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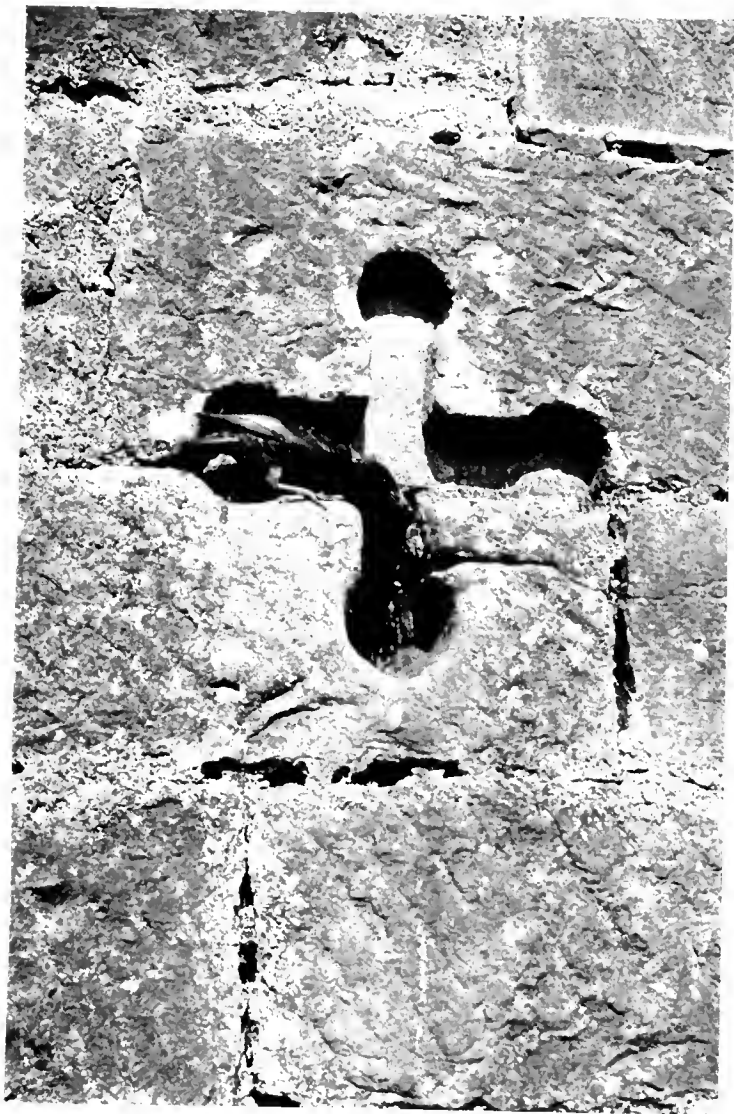
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CORMORANTS AND YOUNG



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YOUNG

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PETITS

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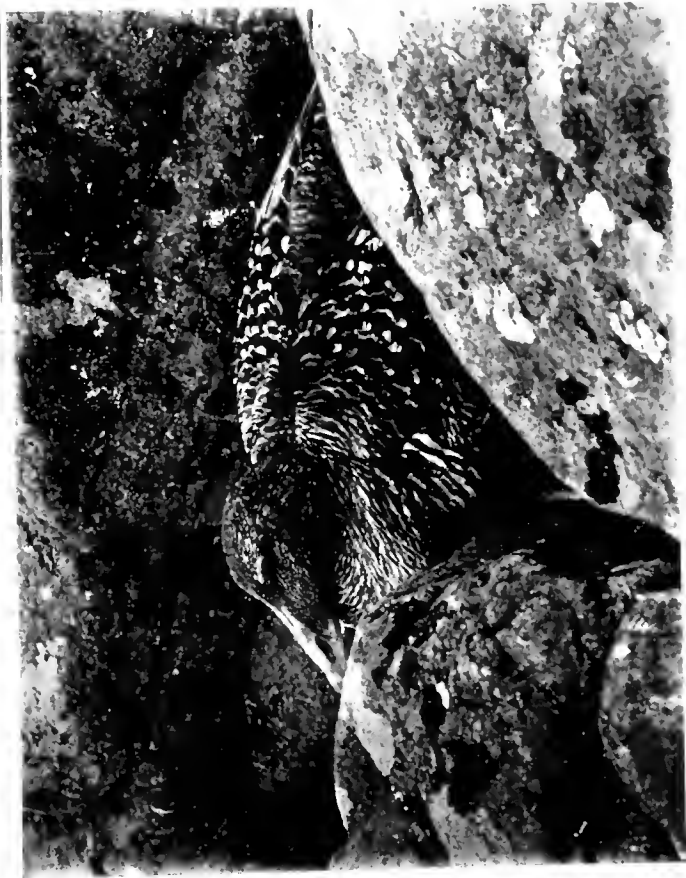
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COQ DE BRUYÈRE SUR SON NID

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EGGS (FOUR) OF RINGED PLOVER *in situ* ŒUFS (QUATRE) DE PLUVIER A COLLIER *in situ*
EIER (VIER) DES HALSBANDREGENPFEIFERS *in situ*
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RINGED PLOVER SETTLING
ON NEST

PLUVIER A COLLIER S'ÉTABLISSANT

SUR SON NID

HALSBANDREGENPFEIFER SICH AUF'S NEST SETZEND

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RINGED PLOVER SETTLED ON NEST PLUVIER A COLLIER ÉTABLI SUR SON NID
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GORLANDS BRUNS (PETITS MANTEAUX NOIRS)

HERINGSMÖVEN

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Some Notes on the Birds

OF WHICH

PHOTOGRAPHS APPEAR IN
THE FOREGOING PAGES . .

