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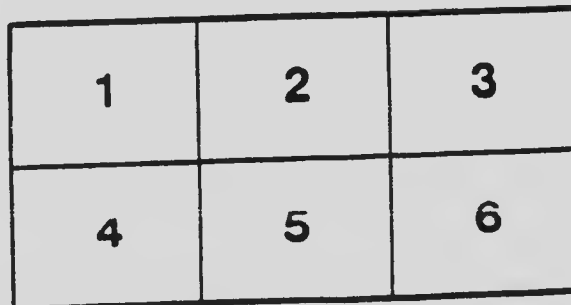
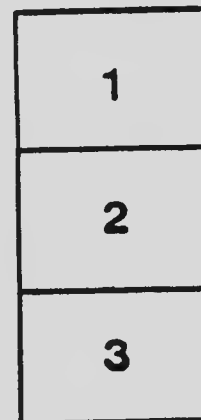
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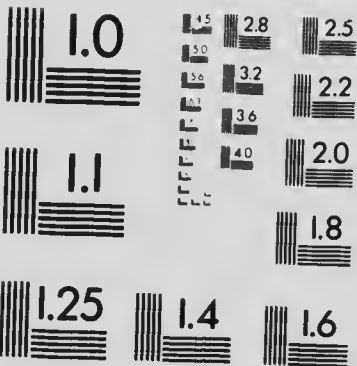
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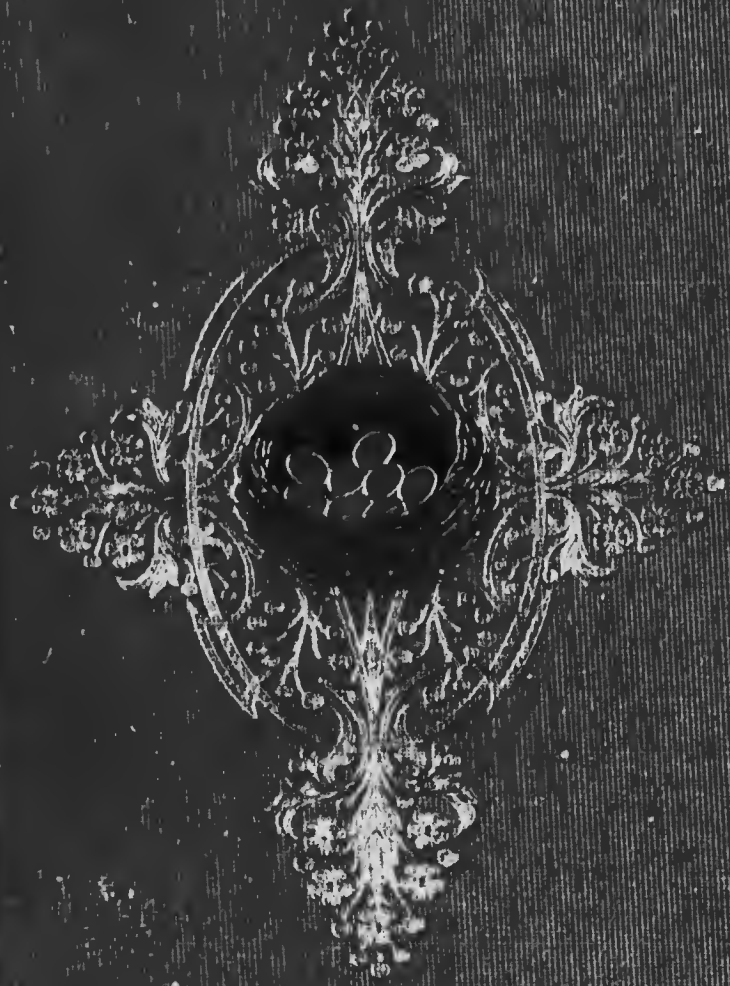
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HOME LIFE IN BIRD-LAND







NEST AND EGGS OF CURLEW, PHOTOGRAPHED ON THE SUMMIT OF A
WELSH MOUNTAIN.

HOME LIFE

WILD-LAND

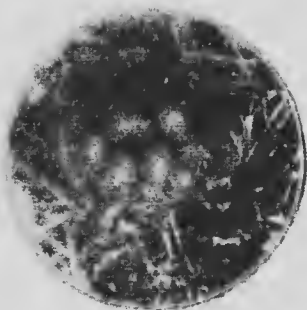
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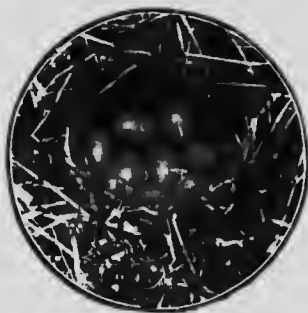
REEDS AND EGGS OF CREEP, PHOTOGRAPHED ON THE SUMMIT OF A
WELSH MOUNTAIN

HOME LIFE IN BIRD-LAND

BY OLIVER G. PIKE

AUTHOR OF 'WOODLAND, FIELD, AND SHORE,' 'IN BIRD-LAND
WITH FIELD GLASS AND CAMERA,' 'HILLSIDE, ROCK, AND DALE,
ETC. ETC.

ILLUSTRATED WITH OVER EIGHTY ORIGINAL
PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN DIRECT FROM WILD NATURE
BY THE AUTHOR



TORONTO
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NOTE

‘THE earth is full of the glory of the Lord,’ but some of us have not opened our eyes wide to see it. Mr. Pike’s delightful book will help us to observe, with a renewed zest and a fresh clearness, the ways of God in His dealings with some humbler members of His glorious creation; it will quicken our perception of the endless wonder and the gracious beauty of the world of Nature; and it will vividly renew our sense of the infinite wisdom of Him who doeth all things well—who provides the birds of the air with their nests, and without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground. When the dwellers of the air salute the dawn with their cheerful songs, they are taking their part in the great choruses of praise which daily ascends to the Maker and Father of us all. Every morning, with the birds, let us lift up our souls to God, and flee unto Him ‘as a bird to the mountain.’

The main charm of Mr. Pike’s book, in addition to the testimony it bears to the

wisdom and power of the Creator, lies in the unaffected, enthusiastic delight of the author in the Bird-land of which he writes so vividly. When you have read our author's narrative of one of his adventures among his feathered friends, you almost feel that you must yourself at once proceed on an expedition into the new territories of knowledge and experience that he has opened up. We are convinced that this book will not only be read with ever-growing delight to the last page, but will give a powerful stimulus to the loving and reverent study of the gentle creatures whom Mr. Pike knows so well, and of whom he writes with such spontaneous joy.

We desire to call special attention to the large number of remarkable illustrations which are reproduced in this volume. Bird-photography is an art which Mr. Pike has long studied, and in which he has achieved remarkable success. The ingenuity, skill, and patience that he has shown in his search for faithful pictures of his Bird-friends have been truly marvellous: but the results, as readers of this volume will admit, have been worth the labour, and constitute a very valuable addition to Bird-lore.

P R E F A C E

FOR opportunities of photographing some of the rarer nests shown in this book, I am indebted to Mr. E. D. Thomas, J.P., and Colonel Evan Thomas, both of whom have done, and continue to do, so much to encourage the breeding of rare birds by protecting the eggs of some of those species which have for years added attraction to their grounds. It is owing to such action that the birds referred to are not so scarce as they would have been, if their friends had not undertaken to forbid the shooting of them, or the taking of their eggs. It would be a fine thing for our rarer breeding birds if there were more of such genuine bird-lovers to protect and favour them.

I also have to thank the Rev. D. Edmondson

Owen, another good lover of birds, for giving me the opportunity of studying Bird-life amongst the Welsh hills during a memorable three weeks' visit at the picturesque Rectory of Llanelwedd, on the banks of the ever-charming river Wye. I shall not readily forget the long rambles we had together; I not only increased my knowledge of birds, but I became more fully acquainted with certain ancient castles and battlefields of the Principality. The facts which my guide was able to tell me about such sights and scenes, naturally added a thousandfold to the interest of our adventures in a land of beauty and of romantic historical memories.

The photographs of the nests of some of our better-known birds have been taken in the grounds of the following gentlemen: Captain John Taylor, Captain Otto Gurlitt, Mr. Ernest Smith, and Mr. W. K. Robertson; and my cordial thanks are due to these, for their kindness in allowing me the run of their grounds, and even for letting me know when nests were discovered, and for the help rendered while photographing nests built in places difficult of access.

Preface

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Mr. Percy Hanson and Mr. H. E. Forrest have both given me valuable help in securing some of the pictures illustrating this volume.

I shall always be glad to hear of haunts of rare birds, with a view to photographing them or their nests; the locality of such places will be held in strictest secrecy.

O. G. P.

WISCHMORE HILL,
MIDDLESEX,
May, 1905.

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CHAPTER I
BIRD-LAND

I HAVE been asked from time to time why I use the word 'Bird-land,' and some of my questioners have even wondered where Bird-land can be. I may say at once that by Bird-land I simply mean the woods, the fields, and the seashore. Bird-land is no secluded private park, nor safely guarded breeding haunt of my friends the birds; it is a name given to the country at large, and I chose the term because, although I am a lover of Nature in general, birds are my special favourites.

Yes, the whole of the country is Bird-land, whether it be on the mountain-top, on the marsh, or elsewhere. With what a variety of scenes have I found my feathered companions surrounded! infinitely diversified, but all beautiful. I can see beauty and the hand of an infinite and

all-loving Creator in all the ever-varying parts of the country, whether it be a bleak, cold, bare moor, a fruitful meadow, a fresh-running stream, a dense, darkened wood, a rough marsh, or amongst the eternal snows of the great silent Alps. In all these places I have met my feathered friends.

The little dashing Merlin and the loud-calling Curlew have often been my only companions amidst the moors and hills of Wales and Scotland: yet in such bare spots, where, as far as the eye could reach, there has been nothing but dry, coarse grass—no trees, no bushes, just the sunshine, grass, the wind—and my friends the birds. What a glorious place a meadow is in the summer-time before the mowers have been at work, when the tall grasses wave gently to and fro to the music of the soft wind! The birds are singing for very joy. Over all, high up in the deep, deep blue, the Skylark carols his lay of love, while down below Whinchats and Pipits pipe their shorter songs. The gently flowing stream and the wildly rushing river have also their birds. It is one of the chief charms of

The Buzzard's Wild Cry 19

Bird-land, that in each different part which we may explore we find a distinct class of birds. In the great dense forests of the



REDSTART'S NEST UNDER TILES.

West and North I have found the Buzzard at home, where his wild cry is the only sound; and small birds, which love the outskirts of the wood, are absent. Then on the marshes of

the country, and the marshes of the seashore, I have found many an interesting friend; and what can be more sweet, more elevating, than to be alone with Nature, and with Nature's God, on a far-stretching mere on a bright winter evening? The moonlight adds a weird exaggeration to the outlook: the little shore-birds appear to be much larger than they really are, and the great Geese, as they strut along, almost resemble superior beings. The sea sings a solemn chant as it slowly comes up to flood the mud or sand; the stillness of the air is broken by the many calls, some recognised, others unknown, of the birds as they move away, while the eastern sky gets lighter.

