeness) recollects five or six pairs nesting about twenty-five years ago, but the eggs were

all taken for eating, together with those of Gulls and other birds.—TICEHURST'S *Birds of Kent*.

Though nearly all its ancient abodes have been drained, and for its purposes sterilised these many years past, not a spring comes but it shows itself in small companies in the eastern counties of England, evidently seeking a breeding-place. All around the coast the diminution in the numbers of the remaining species of Terns within the last 50 years is no less deplorable than demonstrable.—NEWTON'S *Dictionary of Birds*.

XII. BITTERN

(Botaurus stellaris)

THIS species, once called the Common Bittern, and found in all suitable localities in England, Scotland, and Ireland, was one of the most fascinating of the British birds on account of its solitary, mysterious habits, its strange, richly coloured and beautifully pencilled plumage, and that booming cry, once familiar in our land, that "shakes the sounding marsh." This "boom," which was uttered during the love season, is likened by those who have heard it to the deep-toned bellowing of a bull. People wondered how so vast a volume of sound could proceed from a bird of its size; and superstitious persons who dwelt commonly within hearing of it, attributed the sound to no Bittern, or bird, but to the demon or spirit of the desolate places of the earth. There is, said Robert Mudie, a "sublimity" about the Bittern.

In Norfolk and Lincolnshire it was formerly most abundant, and Stevenson tells of marshmen who were not satisfied to sit down to their Sunday dinner without a roasted Bittern on the table. In 1830 the bird had already become comparatively rare, and the same writer says: "For at least fifteen or sixteen years, prior to 1866, I believe this species had altogether deserted us, but in the summer of 1866 the boom of the Bittern was again heard at Hoveton

Broad." Two years later, in the summer of 1868, two eggs were found at Upton, and one young bird was taken.

No further record of their breeding existed until 1911, when a nest was discovered on one of the Norfolk Broads which is most zealously protected. But as a migrant, or straggler, the bird has continued to come to our shores, especially in severe winters, only to perish miserably at the hands of man. And always there have been great Bittern years, when they have come in numbers and have been found all over the land. It is on account of these movements that we may still hope to get it back in more than one district, if the shooting of every bird seen, by any lout with a gun, can be stopped. There is perhaps no rare species whose appearance in some part of England is more often recorded by an obituary notice in the newspapers. Occasionally a prosecution is taken in hand, usually through the efforts of the Society for the Protection of Birds; but with little or no effect, for no effect is possible under the present condition of things. We may cherish a hope of the establishment of new British breeding-places of the Bittern in some of the haunts of the old British race: but as long as the excuse avails that the strange visitor was shot in mistake for a Heron or a Duck, or as something unknown and therefore to be killed, any law is little likely to be observed. And as long as magistrates, though compelled by the evidence to impose a small fine, leave the skin with the man who killed it or bought its dead body, they

BITTERN (*Botaurus stellaris*)

One-sixth natural size

maintain the hateful fallacy that the value of a rare bird lies in its skin and feathers, and that the collector is more to be considered than the bird life of the country. It is still true, as when these papers were written more than a quarter of a century ago, that a Bittern is no sooner seen than shot, when the event, together with the name of the local bird-stuffer, who receives the body to practise his beautiful art on, is chronicled in the newspapers. There the interest ends; since the dead Bittern, having lost its "sublimity" with its life, is no longer an object that any rational being can take pleasure in contemplating.

Can nothing be done to stop the annual slaughter of such visitants as these? of which some few, I feel confident, under a protective system, would still pretty regularly remain to breed with us.

Thus wrote Henry Stevenson, author of the *Birds of Norfolk*, when near the end of his life. In the favoured county where he had always lived, he had witnessed the extermination of some beautiful and interesting species, and had observed that others were annually becoming scarcer; and his soul at length revolted against the senseless and hateful passion for killing every creature distinguished by its beauty, strangeness, or rarity. But he could do no more than ask, as so many others have asked during the last half-century, "Can nothing be done?"

This without doubt is that bird our common people call the Night-Raven, and have felt such a dread of, imagining its cry portends no less than their death, or the death of their near relations. For it flies in the night, answers their descriptions of being like a flagging collar, and hath such a kind of hooping cry as they talk of.—WILLUGHBY.

It is a remarkable fact that of the rare species recorded by Sir Thomas Browne as seen in Norfolk in 1671, but two, the Spoonbill and the Cormorant, had ceased to do so at the commencement of the present century. Whilst from this time we must date those agricultural changes which were destined to alter the general aspect of the county, it was not until within the last twenty-five or thirty years that these, combined with other causes, resulted in the extermination of so many resident species. Among our marsh breeders the curtailment and in some places total reclamation of their haunts through drainage has been the main cause of extinction; but the increasing demand of collectors of late years, and the high prices given for both birds and eggs, the cheapness of fire-arms and rapid transit by rail to all parts of the country, offering every facility—have conducted not a little to the same end, and former residents, receiving additions to their numbers in autumn and winter, can be described now only as migrants, perhaps occasionally remaining to breed. As such the Bittern alone holds its place amongst the birds of Norfolk at the present time, although entered as "common" in Hunt's list in 1829.—STEVENSON'S *Birds of Norfolk*.

In 1837 about a dozen passed through the hands of Mr. Henry Chapman, bird-stuffer, of York, and in 1831 twenty-five specimens were brought to Mr. Hugh Reid of Doncaster. Fifteen were shot near that town in one year. Upwards of sixty were ascertained by Mr. Arthur Strickland to have been killed in the county in that year, in which they were unusually abundant all over England.—MORRIS'S *British Birds*.

In the first half of the last century it nested in many parts of the British Isles, and, in spite of persecution, survived in Norfolk until the end of the sixties. After 1868, except for some young birds which had evidently been hatched in the neighbourhood, reported in 1886, it was extinct as a breeding species until 1911, when Miss Turner and James Vincent located a nest. How many pairs managed to rear young in the next few years is uncertain, but in 1918 and 1919 a number of broods were safely reared. Collectors and not drainage were responsible for the loss of the Bittern; when under protection it found a safe area it quickly increased—yet outside strictly preserved districts ruthless shooting of the Bittern continues.—COWARD'S *Birds of the British Isles*.

Witherby's *Handbook* states that at least twelve pairs were breeding in 1920.—Vol. II. 220.

XIII. MARSH HARRIER

(*Circus æruginosus*)

MARSH Harrier, Ruff and Reeve, and Hen Harrier came to the end of their existence as British birds almost simultaneously. Harriers are birds of the open moorland and marsh, and nest on the ground; it follows that in a country where no interval of mercy, or Close Time, is extended to birds of prey, they are less able to escape destruction than the species which nest in cliffs and trees—Falcons, Kites, and Buzzards. Of Harriers we possessed three species, and of these the Marsh, the largest of the three, was the first to vanish. It was once a regular breeder, abundant in the fen district, and not uncommon in suitable localities throughout the British Islands, and particularly common in Ireland. Ornithological writers of half a century ago wrote of it as not yet quite extinct, since a few pairs still bred, or tried to breed, in the Broads district of Norfolk. I think that since that date the British race has long become extinct; but there are certain migratory species which re-appear at frequent intervals after the original race has ceased to exist, and the Marsh Harrier is one of these. It had practically died out, or been exterminated, in the seventies, but a few pairs are often seen, and a few have bred in Norfolk of late years. In 1899, for instance, a nest ready for eggs

was found, but the two birds were shot, and Mr. J. H. Gurney reported in his Ornithological Notes for the county in 1900 that none had bred since 1894. Adult birds which would have nested were shot in May and June, 1905 and 1906. In 1915 and 1919 single pairs were stated to have brought off young successfully on one of the Broads where such visitors are rigorously protected. But these are casual visitors, and elsewhere the Marsh Harrier occurs but as a rare vagrant in autumn and winter seasons. As an inhabitant of swamp and marsh, no doubt its numbers were gradually diminished by cultivation and drainage, but it is safe to say that but for the keeper and collector the species would survive to-day in many districts well suited to its habits. At one time it was plentiful in the New Forest; in Somerset it seems to have lingered until the seventies; and in the fifties it still bred in Cornwall.

Willughby, writing of the bird by its old name of More or Moor Buzzard, speaks of it as "common to be seen in Heaths and Wastes; sitting upon small trees and shrubs" and "said to build in Fenny places." Hancock, in *Birds of Northumberland and Durham* (1873), wrote:

A few years ago common on swampy moorlands, where it bred, it has now almost disappeared under the policy of the game-preserve, and is fallen, or is fast falling, from the rank of a resident to that of a mere casual visitant. In 1823 I took a nest of it, with four eggs, on the moors at Wemmergill, near Middleton-on-Tees, the shooting-box of the late Lord Strathmore. Both parent birds had been trapped or shot by the gamekeeper, and formed part of his museum, nailed against the stable-

MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*)

One-fifth natural size

walls. This collection was made up of Hawks, Owls, Daws, Buzzards, and such like "vermin," both biped and quadruped, being altogether one of the largest and most disgusting I have ever seen. It is now quite impossible in the north of England for any gamekeeper to form such another museum to bear testimony to his zeal and ignorance, as the so-called vermin no longer exist.

Mr. Dresser (*Birds of Europe*) says:

In Wales, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire, and the counties from Yorkshire northward, it has become historical.

In 1889 Mr. Howard Saunders (*Manual of British Birds*) wrote:

The Marsh Harrier is now all but banished from the number of our indigenous birds. . . . At the present day a pair or two, probably colonists from Holland, almost annually attempt to rear their broods in the Broads district of Norfolk, but are rarely if ever allowed to succeed; and I know of no other county in which this Harrier has recently nested. . . . Statements respecting its breeding in Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, etc., are simply incredible. Ireland offers many more congenial situations, and the bird was formerly common. . . . Since 1840 the keepers have nearly succeeded in exterminating it by the use of poison.

That any Harriers survive in Irish wilds is not known. The keepers have now wholly succeeded; guns, traps, and poison have given this graceful and interesting Hawk his quietus.

The Marsh Harrier has not yet been quite exterminated from the British Islands. It still breeds in the Norfolk Broads and in Devonshire, and occasionally escapes the gamekeeper's gun in other parts of the kingdom. In Scotland it is still more local.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

Formerly nested abundantly in many of the marshy districts of England, but owing partly to the drainage of the fens, though chiefly to the destruction by gamekeepers, it has now ceased to do so. In Ireland, according to Messrs. Ussher and Warren, it still breeds in Queen's County, where it is preserved, and in

Galway, but elsewhere it has been exterminated.—DRESSER'S *Eggs of the Birds of Europe*.

In the British Isles, where the bird at one time nested in suitable places in England and Ireland, it is now best known as a rare spring and autumn visitor, though a few pairs still nest, or attempt to nest, in Norfolk and the wildest bogs in Ireland.—COWARD'S *Birds of the British Isles*.