BY

GEORGE GIRDWOOD.

Capercaillie.—The Capercaillie is much the largest of the British game birds, the male attaining to the length of 35 inches, the female being some 10 inches shorter. The former is a very handsome bird, dark slate grey in colour, with each feather finely vermiculated with white. It is possessed of an extremely powerful bill, curved in shape, and has a habit of distending the feathers of the throat, the combination giving to the bird a somewhat fierce look, which is however altogether belied by its nature and habits, which much resemble those of the black grouse. The colour of the female is chestnut, barred with black, the tips of the feathers being touched with white. This species was at one time indigenous to Great Britain, but became extinct. It was, however, re-introduced to Scotland some 50 years ago, and has within late years greatly increased in numbers, and in its range; occurring now frequently in counties much farther south than that into which it was re-introduced. The food of the Capercaillie consists very largely of the needles of the Scots fir, a diet which imparts to its flesh a strongly resinous flavour. In dissecting a mature male, it is not uncommon to find its crop distended with an enormous mass of these needles, so hard and dry as to cause admiration of the extraordinary digestive power which can reduce and assimilate such unlikely material. This bird also feeds on berries and acorns, and the young shoots and buds of a variety of trees. The Capercaillie is polygamous, and in the breeding season the males are said to indulge in severe fighting, at which time they may be easily approached. The nest of the Capercaillie consists of a mere scraping in the ground in which are laid from five to eight eggs, or in the case of older females from eight to twelve, though as many as sixteen eggs have been found—in the last case probably the product of two hens. They resemble the eggs of the black grouse, being of a dull cream ground colour, spotted with reddish brown, and are rather over 2 inches in length.

Cormorant.—The Cormorant is a resident species, breeding in all suitable localities round our coast line, except in the north and north-west, where it is superseded by the Green Cormorant or Shag. This bird is easily identified. Most of our sea fowl are light in colour; the Cormorant, on the other hand, is a dead black, though in the breeding season this is varied by a slight metallic wash of bluish black, and at this season also both sexes assume a series of white nuptial plumes, extending from the crown down either side of the neck, and also a large white patch on each thigh. The length of the Cormorant is 32 inches.

In flight the Cormorant is a heavy bird, and though once on the wing it moves with considerable rapidity, it yet gives the observer the appearance of being heavy, and its flight only sustained by much exertion. The bird is a most rapacious feeder. Its food consists entirely of fish, which it captures by diving, and in its pursuit of its prey below the surface it is itself fish-like in the rapidity of its movement and the length of the time it remains submerged. After the period of feeding and its consequent diving a very favourite attitude of the Cormorant is to sit upon a rock, or even on a buoy, just above the reach of the waves, with its wings extended and apparently in a state of repletion.

The Cormorant breeds in colonies, most frequently on rocky ledges on the sea coast, but often selects what appears so unusual a site as the tops of high trees, where it breeds in conditions similar to those of the Heron. The eggs are usually three in number, and are of a pale blue ground colour, though this is covered with a chalky white coating which quickly becomes soiled and discoloured. There is something weird in the appearance of the Cormorant, with its staring light green eye, strong bill with its sharp hook at the end, its unfeathered face, and its snake-like neck, and its general repulsiveness of appearance, no doubt, was the reason of Milton selecting its description as similar to that of Satan. A visit to the breeding-place is interesting, but unsavoury. A peculiar habit in its feeding of its young is that the young bird thrusts its head down the throat of the parent, which regurgitates the half-digested fish it has captured.

Crow, Carrion.—This bird is a resident, though in winter its numbers are enormously increased by an autumn invasion from the Continent and Scandinavia. Of the Carrion-Crow very little good can be said, while it is unquestionably the source of much trouble and loss to game preservers. In size it is slightly larger than the Rook, which it also resembles closely in appearance, the chief distinctions between the two being that, while the Rook is always gregarious, the Carrion-Crow is a solitary bird, and the latter has at all ages the face feathered, in contrast to the Rook, which in its second year loses the facial feathers, presenting that rough and uncouth appearance which is so familiar to all.