Such a place truly seems to represent solitude. Yet there is a deeper solitude even than this—that of the mighty snow-capped mountains. Amidst these eternal silences I have seen the Eagle in the majesty of his might; he, too, a lover of solitude. Look at him as he soars up higher, and still higher, with the gigantic snow-covered peaks beyond and beyond. At my feet there is a clear precipice of over one

Bird-land is Everywhere 21

thousand feet : in this vast amphitheatre he revolves in his strength, looking indeed as though he were the real monarch of the hills and of space. Here we see bird-flight in perfection : those great wings outspread to catch the icy winds which rush up the snowy steeps, sustaining the Eagle's weight even in mid-air, and enabling him to rise with greatest ease until he is even higher than the most lofty peak, and the ragged, rough white sentinels of the sky are left silent and solitary far below. Those who have not seen this great brown Eagle alone in his chosen home may despise him, but I know full well that he bears his rightful title of king of Bird-land.

Thus even the highest peaks, clad in their covering of everlasting snow, are still Bird-land : and although a contrast to fair meadows or bleak marshes, they are nevertheless still intensely interesting, for if only we keep a sharp look-out, birds are to be seen nearly everywhere, and that is why in my writing I have given to the country-side the name of Bird-land.

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF SPRING

A FEW days after the more severe frosts of winter had come to an end, I was walking alongside a hedgerow, and almost hidden in the grass I saw a tiny patch of yellow. On moving the grass aside with my stick, I saw that this was a primrose. The warmth of the sun had made this pioneer of a more cheerful season open its eyes, as it were, and now it was pushing its way through the stronger grass to receive more fully the beams of the stimulating spring sun. As I stood and looked on this first gleam of colour on that hedgeside bank, it seemed as though I saw in that little yellow flower an allegory. It uttered a prophecy that would surely be fulfilled; it foretold the universal resurrection of Nature that would soon take the place of winter deadness:

it told me of the coming days of happiness and life. I seemed to hear the songs of birds and the call of the Cuckoo, as he heralds the hours of summer. I saw the Swallow skimming with graceful flight over silvery pools lit up with the gladsome light of summer: I saw the Skylark hovering in the deep-blue sky of spring, and I heard his happy notes as he neared the vault of blue. I saw fields of yellow buttercups, and hedges thick with may-blossom: I saw the wild roses hanging over the slowly flowing brook. The whole pageant of spring seemed to move before my eyes.

It was only a single bloom of the wild primrose I looked at! Only a primrose, yet the harbinger of that joyous season when Nature is roused by infinite power until everything around, each tree and flower, seems, as it were, to be making an attempt to excel its neighbour in beauty, and each bird to be competing with those around in a great outburst of song. I left the primrose there: I did not like to pick the first wild-flower, for it might have a story to tell to others, as it had spoken to me.

As I stand looking, a Skylark rises from a green meadow near, and soars towards the blue with a glorious outburst of passionate, loving music. It is his first song of welcome to spring. How sweet it sounds! Like the primrose bloom, the notes are a reminder of future joys; and although so simple and homely, there seems to be in them a great and wonderful story. The brown bird soars into the vault of heaven, singing as though his little heart could not contain the rapture he feels. At last he reaches his limit: he makes several efforts to rise higher, but fails; and then with outspread wings he slowly descends to the earth.

Down, slowly down, but still singing; and all the countryside around seems hushed into sympathy, listening, as it were, to his first song of welcome, and realising that these notes which come from such a small creature in the vast blue dome of heaven are the song of a genuine harbinger of spring, a bird that helps to make the spring-time what it is — an outburst of life going on into summer. Still he drops, moving in spiral circles towards the greensward, singing



As I stand looking, a Skylark rises from a green meadow near, and soars towards the blue with a glorious outburst of passionate, loving music. 'It is his first song of welcome to spring. How sweet it sounds!' Like the primrose bloom, the notes are a reminder of a time joyous and although so simple and homely, there seems to be in them a great and wonderful story. The brown bird soars into the vault of heaven, singing as though his little heart could not contain the rapture he feels. At last he reaches his limit; he makes several efforts to rise higher, but fails; and then with outspread wings he slowly descends to the earth.

Descending slowly down, but still singing, and circling in a wide, airy orbit, he is hatched into a meadow, listening, as it were, to his first song of welcome, and realising that these notes which come from a tiny, small creature in the vast dome of heaven are the song of a genuine messenger of spring, a bird that helps to make us realise what it is, an outburst of life and joy into sunshine. Still he drops, moving slowly and steadily towards the ground, singing



COAL-TIT.

The Pageant of Nature 27

all the time: then, when he reaches the top of the highest oak by the stream, his tired wings close, and he comes swiftly to the ground. There is silence for some moments—silence and solitude: and then a Blackbird trills his notes, flutters on to another holly-bush, and sings again. A Thrush takes up the challenge, a small brown Wren from the summit of a post also sends out his far-reaching notes. Hedge-sparrows sing from the depth of the black hedges, and several Robins, not to be left out of the chorus, join in the opening concert of spring.

Once more there is silence. I turn again to my yellow flower. Is it mere fancy, or has it really assumed a brighter hue? It almost seems as though the fulness of life which is in the air of returning spring has imparted some of its energy to the modest harbinger beneath the hedge. As I look at it again I seem to forget winter, and to see once again the brighter side of things.

The pageant of reviving Nature passes before me: it is the glory of this resurrection that makes the birds sing. Think of the beauty

which is theirs! Go into an orchard at early morning when the trees are in bloom, and listen to their songs. It is when the flowers in their thousand forms are fresh with the dew of morning, when the grasses bend with hundreds of tiny sparkling mirrors, that the birds sing their best songs. I hear all these and much more; and as the pageant passes, more flowers seem to come and go, until the lovely veronica arrives. I can never pass this by. The large patches of this tiny flower with its thousand petals seem as though it had received something of the blue from above; the flowers are like so many tiny mirrors, with the deep colour of a fairy Eastern sky reflected in their forms. The spring-time is so short, the glory of it passes so quickly, that when I see these flowers which I love so well, I feel that I cannot leave them without pensive regret.

It seems that I must linger in the midst of the long grass, charming with flowers, and live in the midst of the luxury which is theirs, or remain to hear the Blackbird's liquid song. I feel within my own heart something of all this

The Thoughts of God 29

fulness of life which the sun has stimulated. Flowers, grass, and the boundless fresh foliage refresh me with their newborn beauty: they impart something of the pure joy which they seem to have themselves. God gives the birds their sweet songs that we may listen to them and enjoy them: the exceeding beauty and surpassing splendour of reviving Nature should be an inspiration to us: for in every song there is a new thought, and fresh ideas in every petal.

But my reverie of flowers and song is broken by the Owl's awaking call, and looking around, I see the land is bare, the trees and hedges leafless, and the chill wind of evening is rocking the taller pines. The only gleam of colour besides that of the grass is the little yellow flower almost lost sight of in the ditch. Yet in this primrose I seem to see the story of a thousand destinies the whole story of spring.

CHAPTER III

WHEN THE SWALLOWS COME

THE primrose was the first flower to tell me that spring had come; then I saw it in the green buds unfolding in the warmth of the sun. I knew that spring had come, for the Blackbird told me so when he sang his wild song first from tree-top, then from more lowly bushes. All came on so quickly; soon after the last days of winter the signs of a genial change came on apace, until the spring-time, the most joyous time of the whole year, was actually seen in outbursts of life and beauty on every hand.

Give me an orchard for beauty in the spring days. As I now write, the resplendent trees, each with 'blossoms snowed along the bough,' are all around; branches, heavy with flowers of promise, are waving in the warm air; the tender green leaves—the most delicate green—are just

The Old Orchard

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showing between the masses of blossom. The love I have for this old orchard has made me write about it before, but we cannot exhaust a world like this ; each ramble in its sylvan byways brings new revelations. My friends the birds love such a retreat quite as much as I do, for every tree has its feathered singer. Blackcap, Garden-warbler, and Willow-wren give out their sweet tunes, and many petals float down on the still air as they hop from branch to branch, searching for insects which we cannot see, and which are harmful to the fruit-crop coming on.

The avenues of pear-blossom are the grandest now, although later on, when this is over, the apple-trees make a more beautiful show ; but now the great masses of pear-bloom, looking in the distance like a charming contrast to winter snow, give a promise of a rich autumn crop.

All around there is a continual cheerful hum : my bees, which are leaving their hives by the house, are out in force ; there are hundreds of thousands hard at work in the trees, and as many more are hastening home heavily laden, each with a tiny drop of honey, which has been sucked from

32 When the Swallows come

the sweet rich blossoms. How bees seem to glory in the sun! They revel in its warmth as well as in the attractions of the trees. A friend who was standing talking to me a few days ago, asked what that noise was which he likened to the hum of an engine working at great speed: this was caused by the rapidly vibrating wings of my bees flying to and from their hives.

But it is the birds which make me love this orchard: their spring-time songs draw one amongst the trees, and make one wish to stay there. The little Garden-warbler is one of my favourites: he is so tame and confiding, and already he is searching with his mate for a suitable gooseberry-bush in which to build.

But as I stand watching all these I become conscious of a great commotion in the tree on my right. Peering through the blossom, I see the cause. Two spiteful Willow-wrens are fighting for a mate which each of them wants: and as they cannot both be gratified, they settle their differences by doing their best to tear one another to pieces. As they flutter their wings and hop from branch to twig in their passion,

Fighting for a Mate 33

many a petal flutters down. There is no doubt they are in a violent mood: for they dash about and give out curious little notes that they only utter when angry. When more blossoms have



YOUNG MISSILE-THRUSHES.

been knocked off, one seems to gain the advantage, and he follows this up with continued pecks and a shower of scratches from his sharp claws, until at last, after a (happily) short but desperate encounter, the battle is lost and won. The

34 When the Swallows come

victor, to let the hen know that he has won her, sings out his loudest by way of a song of victory. When this is finished he starts again and again, ever trying to begin in a higher pitch, until the excitement threatens to be too much for him.

We wander on and leave this love-scene, however, for there will be plenty of similar incidents before we reach the orchard's distant corner.

The most delicate green of the whole year is now seen on the pear-trees. The white bloom amongst their beautiful foliage is indeed something to make one often halt to admire; but how quickly this fair show passes away, to be superseded by the darker green of summer! I have seen the whole countryside changed into a deeper tint after an early summer shower. Down beyond the orchard there is a hanging wood, and looking at this I see almost every conceivable tint of green, besides many other hues.

There is a sweet piping from a blossom-covered branch, and the black head of a Bullfinch appears. He seems to be busy as he hops about, pulling and pecking at the blossoms; yet if we

examine these as they fall, every one is found to be diseased in some way. The poor Bullfinch has a bad reputation for damaging fruit-blossom; certainly he does do harm, but on the other hand he does good by destroying many troublesome insect pests.

The growth of flowers beneath the trees, principally dandelions, seems, as it were, to be trying to catch the life-giving sunbeams as they play or flit about the grass. The patches of light are not still for a moment, for as the branches move to and fro they constantly let the sun's cheerful rays through, and one moment they make the bright yellow flowers brighter, the next they shine on the tall grass. *Cuckoo! cuckoo!* cries out the bird, and when heard so close the call is almost startling. Cuckoos seem to delight in this orchard, and many an egg is safely placed in the nest of a Finch or Pipit cosily hidden amongst the branches or on the ground. The best time to see the Cuckoo is in the early morning, when the dew is on the grass. When walking in the orchard on a spring-time

36 When the Swallows come

morning, I have almost trodden on a Cuckoo before it knew I was near.