Professor Newton, in the latest edition of *Yarrell*, issued in 1874, says that "the birds breed regularly in Devonshire, Norfolk, and Aberdeenshire; and Mr. Dixon, in his *Nests and Eggs of British Birds*, issued just twenty years after, says that Norfolk is the only county in Great Britain in which the bird regularly attempts to breed. This is one among many of the facts which serve to illustrate the rapidity with which our rarer birds are being banished.—KEARTON, *British Birds' Nests*.

XIV. RUFF AND REEVE

(*Machetes pugnax*)

THE Ruff with his developed ear-tufts and neck frill, looking like an immense Elizabethan collar, or a shield with a quaint head for a centre, presents a very singular appearance, as the accompanying drawing will serve to show. These were its nuptial ornaments, assumed in May and shed in June or July. To make themselves still more conspicuous during the season of courtship, the birds have the curious custom of uniting in what are called "hills of Ruffs." The "hill" is a small hillock on a marshy flat, which the birds select as a meeting-place; every morning this spot is resorted to by a number of individuals, who come together to display their feather ornaments and to fight with each other, probably for possession of the females. In the districts frequented by the birds, it was the custom of the fowlers to find the "hills" and set small horse-hair snares on them to capture the birds; and to the annual persecution of the birds in this way during the breeding season, we must attribute the extermination of the Ruff and Reeve in England.

Down to 1834, the species was described as "common" in Norfolk, especially at Reedham and Acle. In Pennant's time it frequented suitable localities in the East Riding of Yorkshire, as well as in

the Isle of Ely and Lincolnshire. Colonel Montagu, when he journeyed through Lincolnshire early in the nineteenth century to inquire into the status of this species, found that already "they had become much more scarce than they were before the large tract of the fens was drained and enclosed." They still haunted the county in ever decreasing numbers until the collector destroyed the remnant left from the persecution of the marshmen. In North Lincolnshire eggs were taken in 1856, and one nest with two eggs as recently as 1882, the female bird being shot from the nest. "This last probably marks the extinction of the species in this country," says Mr. Cordeaux.

Lubbock, in his *Fauna of Norfolk* (1845), gives the price of freshly-caught birds as 6s. a couple, adding that twenty years previously they fetched only tenpence or a shilling apiece. He attributes the great decrease in its numbers of late years to the beauty of the bird having caused it to be more than ever sought after. A Ruff "with his show on," which is the provincial phrase by which the fen-men designate one of these birds in the breeding plumage, is exactly the creature which all bird preservers eagerly snatch up, being purchased not only by the naturalist, but by anyone desiring a "pretty object in a glass case." In this its favourite county it continued to breed long after Lubbock's time. Stevenson, in the second volume of his *Birds of Norfolk* (1870), laments the loss within recent times of the Avocet, Black Tern, and Blacktailed Godwit,

RUFF AND REEVE (*Machetes pugnax*)

One-third natural size

and adds: "The Ruff and the Reeve, represented by only a few pairs and in one locality, must shortly be added to the list if the timely protection of the law be not invoked to protect it. . . . In this county in former times not only the marshy portions of the Broads district, but also the western fens, appear to have been frequented by these birds in considerable numbers." They were, he says, no doubt plentiful enough on the Hockwold and Feltwell Fens between twenty and thirty years ago. "In my own notes for the last sixteen years I find frequent entries with reference to both birds and eggs sent up to Norwich for sale from the Hickling marshes, and in the summer of 1866, when there were an unusual number of nests, a corresponding supply of Reeves' eggs found their way into the market, and of skins into the hands of our bird-stuffers." . . . As long since as 1824 Messrs. Sheppard and Whitear attributed the growing scarcity of this species in the Norfolk marshes to birds and eggs being alike largely sought after for the London market. They recount a story which illustrates the devotion of the bird to its nest. A Reeve was captured on her nest by a warrener's boy and taken to his master. The man, with a tenderer heart than that of the Lincolnshire miscreant, set it at liberty, and next day the bird was found back on her nest again.

On the clinging of this and other species to an old nesting-ground, Stevenson adds:

So strong, I believe, is the attachment of certain birds to the place of their birth, and so unerring the instinct which directs

them, though absent in winter, to return year after year to the same spot, that, provided only a single pair survives to represent the indigenous race, the ancestral haunt will not be deserted; but if that last *native* pair be destroyed, their place is rarely, if ever, again filled, even though many representatives of the species on their migratory course may visit our shores in spring; for these too are seeking some far-off *home*, and the local race may thus pass away for ever.

Practically the Ruff and Reeve have so passed away. We have already seen in Stevenson's account of the Black-Tailed Godwit's extermination, that for twenty years after that mournful event one or two pairs annually returned to the old haunts and attempted to breed. This long remained the case with the Ruff and Reeve. Professor Newton believed that one pair annually nested at Hickling, Norfolk, down to the end of the nineteenth century, but only to have their eggs "poached." In 1907 a nest was found in the Norfolk Broads, the first known with certainty since 1889, and a few probably still return to breed. In 1901 Yorkshire and Durham each laid claim to a nest on the borderland of the two counties, even as Yorkshire and Lincolnshire contested for the honour of possessing the last Avocet. In old days the Ruff's district extended as far north as Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Mr. John Cordeaux writes (*Zoologist*, 1890):

The occasional appearance of Ruffs and Reeves in the future on our coast district, during the periods of their double passage, may reasonably be expected, but, unless England becomes dispeopled and uncultivated, nothing can ever bring back in numbers or variety the wealth of the ancient avi-fauna.

Howard Saunders notes in his *Manual* that these birds were taken for the table in spring especially,

because game was not then to be had. In the same way an onslaught is made upon the Ruffs and Reeves of Holland at the present day, and they may be sometimes seen in London poulterers' shops in spring in full breeding plumage.

The Ruff, formerly an abundant nesting species in Britain, was practically wiped out during the first half of the nineteenth century; it was good to eat, and easy to kill when obsessed with its spring madness; so soon as it was rare the collectors took care that no eggs were hatched. By 1880 very few nesting pairs remained, and during the last forty years, though birds have occasionally attempted to nest, most of the eggs laid are in private collections.—COWARD'S *Birds of the British Isles*.

The Ruff and Reeve used formerly to breed in many of the marshy districts of England; but drainage, and the practice of capturing the birds for the table in spring, when game is out of season, have so far diminished their numbers that they are now little more than visitors on the spring migration, and again more abundantly in autumn. In Lincolnshire, where the species was once plentiful, a female was shot from her nest, in defiance of the law, in 1882, and in Norfolk a few harassed birds sometimes rear their broods in spite of the endeavours of collectors to obtain the adults with the eggs.—SAUNDERS'S *Manual*.

A pair nested 1901, 1902, and 1903 near Teesmouth (Durham). In Norfolk Broads 1907 (and possibly other years); eggs said to have been taken Lancs 1910. (Some doubt exists as to the latter, which were shown at a meeting of the British Ornithologists Union.)—WITHERBY'S *Handbook*.

The Ruff is a rare summer migrant to the British Islands, a few pairs still occasionally breeding in the Norfolk Broads; but it is more abundant on spring and autumn migration. Formerly it bred in great numbers in most of the marshy districts of England, from Northumberland southwards.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

XV. HEN HARRIER

(*Circus cyaneus*)

IN the original edition of this work, which appeared in 1894, I said: "That this bird is now wholly extinct in Great Britain it would scarcely be safe to affirm; one can only say that, like the preceding species (Ruff and Reeve) it is practically extinct." The sight of a Hen Harrier is now an extraordinarily rare occurrence, and when seen its appearance and flight render it an easy target. It became practically extinct in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and does not return to breed like the Marsh and Montagu's Harriers.

The adult male Hen Harrier is, or was, undoubtedly the handsomest of the British Harriers. From the soft blue-grey of the plumage it has been called the Blue Hawk and Dove Hawk. The bars on the tail of the female gave it the name of Ringtail, and at one time led to the supposition that this was a distinct species. Turner (1548) writes of them as two different birds, adding however that they were alike in habits, but Willughby (1678) describes "The Ringtail, the male whereof is called the Henharrier." In figure it is more slender and airy than the other raptors, and it has a singularly buoyant and graceful flight, not unlike that of a Gull, as it beats over the

HEN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

One-fifth natural size

ground in quest of prey, often riding so low as almost to touch the surface.

In the time when Knox wrote (1849) the Hen Harrier was, he says, far more common in Sussex than the Marsh Harrier, and he adds that examples, "for the most part immature, are shot or trapped every year and figure either in the game-keeper's larder or the cabinet of the collector." "But," he adds, "all three species must be considered rare, even on the gorse-covered downs, exposed moors, and marshy commons where they once abounded." The few birds recorded in Britain to-day are mainly immature birds wandering here when on migration, though once in a way there is a rumour of a breeding pair. Kelsall and Munn give 1893 as the date of the last nest in the New Forest, where the species was once a resident. In Wise's *New Forest* it is stated to have become "much more numerous of late years, and no less than six or seven pairs were trapped last year." This method of procedure probably acted as an effectual check in Wise's time, and the 1893 record is followed by the companion statement that two birds were killed in the Forest that year. Mr. J. H. Gurney in his Notes for 1917 says, "It is probable that a pair or two may still nest in Norfolk, but for some years there has been no proof of their doing so." In 1907 it was believed that a pair nested and were shot in Surrey. It was afterwards supposed, on the examination of the slaughtered birds by F. C. Selous, that the male bird left the place after the female was shot, and that the second victim was a young

Montagu's Harrier, this species having nested in the locality in previous years. Such details matter little. To all intents and purposes the Hen Harrier is a lost British Bird.

The loss of these extinct Hawks, and of others that are threatened with extinction, is greatly to be deplored. To say nothing of their value to us because they are what they are—parts of that harmonious and infinitely complex system which the mind contemplates with inexhaustible delight—they are necessary to the health of the system. They are, as Canon Tristram has aptly said, the “sanitary police of nature”; and their action in removing the weaklings and the infected, and in keeping all creatures that are liable to be preyed on by them perpetually on the alert, is wholly beneficial, and the chief cause of that undimmed health, boundless vigour, and bright intelligence characteristic of wild animal life.

These are familiar truths, but unhappily they have been, and continue to be, disregarded by our landowners—the one class that had it in their power to preserve the bird population to the country in something like its original varied character. The desire for a large head of game, a big autumnal “shoot”—the ignoble ambition to transform a great estate into a kind of glorified poultry-farm, where you shoot your birds, instead of catching them in the usual way and wringing their necks—has overbalanced all other considerations. Hence the Partridge and Pheasant coddling policy, and the pitiless persecution of all

birds whose presence is, or is ignorantly supposed to be, a check on the excessive multiplication of the one or two species chosen for preservation.