The Carrion-Crow has deservedly earned persecution, with the result that it is now a shy bird and to be found in any number only in the more retired and inaccessible parts of our islands, where it resorts to breed. The nest is placed either in crevices amongst rocks, or perhaps more frequently in the branches of a tree growing from a cliff face, though now and again an odd pair may be found nesting in an unexpected situation, such as the corner of a coppice, quite near to human habitation, though in such cases it is unlikely there is a gamekeeper near. The eggs are four or five in number, of a bluish green ground colour, thickly blotched, spotted and streaked with olive brown. The Carrion-Crow is the nearest relative of the Hooded Crow, with which it not infrequently inter-breeds, the young in such cases partaking of the characteristics of one of the parents—that is, appearing either all black, as the Carrion-Crow, or with the plumage of the true Hooded Crow.

In colour the Carrion-Crow is black, with a metallic lustre of dark steel blue, which is particularly apparent in the spring months; its length is about 19 inches.

Cuckoo.—This well-known bird is perhaps from one point of view the best known of our summer migrants, its note being eagerly listened for each year by many as the harbinger of that pleasant

season which comes with April. Volumes of great length might be written regarding the Cuckoo and its habits without exhausting its history, but in these short notes one can touch only on one or two salient points. First and foremost is of course the parasitical habit of the Cuckoo, which thrusts the burden of its family upon other birds. The female Cuckoo lays her egg upon the ground, and lifting it in her bill places it in the nest of another bird. In our country the Meadow-Pipit, Hedge-Sparrow, and the Pied Wagtail are the species most usually victimised. When the young Cuckoo is born it is blind, but is possessed of an instinct which teaches it to endeavour to eject whatever else be in the nest beside it, and this effort it exerts unceasingly until eggs or young are thrown out and it is left the sole occupant.

The Cuckoo is a handsome bird, closely resembling in appearance the Sparrow-Hawk, for which it is indeed not infrequently taken. Above the general colour is ashy blue, the breast is white, barred with black; while in the female on the breast there is a wash of rufous colour which still further leads to its resemblance to the Sparrow-Hawk. The bird has been the subject of much study by ornithologists from the time of Dr. Jenner, of vaccination fame, up to the present day, and the conclusion has been generally arrived at that one of the reasons for the parasitical habit of the bird is that the males greatly exceed the females in number. One German authority states he believes that the female Cuckoo lays up to as many as 17 or 20 eggs, but as, of course, each is placed in a different nest any definite conclusion on this subject is most difficult to arrive at. The old Cuckoos leave our country for their winter haunts in Africa, Persia, and elsewhere at the end of July, and not the least interesting speculation connected with the migration of birds is that with which one wonders how the young Cuckoo without guide, philosopher, or friend finds its way later in the year to these far distant shores. The egg of the Cuckoo is very variable, light blue eggs being occasionally found, but the ordinary type resembles closely that of the Meadow-Pipit, though somewhat larger in size than that of the latter bird. The Cuckoo is insectivorous, is particularly fond of caterpillars, and is stated to be the only bird which preys upon the hairy variety of this insect.

Dipper, or Water-Ouzel.—The Dipper, or, as it is known in Scotland, the Water Crow, is a native bird, distributed over the British Isles, more numerously on the mountain streams of our higher lands, though it is also to be found on the moorland streams of Devonshire and elsewhere. In appearance the Dipper resembles a large Wren, being of the same build and carrying its tail in the same perky, upturned fashion. In colour this bird is of a dark sooty brown, showing up in the surroundings where it is to be observed as a distinct black, save on the breast, which is pure white. Its length is seven inches.

This bird is one of our most interesting on account of the peculiarity of its habit, disassociated as it is with anything in its appearance which would lead us to suppose it possesses the powers it has. As we have stated, it resembles the Wren in its appearance, but it is really a water bird, under the surface of which it obtains its food. It feeds chiefly upon the Caddis-Worm and the larvæ of water insects; these it finds at the bottom of pools into which it walks, or, slipping off the side of a stone, disappears horizontally beneath the surface. How the Dipper manages to keep itself under water in places such as the swift running part of a stream, where it may often be observed, is somewhat of a mystery, yet it does so, and

the fortunate observer who may see the Dipper enter the water may with great caution approach sufficiently near to see it moving along the bottom actively engaged in its search for food. When it so desires it rises, cork-like, to the surface, and, taking wing, usually flies in a straight line up stream to the nearest stone affording a resting-place above water. Like most of our native birds, the Dipper breeds more than once in the course of a season; the first nest may be found in favourable seasons early in April. It resembles the nest of the Wren, though it is, of course, much larger, while the aperture is lower down in the side. It consists of a large ball of moss felted closely together, and is lined with dry leaves, frequently those of the beech, and contains four or five eggs, pure white and of a rather pointed shape. They, before being blown, possess a delicate pinky tinge, due to the translucence of the shell and the presence of the yoke within. The nest has, in the writer's experience, been always placed above water in such a position that the young, if emerging before flight, would fall into the water. It is most usually placed in the crevices of a rocky bank, though occasionally in the roots of a tree projecting from a similar situation. The song of the Dipper is very musical, and heard in the young months of the year and in its usually exquisite surroundings has a charm all its own.