If we follow the stream at the bottom of the orchard we come to a good-sized lake, and it is here we nearly always see the Swallow for the first time. When the trees are fading in autumn, this is also the place where we last see them before their long and perilous journey to a more sunny home in the South. On this morning in particular the silvery ripples are catching the early sunbeams; and twittering Swallows seem quite at home on their old lake, although they have only been back here for a day or two. Moor-hens and Coots are swimming about, and a Little Grebe plays on the water near the island. On this tree-covered island a pair of Swans have their nest, and a great structure it is, too: I went over in a rickety old punt and photographed it.

A friend who tried a similar feat a few days later was not so successful. The punt was all right so long as you kept it level and made a quick passage from shore to island and *vice versa*. It filled with water fairly quickly, however, and unless one was swift and sure in

The Joy of the Bird-lover 37

his actions the weather-worn craft was liable to go under the flood. My friend succeeded in going across, and took his photograph; but



BLACKCAP (HEN) SITTING.

on the return voyage the punt capsized in mid-stream, and he had to swim ashore.

Orchard, stream, and meadow are alike full of life at this joyous time of the year, when the

38 When the Swallows come

Swallows come. It is to a bird-lover the best time of all the changing seasons, and many a happy hour can be spent in a meadow or by the lake-side, or, better still, in an old-time orchard. In such a retreat Swallows twitter their sweetest and loudest songs. While skimming about with a sea of bloom beneath, they find an abundance of food, and no doubt feel that they must sing, just to complete the chorus kept up by Blackbird, Garden-warbler, Blackcap, Thrush, and a dozen other songsters. All of these seem to be doing their best to make the spring day brighter and to increase the beauty of the winsome hours when the Swallows are on the wing. As we listen to this orchard music the sunbeams seem more brilliant and playful, the blossoms more full of life, and the sky a deeper blue: gentle spring has come down alike on hill, valley, and plain.

CHAPTER IV

THE BUZZARD'S HOME

I was in one of the most beautiful and picturesque of valleys I have ever seen. On either side were mighty grey rocks, covered with green, showing many tints of lovely colour. Trailing ivy covered their sides, while mountain-ash bushes were here and there seen jutting out from the crevices. Below there was the bubbling music of a stream of clearest water, as varied in its reflected colours as the hill-sides. On one of the great rounded rocks that rose from the river bed there sat a Dipper, which bobbed its head several times, then entered the shallow water and probed for insects hidden under the smaller pebbles. Some of these rocks were covered with moss, others were bare, but all looked as though they might have rolled down from the giant cliffs above. On the grassy



AUTHOR PHOTOGRAPHING BUZZARD'S NEST.

My First Buzzard

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slope, showing much broken slate, which rose from the water's edge to the ivied rocks, there were numberless flowers of spring not yet open. Primroses and bluebells, bracken, and a dozen others were there, only waiting for the spring-time sun to open their petals and leaves. The roadway along which we were driving, and which followed the stream-side, was not straight for forty yards: but all this added to its beauty. It was altogether a magnificent picture of wild and rugged Nature, one view in an ever-changing panorama.

This particular scene remains as a permanent photograph in my mind's eye; for it was here I first saw the Buzzard. I had often wondered where I should be privileged first to see this large and rare bird of prey. I had read so much about the species being almost extinct in this country, that there seemed a probability of my never seeing a Buzzard at all. But at last, and just over the brow of a vast grey cliff, were six of these majestic birds slowly circling round and round, ever getting nearer, as it seemed, to the azure blue of spring's more sunny

sky. No wonder I still remember that scene. Six of the species all in one party, and my first view of the Buzzard! It was enough to make any one excited, not to mention the fact that I was an enthusiastic bird-lover. I watched these six birds until they were mere dots in the sky.

We then drove onwards, and later in the evening we were snugly housed in a delightful little Welsh inn, hidden from the outside world by range after range of mighty black hills and many beautiful valleys watered by musically flowing streams. Since that memorable time I have spent many happy hours in the Buzzard's haunt, and I have seen as many as thirty of these uncommon birds in one day. I have also been entertained with the uncommon sight of a Buzzard, Kite, and Raven all in one party.

In the morning we leave the river-side inn, and, accompanied by our friend the keeper, we roam over the surrounding hills, climb rugged cliffs, and wade through rivers and marsh-land in search of the Buzzard's eyrie. It is not play, nesting in such a rough country, but downright hard work, which requires all

our pluck and nerve if we wish to be successful. After a day's walk, lasting from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., one may be excused for being tired out, and more than ready for the excellent dinner provided by our host.

In searching for the first Buzzard's nest we tramped for half the day over



BUZZARD'S NEST.

rough, undulating country, skirting the hills wherever possible; for although it means a greater distance, it is far less tiring to go round than over a hill. The great moors across which we walked were very rough, and the coarse mountain grass, growing in large clumps, sometimes made walking a difficult matter. After all, however, it was a less tiring walk than continuous travelling on level town pavement, for this mountain grass seems to have a spring about it which helps one along. I retain vivid recollections of that ramble; for not only was it a very successful one from our standpoint, but it was also an exceedingly hot day, and we experienced one of the roughest and longest walks during our adventurous tour in Wales.

After tramping slowly up a marshy hill, of which it seemed as though we never should reach the top, we found a delightful little spring, and refreshing ourselves with a cooling draught of its water, we walked, or rather climbed, slowly down the other side. What a view was the one now before us! A vast winding valley—grey and green, slate making the one colour, and grass

showing the other. Beyond the opposite side of this bare wide area there stretched several ranges of hills, partially hidden in the blue haze of summer heat. There was not a tree in sight, with the exception of one or two growing amidst the steep rocks on our side of the valley. The only sound was the still common music of running water: far, far below there appeared a tiny silver streak, the pure stream from which the welcome sound arose. A Meadow-pipit, soaring up, poured out his sweet, tremulous song—the only sign of bird-life in this bleak and wild spot. There were some sheep dotted here and there on the hill-side opposite, and now and then we heard their familiar bleat. Great shadows cast by the clouds travelled slowly across the valley and disappeared over the opposite hill. It was almost too bleak even for flowers, so that hardly one of these was seen. Amidst such surroundings, then, was the first home of the Buzzard that I was destined to look upon.

We climbed carefully along the crumbling cliff and found a Buzzard's old nest: later on we found another. The Buzzard always makes two

nests, and one of these only is occupied, although I have known an instance of a Buzzard laying one egg in each nest. Whether the bird would have hatched either of these I do not know. An attempt was made to solve the problem by placing both eggs in one of the nests; but before the bird had a chance to sit on them sufficiently long they were both taken by a collector. We had not gone much farther when a loud call, *pee-o-ou!* made us look up, and there, high in the air, we saw a Buzzard wheeling round in small circles and giving out his wild, far-reaching whistle. That there must be a nest close at hand we felt sure, for the male nearly always calls over his nest if any one is near. By so doing he has in hundreds of instances led the collector to the haunt, and so lost his eggs.

Immediately a careful search was made along the face of this crumbling hill-side. Every clump of ivy was carefully scrutinised with our powerful field-glass: every mountain-ash was also examined, for it is at the base of such trees that the Buzzard loves to build. Only one small



BUZZARD'S NEST.

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An attempt was made to solve the problem by placing both eggs in one of the nests, but before the bird had a chance to sit on them sufficiently long they were both taken by a collector. We had not gone much farther when a loud call, *pe-oo-oo*, made us look up, and there, high in the air, we saw a Buzzard wheeling round in small circles and giving out his wild, penetrating whistle. That there must be a nest close at hand we felt sure, for the bird usually always comes like this if any one is near. By scanning the country for several instances of the collector's behavior we were enabled to find his nest.

Immediately a careful search was made along the rim of this crumbling hill-side. Every clump of ivy was carefully scrutinized with our powerful field glass, every mountain ash was also examined for a hole in the case of such trees as the Buzzard likes to land. Only one small



BIZZARD'S NEST.

A Sight to be Remembered 49

bush remained unexamined, and we were just about to abandon the search when, with a rush of her great wings, the hen Buzzard flew out from the face of the cliff. We stood intently watching the two birds for a moment. How striking they looked while circling round and above their mountain home! Their powerful wings were spread out in such a way as to show plainly the larger feathers. Round and round they went: now the summer sun lights up the mottled brown back, and then the breast is seen as they swoop past, up and down, one moment high up over our heads, the next far, far below. What a perfect view we enjoyed of these long-sought-for birds as they manoeuvred round that great bare valley!

The whole scene was one of loveliness: the aspect of the great rugged piece of slaty cliff was almost depressing, while the presence of these birds, which love such desolate haunts, ever and anon uttering their weird cry, made us realise that we were indeed in one of the little-known byways of Bird-land. The bird-lover alone knows the joy of such a hunt. The sportsman,

I think, could not join with us in the excitement of tracking a rare bird of prey to its lair: for we were not on slaughter bent, but on a friendly visit of inquiry.

A true naturalist finds his pleasure in the observation of the realities of life and motion. Dead birds and empty egg-shells are not his delight. There is a joy in the poetry of life that is not known to the museum naturalist, or to those collectors I have met who gloat over their cabinets of egg-shells, and make it their one chief aim in life to obtain fifty or more varieties of each species. What a pity it is these victims of egg-mania cannot see themselves as some others see them! I do not altogether despise egg-collecting, but I consider it very blame-worthy to ransack a whole neighbourhood in one season to obtain such eggs as those of the Buzzard, Raven, Merlin, Kite, Kestrel, etc., etc., and, not being content with this devastation, to continue this wholesale robbery through several successive seasons. No wonder that true bird-lovers cry out against collectors when this kind of thing is being done; yet it still continues, as

Photographing the Nest 51

I can well prove, threatening the actual extermination of several species.

But this is a digression. Let us get back to the cliff. The Buzzards were still calling out their wild cry when we reached the small mountain-ash from which the hen had flown. At the foot of this tree we saw the nest, and in it were two eggs, not very strikingly marked, but just spotted here and there with brown spots. The nest was a large one, but not so massive as one of the two first nests we had passed. It was constructed of large sticks: a few coarse grasses were in the interior for a lining, and also one or two fresh green leaves of the mountain-ash. I have wondered why the Buzzard likes to have fresh green leaves in its nest. I have seen a number of Buzzards' nests, and in every one I have found these young leaves, but I have not been able to give a satisfactory explanation of the circumstance.

This nest was not a difficult one to photograph, for if one comrade held on to the photographer, he was prevented from overbalancing and so



BUZZARD'S NEST.

slipping down the cliff. The picture is, after all, not very successful; for we had to look down upon the nest from almost immediately above, and a nest photograph never shows to advantage. When our task was finished we moved away and watched the two birds for a few

Tramping the Hills 53

minutes : then we made a cut across country in search of another Buzzard's haunt.

It is still rough travelling : for on these rugged hills the grass has grown for centuries and has never been touched by the hand of man. Great clumps are everywhere, and we have to pick our way between them. Although the sun is hot overhead, there is plenty of slush between these clumps underfoot. The condition of the ground is not the same for any great distance : we traverse patches of heather and tracts of more level grass-land.

This toilsome pilgrimage makes me unutterably thirsty. But one need not remain thirsty for long in this charmingly wild part of Wales : almost every hillock has its clear, sparkling spring of the most delightful pure cold water. It almost makes me thirsty now to think of those welcome Welsh springs. After an hour's tramp over the hills on a hot summer day, one feels that life is worth living indeed, when the trickling of water is heard, and a tiny stream, clear and sweet, is seen issuing from a hole in the ground, surrounded, as most are, by patches of rushes.

We fall on our knees, not objecting to a wetting, and drink, then drink again: you cannot help drinking: you feel that you must take a deep draught, for you never know how far it may be to the next precious spring. The more one drinks, however, from these delightful mountain springs the more one seems to want to drink. After quenching your thirst, the first question you ask the keeper is, 'How far is it to the next spring?'