On the other side it may be said that the careful preservation of Partridges, and still more of Pheasants, affords protection to incalculable numbers of small birds; not only from "vermin," but also from human beings who kill birds and pull their nests down, merely for the pleasure of so doing. To those, then, who are satisfied so long as we possess an abundance of bird life, however few the species and insignificant the forms may be, the game-preserved's action may be regarded as on the whole more beneficial than harmful. To all others this accidental benefit will not appear a thing to be grateful for, but, on the contrary, a very poor exchange. When the trees have shed their foliage we are best able to take stock of our remaining resident land species; and, excepting only the comparatively large omnipresent Rook and Wood-Pigeon, and the couple of artificially-protected and semi-domestic game birds, what species do we find in the cultivated and preserved country? The cloud of Sparrows in the rickyard; the congregations of Larks and Starlings in the fields and meadows; the swarm of mixed Finches in the stubbles and along the hedge-rows; Blackbirds and Thrushes in the woods and copses; and, overhead, the usual company of small wandering Titmice, with here and there a Robin, Wren, or Creeper—a day of terribly small things for the ornithologist! If, by chance, a Buzzard or Heron should appear, the unexpectedness of the sight, the

great size by contrast of such a bird, the instant relief and change it affords from the almost hateful monotony which English bird life usually presents, excites the beholder with astonishment and delight, as if some lordly giant among the avians had been seen—an Ostrich or a Condor.

For this condition of things we have to thank the game-preserved.

So far I had written in 1894, but something remains to be added to modify, or remodel, these conclusions. Since that date a considerable change has been forced upon this country of which we do not yet see the end. We live in strange times, getting more democratic every day; and although the feeling for preserving our wild bird life—or what is left of it—has been growing apace, there have come within the last decade a social revolution. In these later days it appears likely that the game-preservers and gamekeepers, or many of them, will go with the great estates that are everywhere being reduced in size and number. The new owners of the land will be the small-holder and those of his class, who have less interest in ornithology as a science than the big landowner, and have not had time to acquire either knowledge of their own relationship with wild birds as a practical question, or the inherited sentiment which has preserved many a Rookery and Heronry. The beautiful has vanished and returns not, in so far as regards our Eagles and Harriers and Kites and Ospreys. The lesser bird-life does not come within the purposes of

this book, yet it is impossible to think without some disturbed feeling of the outlook here. With the adult population, the democracy of to-day, nothing can be done. We can but say that unless an education at once more vital and were humane is given in our schools, and that quickly, those who come after us may have cause to look back to the day of small things which we owe to the game-preserved of the nineteenth century, with an even greater wonder and a more passionate regret than we ourselves look back to the days when Crane and Spoonbill and Bustard and Harrier were common sights in this country.

The Hen Harrier was formerly a regular summer visitor to the British Isles, a few even remaining through the winter, and it has only very recently been exterminated in the breeding-season from most parts of England. Now it is principally seen on the autumn migration, but is still said to breed occasionally in some of the wilder districts.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

Of late years its numbers have been so far thinned by game-preservers that it is now only to be found nesting on a few of the wildest and most extensive moorlands and wastes in England and Wales. Even in Scotland, where it was formerly numerous, it is rapidly decreasing as a breeding-species.—SAUNDERS'S *Manual*.

Twenty or thirty years ago it was known to nest in many parts of the four kingdoms. So large and conspicuous a bird could not exist where game-preservation was keen, and nowadays it is doubtful if, as a breeding species, it exists anywhere except in the Orkneys, Outer Hebrides, and perhaps Ireland.—COWARD'S *British Birds*.

The steady and persistent slaughter of these birds on the Berkshire downs and in the adjacent counties every winter must result eventually in the extermination, or at any rate serious diminution of this species in its breeding haunts in the Orkneys and Outer Hebrides, when it will probably be ascribed to quite different causes.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN, *British Birds* (1922), XV. 211.

XVI. MONTAGU'S HARRIER

(*Circus cineraceus*)

As this Harrier, known as the Blue Hawk, was not recognised as a separate species from the somewhat larger Hen Harrier until distinguished by Colonel Montagu, it is impossible to arrive at the status of the bird in Great Britain before the nineteenth century. There is, however, no doubt that it was far more common at the opening of the century than at its close. In all probability the original British race ceased to exist and its place has been taken in later years by fresh migrants, the species being at all times only a summer resident. Its position in England is said to have slightly improved in the last decade. According to Mr. J. H. Gurney it nests fairly regularly on the Norfolk Broads and fens and hatched out young in 1918, and again in 1922. In Hampshire, where the New Forest was one of the old homes of the species, its history is no more creditable than that of the Honey Buzzard. Mr. Corbin, writing in the *Zoologist* (1875) narrates that on one day he observed a bird near the Dorset border and "for several consecutive days its presence was to me a source of pleasure." Soon afterwards a Montagu's Harrier was trapped and brought to him. "Since then I have seen several others, especially males, at the bird-stuffers in neighbouring towns, and during the spring

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus cineraceus*)

One-fifth natural size

of 1874 I was highly gratified at seeing two, if not three, pairs in the New Forest, where the species undoubtedly breeds most seasons. A gamekeeper trapped two pairs, and I did not see the others afterwards."

Messrs. Kelsall and Munn state that it is now (1905) "by far the most common Harrier in this county, and we believe there are two districts, besides the New Forest, where it appears annually, and attempts, with more or less success, to rear its young." It also attempts "with more or less success" to nest in several other counties. I quote the following list from the *Additions to our knowledge of British Birds since 1899*, published in *British Birds*, 1908 and 1909:

1893. Two pairs bred in the Cambs fens. One nest taken. Eggs laid in East Sussex, bird and nest destroyed.

1898. Nest with young found in S.E. Hampshire, "and this haunt still visited by the birds."

1900. Pair nested at Bala, bird shot.

1903. Eggs again laid in E. Sussex, birds and nest destroyed. Nest with two eggs found in Yorks, female caught.

1905. Bird shot in Northumberland, apparently while incubating. Male shot in Notts, probably had a mate nesting.

1906. Adult female shot in Norfolk.

1907. Pair nested in Surrey, failed to hatch out. Male and female, Norfolk, both shot.

An editorial note is appended to the Norfolk records: "It may be pointed out (since it is not generally recognised) that as long as keepers know that they can dispose of such birds, the more inclined they will be to destroy them." Until this fairly obvious fact *is* recognised, and until the private collector ceases to be countenanced by the ornithologists of this country and by the law of this country, the chances for these and other rare birds are small.

In this country, though in no parts numerous, it is generally dispersed.—MORRIS'S *British Birds*.

Though formerly a resident in Great Britain, Montagu's Harrier is now only an accidental visitor, occasionally breeding where it is left unmolested. It is still rarer in Scotland.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

A hundred years ago this species was very much more common than it is now, although comparatively recent instances of its breeding are known in Devonshire, Somerset, Dorset, and Hants. Its principal haunts at the present day appear to be the heaths of Norfolk. Possibly the bringing of common lands into cultivation may have had some influence in reducing the numbers of this Harrier; but there can be no doubt that the persecution of gamekeepers has had infinitely more. If we are to retain this elegant and pretty bird in our fauna, measures will have speedily to be taken, for all the available evidence at the present day goes to show that this Harrier is upon the very verge of extinction. The old stock of birds that has been in the habit of migrating to Britain is nearly exhausted, and if the few remaining pairs are not shown some consideration, the species must cease to exist as a British one.—C. DIXON, *Lost and Vanishing Birds* (1897).

Nests annually East Anglia, fairly regularly in Cambs, Hants, Dorset, and Devon, and occasionally elsewhere, as in Cornwall, Isle of Wight, Sussex, Surrey, Yorks, and Merioneth, and possibly Somerset, Notts, and Northumberland. Rare vagrant in Scotland and Ireland.—WITHERBY'S *Handbook*, II. 154 (1921).

XVII. HONEY BUZZARD

(Pernis apivorus)

IN the time of the earliest of our ornithologists, and we know not for how many centuries before his day, the Honey Buzzard was a common British bird. It was one of our finest Hawks, equal in size to the (so-called) Common Buzzard, beautiful in appearance, harmless and interesting in its habits. It did not, like many other Hawks, attack game, but was content with such small deer as wild bees and wasps and their grubs, grasshoppers, small reptiles, and the like. None of these things availed to save it. It was a Hawk: that was enough for the gamekeeper. It was a large Hawk; therefore it must be the more mischievous. And as it became more and more uncommon, so its skin and eggs became the more desirable in the eyes of the collectors. In the nineties of last century the bird was finally exterminated as a British species.

The Honey Buzzard, a summer migrant to this country, used to breed in all extensive woods. Willughby wrote: "It hath not yet, that we know of, been described by any writer, though it be frequent enough with us"; and in the middle of last century Knox wrote that it was commoner in Sussex than either the Kite or the common Buzzard, words which

meant more in his day than they do in ours. The description of the Selborne bird and nest in White's letters to Pennant is well known: how in 1780 a pair of Honey Buzzards built a large nest, composed of twigs and lined with dead beechen leaves, upon a tall slender beech tree near the middle of the Hanger; how a bold boy climbed the tree "though standing in so steep and dizzy a situation," and brought down the one egg; and how the bird was then shot and found to answer exactly Mr. Ray's description of the species, while in its craw were some limbs of frogs and many grey snails without shells.

Montagu mentions that the Honey Buzzard was very rare in his time, and cites a specimen killed at Highclere, on the Hants and Berks border; and Seebohm wrote in 1885: "It is a great pity that such an extremely handsome and entirely harmless bird should be on the verge of extinction in our country. In addition to the persecution of gamekeepers, who have not yet learned to distinguish between useful and harmful birds of prey, it is much sought after by collectors, both for its skin and its remarkably handsome eggs. In spite, however, of all its enemies, it still yearly breeds in the New Forest and some other parts of England and Scotland."

From all its habitats, except the New Forest, it had probably disappeared before this passage was written. The usual rush was made for it by the ornithologists who hold that when a species is on its last legs (or wings) is the time to fight for the glory of securing the last British-killed specimen of the bird,

HONEY-BUZZARD (*Pernis apivorus*)

One-fifth natural size

the last British-taken egg. The disgraceful end soon came.

Mr. Meade-Waldo, writing in the *Victoria History of Hampshire*, says that the principal war of extermination was between 1860 and 1870, but that in 1880 an attempt was made to give protection to this and other interesting inhabitants of the Forest. But, he adds, "for this particular bird it seems to have been too late, and I do not know a single authentic case of its having bred since that date." It was indeed more than twenty years too late. About 1860, as Howard Saunders tells us, "it was known that several pairs annually resorted to the New Forest. Five pounds soon became the standard price which collectors of 'British' specimens were willing to pay for a couple of well-marked eggs; and to these inducements were added such extravagant sums as nearly £40 for the pair of old birds. By about 1870 the birds which had not been killed were driven away; and if any have since returned the persons acquainted with the fact have exercised a becoming reticence on the subject." Mr. Meade-Waldo says that a female bird was shot in Brockenhurst Park in 1887, and that Mr. Hart answered for a case of the bird nesting in the Forest in 1895. He adds that in the following year, 1896, he himself noticed a bird frequenting one part of the Forest which invariably took the same flight—the only instance, he says, in which he had seen a Honey Buzzard whose actions suggested that it might have a nest, though he had watched year after year and

met pretty frequently with individual birds. That one instance is now a quarter of a century old. We may conclude that the Honey Buzzard is a lost British bird. Nests recorded in the *Zoologist*, at Hereford in 1895 and on the banks of the Derwent (Durham) in 1899, can only be regarded as accidental.