Duck, Common Eider.—This bird is resident with us throughout the year, in winter its numbers are added to by migrants from the Faroe Islands, and also from Scandinavia, but a considerable number instead of proceeding north in the spring remain with us to breed. On the well protected Farne Isles they breed in numbers. Their favourite haunt is further north, numbers frequenting the Hebrides and larger numbers the Orkneys and Shetlands. In the latter Isles, it is not an uncommon sight to find eight or ten Eiders on a small out-lying Islet.

The well-known down of this bird is a commercial commodity, and they are accordingly afforded much protection in Iceland and Scandinavia, where the down is regularly gathered, but the bird does not occur in our Islands in numbers sufficient to enable this to be profitably done. The female Eider like all the others of the duck tribe lines her nest with the down pulled from her own breast, this down is of grey colour, centred with white, and a very considerable portion is employed in the construction of each nest. In the centre of this warm and comfortable nest, are to be found from three to five eggs of a greenish grey colour. The female Eider is very tame at the nest, often sitting until actually touched. The male Eider is a particularly handsome bird, some 23 inches in length, the plumage of the back is pure white, and the crown of the head of a rich glossy black, the sides of the head and neck are white, washed with exquisite Eau-de-nil. The breast is white, washed with a delicate roseate cream, ending in a clearly defined line, where it meets the under parts of the bird which are of a rich black. The male Eider has in the breeding season a most peculiar call, resembling the coo of a dove, though much harsher in tone. The food of the Eider consists of shell-fish and its digestive powers may be described as tremendous. In dissecting this duck a large quantity of whelks may often be found in its gizzard, entire, including the shell. They are there ground to a rough, gritty powder by the powerful action of this organ, and pass to the stomach, where the nutritious part is assimilated and from which the ground shell is ejected.

Duck, Common Sheld.—This bird is our most brilliantly coloured duck, its plumage being in broad patches of pure white,

jetty black, and rich chestnut, while its head is of a rich dark metallic green. Its bill and feet are brilliant red, while the bill of the male has a basal knob of the same rich brilliancy. Its length is 22 inches.

The Sheld-Duck is a resident species, and is becoming less uncommon of recent years. The adjustment that nature makes for the preservation of species is shown by the nesting habit of this Duck with brilliant plumage, namely, to resort to rabbits' burrows. When in the open its colour oft reveals it to the prying eye, but in the dark seclusion of its underground home, which it enters and emerges from in the most careful fashion, it is not to be easily discovered. At a distance of some four or five feet from the entrance of the burrow the Sheld-Duck makes her nest of down, pulled from her own breast, and in this most exquisite of nests she lays from 12 to even 16 large creamy-coloured eggs. It is a most interesting sight to see the parent birds bring down their young brood from where they have been born to the water. It is a time of great anxiety, as the ducklings are most defenceless, and the ingenuity and patience of both parents and young in overcoming their difficulties is very wonderful.

The food of the Sheld-Duck consists of slugs, worms, and shellfish, and is invariably obtained on or near the sea coast. This is one of the birds which has undoubtedly benefited by the Wild Bird Protection Act, and it is to be hoped its numbers will still continue to increase that its beauty may become more common round our shores.

Flycatcher, Spotted.—This "most familiar bird," so lovingly written of by Gilbert White, is widely distributed and not uncommon. It is a summer migrant, and may be identified by its persistent habit of perching on the top of some favourite post, from which it ever and again flits out to hawk at a passing insect, returning to the post only to repeat its flight after a short interval. Save for this habit it is so unobtrusive as to attract but little notice; its lack of song and inconspicuous colouring allowing it to pass unnoticed in many cases. The nest is placed in a variety of situations, the most favourite being possibly a recess in a tree trunk, where a branch has rotted out, or in the cleft where a branch springs from the main stem, though a clump of fern growing out from a wall or a hole in the wall itself are sites often selected. The eggs, four or five in number, are usually of a pale green ground-colour, prettily blotched with a light brown, though occasionally a clutch may be observed where the ground-colour is of decided green, with distinct spots of red-brown.

Greenfinch.—The Greenfinch is resident in Britain throughout the year, and is not uncommon. It is a heavily built bird, about six inches long, and is possessed of a very thick and powerful bill, which it uses with effect upon the seeds on which it chiefly feeds, though, like most of our other small birds, it feeds its young chiefly upon insects. The general colour of the Greenfinch or Green Linnet, as it is sometimes named, is olive green, but this is relieved, particularly in the male bird, by, on wing and tail, a light and brilliant yellow, making the bird when in flight quite brilliant.

The favourite haunt of this species is the hedgerow, small coppice, and garden, where its feeble efforts at song are to be heard in the spring months. The nest is placed often in the hawthorn hedge, sometimes in small fir trees, but is also to be found in whins and ivy-covered walls, and it is not an unusual thing to find two or even three nests in comparatively close proximity. The eggs are four or five in number and of a pale greenish ground tint with small spots of reddish brown. In size they are just larger than those of the

Common Linnet, which in appearance they closely resemble, though there is a great variation in size in the Green Linnet's eggs, with the result that occasionally the sizes overlap—that is, eggs of the Green Linnet may be found smaller than eggs of the Common Linnet, and identification is impossible without observation of the parent bird.