After a tramp of many miles we at last heard the welcome call, *pee-o-ou!* of the Buzzard, and on looking ahead we saw him circling round a rock, thus undoubtedly telling us that his nest was there. As we got closer to his home the hen left a ledge, and joined in the aerial manoeuvres over their nest, each giving out at intervals their loud, wild, characteristic cry.

What a contrast is this to the haunt we last saw! Here everything is green, with the exception of a grey patch of rock jutting out from the grass-covered ground. Just below is a rushing, tumbling stream, roaring its way over great rounded rocks, and ever becoming wider

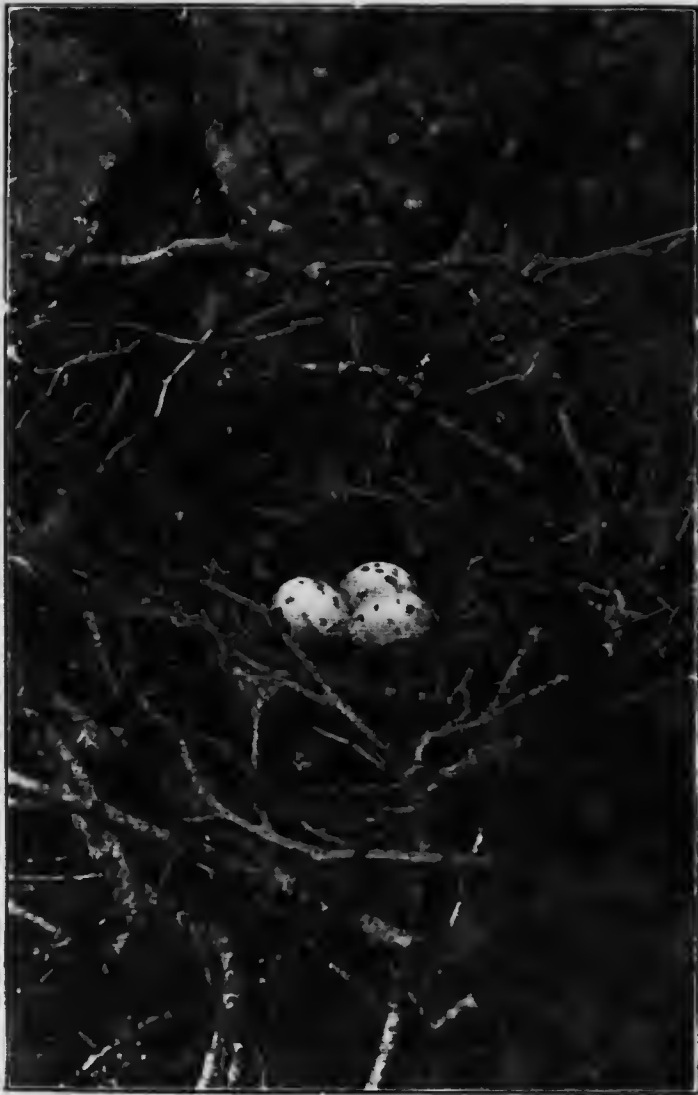


NO. 1

We fall on our knees, not objecting to a wetting, and drink, then drink again; you cannot help drinking; you feel that you must take a deep draught, for you never know how far it may be to the next precious spring. The more one drinks, however, from these delightful mountain springs the more one seems to want to drink. After quenching your thirst, the first question you ask the keeper is: How far is it to the next spring?

After a tramp of many miles we at last heard the welcome call, *pee-o-oo!* of the Buzzard, and on looking ahead we saw him circling round a rock, thus undoubtedly telling us that his nest was here. As we got closer to his home the hen came along and joined in the aerial manoeuvres over their nest, each giving out at intervals a long, wild, characteristic cry.

What a contrast is this to the haunt we last saw! Here everything is green, with the exception of a grey patch of rock jutting out from the grass covered ground. Just below is a rushing, tumbling stream, roaring its way over great rounded rocks, and ever becoming wider



BUZZARD'S NEST.



as it descends to the valley. A number of small waterfalls from near the Buzzard's nest make such a continuous roar, that it is difficult to hear even the sound of one's own voice, and the cries of the agitated birds are quite drowned by the noise of the falls.

We reached the summit of the small rock, and on looking over the edge saw the Buzzard's eggs in a slight nest on a ledge about two feet wide. The ledge was six feet down the cliff, bending inwards during this short descent, so that it was difficult of access, especially as we were without ropes. With the aid of a stout strap, however, I was successful in reaching it, and soon secured several pictures of the two eggs. The nest was a slight one, made of twigs of furze and broom. A few pieces of green moss and a tuft of lamb's wool sufficed for the lining, the whole structure measuring seventeen inches across. The large greenish-white eggs were without spots: the marks seen on the eggs in our picture are blotches of dirt from the breast of the sitting bird. While photographing the nest a very strong wind was blowing

58 The Buzzard's Home

from behind: but my body and the camera made a sufficiently large screen to protect the nest from any movement during exposure.

One of the Buzzards at this nest was exceptionally dark in its markings, and the two birds as they circled round in the sunshine looked almost like two species instead of a pair. Just across the stream we found the dummy nest belonging to this couple. This nest and the one just described were taken possession of by these same Buzzards in the year following, when one egg was laid in each, as already mentioned.

In our rambles we found and photographed many other nests of these fine birds of prey: but accounts of three more must suffice for this chapter. The third nest was in a different kind of place from either of the others mentioned. Imagine a wide fertile valley with fair meadows surrounding picturesque farmhouses, cattle grazing on the grass of deeper green nearest the stream. Instead of roaring along like its neighbour in the wilder regions, the stream flows leisurely, and in place of the deafening rush of water falling over wild rocks, there is

An Oasis in the Desert 59

the soft summer music of multiplied tiny ripples dancing over the rounded pebbles. Farther on beyond the green of the stream a straggling flock of sheep is seen, their calls adding to the peace and harmony. The shepherd with his well-trained dogs is getting the whole flock through a narrow gate into the larger meadow beyond. The songs of summer's best warblers fill the air. Whitethroats, Garden-warblers, and even the chatty song of the Sedge-warbler are heard as we walk onwards. What a magnificent oasis in a hilly desert this fair valley seems to be! It is during the winsome hours of the day spent in such a place that one realises the beauty and the sublime in Nature.

As we pass along, following the curve of the stream, we see, on before, a very steep hill rising for something like seven hundred feet from the water. Its side is covered with what looks like an exceedingly thick forest; but when we get nearer amongst the trees, we find that it is not really so dense as it seemed to be from a distance. It was here that the Kite once nested and almost succeeded in rearing a brood; but when the

60 The Buzzard's Home

young were almost ready to leave their home they were found by some prowling boys and taken away. How laborious a task it was to climb that hill: for underneath the bracken and loose undergrowth there is so much slate that for nearly every two steps taken, we slip a step backwards!

At last we reach a pathway near the summit, and then each searches in a different direction for the Buzzard's nest which we hope is here to be found. We photograph one historical nest in a tree which has been used by the birds for years out of number, but this contains no eggs. As we continue our search the keeper comes back to tell us that he has located the nest, which contains three of the most magnificent Buzzard's eggs he has ever seen. Eagerly we follow him, and when we look into that great nest we cannot but stand and admire those three handsome eggs. I have seen a good many Buzzards' eggs in my time, and the keeper had seen some hundreds: yet we both agreed that three such eggs had never been looked upon before by either of us.

A Large Nest

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The large nest, about three feet across and of the same depth, was built at the foot of a good-sized tree growing from the side of a perpendicular rock on the hillside. It was in an easy place to photograph, several pictures being



HIZZARD'S NEST.

taken from either side, and the beautiful markings show up well in the photograph. In this nest also there was a considerable quantity of green leaves of the mountain-ash. While we were photographing the nest, the

62 The Buzzard's Home

Buzzards did not make nearly so much noise as was the case with birds at some of the other nests we saw.

When there are three eggs in a Buzzard's nest one of the three is nearly always infertile, and the reader can imagine what severe self-denial it was to us to leave all three of those magnificent specimens, when any one would have greatly enhanced the value of any collection. We passed on, however, and left all intact. I believe that two young were afterwards successfully reared.

The following day a nest was found containing a big downy youngster, but without ropes it would have been quite impossible to photograph it. It was on the face of a steep rock rising for about fifty feet from a wide ledge on a slanting cliff four hundred feet high. Underneath the nest there was a narrow platform, and all three of us climbed to this. The nest itself was supported by a thick clump of ivy, and it was only by climbing up this that it could be reached. One of the thick ivy trailers ran in a vertical fashion four feet under the nest, but this was not nearly strong enough to hold

A Young Buzzard 63

any one, so my two companions put their hands under this and held it up, while I slowly made my way along.

At last I reached the nest, put my hand inside, and stroked the young Buzzard. It looked at me in a queer manner with its bright eyes, and seemed not at all alarmed at my visit. There were the remains of a mole by its side, and also portions of a rabbit, besides many bones of small rodents.

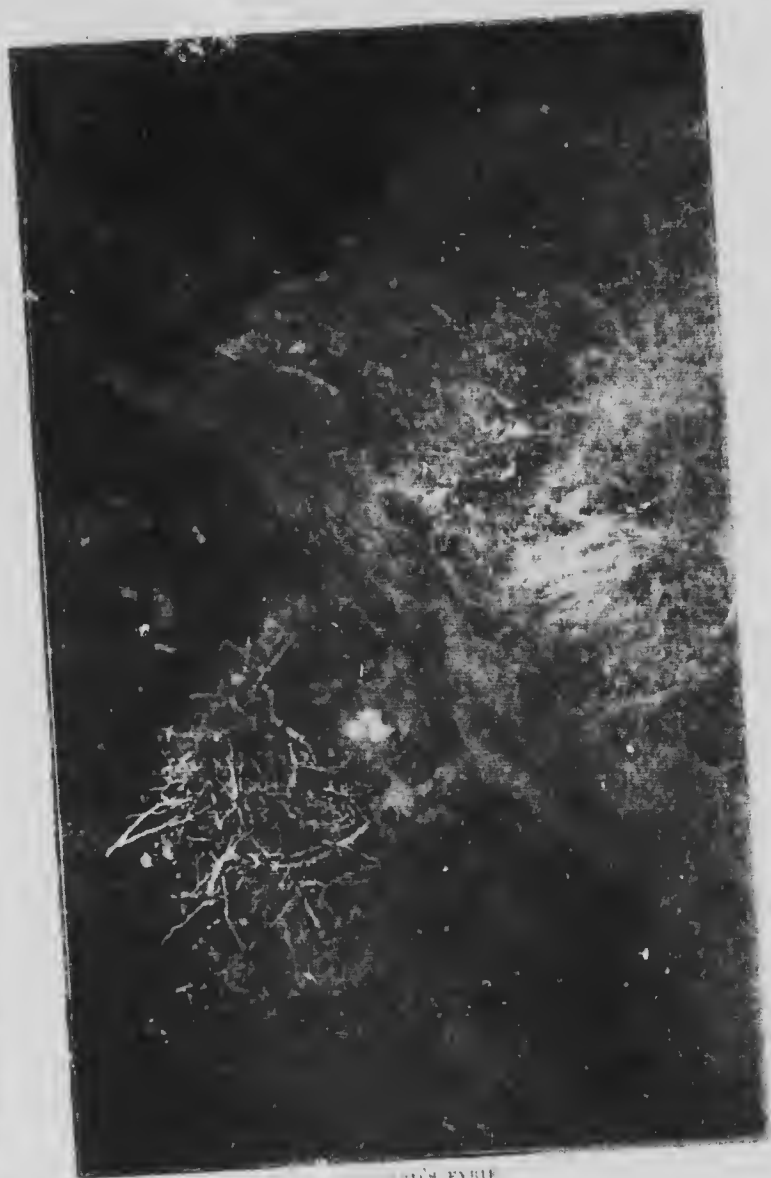
The last nest pictured in this chapter was found a year later. We were returning from a long, fruitless search after a certain nest, a walk which had commenced about sunrise and finished at dusk. About 6 o'clock p.m., when on our way home, we saw a Buzzard leave a small dingle between two hills, and very soon discovered its home. This contained three eggs, but nothing like so richly marked as those just described. Although on a steep piece of rock, the nest was not difficult to photograph; and we were pleased to find such a good one after a hard day's work, which up to that point had not been successful.