The Honey Buzzard was formerly a regular summer visitant to this country, breeding in most of the counties of England and Wales where the woods were large enough to afford it a secure retreat. In Scotland and Ireland the information we have is very meagre; but it appears to have formerly bred in both countries, where it has now, as well as in England, become a rare summer visitor. It is also occasionally seen on the autumn migration. It is a great pity that such an extremely handsome and entirely harmless bird should be on the verge of extermination in our country. In addition to the persecutions of the gamekeepers, who have not yet learnt to distinguish between useful and harmful birds of prey, it is much sought after by collectors, both for its skin and for its remarkably handsome eggs. In spite, however, of all its enemies it still yearly breeds in the New Forest and some other parts of England and Scotland.—SEEBOHM'S *British Birds*.

The Honey Buzzard is now mainly known in our islands as a rare spring and autumn visitor on passage, but has a perfect right to rank as a scarce summer visitor, since within recent years it has nested in many parts of England and southern Scotland. At one time it was undoubtedly a regular breeder, and until about 1870 nested annually in the New Forest.—COWARD'S *Birds of the British Isles*.

XVIII. OSPREY

(Pandion haliaëtus)

Down almost to the middle of last century this bird, sometimes called the Fish-Hawk or Mullet Hawk, could be met with and its eyrie seen among the lochs and islets of the Highlands of Scotland, where it then bred "in the fancied continuance of that safety which had for so many years been real." Up to that time there was, we are told by Scottish naturalists, scarcely a loch without its pair of Ospreys. Within the last ten years it has become extinct, and not a bird exists even in the remotest corner of the land, except the few that from time to time wander to the British Isles on migration and are greeted by the keeper with his tribute of lead. The last indication of a breeding pair seems to have been in 1904, when an adult bird was seen at a loch feeding a young one.

For three-quarters of a century the story of the Osprey in Britain was a story of incessant persecution. To the gamekeeper it is one of the hated tribe of Hawks; to the water-keeper it is an object of still more deadly hate, because it takes of the fish in lake or stream: for the Osprey feeds exclusively on fish, plunging down upon them like a gannet and fixing its curved talons in them with the strike of

a Falcon. So certain is its aim that in old days it was believed to possess some magical power by which fish were compelled to rise and float on the surface in readiness to be taken. Moreover, as with other rare species, so with the Osprey. The measure of its rarity was the measure of the collector's zeal to secure a British-taken specimen.

That the Fish-Hawk lingered so long on the verge of extermination is due mainly to the vigilant protection afforded by two Highland lairds on whose estates the last of the British race nested for many years. The Gold Medal of the Zoological Society was rarely better merited than by Grant of Rothiemurchus, and Cameron of Lochiel, to whom it was awarded in 1895 for their efforts to preserve the noble birds that found sanctuary with them. In one of these instances the birds were known to have nested in the same place—a ruined tower on an island in Loch-an-Eilan—for sixty years. They mate for life, renewing the same nest year after year and probably generation after generation, so that the structure grows to a huge size. One of the nesting birds was eventually killed, and the remaining bird apparently found no mate; no young have been reared there within the present century. At Loch Lomond they nested down to the evil days of the forties and fifties, but “a noted sportsman and author, to his great regret afterwards, shot the female bird, and since then the birds have forsaken the place.” How would the glimpse of such a bird give an added grandeur to the lake and to the

misty sides of the mountain, could the tourist see the soaring flight and the bold plunge now!

In 1883 Seebohm wrote of the Ospreys as "one of the finest, though fast-expiring ornaments of the wild mountain-lochs, the bleak barren moors, and upland forests." Its numbers, he goes on to say, "have greatly decreased and only a few pairs resort to the central and northern districts of the Highlands for the purpose of rearing their young. There are still one or two eyries in Inverness-shire and Ross-shire, and also in Galloway—a sufficient number of birds, if strictly preserved, to retain the Osprey in the rank of a regular migrant to our islands." But Seebohm did not take into account that protection at the nest is not enough for a migratory species. Many miles of an unfriendly land have to be crossed before the breeding-ground is reached and again when the return southward is made; and if any of the Inverness- or Ross-shire race have endeavoured to seek the old home doubtless they have fallen to trap or gun. Eighteen years later than Seebohm, Mr. Harvie-Browne wrote, in a leaflet prepared for the Society for the Protection of Birds: "The history of Scottish Ospreys goes back into the last [eighteenth] century, whence the chronology of their dates, with here and there a hiatus, extends down to the present time. That is to say, we have sufficiently continuous data to mark distinctly their almost, if not quite, continuous occupation of many sites in Scotland. But at the present day these numerous sites, principally by the cupidity of private collectors, have been long

deserted, and the places that once knew these fine and harmless birds know them no longer, and the glory has departed from many an ancient stronghold." From the last of those strongholds it has now disappeared.

In olden days the Fish-Hawk almost certainly bred in England. It is said to have done so in the Lake district as recently as the end of the eighteenth century. For at least a hundred years, however, it has been known to us only as a passing migrant on the way to or from the nesting-place. In one or two instances it would appear that the place sought was not far distant, as in that of a female bird shot on a public common at Beverley in Yorkshire, in June 1898. September is the month when the birds fly south, and it is usually then that we come across mention of an Osprey being seen in the vicinity of a more or less secluded piece of water, with the almost inevitable addition that it had been shot and stuffed and added to the ornithological records of the county. Mr. Bucknill's *Birds of Surrey* gives a list of fourteen occurrences; in ten of these the visitor was killed. The most favoured spot is Frensham Pond, at which place Gilbert White reported its visit in 1772. "The Osprey was shot about a year ago at Frensham-pond, a great lake, at about six miles from hence, while it was sitting on the handle of a plough and devouring a fish." Two others have been killed in the county since Mr. Bucknill's list was compiled, one by a keeper at Vachery Pond, near Cranleigh, on the plea that its presence was

inimical to the interests of a fishing club that was being organised. By this time some effort had been made to preserve rare birds by the help of the law, and master and man were each fined and their dead victim taken out of their keeping.

A typical incident which occurred in 1878 is recorded in Witchell's *Fauna of Gloucestershire*. A pair of Ospreys appeared in the Golden Valley, near Stroud. "The sight of these majestic hawks soaring on wings wide as the Heron's was enough to stir the ardour of every gunner in the neighbourhood." One of the birds was soon shot, bought, and stuffed. "For some days the other remained in the vicinity, and in one day four attempts were made to shoot it without apparent effect, and then it quitted the inhospitable Cotswolds, to which it never returned." These were very probably birds on the way from their Scottish home.

The Osprey has been seen as near London as Richmond Park and Kew Gardens. Wandering from the Park to Barnes, after a stay of some weeks in 1889, one of these noble strangers was promptly shot. Its wild fierce spirit must have seemed out of all harmony with a London suburb even in those days. But nine years later Londoners had the rare delight of seeing the great Hawk fishing in the Pen Ponds; and this bird is believed to have got safely out of England.

They are abundant with us on sea-coasts and in the Isle of Wight. Our people call it an Osprey.—JOHN CAIUS (1570).

A bird which as a breeding species is reduced to a solitary

pair or so. Of such is the heritage of the modern ornithologist. What trap and gun have not attained, the collector's zeal has accomplished.—P. H. BAHR in *British Birds*, I. 17 (1907).

Years ago, before the railway had joined the Highland solitudes with southern industry, before such attention was given to the preservation of game and the destruction of "vermin," the Osprey dwelt among the mountain Lochs, or on the brown heathlands studded thickly with stunted fir and birch trees. Now his haunts, which are only few and far between, appear to be the dense pine-forests that clothe the steep and rocky hill-sides, or away lower down the slopes in the broad stretches of bogland thinly sprinkled with timber and overgrown with green and treacherous moss and rushes. . . . Here, on these strictly preserved estates, the Osprey is a regular visitor in the summer months, and bids fair, with the aid of the protection now afforded it, to re-instate itself in the home of its ancestors.—SEEBOHM's *British Birds*.

XIX. KITE

(Milvus ictinus)

SOME special interest attaches to the Kite, partly because of the rapidity with which its numbers have been reduced almost to vanishing-point, and partly because it was not a bird of the forest or moor or lonely shore only, but of London and other great cities. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Kites were not merely abundant in London but were protected on account of their value as feathered scavengers at a time when the streets of the Metropolis served as its dust-bin and refuse-heap. The story of their presence and their boldness in the city streets is as familiar as that of the Woodcock flushed in Berkeley Square. Thus, the Bohemian Schaschek, when in London in 1461, said he had never seen so many Kites as about London Bridge, where their graceful flight must have attracted a stranger's attention even as the crowd of wheeling Gulls take the eye nowadays of anyone who looks over the Thames from one of the bridges in winter. Instead of the floating white figures circling and screaming, there were the soaring Red Kites with their long forked tails and their splendid mastery of wing, and with their keen eyes for each fragment of food thrown out on the water from the old houses of London

Bridge. Belon, too, the French naturalist, who came to England during his travels in the middle of the sixteenth century, says they were scarcely as numerous in Cairo as he found them in London.

In an unpublished letter to Pennant, quoted by Mr. Harting, Gilbert White writes in 1777: "I have to thank you for the young Kites from the rook's nest in the gardens of Gray's Inn Square. Their stomachs contained young frogs. The locality is interesting, but I find that the Kite had bred in Hyde Park in two instances." This was the last nest in London, and it was pulled down in order that the young birds might be dissected to find out what they had been feeding on.

In Tudor times, and later, the bird was in truth the "common" Kite all over the country. Turner speaks of it as abundant and remarkably rapacious. "This kind is wont to snatch food out of children's hands, in our cities and towns." Willughby also alludes to its numbers; he says: "Yea, so abundant are they that they affect to prey in cities and places frequented by men; so that the very gardens and courts or yards of houses are not secure from their ravine. For which cause our good housewives are very angry with them and of all the birds hate and curse them most." And with regard to the migrations of the Kite he observes: "Howbeit, with us in England they are seen all the year, nor do they fear or fly our winters."

From Sir Thomas Browne's record of Norfolk birds we know that Kites were still a familiar sight,

KITE (*Milvus ictinus*)

One-fifth natural size

even in cities, in the middle of the seventeenth century, though in Norwich they had been ousted more or less by Ravens, these birds being "in good plenty about the city, which makes so few Kites to be seen hereabouts." By the time Stevenson wrote on the birds of Norfolk they had become extinct in East Anglia.

Knapp's *Journal of a Naturalist* (1829) shows that the species was then becoming scarce in Gloucestershire. He contrasts its growing rarity with the state of things existing in his younger days: "The Kite is one of our rarest birds. We see it occasionally in its progress to other parts, sailing along sedately on its way; but it never visits us. . . . In former years I was intimately acquainted with this bird; but its numbers seem greatly on the decline, having been destroyed or driven away to lonely places or to the most extensive woodlands. In the breeding season it will at times approach near the outskirts of villages seeking materials for its nest; but in general it avoids the haunts of man. It is the finest native bird we possess, and all its deportment partakes of a dignity peculiar to itself." The materials for its nest often included, as is well known, fragments of paper and (in later times) pieces of newspaper, also linen spread to dry or bleach on the hedge. Autolycus alludes to it as, like himself, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles: "My traffic is sheets; when the Kite builds look to the lesser linen."