Gull, Lesser Black-backed.—This bird, a resident in Britain throughout the year, is numerous and widely distributed along our coast-lines. It is a large and handsome bird, white in colour but with, as the name denotes, back and wings of blue-black colour, and with a large and powerful beak. The young do not become mature until their fourth year, and are until then of a dull white colour, speckled with grey. The Lesser Black-backed Gull has few, if any good qualities, nay, is indeed both thief and murderer. They nest most usually in the vicinity of other sea fowl, and are ruthless robbers of the eggs and young of such species as Guillemots and Kittiwakes, selecting a moment when the parent bird is absent, to make a dash and seize their prey. Their nest is a slight structure of dry grasses, placed upon the green slopes of the cliffs along our coast-line and islands, but occasionally they will select an island on some fresh-water lake, or even the heather of the open moorland. The eggs are three in number, somewhat variable in shade, but usually of a greenish stone ground-colour, spotted and blotched with grey and black, and are not to be distinguished from those of the Herring-Gull, save by identification of the bird as she rises from the nest.

Kestrel.—The Kestrel is the commonest of our British hawks, and is a harmless inoffensive bird, but alas! to the indiscriminating eye of the game-keeper, a hawk is a hawk, and the mouse-loving "windhover" has oft-times to fall the victim of his gun. The food of the Kestrel consists almost entirely of mice and beetles, and it is while in pursuit of the former, that it may so frequently be seen hovering high in air, there poised for a few seconds absolutely motionless, ere it darts down to seize the mouse it has been watching. The Kestrel is a handsome bird, the general colour above dull chestnut, with a black spot in the centre of each feather, in the male bird the head and neck are steely blue, as is also the tail, the latter being tipped with white; the throat is buff, the breast and undersides reddish fawn, streaked with black. In the female the blue of the head and tail is absent. The Kestrel is partially migratory, but is found in Britain throughout the year. In the winter it will leave the high lands and descend to avail itself of the less severe conditions of the lower lying parts. A number migrate to the continent while an immigration of a certain number takes place to the British Isles from more northern countries. The Kestrel nests in cliffs, old ruins, or even in the old and deserted nest of a crow or wood-pigeon. The eggs, four, five, or even as many as seven in number, are white in ground colour, but often this is so thickly blotched and spotted with brownish red as to be barely visible.

Oyster-catcher.—This bird, known as the Sea Pie or Mussel Picker, is a bird of brilliant plumage, and though not uncommon, is in only a few localities abundant. It is resident and breeds with us, but its numbers are augmented in winter by migrants from breeding grounds further north. The length of the Oyster-catcher is some 16 inches, the upper parts are of a rich glossy black, contrasting sharply with the white of the lower parts, and giving the appearance which has suggested its name of Sea Pie. The bill is some three inches in length and of a bright blood red, the

legs are somewhat long in relation to the size of the bird, and are of a purplish orange. It is to be questioned whether the bird actually preys on oysters, but it is without doubt that both the mussel and limpet form the staple of its food, while small crustaceans and shell-fish of other kinds also form part of its diet. In the Shetlands it is particularly numerous, and it is there known as the Sbelder. On all the coast lines of these rocky islands it is to be found breeding, never in colonies, but often several pairs may be found comparatively near each other. The eggs are two or three in number, the ground colour, clay, spotted, blotched and streaked with black, and with grey underlying shell markings, the egg has a slight gloss. This bird is often to be found in small parties in winter, and they are very wary, usually sending out a loud piping whistle before the advance of the sportsman within gunshot, and so warning all neighbouring fowl that danger is near.

The nest of the Oyster-catcher consists of a slight depression on the ground, often in shingle, is shallow as though shaped by the breast of the bird and is invariably lined with pieces of white shell. A notable feature of the nesting of this bird is that it makes several of these depressions before finally fixing upon one. These mock nests are not lined like the final one, but are often the guide to the vicinity of the true nest.

Pipit, Meadow.—The Meadow-Pipit, or Tit-Lark is common and widely distributed over the whole of the British Isles. In appearance it resembles the Skylark, but is smaller in size and darker in colour. It is pre-eminently the small bird of the moorland, where it nests, carefully concealing its eggs within the shelter of a tussock of grass. The eggs, four or five in number, are of a dull bluish-white in ground-colour, but are so thickly besprinkled with spots and freckles of greyish-brown as to leave the ground-colour barely visible. This is the bird in whose nest the cuckoo frequently places its egg; and it is indeed an incongruous sight, that of the two Tit-Larks feeding the young monster palmed off upon them, which, even before fully grown, is in bulk much larger than both its foster-parents together. This species is much preyed on by the Merlin, to whose dash, in the absence of cover on the moor, it falls a somewhat easy victim. While resident with us throughout the year, it descends during the winter months from the high moorland to lower-lying and less inhospitable parts.

Plover, Ringed.—This bird, known also as the Ringed Sand Plover, and in some localities as the Sand Lark, is resident with us, and is widely distributed, breeding along the coast line in many localities, as also round the coasts of the Hebrides, Orkneys, and Shetlands. It is an insect eater, and finds a plentiful supply of food, particularly in the summer months upon the insect life present on the beach.