We have seen several Buzzards' nests, and I

have tried to depict some of their haunts: now let us watch the Buzzard itself at home.

Far, far away from cottage, farmhouse, or other haunt of man there is a lonely bleak hill. A lamb has strayed from the flock and fallen over a rock on this eminence, and now lies jammed between two smaller rocks. It has not laid here long when there is a hoarse croak overhead. *Kraak! kraak!* and that big black outlaw of the air, the Raven, calls to his mate that he has found a meal. The hen hurries up, but first circles round overhead and makes sure that no enemy is lurking near. Then the birds set to work: the lamb's eyes are first pulled out: then with their powerful beaks they pull away portions of the flesh and carry it off to their young.

As they go, a Buzzard comes up, and, seeing that the Ravens are unmolested, he too flies to the carcase and eagerly pulls off the best portions of the flesh. These are swiftly carried to his young. The Buzzard is now joined by his mate, and together they go back to the scene of the tragedy. Before the lamb is half eaten

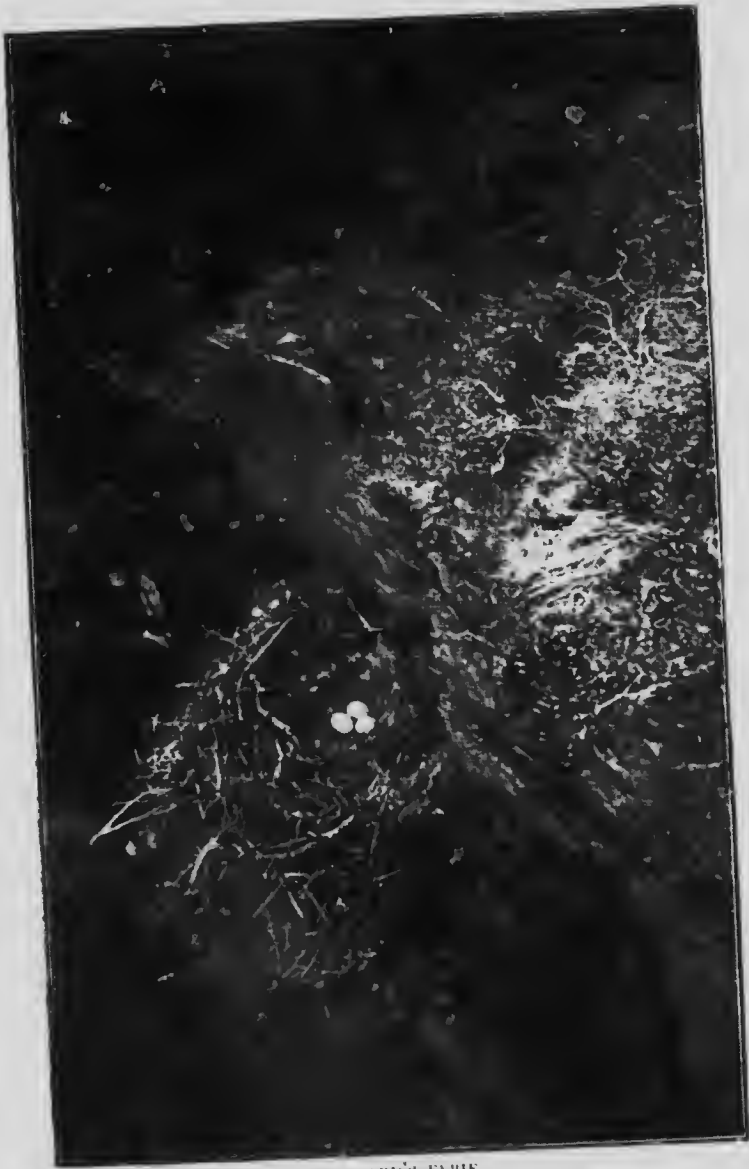


RO'S FORD

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Far, far away from cottage, farmhouse, or other haunt of man there is a lonely bleak hill. A lamb has strayed from the flock and fallen over a rock on this eminence and now lies jammed between two smaller rocks. It has not laid here long when there is a hoarse croak overhead, *Kraak! kraak!* and that big black outlaw of the air, the Raven, calls to his mate that he has found a meal. The other buzzes up, but first circles round overhead and makes sure that no enemy is lurking near. Then the birds set to work: the lamb's eyes are first pulled out, then with their powerful beaks they pull away portions of the flesh, some of it is all to their young.

Very soon a Buzzard comes up and seeing that the Raven has already started to eat this bit of the carcass, it eagerly pulls off the best portions of the flesh. Then it is swiftly carried away again. The Buzzard is now joined by his mate and together they go back to the scene of the crime. Before the lamb has been eaten



BUZZARD'S EYRIE.



A Sight in Early Spring 67

many more birds come and join in the feast, for 'where the carcase is, there will the Eagles be gathered together.'

The Buzzard loves carrion as much as anything; he is not a dashing Hawk, like the Peregrine or Sparrow-hawk; all his movements seem slow when compared with their more rapid flight. When flying he looks slow and heavy, and when searching for food he flaps his great wings in a leisurely, methodical manner as he quarters the ground from a height of about thirty feet.

Let us for a moment go back a month or two and watch the Buzzard in the very early spring. I have often seen a flock circling over some gigantic rock. It is at such times that we see the full beauty of their flight; for although slow and sometimes seeming almost clumsy, they go up towards the infinite expanse of pale blue by a series of circles, and nothing can be more perfect than the timed curves and accurate circles which they describe. Imagine six or more of these great birds circling up in this way, each keeping time as they seem

to perform some mysterious aerial manœuvres. How they go up is a greater mystery; for there is hardly a movement of their outspread wings, only the tips give an occasional flap as the birds turn in their ascent.

After watching them for some time with my powerful Goerz binoculars, I find that they do flap the tips of the wings now and then, and do not, as other observers say, go up without a movement. From a distance, or with weak field-glasses, it is quite impossible to see this slight movement. Any bird-lover or naturalist who wishes to observe bird-life accurately should provide himself with these small and light, but extremely powerful, field-glasses. The Buzzard thus differs from the Kestrel, which, as I have known, goes up almost out of sight without a visible movement of its wings. As the Buzzards ascend, their wild, far-reaching call, *pee-o-ou!* grows fainter and fainter until it is almost or altogether inaudible.

If three eggs in a Buzzard's nest should be hatched, it almost invariably happens that one of the youngsters disappears, and if we go to the

Protecting the Buzzard's Nest 69

nest some days later we shall probably see only one. What becomes of the other two is somewhat of a mystery; but I am inclined to think that the parent birds kill off two of their young and give them to the survivor as food! Some naturalists think that the strongest of the three kills the others in turn and devours them. My experience is that young birds, whether in their nests or out of their nests, are not always friendly one towards the other.

In a most interesting letter from my friend, the Rev. D. Edmondes Owen, he says: 'The Buzzards and the Ravens in Wales have done very well this year (1904). Yesterday I was told that seven young Ravens are to be seen daily in one of the ravines near —. They have left the nest, and are protected from guns and traps. I have myself seen three, and have heard of five Buzzards' nests in which the eggs have hatched off successfully. The most interesting was in a solitary birch-tree, about twenty feet high, on the open mountain near — wood. When Mr. Gwynne-Vaughan, Mr. Percy Pleyer, and I visited it, two young birds were about a week old,



A TYPICAL CLIMBER.

and one egg had a young bird just emerging from it. This goes to prove that the Buzzard begins to sit immediately she lays her first egg. The mother bird was furious, and charged us. It was one of the loveliest sights I have ever seen to watch her flying up and away from us until she was about half a mile distant, and then, wheeling round, forming herself into an arrow shape, coming towards us with

An Angry Buzzard

71

lightning speed, and stopping only when we waved hats and sticks and shouted ourselves hoarse, and that within a very few yards of us. It was most interesting to see her opening out her fan-tail and huge wings, and suddenly checking her speedy and fierce career much more cleverly than the best parachutist. We, who were so near her outstretched talons and angry-looking eye, will not soon forget the sight and sensation.

As we leave the Buzzard's haunt the calmness of evening is falling on the landscape. The hills are silent and dark: the great pine-woods on the sloping hill-sides stand out like black spots on a vast grey background. The birds are singing their last evening notes, and the wild, musical cry of the Curlew reaches us from beyond the stream. On a small piece of marsh-land near the water a patch of yellow is seen in the evening shade, and from these marsh-marigolds we flush a Snipe. The stream still bubbles along, the music at night being as sweet as that by day: and although the sun is not now lighting up those silvery ripples,

they tell their own bright story of summer's grandeur. We pass a bush of the crab-apple in full bloom, and pluck a spray of the blossom for our coats. Passing a farmhouse, we notice a few sheep grazing in the field beyond, and as the snow-white clouds of day change to the greyness of night we hear a Snipe bleating above us.

Farther along the harsh cry of a Carrion-crow is startling, and by the sheep-walk we see the remains of a dead lamb, the body being almost torn to pieces. For a moment we stop, and look sadly at one of the unrecorded tragedies of these wild western hills, and our friend the keeper shakes his fist at the departing feathered outlaw, and hurls one or two uncomplimentary words at him as he is lost to our view in the gloom. A Pheasant then crows from a coppice near when he hears our footsteps, and then on ahead in the valley below we see the welcome lights of our little inn, which has a clear, pure, sparkling stream flowing past its doors.

Thoughts of the meal awaiting us make us press on, for a day's work in Nature's wilds

The Day's Adventures 73

gives one an appetite worthy of the Welsh hills. After a wash and a well-served meal we join some jolly fishermen in another room, and by the light of a small oil-lamp talk over the adventures of the day.