In Knapp's time, however, it was still abundant in the eastern and midland counties. One of its noted

strongholds was Alconbury Hill in Huntingdonshire. Colonel Birch Reynardson, in his *Reminiscences of a Gentleman Coachman*, writes: "Within a few miles of Stilton and between Stilton and Stamford, is a hill called Alconbury Hill. About the year 1824, and from before that time to 1828 or 1829, there used to be in that part of the country an incredible number of Kites—the fork-tailed Kite, or what in Scotland were called Gleads, the red feathers of whose forked tails were famous for wings of salmon flies. These birds used to be soaring over the road and over a wood called Monk's Wood. In almost every direction, when travelling by the Stamford Regent Coach, one used actually to see them sitting in the middle of the road, and on one occasion I remember counting as many as twenty-seven in the air at the same time. The preservation of game, I suppose, has got rid of them, for no such bird is to be seen now; and it is wonderful how, in a few years, these birds have become almost extinct throughout England. I have not seen one for at least thirty-six years." An egg, probably the last laid there, was taken in this locality in 1844.

In the early sixties four or five pairs lingered on in Lincolnshire, and the last egg was taken in a wood near Wragby as late in the century as 1870. Men who were alive when the first part of this book was written could remember the time when Kites were to be seen over the River Witham and when one of the last of the race was killed from a pollard willow on its banks within sight of Lincoln Cathedral.

A pair were supposed to have nested at Maldon in Essex in 1854. In the New Forest, where the bird was at one time abundant, eggs were taken in 1850, according to Mr. Harting (quoted in Kelsall and Munn's *Birds of Hampshire*); and it is also said that the last egg from the county of Hampshire came from a nest in the avenue of Queenwood College in 1864. Lord Lilford, in a letter written in 1855, speaks of "the real forky-tailed Kite" then breeding in a large wood seventeen miles from Devonport (*Life of Lord Lilford*, p. 64).

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the bird rapidly approached complete extinction, and "the wheeling Kite's wild solitary cry" is never likely to be again a voice of the countryside. In Scotland, according to Mr. H. B. Macpherson (*Country Life*, 1907), "the Gled or forktailed Kite was plentiful thirty years ago, but, being easily trapped, is now, to all intents and purposes, extinct. Personally, I do not know of a single eyrie tenanted by the Kite in the Grampians, though it is possible that the wilds of Mar and Atholl may boast of a solitary pair. Some years ago I saw a pair in the Monadhliadhs, but I fear they have since fallen victims to trap or gun." Mr. Ogilvie-Grant says they used to breed in the Forest of Rothiemurchus.

A small remnant is now artificially preserved in Wales, their existence hanging as it were on a thread and dependent upon the goodwill of those on whose land their nests are built. That they exist at all is due to the determination of a handful of naturalists

to save the few remaining birds, by strenuous effort and at considerable expense, from the collector.

When the first edition of Yarrell's *Birds* was published, the Kite still bred at Alconbury Hill, in Huntingdonshire, and the bird was said to become more numerous in the northern counties, where, however, no trace of it can now be found. Waterton spoke of seeing the Kite at his seat in Yorkshire; and, upon the authority of Dr. Heysham, it used to breed in the woods of the Lake District. There were nests in the large woods of Lincolnshire up to 1857; but since so much timber has been felled the Kites have deserted that locality. A few pairs still remain in the secluded districts of Wales. In Scotland it was formerly a very common bird, but is now rarely seen.—SEEBOHM's *British Birds*.

In five years the number of Kites has been raised from five to well over twenty. It is painful to have to admit that this result has only been achieved by force. That is to say, the nests have been watched day and night to prevent their being robbed by the collector of rare British eggs or his agent. The extinction of any creature in any area is a deplorable loss to science, yet many of those who would not hesitate to jeopardise the existence of any rare British-breeding bird by taking its eggs have the audacity to call themselves scientific, and it has become necessary for those who take a more correct view to spend their time and money in protecting ornithology from "ornithologists."—H. F. WITHERBY in *British Birds*, IV. 85 (1913).

XX. ROSEATE TERN

(Sterna dougalli)

THE Roseate Tern was first observed breeding on the small Cumbrae Islands in the Firth of Clyde about the end of the eighteenth century or beginning of the nineteenth, by a Dr. MacDougall of Glasgow; and it was first described in the Supplement of Montagu's *Ornithological Dictionary* (1812). MacDougall, writes Seebohm, "found several of these beautiful birds in company with great numbers of the Common Tern and sent a skin and many interesting particulars respecting the peculiarities and habits of the new species to Colonel Montagu." It was then found to be breeding in many places on the Scotch, Irish and English coasts, also the Scillies. From that time onwards (attention having been called to it), its diminution began and continued down to the eighties of last century, when it was pronounced extinct as a British breeding species. "It is doubtful," wrote Seebohm in 1884, "whether the Roseate Tern breeds in any part of the British Islands at the present time," though the bird had appeared on the Farnes and on the Norfolk coast as recently as 1880. In more recent years one of its old breeding-places on the Lancashire coast has been re-colonised, and there are one or two other small colonies which are maintained by means of special protection. Here

the birds will linger until all have been obtained by the collectors, or until—until——

The Roseate Tern is at once the most beautiful and the most swallow-like of these swallows of the sea, the breast being tinged with a very soft rosy flush—though this faint exquisite hue is seen only with the binoculars or when very near at hand—and the streamers of the tail being very long, some inches longer than the central feathers. The wings are somewhat shorter and narrower than those of the Common or Arctic Tern, but the flight is even more buoyant and graceful. Howard Saunders says that it is “more intolerant of interference” than other Terns; hence many of its old breeding stations have been abandoned owing to egg-collecting. He also attributes the decrease of the species, on the authority of a French naturalist, to the increase of the larger strong-billed Common Tern; but there is little need to cast about for any such explanation. The two birds had probably nested on the same ground, or in close neighbourhood, for many years before Montagu’s time, though it is unlikely that their numbers were ever great. Mr. Bickerton who, in *The Home Life of the Terns*, describes a breeding site and the behaviour of the birds, tells us that he found them preferring to associate themselves with the Common Tern rather than with the Arctic, though also preferring to nest in solitary pairs and nearer to the edge of the cliff than the ground selected by their relations. They were, he points out, never numerous, because the British shore is on the further northern

ROSEATE TERN (*Sterna dougalli*)

One-fourth natural size

fringe of their breeding range; therefore comparatively few reach our islands on the annual migration. When Mr. Bickerton came to exhibit his lantern slides of the bird at a meeting of the British Ornithological Club in 1909, Mr. W. R. Ogilvie-Grant wrote: "I hope you will not give the locality of the Roseate Terns, as once the spot is generally known it will be hard to keep exterminators off." Since such localities have been known, whether on the Cumbræ or Farnes, or the Scillies, or in Ireland, it has been indeed not hard, but impossible, to keep exterminators off.

Some few years ago a well-known private collector offered a couple of the eggs, or a couple of clutches of eggs, to the British Museum (Natural History) as a joint gift from himself and the owner of the place where they were taken. It was a piece of unexampled generosity no doubt. But it turned out that these eggs had been illegally taken, since they were protected by the law, that a watcher was employed to guard them, that the visitor, though citing the landowner's name, was unknown to him and had been warned not to take the eggs, and that the landowner knew nothing about the whole business, from nesting-ground to museum, until after the event.

Formerly a tolerably common summer visitor to several localities in our Islands, has become of late years a decidedly rare British bird.—LILFORD'S *Birds of the British Islands*.

This very elegant Tern was first discovered by Dr. Macdougall, after whom it was named, on an island called Cumbray in the Firth of Clyde. It has since been observed in divers other localities, among them in Cumberland, at Brugh Marsh Point,

on the Solway Firth. They breed on the Fern Islands, the Walmseys, and Coquet Island, off the Northumbrian land, also in numbers on Foulney Island, on the coast of Lancashire, and at Scilly; in Scotland in the Isle of May, in the Firth of Forth, and, as already mentioned, in the Cumbray Islands.—MORRIS'S *British Birds*.

In 1896 Dr. Sharpe was informed of another "nice little colony" established in Wales, so that reasonable hope may be entertained of the beautiful Roseate Tern thoroughly re-establishing itself in our Islands after being apparently on the very brink of extinction. Great care, however, will be necessary, and the few resorts of this species kept as secret as possible, and free from the intrusion of trading and grabbing collectors.—DIXON'S *Lost and Vanishing Birds*.

The Roseate Tern was nesting in fair numbers in Scilly up to the early forties, but only a few pair were there in 1854, and it was last seen about 1867.—H. W. ROBINSON, *British Birds*, XIV. 65 (1920).

The Roseate Tern is not only by far the rarest of our British nesting species of Tern, but it is also [one of] the rarest of British breeding birds. . . . Being so rare it is the more worthy of all the protection that bird-lovers can extend to it.—W. BICKERTON, *Home Life of the Terns* (1912).

XXI. DOTTEREL

(Endromias morinellus)

THE Dotterel was once very abundant in England, as we may suppose from old records. It is not yet extinct as to the British race, but is one of those species, like the Roseate Tern, which linger on the verge of extinction. It is supposed that four or five or perhaps half a dozen pairs still actually breed in England on the mountains of Westmorland. A considerably larger number inhabit the northern part of Scotland, where they breed on the Grampians and Cairngorms and possibly other heights, at an altitude of 3000 to over 4000 feet—higher in fact than the Ptarmigan, so that during the whole of the breeding season snow lies on the summits where they nest. But even in that wild solitary place above the clouds, where one would suppose their deadliest enemy would be the Golden Eagle or the marauding fox, their chief foe is the egg-seeker for the collectors' cabinet. For as there are hundreds of private collectors, and every one must have "British-taken" eggs of the Dotterel, there is a very considerable demand; and if this continues, as it must unless prevented by legislation, these lovely little birds will go the way of many others.

The Dotterel has always had to face a various persecution from man. It was coveted as a table bird, and shot on its spring migration, "a most unsportsman-like practice" as one writer thinks it

necessary to point out; the feathers were sought to some extent for the making of fishermen's flies: and when the birds grew too scarce to be worth the sportsman's attention or to yield a paying quantity of feathers, the collector stepped in to finish the tale. Old writers allude to it as a delicate bird to eat, "a daintie dish," as Drayton wrote, and we come across mention of it in a household book of the Dukes of Northumberland, 1512: "Dotterels to be bought for my Lord." It was also early famed for its supposed foolishness; being simple and unsuspecting and therefore easily caught, it was naturally regarded as stupid. Legends grew up as to the manner in which it was imagined the bird would imitate the movements of its would-be captors and walk straight into the net. Dr. Key, or Caius, in a letter to Gesner, relates the fable. "It is," he says, "a very foolish bird, but delicate to eat, and is accounted a great delicacy. It is a mimic, and so, as the Scops and Otis are taken by an imitation of dancing, this bird is caught at night by the light of a candle according to the motion of the captor, for if he stretches out an arm that also stretches out a wing; if a foot that likewise a foot. In brief, whatever the fowler doth, the same doth the bird, and so being intent on men's gestures it is fooled and caught in the net. . . . Our people call it 'Doterell,' as if they were to say doating with folly." Drayton writes:

As you creep or cower or lie or stoop or go,
So marking you with care the apish bird doth do.