In colour the Ringed Plover is of a light brown on the upper parts, the forehead pure white, divided from the light brown at the back of the head by an intermediate band of black. There is also a band of black round the upper part of the breast, while the under parts of the bird are white; the tail and legs are orange, and the whole appearance of the bird assimilates in a wonderful degree with its usual surroundings. The length of the Ringed Plover is 7 inches.

During the breeding season in particular, the Sand Lark haunts those parts of the beach rich with yellow sand and covered with shingle, and were the bird to remain quiet it would be well nigh impossible for the human eye to discover it, but it greets the intruder with a low, piping whistle, and trips along with hurried

little steps, usually close to the margin of the sea, ostentatiously showing off with an overdone air of innocence as though the last thing it thought of was nesting. However, in early May, a very careful search in the neighbourhood where the birds are seen will reveal one of the most wonderful instances of nature's protective power. On the sbingle, in a slight indentation often lined with small particles of sbell may be found the four pear-shaped eggs. In ground colour bright clay, spotted with black, and so exactly resembling the sbingle on which they rest that even to remove one's eye for a moment renders it difficult immediately to re-locate them. The photograph gives an instance of how bard these eggs are to find, and when the knowledge is given that the eggs are present on this small pbotograph, this is contrasted with a search along a mile of sea sbore it will be evident how well nature cares for her own.

Redstart.—This bird is a summer migrant, arriving on our shores usually in the earlier part of April. The males precede the females by a few days, and it is at this period that this species is most usually to be observed, as later, after pairing, they become sbyter, and are then much less in evidence. The male is a very handsome bird, above slatey grey, the forehead pure white, the throat black, while the under parts are a rich orange chestnut. The tail coverts are also of this chestnut colour approaching to red, and this, combined with the quaint lateral movement of the tail, has given the bird its popular name of Fire Tail. The length of the Redstart is between five and six inches.

The Redstart is widely distributed though in no district very numerous. It haunts the old walls surrounding woodlands and quiet country roadways. Its food consists mostly of insects, many of which it captures after the manner of a flycatcher. In autumn this species varies this diet with seeds and fruits.

The nest of the Redstart is always placed in concealment and is sometimes very difficult to find; holes in old walls are favourite sites, while cavities in old trees and similar situations are frequently resorted to. The eggs are five, six, and sometimes seven in number; the colour resembles that of the egg of the Hedge Accentor, but is slightly paler; while the egg is rather smaller in size, more of a pointed oval and with a greater polish on the surface.

Ring-Dove.—The Ring Dove, Wood-Pigeon, or as it is known in Scotland, Cushat-Doo is a large and handsome bird. It is resident and now breeds freely in almost every locality, rearing several broods each season, as do most of the genus. At one time it was not so numerous in Scotland, but of late years the Ring-Dove has increased in numbers till in certain counties its depredations have become a source of serious menace to the farmer. In Berwickshire some years ago a systematic raid was made upon these birds, resulting in the destruction of something over 100,000 in one month. As their chief food consists of peas, seeds, and grain, there is little doubt that when their numbers become excessive the agriculturalist suffers, even though it is taken into consideration that they also consume the seeds of noxious weeds.

In autumn the favourite food of the Cushat-Doo is the beech mast on which they feed to repletion, and good sport may be obtained by hiding up in the vicinity of a beech wood at this season of the year. The length of the Ring-Dove is some 16 inches, its colour is slaty blue, washed with a vinous tinge, and neck and breast possess the rich metallic lustre common to the Dove tribe. On either side of the neck is a large spot of white feathers, from which it derives its name of Ring-Dove. The bill and feet are of a bright coraal red.

The Ring-Dove in its usual haunt is a shy and wary bird, it is more frequently heard than seen. Through the spring and summer its low sweet crooning love song may be heard in almost any woodland, while its noisy departure when startled gives one the idea of it almost crashing through the overhead foliage. Strangely enough this bird has of recent years become a denizen of the parks of London, and the countryman is astonished to see his native Cusbat, usually so shy and wary, here tame and confiding, so much so, as to actually take food from the outstretched hand.

The nest of the Ring-Dove is frequently placed on the branch of a fir tree though it will select ivy covered trees and various other sites. It is built rudely of a few dried twigs, and is frequently so loosely constructed as to show from below, through the interstices of its frame, the two white eggs which it contains.

Rook.—The Rook, often erroneously called the Crow, is one of the most familiar and widely distributed of British birds. It is to be found everywhere, save in the outer islands, and even to those spots is occasionally a visitor. The plumage of the Rook, as seen in the sunshine of early spring, has a rich dark blue gloss; the length of the bird is seventeen inches, and in the mature form, the face is devoid of feathers, giving it an unsightly and almost repulsive look. As is well known, the Rook is gregarious, both in winter and during the nesting season, which begins early in March, at which time they build their nests in colonies, known as rookeries. In the main the rook is undoubtedly the farmer's friend, ridding his ground of the grubs of many destructive insects. The eggs are three to five in number, pale green in ground colour, spotted and blotched with blackish brown.