HAUNT OF THE BUZZARD



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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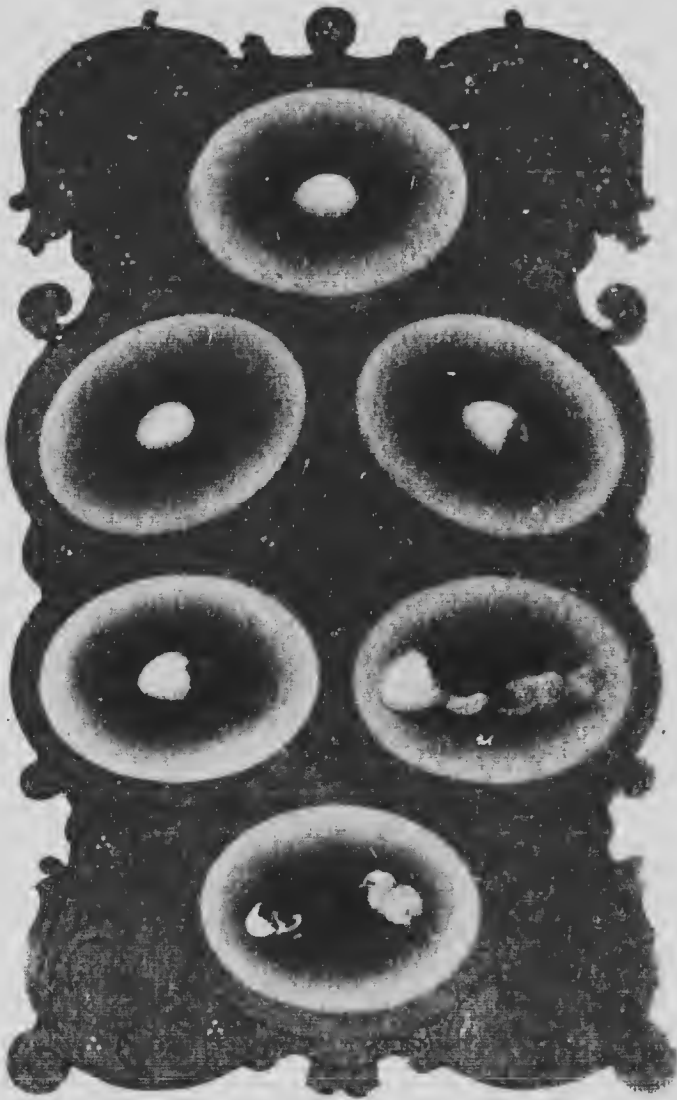
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(716) 288-5989 - Fax

CHAPTER V

A STORY OF TWO WORLDS

A VERY large number of persons have some time or other during their lives kept fowls; very many have reared chickens: but few indeed have ever witnessed how a chick when hatched comes forth from its shell. By the aid of the camera, I am able to show my readers a series of pictures of a chicken leaving the little world it first lived in, and going out into the greater world of its more active existence.

The first photograph is of a new-laid egg. This egg was placed in an incubator. On the evening of the twentieth day the shell 'chipped' (as is shown in photograph No. 2). The beak of the chick is provided with a sharp, horny point, and with this the fully hatched bird makes a hole in the egg-shell.



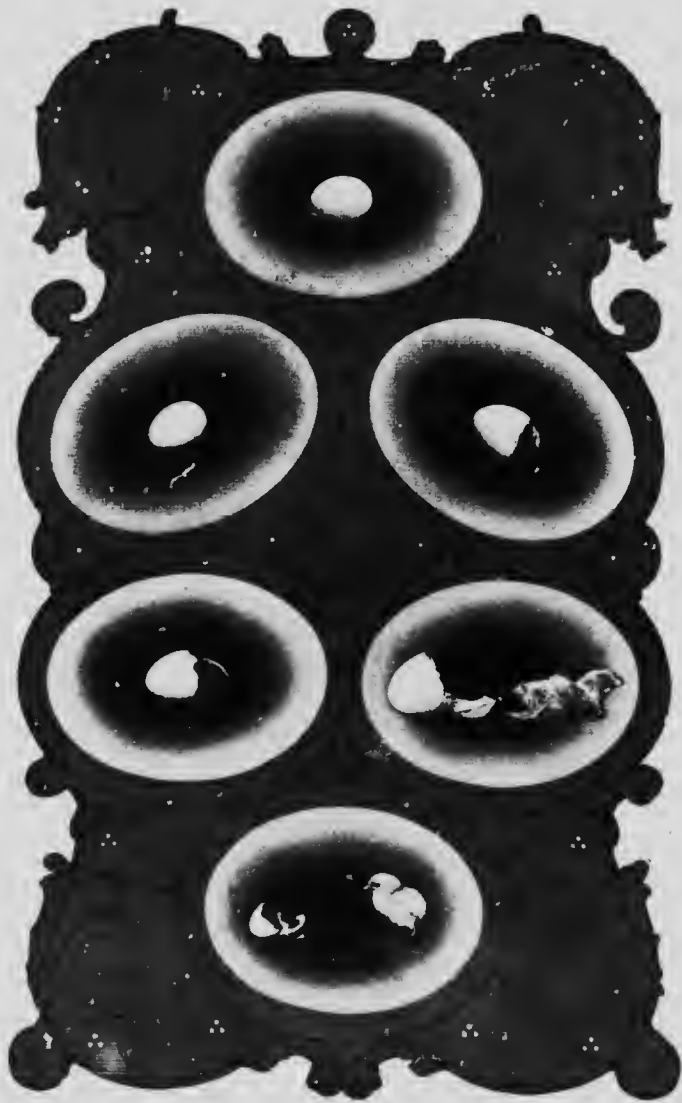
A SHAY OF LAG-ABLAN

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The first photograph is of a new laid egg. This egg was placed in an incubator. On the evening of the twentieth day the shell "bumped" as is shown in photograph No. 2. The beak of the chick is provided with a sharp, horny point, and with this the fully developed bird makes a hole in the egg-shell.



A STORY OF TWO WORLDS.

The Chick Emerging 77

which allows air to enter more freely. This gives the youngster such life and vigour that he turns slowly round inside the shell, chipping his prison wall as he goes, about four-fifths of the circle being broken in this way.

Then, finally, with a vigorous push, the chick bursts off the top of the shell, and for the first time gets a glimpse of the world outside. In this position (seen in picture No. 3) the little creature struggles and tries hard to wriggle out of the shell, its chief endeavour seemingly being to get one foot out. When a leg or foot is outside, the rest of the escape is easy: for by placing this against the egg-shell, and giving a final vigorous push, the chicken frees itself from its little prison, and finds itself really in the great open world a mighty contrast to the abode it has just left, and an outlook which must seem strange indeed.

Before leaving the shell the yolk of the egg is absorbed into the bird's stomach: and this supply is sufficient food to last for the first twenty-four hours of the chicken's existence.

78 A Story of Two Worlds

When it first leaves the old home the new-comer is a very strange-looking little creature indeed, and apparently helpless. The few feathers on its body, or what will soon develop into such, are wet and slimy—they actually, as it were, stick to the skin; but in a very few hours a striking and really wonderful change comes over our little friend.

In the picture (No. 6) the chick is about twenty-four hours old. As it stands looking at the home it has left, and gazing around on the world it has come into, we can imagine it saying to itself, 'Did I come out of that shell?' and then adding, 'Well, I don't believe it'; and for the last time it turns its back on the old world and marches forth into the new, to seek its fortune and to fulfil its destiny as one of the most useful of our feathered friends.

CHAPTER VI

A BIRD OF THE NIGHT

In the summer months, after the Nightingale has ceased to sing, there is another bird which may be heard during the still hours of night. One can hardly call the Nightjar's curious reeling note a song; yet it adds to the charms of the still hours after summer sunset. When several Nightjars are heard at once on some wild sombre moor or in a lonely wood, uttering their notes in different pitches, the general effect is peculiarly weird.

The New Forest is a well-known haunt of Nightjars, and in some of the open glades there I had uncommonly good opportunities of watching them. Let me take a typical scene.

Everything around me is silent and still. The branches of trees, covered thick with dark

80 A Bird of the Night

foliage, are motionless; the only movement perceptible is that of the great cumulus clouds floating across the moonlit heavens. From openings in these clouds the light of the moon is shed over an extensive stretch of marsh and bog-land, producing fantastic shadows. Here and there is a shimmer of light as the moonbeams are reflected in a small piece of water almost hidden by clumps of candle-rush around. Some white forms gleam in the grass of the marsh; a deep-toned clanging is heard proceeding from the weird forms. They are New Forest cattle, each with a bell affixed to its neck. This bell is often made of tin or of an old can, the different tones as the cows move about making very meanny music.

We walk on, and as we come near the sloping hill which leads to the forest, another white form bars our way, and this time it is a horse in a fierce and unpleasant mood. He stands in our path, snorts furiously at us, then turns and runs a hundred yards ahead; he waits for us to come up, and his angry snorting can be heard after we reach the forest.

Tawny Owls

81

There is an old hollow tree in a distant corner, and a pair of Tawny Owls have nested there for some years past: their wild, musical hoots now and again ring out across the marsh.



YOUNG TAWNY OWL.

82 A Bird of the Night

Overhead, Snipe are flying rapidly to and from their feeding-ground, the swish of their wings being heard before and after they are seen through the gloom.

As we reach the spot where ancient lichen-covered trees mark the wood boundary, we hear the Nightjar's 'reeling.' There are three close at hand, yet at first it is hard to discover in which tree they are. No amount of searching will show them; for, instead of perching on a branch like other birds, they sit or squat along the branch, and are therefore well enough out of sight. These birds do not always sit in this characteristic way, however, for I have seen them perched on a branch like other species.

The moon is now rising higher in the sky, and the large masses of eclipsing clouds are passing away; the wild country all around becomes more clearly seen each minute. The 'reeling' in the tree above does not cease, uttered now in the higher pitch, then in the lower; and other Nightjars in adjacent trees are still giving out their notes.

A Magnificent Swoop 83

Again and again the Tawny Owl's hoot sounds clear and loud from across the reedy marsh; again we hear the clanging bells as some cows walk past; then for one brief moment the Nightjar stops. But again he reels out his song, and on looking up we just see a branch moving—only just a slight bending; the notes stop, and the Nightjar seems to throw himself into the air. He soars aloft with a magnificent swoop; he seems to remain still for a moment in the sky, then drops to the ground with wings raised over his back. Just before the grass is reached he hovers, then rises again, seeming to turn summersaults in space. Backwards and forwards, up and down he goes, with a flight that reminds one of a butterfly flying over a bed of flowers; and often as he descends, with a light, buoyant drop, his wings are clapped together over his back, producing a sharp sound. It is a wonderful example of almost ideal flight; he seems to be a native of the air indeed; for the most skilful manoeuvres are made without any effort.

Another Nightjar joins him in practising

84 A Bird of the Night

these aerial gymnastics. While one rises, the other descends: and as they pass and repass up and down, their wings are clapped together. After a long exercise, each returns to its respective tree and commences 'reeling' again.

What are they doing? Are these beautiful aerial exercises a way they have of courting? A bird's courting is always an exceedingly pretty thing, whether the lovers are tiny Wrens in a hedgerow, or the wild Buzzards in their mountain home. A beautiful Bird-land courtship is this of the Nightjar's, in the moonlight amidst the silence.

The Nightjar's eggs are placed on the ground, sometimes on pebbles, more often amongst broken twigs underneath bracken. Not the slightest attempt is made to form a nest not even when the young are hatched.¹ In a most marvellous degree the hen Nightjar resembles her surroundings in hue: and nine out of every ten people would pass her as she sits by the woodland path, without noticing her form.

¹ Since the above was written I have found and photographed a very perfect Nightjar's *nest*.

Funny, Fluffy Little Things 85

The sitting bird during the daytime seems to be asleep: but if we look more closely, we see just a narrow slit in the almost closed eyelids, through which the vigilant watcher can see us. I have sometimes walked silently up to a sitting bird, approaching her from behind, and have then



YOUNG TAWNY OWLS.

tried to touch her: but as soon as my hand was within about twelve inches she was up and away, to settle on a branch to watch and to make sure of my retreat. The fledglings are funny, fluffy little things, and during the daytime they also keep their eyes nearly closed, but if

86 A Bird of the Night

disturbed, they do their level best to crawl away and hide if possible. If once these youngsters really succeed in getting out of our sight, it is almost impossible to discover them again, although they may actually be within a yard or two of where we stand.