DOTTEREL (*Eudromias morinellus*)

Half natural size

The simple ground for all this fabrication, which was credited by our ornithologists for the space of two or three centuries, was the one fact that, like many other birds, the Dotterel stretches out a wing and leg when disturbed from its repose. The only folly that the bird is guilty of, Seebohm comments, is that of permitting the near approach of man. But foolishness continues to be its accepted characteristic. Mr. T. A. Coward tells us that when the little parties, or "trips" arrive in England in spring, on their way to their breeding-quarters, they are tired and stupid, and if fired at will settle again at once: "it was not uncommon for the whole trip to be wiped out: within recent years similar massacres having come to my notice." We are reminded here of Lord Lilford's description of the actions of the Kentish Plover, the Dotterel's near relation, as he observed it in Spain. "If a flock be fired at many of the survivors will very soon return to the spot from which they were startled."

"These birds are getting more and more scarce in the neighbourhood of the Lakes; and from the number that are annually killed by the anglers of Keswick and its vicinity—their feathers having long been held in esteem for dressing flies—it is extremely probable that in a few years they will become so extremely rare that specimens will be procured with considerable difficulty." So wrote Mr. T. C. Heysham in 1834—an ardent collector who killed as many Dotterels, old and young, and took as many eggs as he could find. Naturally he cursed the anglers.

Morris says that formerly numbers could be

obtained on the Yorkshire wolds when the birds were on their way back to the mountains in the north-west, but that in his time one had to be up early in the morning and range the country on horseback before the ploughman was up, to obtain even a few. They were then to be found breeding, however, in the Lake district, in Westmorland and Cumberland, on Robinson Fell, Great Gable, Whiteside, Helvellyn, Saddleback, Watson Dod, Great Dod, and Skiddaw, also in Northumberland. . . . "In Scotland they breed about Braemar, also on the Grampian hills, and in Elgin, Dumfriesshire, Sutherland, East Lothian, the Lammermoor hills, and other parts." They are said to have been seen in spring in comparatively recent times on the Merioneth mountains, and even on Salisbury Plain, both perhaps memories of old-time breeding grounds.

The Dotterel probably bred years ago on some of the wildest hills in the south of England, but it has long since ceased to do so, having been exterminated by collectors and others. Even whilst on migration it is subject to incessant persecution, and naturally retires to those few chosen habitats in the wildest parts of Scotland where it can rear its young unmolested by man.—*SEEBOHM'S British Birds.*

In spite of centuries of persecution it still nests in small numbers in the Lake District and in the Grampians and other Highland mountains, but in most parts is only known as a scarce spring visitor. Towards the end of April or early in May "trips," as the small parties are called, arrive in England, and their arrival is, or was, watched for keenly, for the Dotterel has always had a high money value, originally for its flesh, but later for its plumage; inconsiderate fishermen demand certain feathers for artificial flies. . . . Egg collection is responsible for further diminution in numbers, but is less to blame than the wholesale destruction of recently arrived immigrants.—*COWARD'S Birds of the British Isles.*

XXII. KENTISH PLOVER

(Ægialitis cantiana)

BOTH names, common and scientific, fit the bird, first described in 1781 as an inhabitant of the Kentish coast, and surviving now only on the flats of Dungeness, where men are engaged by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to save the few remaining birds and their eggs from the prowling scoundrels employed by the collectors.

The Kentish Plover, if not so strikingly coloured as its near relative the Ringed Dotterel or Plover and many others in this pretty group, is a peculiarly neat and graceful little bird, with a subdued colouring which harmonises with the level world of its desolate habitat. To the ordinary observer it appears as a smaller and paler Ring Plover, with less distinct markings but with the same dainty attractive ways. It is a summer visitor and spends no more than the actual breeding-time with us. That it will continue to return for long is doubtful, unless a law prohibiting the possession of rare birds and their eggs is obtained. A Sandwich ornithologist was the first to call attention to the species, by sending specimens to Latham, from which it was figured in Lewin's *Birds of Great Britain* and described in Latham's Supplement to his *Index Ornithologicus*. According to Yarrell it was in his time still found in the Sandwich neighbourhood

and also at Pegwell Bay. It was seen too in various other places on the south and east coasts, but is not known to have bred in any other counties than Kent and Sussex.

A few years later it was Yarrell who first put the collectors on to the too well-known breeding-ground at Dungeness. Particulars of this were supplied to him by Plomley, who, it is said, "afterwards deeply lamented the part he played in the extermination of the species." This lament he set down in some MS. notes quoted by Dr. N. F. Ticehurst, whose *History of the Birds of Kent* tells the story of this essentially Kentish species. "Of all birds," Plomley avows, "these are my especial favourites . . . and I shall always regret having made known the locality in this county where they abounded and where (until my notice of them in Yarrell's book) they lived, enjoyed, and brought forth their young, unnoticed, undisturbed and unseen." Plomley, however, over-estimated the part he played in the matter. The birds were already known to have their chief breeding-ground on the coast near the Kent and Sussex border, for Yarrell himself relates that dogs were trained to hunt for their nests and eggs; and the collector was as keen on the scent as the dogs, and would certainly have tracked the birds down as industriously. Four years after the giving away of the Dungeness secret to the ornithological public of that day, the birds were already fast disappearing. And the hunt went on until these little birds, so pretty in their appearance and ways as they lightly tripped over

KENTISH PLOVER (*Egialitis cantiana*)

Two-thirds natural size

the shingly beech, so harmless and so innocently tame in the presence of their arch-enemy man, were on the point of extermination in this country.

Not only were the eggs searched for with avidity, but the birds themselves were ruthlessly shot during the breeding season, and such young as were hatched were destroyed with the adult birds by another onslaught in September before they could get away from England. The wonder is that any survived. I will here again quote Dr. Ticehurst:

The eggs, we know, were constantly taken both by collectors from a distance and by the local people to supply the ever-ready market, but the chief cause to my mind of the almost successful extermination of the species was the shooting of the old birds during the breeding season, which went on more or less every year until the appointment of an authorised Watcher. As recently as 1902 I received information of twenty-one being killed, of which at least six pairs were old birds shot in the breeding season.

This, be it noted, was twenty years after the passing of a law prohibiting the killing of all birds at that season and scheduling the Plovers for the fullest protection the Act could give. In ornithological circles the fact of the slaughter was of course known; we readily understand why nothing was said or done.

Another factor that has been detrimental to their increase has been the shooting in August. At this time young and old are to be found in flocks on the sands, and being very tame, large numbers not only fall to the gun of the pot-hunter, but I have it on good authority that professional collectors were in the habit of firing into the flocks and picking up the adult birds only, leaving the immature birds dead and dying on the sands.

At what seemed the last moment, or as a forlorn hope, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

made a desperate effort to save the remnant of the British Kentish Plovers, and they still continue that effort. By untiring vigilance, and in spite of shameless attempts to overcome this by bribe and stratagem, the feeble little company has even increased of late years. That it will go on increasing is an anxious hope, but far from certainty as long as the private collector can laugh at a law which leaves him outside its futile enactments.

No more damning evidence of that futility can be required than the shameful story of Kent's little Plover.

The Kentish Plover is one of the most local of British birds, and has only been obtained very sparingly on the south and east coasts of England, as far north as Flamborough Head in Yorkshire and as far west as Cornwall. Its only breeding places in the country appear to be on the coasts of Kent and Sussex; but even there it is a rare bird, and is fast disappearing before the inroads of collectors.—SEEBOHM's *British Birds*.

Protection was just in time to save the Kentish Plover; it nearly came too late.—COWARD's *Birds of the British Isles*.

XXIII. GOLDEN ORIOLE

(Oriolus galbula)

DOUBTLESS the Golden Oriole is one of the migratory species that do not remain, young and adult, everlastingly in the same limited area, or neighbourhood, but fly forth to explore new ground, and if they find a suitable spot they colonise. Thus, although the bird is decreasing with us we still have it as a recurring visitant to these islands: where it is collected as soon as seen. Why collected? may well be asked, seeing that its rare and brilliant colouring—the daring of its pied black and golden-yellow—would cause it to shine among the somewhat soberly clad species of our woodlands like a gleaming topaz in a necklace of little brown and green and freckled stones. The answer is, because a British-killed specimen is worth much more to the basest of all collectors, he who looks to make something by killing a visitor to our shores, than he would get by a specimen of the same species from France or elsewhere in Europe. And yet he knows, and the man who buys it from him knows, that the British-killed specimen is a French, or Belgian, or Dutch bird, and not British; also that it is through him and others of his kind, that we have no British Orioles.

Sometimes the Golden Orioles arrive in numbers, as was the case in May 1870, when forty were seen in

one flock. This was close to the town of Penzance, where I am now writing. I have talked with the old head-keeper of the woods in which they appeared. Everyone in the place was up and after them, and soon they were all shot, he told me.

Another county where they would, undoubtedly, nest if allowed to do so, and where they have bred not only once but with a determination only overcome by the greater determination of the collector to prevent their doing so, is Kent. Apart from actual nesting records, Mr. N. F. Ticehurst compiled a list of sixty-five instances of Golden Orioles being either seen or shot (usually both) in that county since 1834, "and there are very few years unrepresented in the list, while only four apply to any other season than spring." I may here quote briefly from the *History of the Birds of Kent*, which I also quoted in writing of the Kentish Plover. Before 1834 Orioles had been noticed as visitors to the county, and in that year several were shot near Sandwich. Two years later a nest was found, and the young birds were taken; and a useless attempt was made to rear them in captivity. When again a nest was discovered, the young were taken, this time by a countryman to feed his ferrets. Between 1840 and 1845 further birds were seen and shot. In 1849 a nest was found at Elmstone; the birds were shot and the nest and eggs taken by a parson of the neighbourhood. Next year a female bird was shot in the same place. In another parish a second pair nested; the nest and eggs were taken and "long carefully

GOLDEN ORIOLE (*Oriolus galbula*)

Half natural size

preserved at the rectory there." Four more Orioles, obtained at Elmstone, are "carefully preserved" in a private collection. So the miserable story goes on.

In a certain park in Thanet a pair were shot in 1874, but the owner of the place, strangely enough, gave orders that if any more appeared they were not to be killed. Consequently the birds nested there safely until 1883. In that year two eggs were taken, the park changed hands, and the next arrivals were promptly shot. The birds have made no further attempt to nest in that park.