Snipe, Common.—In size the Common Snipe occupies an intermediate place between the Great Snipe and the Jack Snipe. Its length is some ten inches, and its chief characteristic is its long bill, which measures about three inches, or not far short of one-third of its total length. When in flight it appears to be a dark brown bird, but on close examination its plumage is found to be of a rich brown, each feather centred with glossy black, and in certain parts, particularly the tail coverts and tail itself, the colour is exquisitely delicate and beautiful. The eye of the Snipe is placed very far back on the head, and this is no doubt to enable the bird to freely indulge in the probing of the soft mud of river bank and pool edge, which is the means by which it finds its food. This consists chiefly of worms, in the capture of which it is guided by a delicate and wonderfully constructed nerve which extends down the whole length of its bill.

The Snipe is resident in our Isles, and breeds in many counties, chiefly in Ireland and in Scotland. Its numbers are, however, enormously increased in winter when an invasion from north and east takes place to our shores. It is a bird much valued by the sportsman, more on account of the difficulty of bagging it, than for its edible properties, the bird being so small. When the Snipe is flushed it rises with a shrill cry of "Scape," "Scape," in rapid zig-zags until at a little distance from the intruder, when it makes off in a straight line at high speed. The nest of the Snipe is placed upon the ground, usually in a tuft of grass or sedge, the depression is lined with grass, and contains four pear-shaped eggs, often very handsome, the ground colour stone spotted and blotched with rich black.

Sparrow-Hawk.—This bold raptorial bird is resident with us during the year, and despite the most persistent persecution of the species by the game-keeper over the length and breadth of the land,

still manages to maintain itself in considerable numbers. The female is, as throughout the raptorial family, considerably larger than the male, and it is unfortunately unquestionable that she destroys, especially at the breeding season, numbers of the young of the game birds near whose haunts she invariably nests. The site selected by the Sparrow-Hawk for nesting purposes, is frequently a corner of a wood or on the edge of a glade inside a wood, and so suitable a position does this site appear to be that pair after pair of Sparrow-Hawks may be shot from the nest only to be replaced each succeeding year by another couple. The male is blue-black above, the breast white suffused with brown, barred with a darker shade of brown, while his mate is rather lighter in colour, the breast white barred with ashy grey. The legs of both are yellow, with toes greatly developed, giving great grasping power, and ending in needle-pointed talons. The eggs, five or six in number, are of bluish-white ground colour, richly blotched and marked with reddish-brown.

Starling.—This bird is familiar to all, though at one time it was a comparatively rare bird, particularly in Scotland, where Sir Walter Scott, it is recorded, rode 30 miles to see a nest of young, so uncommon was this bird in his day. Through whatever cause, it is unquestionable that the number of Starlings in Britain, where it is a resident and widely distributed breeding bird, within recent years has greatly increased. In addition to our own native birds, enormous numbers of Starlings flock to our shores in the autumn months, and one of the most wonderful and interesting sights in bird life is to be witnessed, when in the darkening hour of an autumn afternoon one waits near one of their roosting places, from every point of the compass at short intervals single birds, little bunches, larger companies, and great flocks may be seen winging their way to the shelter where they pass the night. The writer has on more than one occasion witnessed the gathering of these birds, comprising hundreds of thousands, in one comparatively small shrubbery, where their whistling and chattering resembled the noise of many waters. Before finally settling these birds rise again and again into the air, wheel round several times, and then pour themselves down from on high into the bushes before they finally settle to rest for the night, and to see these countless thousands of birds wheel round, then suddenly turn, almost at right angles, as though animated by one single impulse, is suggestive of some strange understanding between the units, which can enable the mass to act so simultaneously.

The Starling is some eight inches in length, and is of a dark blue colour, washed with brilliant metallic green and blue lustre, though a grey spot at the point of each feather subdues this brilliance and imparts a brownish tinge. It is an indefatigable worker, and may be seen in pairs or small family parties obtaining its food, which consists of slugs, small worms, grubs, and various forms of insect life, by carefully examining almost every individual inch of lawn and pasture over which it runs with hurried eager steps.

The Starling builds its loosely-constructed nest, consisting of a few straws, in holes, frequently in hollow trees, but in all sorts of situations, such as holes in walls, drain pipes, in chimneys or corners of the roofs of sheds and byres, while a favourite situation is in holes in the thatch of an old cottage. The eggs are of an exquisite and delicate pale blue, unspotted, and number from five to eight, or even nine, though it has been suggested that in the case of numbers, such as the last, they are the product of two hens.

Tern, Arctic.—This bird is not to be distinguished from the Common Tern save by the expert, and, indeed, it takes a very exact knowledge for even the student to determine between the Common and Arctic Tern. The latter is very slightly smaller in size, being, perhaps, only half an inch less in length, but in general colour, appearance, and habit it in no way differs from its congener. The one infallible test lies in the difference of the length of the tarsus, which in the Arctic Tern is longer than in the Common Tern.