The Nightjar is an exceedingly interesting bird, and, like most of the nocturnal inhabitants of Bird-land, there is very much yet to be found out about him and his strange habits.

CHAPTER VII

THREE FEATHERED OUTLAWS

THE river Wye was bubbling its way over rounded pebbles: the summer sun was transforming the ripples into gleaming silver. The banks were thick with luxurious growths, and grass even more brilliantly green stretched away along the sloping valley. On one of the larger rocks jutting out of the water a Dipper sat, bobbing his brown and white body. Presently he dashed away under the bridge to the place where his young were feeding higher up the stream.

On a swaying branch there sat a Kingfisher, resplendent in his summer plumage and preening his gay dress, ever and anon looking up and around to see that no danger threatened. Just as he was about to catch a fish he saw a dark form dashing towards him.

88 Three Feathered Outlaw

In a flash he was off, for he recognised the Sparrow-hawk as an enemy. The Hawk, while flying over the stream-side, was attracted by the brilliant-plumaged bird-fisher, and darted down towards him, no doubt thinking he would make an easy capture. On went the Kingfisher in a straight line, giving forth an agonised cry as he flew for his life. The Hawk followed, and gained space quickly; but just at the critical moment, when he was about to strike, there was a splash, and the king of fishers was under the water. The bird of prey, losing his balance, flew on many yards before he could recover his equilibrium. Like a flash the Kingfisher was out of the water, and doubled back, with the angry bird of prey still following and gaining in the wild chase. Again he struck at the Kingfisher, and again was foiled, for the pursued bird dived once more in the very nick of time to save his life.

Up again, and on he flew straight towards the bridge on which my friend Mr. Gwynne-Vaughan and another gentleman were stand-

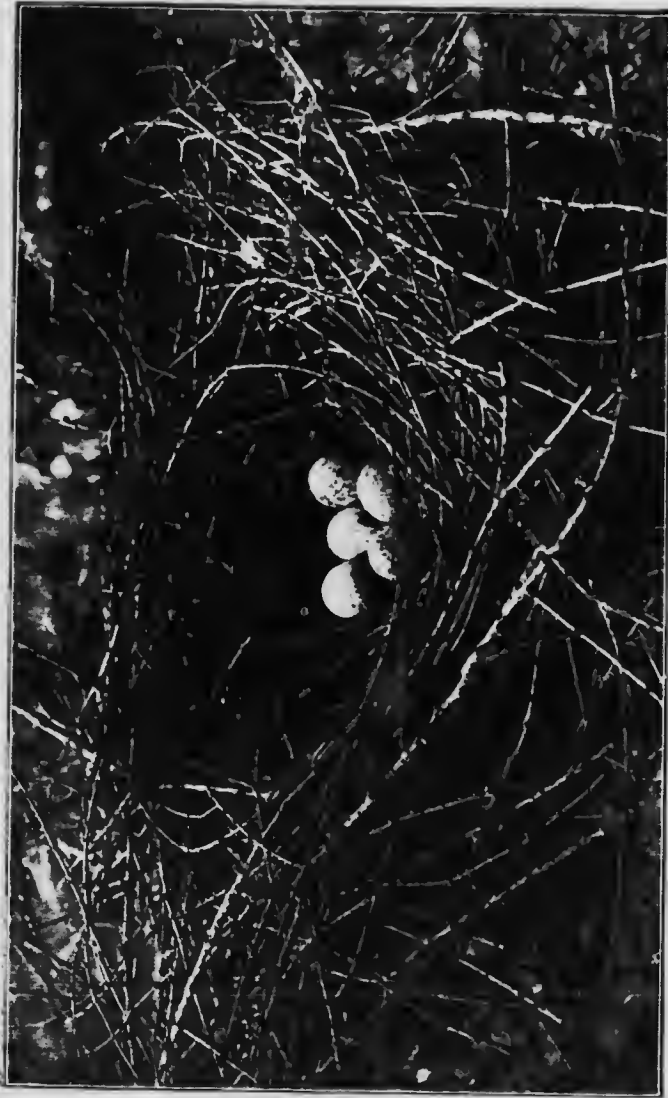


THE BIRD'S NEST

88 Three Feathered Outlaws

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Up again, and on he flew straight towards the ledge, on which my friend Mr. Gwynne-Vincent and another gentleman were stand-



SPARROW HAWK'S NEST.

Hawk versus Kingfisher 91

ing, keenly observing this exciting Bird-land adventure, which seemed likely to end in tragedy. On the birds came, the smaller straining every muscle to elude its pursuer, the enemy with ominous flaps of his great wings coming on with increased speed, and rendered more vicious because of the way in which the brilliant little bird had eluded him.

‘Quick, quick! pick up some stones!’ shouted Mr. Gwynne-Vaughan as the two aerial racers neared the bridge. A few large stones were gathered by the two friends, who waited for their opportunity to help the weaker side. ‘Now, throw at the Hawk,’ was again the word. The friendly stones went on their mission of intervention, and for a moment the Hawk was scared. This gave the Kingfisher a chance; he flew under the bridge and waited there, while the angry and disappointed Hawk was driven on, foiled in his attempt to capture his prey.

I was glad the Kingfisher escaped; yet one could not help feeling some sympathy for the

92 Three Feathered Outlaws

Hawk. Every day he has to hunt hard and perseveringly for each meal, and when he has to tackle such a troublesome quarry as the Kingfisher, whether he succeeds or not in a capture, the pursuit must indeed be exciting. There is no doubt that the Sparrow-hawk well earns each meal. The scene I have described lasted but a few minutes; then all was still again, and the bubbling river flowed on as before—the only sound, that and the wind, but sounds which are all music and so suggestive of that great hidden world, the mysterious side of Nature. The adventure described is just one of those many passing incidents which may or may not develop into tragedy, and which happen every day in Bird-land. Those who wander into the fields and woods, and keep their eyes open, will always see similar things.

I believe that Sparrow-hawks always make their own nests, although I am strongly of opinion that they will sometimes construct one on a squirrel's old drey, or on another built by other birds. The accompanying picture

'The Honeysuckle and the Bee' 93

was taken in a delightful 'hanging' wood on a steep hill-side. Beyond the trees there stretched one of the most magnificent and fertile of valleys to be found in the whole of Wales. Dotted about were one or two villages, but there was just one thing to mar the quiet harmony of this summer scene. Coming up from the valley were heard the familiar strains of a barrel-organ. When I visited the picturesque wilds of Wales, I thought and hoped I should be spared these by no means rare suburban entertainments. But that was not to be, and as I listened the music was certainly familiar. The strain slowly developed into a song some of my readers may have heard 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee.' The music was a startling innovation in this valley and among the hills. I passed on into the wood, and continued the search for nests.

When we had searched through this wood, we came into an open space, and there in the centre was a pole, which we at once saw was that cruel instrument of torture, the pole-trap.

94 Three Feathered Outlaws



SPARROW-HAWK CAPTURED IN POLE-TRAP.

We photographed this, and it will be noticed there is a very fine specimen of the Sparrow-hawk, captured by one leg, hanging head downwards from the trap. These pole-traps are about the vilest things ever invented by man for their purpose, and it is a shame and disgrace that any gentleman should allow such a contrivance on his estate. All birds of prey are very fond of settling on a bare pole if it is in an open

Kestrel's Eggs in Magpie's Nest 95

space. The keeper, knowing this, erects a pole in the ground, and on the top of this he places a circular jaw-trap, fastened to the pole by about a yard of fine but very strong string. When the bird settles on this the trap at once springs and captures him by one or both of his feet. The bird, springing up, dislodges the heavy trap, and it falls down, pulling him with it. The poor struggling captive thus hangs head downwards, and in many cases is left thus for two days, until an agonising death comes to end his misery. Such a diabolical trap ought not to be allowed by law, yet hundreds of our birds of prey are thus captured each year on the estates of gentlemen!¹

In another wood we found the Kestrel breeding, the eggs being laid in an exceedingly old nest of the Magpie. The Kestrel does not make its own nest, being content with the deserted home of another bird; it may be, indeed, that only a hole in, or a ledge on, a

¹ Since the above was written, a law has been passed making the use of these traps illegal.

96 Three Feathered Outlaws

rock is occupied. When either of the two latter situations is chosen, no nest at all is constructed: simply a scratching in the earth forms a place for the eggs.

The Kestrel's flight brings aerial evolutions to the highest pitch of perfection. I have seen them ascend in a perfect calm high up, until they have been invisible in the lazy summer sky: I have seen them go up almost as high when there has been a strong wind: and in each case no movement of their wings takes place.

The Kestrel thus differs from the Buzzard. I have seen it stated in a scientific paper, that the Buzzard will ascend one thousand feet perpendicularly without a movement of its wings. This was evidently written by one whose observation of the bird's flight had been with the naked eye. If any one takes the trouble to watch the Buzzard thus ascending with the wonderful Goerz prism binocular, he will notice that it *does* move its wings—or, rather, the tips—and once in every few turns of the spiral ladder it will be seen



96 Three Feathered Outlaws

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KESTREL'S EGGS IN MAGPIE'S OLD NEST.



The Brown Hawk at Work 99

that the great bird gives a single flap with the ends of its wings, quite enough to give it an impetus for the next ascending ring. Still, it is only a slight flap, and this makes the ascent none the less wonderful.

The Kestrel, however, goes up into the limitless summer blue without making a single movement that we can detect with his outstretched wings, and this upward spiral flight is to me one of the most inexplicable feats of the birds' world.

I like to watch the masterly way in which the little brown Hawk captures his prey. How carefully he quarters the ground, keeping a sharp look-out for any little rodent or beetle which might be only half concealed in the fields below! Then how patiently he hovers over the spot where he thinks something is in hiding! All his food, however, is not obtained in this way. I have seen him descend to the ground and search for food in the same way as other birds; and there is no doubt that when thus hunting he eats a quantity of insects which would be too large for some of the smaller birds to swallow.

100 Three Feathered Outlaws

The Kestrel is the most familiar Hawk we have. It is a well-known frequenter of farm land, and it may be seen in our fields on almost any day in districts where the farmers are not so ignorant as to shoot all the Hawks and Owls which show themselves.

Another interesting little Hawk is the Merlin. Unlike the Kestrel, he is one of the wildest of his tribe. The bleakest moors, far away from the haunt of man, are his home. The Merlin is essentially a bird of the moorland, and he is like his surroundings wild. I have seen him on some of the most unfrequented moors of Wales. As he comes along, chasing a small bird, one can well realise that there is little chance of his prey escaping. Like a flash of forked lightning he pursues it, dodging to right and then to left, up and down, until he dashes upon the helpless creature and bears it off triumphantly to some little grassy hillock or rock.