Early ornithologists confused the Golden Oriole with the Green Woodpecker. This is somewhat singular, seeing that both birds are of uncommon and showy plumage, but yellow is the colour most conspicuous in both when flying. Turner supposed he might identify Aristotle's Vireo or Witwel, "of a dusky green colour," with the bird that suspended its nest "upon a branch at the top of a tree that it should not afford access to any man or beast." The "Galgulus," which "is yellowish in colour and hacks the timber very much" he thought to be the Huhol of the English. Hewhole, or Hewel, and Witwall or Withol, are old English names for the Woodpecker. Marvel wrote:

But most the Hewel's wonders are,
Who here has the holtfelster's care;
He walks still upright from the root,
Meas'ring the timber with his foot.

The Percy Ballads have "the wood weelee sang," which is explained in Walford's Glossary to mean a

Golden Owl, a bird of the Thrush kind, and by others has been imagined to refer to the Woodpecker. More probably it is intended for the Oriole, since the poet says that "it sang and would not cease, sitting upon the spraye." Our old naturalist Willughby, describing the Oriole, says: "All the body is of a bright yellow, very beautiful to behold: so that for the lustre and elegancy of its colours it scarce gives place to any of the American birds. . . . The Low Dutch call this bird by a very fit name, Goutmerle, that is, Golden Ouzel, for it agrees with Thrushes or Blackbirds in the shape of the bill and the whole body; in the bigness, also food, and manner of living. It is called Galbula or Galgulus from its yellow colour."

Our later writers have little to say about the bird, save that it might and would breed, but is not allowed to do so. We may turn to letters written during the great war by some of our men who were in France, to know what impression it conveys in a country where it is abundant. Thus, one wrote in the *Times* (May 1916): "The Orioles are, of course, the chief joy of the wood. They are always in the same small section. One has only to go there and stand still for awhile and sooner or later the beautiful flute-like liquid call comes ringing from somewhere out of the green world above. Then a brilliant meteor of yellow and black flashes through a gap between the tree-tops, and the liquid note which sounded on the right hand is now on the left. Then it is behind one, then in front." And another says: "Orioles are amusing,

active birds, full of life and sound." In England they are in the collectors' cabinets, full only of dusty death.

Ordinary readers are scarcely aware how frequently this handsome and conspicuous bird visits the British Isles or that it has actually bred in them. So far as we can see, there is nothing to prevent the Golden Oriole becoming as common on this side the English Channel (as it most probably was in remoter ages) as it is on the other side. The bird is said to be a regular spring visitor to the Scilly Isles and Cornwall, and thence onwards through the Southern Counties as far as Norfolk, but with perhaps less frequency. It must be remembered that such very showy birds have difficulty in penetrating far after once landing on such inhospitable shores as ours.—C. DIXON, *Lost and Vanishing Birds*.

I cannot too emphatically impress upon my readers that these birds arrive in spring in pairs with the fixed intention of nesting, and that, with the exception of Cornwall and the Scillies, Kent is the only county where they do so with any approach to regularity, so that no one with any love for our country's birds ought to do otherwise than protect them to the utmost of their ability.—TICEHURST'S *Birds of Kent*.

XXIV. COMMON QUAIL

(Coturnix communis)

ONCE called the "Common" Quail, this species ceased to be common in the first half of the nineteenth century. It began to get rare about the end of the first quarter of that century, but even down to the fifties was still fairly abundant. It is impossible to give a date for its general disappearance from its breeding-places in this country, owing to the wide distribution of the bird, its elusive habits, and its gradual decrease over a long period. At the present time a single nest would be an event to record. It is sometimes said that the use of modern agricultural machinery is responsible for the bird's extinction as a breeding species with us, that its decrease is to be compared with that of the Corncrake; but this is not in itself enough to account for the fact, nor, when we consider the circumstances, is it needful to look for local incidents. Cheap and easy transit by sea has been added to cheap and easy methods of capture, and there are no longer Quail to come in any number from their winter quarters.

As late as 1838 they arrived in great numbers. One man is recorded to have killed sixteen birds with one shot on the Lincolnshire coast where the little travellers had just arrived. One great ornithologist, writing in the eighties, goes so far as to say that their

QUAIL (*Coturnix communis*)

Half natural size

far-heard call "is familiar to every plough-boy." It is a pleasing rural sound, a trisyllabic note which most writers describe by likening it to the words "wet-my-lips," many times repeated, with the accent on the first syllable; indeed a charming sound, once in very truth familiar to every ploughboy, and we meet with many mentions of it in descriptions of rural scenery and life in the poets of the first half of last century.

Occasionally I have come across farmers and other countrymen who had met with the bird in their fields, but always many years ago, and the last Quail I heard of was at Land's End in 1903, where one was heard piping his wet-my-lips call in a field near the village. But he was alone here, and soon vanished, to be heard no more. I may here, however, quote from a letter received by the Secretary of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, from Mr. E. S. Dallas, who was fortunate enough to hear the bird in Sussex in May 1921. He writes of listening to its note while on an all-night ramble on the southern slope of the South Downs, near Harting: "We first heard the Quail at about 11 p.m., and after that we heard it with only short intervals throughout the night until about 3.30 a.m., when we were returning home. The characteristic note 'Whit-ti-tit' was the only one I could distinguish; we tracked it to a large field of close-grown oats (green), but, of course, it was impossible to see the birds. I am convinced there were several pairs, as the notes were heard in widely separated parts of the field. We also heard

the birds the next night, but I could not find anyone in the neighbourhood who knew the Quail or its note, though I spoke with some who were by no means ignorant on the subject of bird life. I have a note from an ornithological friend that the bird was heard on the hills above Shere, Surrey, in late spring 1919, and at Warlingham in 1920."

The Quail was common all over Europe up to latitude 64° and in the British Isles was universal, extending to the Outer Hebrides, the Orkneys and the Shetland Isles, and has been found breeding in most of the English counties. It is an extremely prolific bird, like its big relation the Partridge; and from all these facts it might seem of all birds one of those least likely to become rare. Its decline, and with us complete extinction, result from the demand for the gourmet's table. It is destroyed in incredible numbers in Egypt and elsewhere, where it congregates before taking its northward flight over the Mediterranean; and again on its arrival in Europe. Undoubtedly a species may survive indefinitely, even if in reduced numbers, when killed in great quantities in autumn and winter: but once persecution is extended to the breeding-time, the end is in sight. The decline of the Quail in England came before a close-time was enacted. To-day no country in Europe can provide its own supplies, and the tables of the rich people who eat this smallest of game are provided from Egypt, Morocco, Malta, Sicily, and Italy. But the English demand is the main cause for the destruction, for the very reason that we have a close season for

our own game, but society, the fashionable world, wants birds in the spring months. When it is no longer legal to deal in Pheasants and Grouse, the Quail, the Lapwing, and the Ruff take their place. It is easily managed. The dealer, if questioned, has only to plead that they come from abroad. Quails are brought over alive in crates, fattened in captivity, and gradually doled out as advancing spring increases the demand. They winter south of the Mediterranean, and in spring begin their journey northward. Over a million birds have been, it is said, taken on the Island of Capri during the spring migration, 70,000 to 100,000 have been consigned by a single steamer. A few years ago the R.S.P.B. received a letter of protest from a native gentleman in Malta, who wrote of the nets used there: "From this harbour of Valetta alone shiploads of hundreds of thousands of live Quails go into Europe, especially England. I respectfully suggest that these modes of catching Quail only be allowed on the return migration." In Belgium 400,000 were eaten every year (probably Belgium cannot afford this luxury since the war); the port of Marseilles received a million and a half in a year; fashionable dinners and luncheons in London during the season were responsible for the destruction of a million annually. To figures like these has to be added the number that die in transit, said to be fully half of those taken. I give these details on the authority of Mr. F. C. Selous and Count Clary, of the St. Hubert Club of French sportsmen, and they may be found in the *Field* of 1st October 1910.

In that year the International Sporting Congress, held at Vienna, passed a resolution calling for the closing of all Quail shooting in all states during the migration periods, and the prohibition of transit and sale of Quails during the close time.

So far as England is concerned one simple remedy is needed; we have only to make the sale of wild birds, alive or dead, illegal during the time when they may not legally be killed or caught. But, like the trade in finely-plumaged birds to decorate our women, the sale of these semi-game birds out of season is a trade that pays; and England prefers to satisfy her conscience by making protests to other countries and deploring the evil deeds of Arabs and other natives who net the birds she receives and sells.

The Quail is perhaps the one bird named in this book for whose decrease or extermination we have not to thank the collector. It is as yet too soon for him to be interested. The only bird case comparable is that of the Passenger Pigeon of America. In the days of Pliny, Quail, he tells us, migrated in such numbers that when they settled on the sails of ships at night, their weight sank the ships. In recent times they crossed the Mediterranean in millions; their numbers are now computed by thousands. Less than a hundred years ago the Passenger Pigeon existed in countless millions; their numbers were such that the sky was darkened when their huge flocks flew overhead. They were killed without a thought, recklessly. To-day the Passenger Pigeon is utterly extinct. An offer of a large sum

from the American Ornithologists' Union for information of a nesting pair has met with no response; not so much as a single bird can be heard of. A live Passenger Pigeon is as unattainable as a living Great Auk.

It is singular that in the very limited numbers of gallinaceous birds that exist wild in this country there should be included the Capercaillie, the largest of the order, with perhaps the exception of one American species, and the diminutive Quail—a giant and a pigmy. Historically the small species is the more important of the two. . . . When we consider how bound to earth the gallinaceous birds are, seldom using their wings unless to escape from some sudden pressing danger into the nearest cover, it strikes us as very wonderful that the plump little Quail should be as great a migrant as the most aerial kinds—the Swallows and the warblers. When with us in the summer he is a dweller on the ground, like his stay-at-home relation, the Partridge; yet in his wide wanderings he crosses seas, vast deserts, and the loftiest mountain chains; and by means of this migratory instinct he has diffused himself over the three great continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa.—HUDSON'S *British Birds*.

Quails pass through Egypt on their way to their more northerly breeding quarters in March and April. Their return to Egypt is from September to November, and it is during these journeyings that vast quantities are caught in nets, which are sent to every European city for the tables of the rich. Mr. C. D. Burnett Stuart writes: "From Alexandria to Port Said the whole length of coast is practically hung with nets, but the Government has lately forbidden the placing of these on the foreshore which it controls. The number of Quails which migrate passes belief, for it is recorded that in the Coronation year a million were ordered and supplied for the English market alone.—C. WHYMPER, *Egyptian Birds*.

England is the market to which the greater part of these netted birds are brought, and if the sale of Quails in England by poulterers is not shortly made illegal after 31st January the almost complete extinction of these beautiful little game birds cannot be very far distant.—F. C. SELOUS in *The Field* (24th Sept. 1910).

XXV. WHITE-TAILED EAGLE

(Haliaëtus albicilla)

THE White-tailed or Sea Eagle became extinct in the British Isles in 1918. It last bred in our country about ten years before that date, and for those ten years a solitary widowed female bird represented a race once far more common in north Britain than the Golden Eagle.