The Arctic Tern is the only species found nesting in the Shetlands, where it breeds in large colonies on some of the out-lying skerries. Further south it is not uncommon to find colonies of both Arctic and Common Tern breeding in close proximity. Generally speaking, those nests nearest the actual shore belong to the Arctic, the Common Tern not infrequently occupying a site farther from the sea, often in swampy parts or amongst the sandy dunes. The eggs of the Arctic Tern are two in number, very seldom three, and resemble closely those of the Common Tern, though, if distinction can be made, they are possibly a trifle smaller and more boldly marked, though the eggs of each species run through so many variations as to quite overlap each other in this regard. The Arctic Tern is, like the Common Tern, a bird of very powerful flight, which it can sustain hour after hour unweariedly. It also is a summer visitant to our shores, and during the winter season distributes itself along the shores of Africa and further east.

Tern, Common.—This species is a summer migrant to our shores, along which it is widely distributed. It does not extend to the Shetlands and in the Orkneys and the extreme north of Scotland it is outnumbered by the Arctic Tern, but it is the more numerous along the southern parts of the Scottish coast and on the coasts of England.

The Common Tern is an elegant bird in regard to shape, and its plumage is delicately coloured. It is known as the Sea Swallow, and owes this name to its resemblance in shape to the latter bird. It is, however, much larger, being some 15 inches in length, and in colour it is above of pearly grey, the head being capped with black, bill and feet of brilliant blood red, and it is only owing to the length of the wing and the long forked tail that any resemblance can be traced entitling it to the name of Sea Swallow. The Tern in its manner of obtaining food comes between the diving sea fowl, such as the Gannet, and the surface feeders, such as the Gulls. It feeds chiefly on the fry of fish, and in pursuit of these passes with hovering flight along the shore, its head downturned with beak at right angles to its breast, every now and again darting from above and striking the water in a cloud of spray, but it at no time appears to descend more than a few inches below the surface. The Common Tern breeds in colonies, always near water and usually on the sea coast, a favourite site being a low-lying islet. Occasionally these colonies are very large, the nests usually placed in such close proximity as to make it difficult for a visitor to avoid stepping on the eggs, while the ear is assailed by the ceaseless cry, resembling k-rr, shrill and long drawn out, of the birds disturbed from their nests. The intrusion is vehemently resented by many a downward swoop towards the visitor's head. These birds seem to get along with little sleep, as a visit to their nesting place at any hour of day or night reveals the same restless clamour. The nest of the Common Tern is placed upon the ground. The eggs are two or three, frequently three, in number, and are of a stone or olive ground colour, spotted with black, with fainter under shell markings of a purplish tinge.

Tern, Sandwich.—This is the largest of the genus which visits our shores, to which it is a summer migrant. It is also of stouter build than the two earlier-mentioned species, and its bill is stronger and of heavier make. In colour it resembles the Common Tern, but is rather darker, while the bill and feet, instead of being of the brilliant red of the Common and Arctic Tern, are black, the bill tipped with yellowish. The black cap of the Sandwich Tern is elongated, the hindmost feathers forming what might be almost termed a crest. At one time this bird visited our shores in considerable numbers, breeding in colonies at various parts, but unfortunately it is no longer to be found in such large numbers, though at various places carefully guarded colonies still exist, and are, indeed, in certain places increasing in numbers. In habit the Sandwich Tern resembles its smaller cousins, feeding on the fry of fish which it captures in a similar way. The eggs of the Sandwich Tern are to be found at the end of May or in early June. They are placed on the ground in a slight plate-like depression, sometimes entirely unlined, sometimes lined with a few pieces of grass. The eggs are two and three in number, usually two, and are very rich and handsome in appearance. The ground colour varies from stone to buff, and they are richly spotted with black, with strong purplish brown under-markings. A favourite site for the breeding-place of the Sandwich Tern is on an island. There is a considerable colony on one of the Farne Isles, where the birds are carefully protected.

Titmouse, Long-tailed.—This feathered mite is a resident with us, widely distributed, and in certain districts fairly common. As will be seen in the illustration it is possessed of a tail longer than its body, which is of a dull whitish-brown colour, slightly suffused with pale rose. It is indeed a charming sight, to see the little family, consisting of the two parent birds, with their six, eight, nine, or even ten young, flitting along from tree to tree as is their habit in the autumn months. Their tiny size combined with their length of tail renders them quite distinct from any of our other birds. The Long-tailed Tit builds what is unquestionably the most beautiful of British nests, an elongated structure of moss thickly covered with lichen, and felted together with cobwebs, with a small aperture beneath the upper end, and cosily lined with feathers. One patient observer took the trouble to count the number of feathers contained in one nest, to find the surprising number of over 2000. The eggs, usually ten or eleven in number, are extremely small, pure white, and spotted with tiny dots of light brown. With the exception of the Golden-Crested Wren, the egg of the Long-tailed Tit is the smallest laid by any of our British birds. The instinct is surely a marvellous one, which enables these feathered mites to feed without favour and in due turn the ten hungry tots contained in their cradle.



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