In old days this Eagle was not confined to Scotland and the Isles, but seems to have been fairly abundant in England and Wales. It nested in the Lake District, in the neighbourhood of Keswick and Ullswater, also in the Isle of Man, Lundy Island, the Isle of Wight, and probably Cornwall and other remote counties. Warner narrates the taking of the last young birds from the last nest in Culver Cliff, near Shanklin, in 1780, and in Westmorland it is said to have tried to rear young no longer ago than 1835. Its loud yelping cry, and the sight of its great outspread wings, might strike terror into the breasts of London trippers in Shanklin and Sandown nowadays. Scotland, the Hebrides, Orkneys, and Shetlands were, however, its principal homes, and for centuries it wandered over sea and land in North Britain, hunting its prey among weakly animals, including Puffins, Guillemots, and other sea-fowl, and nesting in solitary crags. But the shepherd hated the Erne even more

WHITE-TAILED SEA EAGLE (*Haliaeetus albicilla*)

One-tenth natural size

than he hated the Golden Eagle, and pitiless persecution in the last century quickly reduced its numbers in spite of the wildness and loneliness of the places to which it was by this time restricted. As the bird fed to a great extent on carrion it was readily destroyed by means of poisoned meat. Trapping and shooting also did their work. Any method, however barbarous, was not too barbarous to compass the death of an Erne.

Down to 1835 the "commissioners of supply," in their zeal for aiding the breeding of sheep, offered three shillings for every Eagle of either species; but such encouragement was hardly needed. Morris relates that one hundred and seventy-one full-grown birds were killed in three years in Sutherlandshire, and Macgillivray says they were being destroyed at the rate of twenty a year.

The inland-breeding birds went first, and the eyries on the Bass Rock and Ailsa Craig, and in Galloway and Dumfriesshire, became uninhabited. By the time Messrs. Harvie Brown and Buckley wrote of the fauna of the Outer Hebrides the decrease had become noticeable. For the disappearance of a species may long continue unrecorded or even unobserved, until the last rapid stages are reached. They write (1888):

There is no doubt about the marked decrease in the number of inhabited eyries throughout Scotland during the past ten or fifteen years. . . . It is not yet out of the common to see a fine old Erne perched on a rock at the entrance to Stornoway Harbour. In February, 1870, a fine adult female was shot or trapped near Stornoway, and this, along with an immature male and female, killed respectively in March and June, 1882, and also

obtained near Stornoway, are in the collection of Mr. Chase. In 1887 a pair at Shiant Island were still to the fore. Long may they continue in their inaccessible retreat! So far as we are concerned we are as pleased with a feather which we picked up on the boulder-strewn beach below the eyrie, aye, and a great deal more than if we had shot the bird.

To the non-scientific bird-student it may seem strange that any naturalist should prefer a dead bird to a living one: but so it is. The attitude of these ornithologists was an unusual one and they did well to pride themselves upon it. In Skye, the Orkneys, and St. Kilda the Sea Eagle was by this time extinct. In Ireland, where Giraldus found "Eagles as plentiful as Kites are in other countries," the last eyrie was left tenantless in 1898, though a few generations earlier there was probably at least one pair in every county having a sea-coast. By the beginning of the present century the species was reduced to a pair or two in the Shetlands, and presently to a solitary pair on Unst, whose nesting-place, sometimes Hernadale Head, sometimes the Graveland Cliffs, was protected by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. In 1908 the male bird disappeared, having probably been shot while ranging the land; but the female, a bird of almost pure white plumage, returned year after year to the last nesting-place and seemed to watch and wait for her lost mate, gazing out over the sea from her eyrie, or flying out as if to meet him, when she would be mobbed by the Carrion Crows, but never heeded their vulgar clamour. Occasionally an odd bird of the same species appeared, but did not stay. In the tenth

spring the old white bird herself did not re-appear. She had probably died a natural death, being by this time old even for an Eagle and having been a distinguished figure on the island for thirty years. With her it is believed the race of British Ernes ceased to exist.

A few immature birds visit us from time to time. They are usually shot by keepers and described as "Golden" Eagles, the characteristic plumage being undeveloped.

The Erne has of late years suffered severe persecution, so that at the present time there is probably not a single pair left on the mainland of Scotland, while not fifty years ago it frequented almost every steep headland on our northern shores. Affecting chiefly the coast, mostly building its nest on sea-cliffs, it has been at the mercy of any adventurer, and has been ruthlessly destroyed, apparently to the benefit of nobody in particular. . . . In former days the Sea-Eagle seems to have bred in several parts of England—as the Lake District, and possibly even in the Isle of Wight and on Dartmoor.—NEWTON'S *Dictionary of Birds*.

The last Eagle known to build in Culver Cliff (according to the information I could obtain) came there in 1790. An adventurous countryman, who had frequently descended the rock for the eggs of its other winged tenants, having watched the eagle from the nest, paid a visit to it also. He found this fabrication to be of a considerable size, and formed of sticks and rushes laid alternately; containing one solitary young bird. This he took, but not knowing how to manage it, the eagle soon died.—WARNER'S *History of the Isle of Wight* (1795).

ALLUSIONS IN POETRY

The following fragmentary article was among the papers that furnished the material for this volume. As it is headed "Short Notes," Mr. Hudson probably intended to add others of a similar kind, giving glimpses of lost and rare birds as they appear in literature, and such additional matter as related to his subject, but was off the main line of this work. Unhappily it stands alone.

THAT three of our vanished birds—Bittern, Quail, and Kite—were familiar to all persons in England down to the nineteenth century, and later, even to about 1830, may be known from the numerous allusions to them found in the poems of the time. For it must be borne in mind that in describing rural scenery the poets never introduce a bird by name unless it is one well known to everybody. This accounts for the fact that so few species are mentioned. No English poet of eighty, or even fifty, years ago would dare to mention even the sweetest singers, such as the Willow-Wren or the Reed-Warbler, singing, simply because their names were not as widely and commonly known as the Merle and the Mavis or the Stock-Dove and Ring-Dove and the Nightingale. The Kite, the Bittern, and the Quail figure often in the rural poets, oftenest perhaps in the eighteenth century, down to the first quarter of the nineteenth, when they were becoming so rare that they ceased to figure in literature simply because they ceased to be familiar and were no longer part and parcel of the rural scene.

In Thomson's *Seasons* we find both Bittern and Quail, and to the first we have allusion in the well-known and charming passage:

As yet the trembling year is unconfirmed,
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightless: so that scarce
The Bittern knows his time, with bill ingulphed,
To shake the sounding marsh; or from the shore
The Plovers when to scatter o'er the heath
And sing their wild notes to the listening waste.

Of the Quail in summer he writes:

A fresher gale
Begins to sweep the wood and stir the stream,
Sweeping with shadowy gusts the field of corn,
While the Quail clamours for its running mate.

Ebenezer Elliott, who wrote in the thirties and forties of last century, speaks too of the Bittern. In the poem *Come and Gone* he tells of a youth, bound apprentice in London, grieving for his sister and play-mate, who has died of consumption in the north country during his long absence from home, and that he

No more with her will hear the Bittern boom
At evening's dewy close.

In another poem the same poet describes the Bittern's aerial performance:

When gloaming o'er the welkin steals,
And caps the hills in solemn grey,
The Bitterns in their airy wheels
Amuse the wanderer on his way.

And again in *Morning*, a very pretty poem:

The Bittern's quavering trump on high.

And of the Quail:

Harps the Quail amid the clover,
O'er the moon-fern whews the Plover.

Kirke White, the Nottingham poet (1785-1806) introduces the Bittern to emphasise the solitude and melancholy of one of those pictures of the ruins of London in some distant future which have been painted by many writers besides Macaulay:

Where now is Britain? . . .
Even as the savage sits upon the stone
That marks where stood her capitol, and hears
The Bittern booming in the reeds, he shrinks
From the dismaying solitude.

Shelley again selects the bird for a similar picture in prose, "when London shall be an habitation of Bitterns," but the allusion here is obviously to the Bittern as a symbol only, based on the supposition that this is the bird mentioned under the same name in two or three passages in the Bible. It was of nature and not of emblems that the poets of the country wrote, as when Crabbe tells us

The loud Bittern from his bulrush home
Gave from the salt-ditch side the bellowing boom;

and Wordsworth, describing the Lake scenery in *An Evening Walk*,

In youth's wild eye the livelong day was bright,
The sun at morning, and the stars at night,
Alike, when first the vales the Bittern fills,
Or the first Woodcocks roam'd the midnight hills.

In the same poem he speaks also of the Kite:

Near the midway cliff, the silver'd Kite
In many a whistling circle wheels her flight.

To Scott the Bittern was familiar:

The Bittern sounds his drum,
Booming from the sedgy shallows.

Southey also seems to have known it well:

At evening o'er the swampy plain
The Bittern's boom came far.

Or we may go back to Drayton:

The buzzing Bittern sits, which through his hollow bill
A sudden bellowing sends, which many times doth fill
The neighbouring marsh with noise.

Hurdis, the Sussex poet, in *The Village Curate*, his first and perhaps his best long poem (Burwash, 1788) writes charmingly of the commoner birds of the place, the birds he was most familiar with—the Nightingale, the golden Woodpecker, the restless Pie,

The glossy Raven on the grass
Croaking rude courtship to his glossy mate;

and among them he mentions the Quail:

So have I seen
The spaniel-hunted Quail with lowly wing
Shear the smooth air: and so, too, have I heard
That she can sweetly clamour, though compell'd
To tread the lowly vale.

The Quail pipes also in Gilbert White's poem of *Summer*, placed in the same familiar category with the Cuckoo, Swift, and Swallow.

Evidence of the wide range of the Kite is ampler still, from allusions in Shakespeare and Spenser, down to Keble in *The Christian Year* (1827):

The wheeling Kite's wild solitary cry.

Clare (Northamptonshire, about 1821) in his poem *Autumn*, tells of the Puddock, or Puttock, sailing

slow over the fading woods, uttering his wailing cries before the coming storm. Bloomfield in *The Farmer's Boy* (Suffolk, 1800) describes Euston Woods,

Where the Kite brooding unmolested flies,
and Cowper, in *The Sofa* (1787), in one of his sweet and beautiful passages, tells how not alone the ten thousand warblers of the day delight him,

But cawing Rooks, and Kites that swim sublime
In still repeated circles, screaming loud,
The Jay, the Pie, and ev'n the boding Owl
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.

[Here the notes break off, clearly unfinished, but not inappropriately ending with a poet for whom Mr. Hudson had a special affection. In his old edition of *The Task* (1817), evidently picked up second-hand, he has written on the fly-leaf: "Cowper may come too late to you. To know him long is to regard him as the most *restful* of all poets. Like the ocean, 'he lulls the spirit while he fills the mind.'" And on another page he has pencilled the note: "'Tis all like this, all sweet and beautiful, and the first perfectly natural poetry ever written in England.']*]

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