For a moment he rests, with his sharp talons driven tightly into the little twitching body on which he stands. What a fierce,



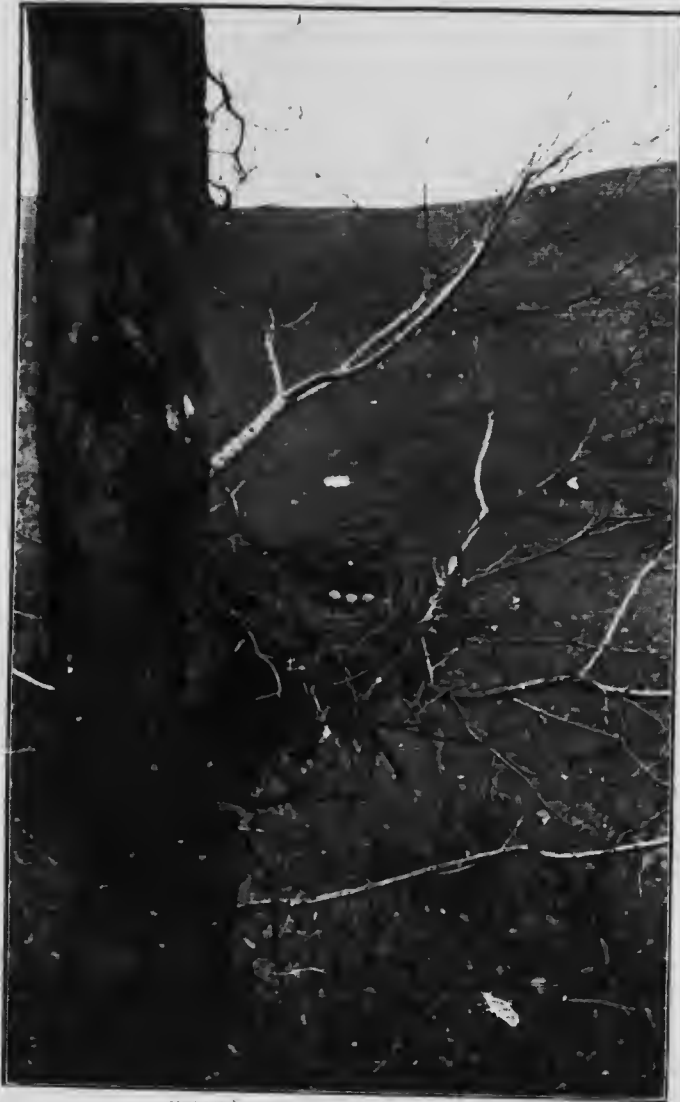
MURPHY'S TUNNEL IN AUBURN, MASS.

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For a moment he rests, with his sharp talons driven tightly into the little twitching body on which he stands. What a fierce,



MERLIN'S EGGS IN CROW'S OLD NEST.

A Bird-land Tragedy 103

eager, warlike creature he looks! His bright yellow eye takes in every movement in the wide, treeless moor, and his head is turned to look at a Pipit which flies overhead. He snaps his beak, as if angry that a bird should pass him. Then, like a hungry cannibal, he tears off a few feathers with his beak, and throws these aside with a sharp toss of his head. They float slowly away and settle lightly on the grass and heather tufts. Then, stooping again, he pulls the little corpse to pieces. All that remains on the grassy knoll to tell the story of the Bird-land tragedy are just one or two wing and tail feathers, and a little feathery down, spotted with dark red blood. Wiping his beak on the grass, the Merlin once more mounts up into the azure above him, and goes off in search of another victim, giving out once or twice a wild, defiant *Kek-kek-kek!*

Merlins are bold little creatures—perhaps the bravest of Hawks. Their nest is, as a rule, made on the ground—a scratching amongst the heather serving for a home. The picture

104 Three Feathered Outlaws

here given, however, is in a unique place. The three eggs were laid in a Crow's old nest, about twenty feet up an oak which was growing on the steep side of a hill. As we approached the tree the Merlin left her eggs, and darted off to fly frantically round the



SPARROW-HAWK'S NEST.

valley, giving out her wild cry as she flew. We watched her for several minutes with our field-glasses, then ascended the tree and found the three eggs placed in row, as they are shown in the photograph. These were of a dull reddish brown colour, very much like those of the Kestrel— and indeed, unless we

In the Kite Country 105

had actually been able to see and distinguish the Merlin, we should have taken them to be eggs of the former. I made several exposures of this rather unique nest, and then we left the Merlin's haunt and went homewards, keeping a good look-out for any signs of bird-life, as we were still in the Kite country, and knowing that one of those rare birds might be seen at any moment and at any turn.

CHAPTER VIII
SOME BIRDS OF A MOUNTAIN
STREAM

THE country is always captivating to lovers of Nature, whether the outlook be meadow, wood, or water: but I think there is more to fascinate one in the running brook, the more silent-flowing river, or the dashing mountain stream than in all other of Nature's scenes. There are certain adventures of a life spent amid Nature's wonders that live always in the memory. Thus one vividly remembered scene is a certain Welsh stream, which was rippling and bubbling over rounded pebbles, in a deep winding valley between the wildest of barren hills. I chiefly recall this particular watercourse because, while roaming along its banks, I saw the Dipper for the first time. This bird belongs to the water: he seems almost to be inseparable



DIPPER'S NEST IN LOG

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DIPPER'S NEST ON THE ROCKY BANK OF A WELSH MOUNTAIN TORRENT.





DIPPER'S NEST.

from it, so constantly does he live amongst running bubbles, dashing waterfalls, and boiling foam.

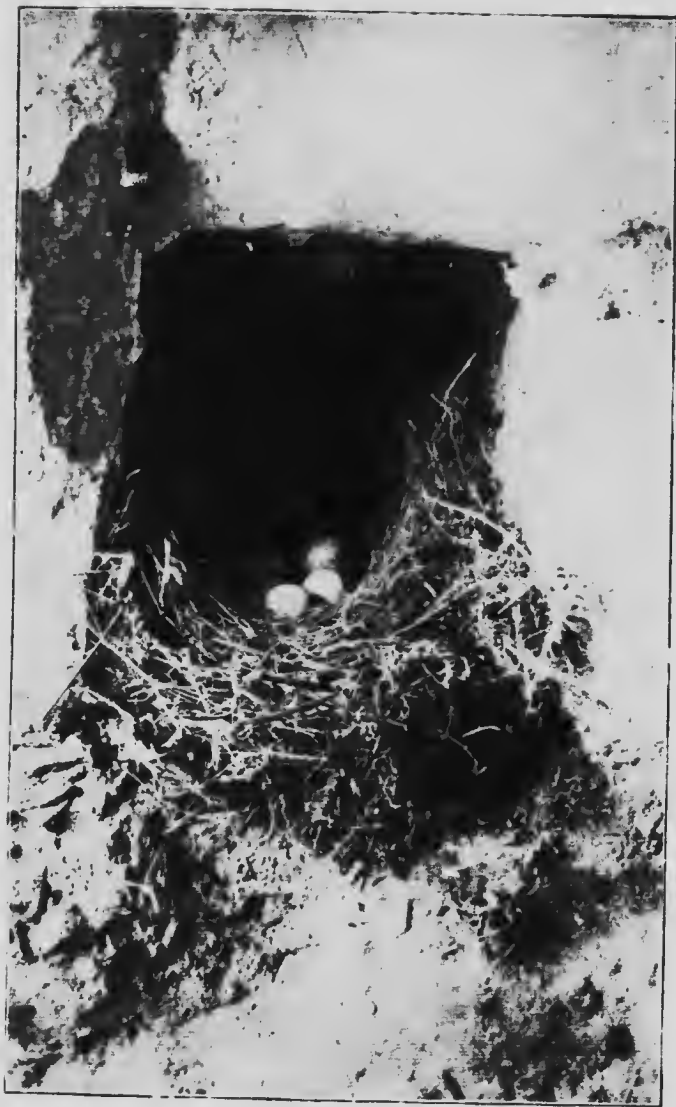
Dipper is an appropriate name for this feathered water adventurer. He is always 'dipping.' Let us watch him for a few minutes, and follow him along the track of his mountain home.

Although the hills above are bare, on the

108 Birds of a Mountain Stream

banks of this stream all is green and fresh with the colours and hues of spring. On the sloping bank to the left is a large patch of bluebells, and intermixed among them are numerous primroses: while above all is the young bracken, which is now growing fast. Alongside the stream is a number of hazel-trees: and these afford shelter while searching for the bird. Rocks are here and there jutting out of the rushing water, and there is plenty of evidence that the Dipper frequents these rocks. Wandering along this changing stream, I come upon still pools and moss-covered rocks.

Down the brown hill-sides many smaller streams are running, like streaks of silver in the distance. In these calmer spots, where the water does not make so much noise, the bleating of sheep on the hills is faintly audible, and ever and anon the harsh bark of a Raven, as he goes by his nest on the towering cliff before us, is heard: and high, high up in the deep blue sky of spring some Buzzards are soaring, their *meowing* being but faintly heard. Thus above are several of our rarest birds:



GREY WAGTAIL'S NEST.

110 Birds of a Mountain Stream

while below, alongside this remote and little-known stream, a pair of Long-tailed Tits are uttering their almost unheard notes, *Zee-zee-zee!*

Far down the stream there is what looks like a small patch of snow on one of the rocks: this moves, and I know I am looking at a Dipper. As carefully as possible I stalk towards it, and am able to get fairly close: but the brown bird with the white breast sees me, darts off with a rapid flight, and settles thirty yards farther on.

I follow, and am able this time to watch the bird without being seen. His mate joins him, and both are now close together on a stone. When standing thus they continually bob or dip up and down, and it is sometimes easy to discover them by watching for this movement. One leaves the rock and plunges into the running water: he is almost hidden, but we can just see his back showing above the stream. For a moment his head is raised, then under he goes again, and is lost sight of in the deeper pool: up he comes again, where least we expected him, and stands on the mossy



THE GREAT RIVER

110 Birds of a Mountain Stream

while below, alongside this remote and little-known stream, a pair of Long-tailed Tits are uttering their almost unheard notes, *Zee-zee-zee!*

Far down the stream there is what looks like a small patch of snow on one of the rocks: this moves, and I know I am looking at a Dipper. As carefully as possible I stalk towards it, and am able to get fairly close: but the brown bird with the white breast sees me, darts off with a rapid flight, and settles thirty yards farther on.

I follow, and am able this time to watch the bird without being seen. His mate joins him, and both are now close together on a stone. When standing thus they continually bob or dip up and down, and it is sometimes easy to discover them by watching for this movement. One leaves the rock and plunges into the running water: he is almost hidden, but we can just see his back showing above the stream. For a moment his head is raised, then under he goes again, and is lost sight of in the deeper pool: up he comes again, where least we expected him, and stands on the mossy



THE DEEPER'S HOME.

The Dipper

113

rock, but all the time he 'dips.' Off he darts once more, and disappears in a much deeper part of the water. He uses his wings to drive himself down, and when at the bottom he clings to the rounded pebbles and turns the smaller ones over with his beak, and snaps up the aquatic insects which are concealed underneath.

The Dipper is a wonderful little bird. When, after a storm, the stream becomes a rushing torrent, he seems to love it the most. If alarmed, he seldom flies from the river, but follows the course, no matter how or whither it winds. His flight is rapid, like the Kingfisher's, and his note is a shrill *Tait-tait!*

A favourite place for Dippers to build their nest is in the rocks under a waterfall, and these have been found in such places that the sitting bird, if she wants to leave, has to dash through the falling water. The more the Dipper is in the water the more he seems to enjoy his adventurous life.

When wandering by a mountain stream or lake, one often hears a number of birds on the

114 Birds of a Mountain Stream

margins. As we approach these, all leave with a curious whistling note, fly in a wide half-circle, and alight again farther along. These are Sandpipers, and most interesting birds they are. All visitors to Scotland in the spring must have noticed these lively birds on the shores of the numerous lochs. We hear the whistling notes, and know they are only a few yards from us; yet so much do they resemble their muddy or stony surroundings that only the eye of the naturalist would 'spot' them.

On many streams where the Dipper is found we meet with the Sandpiper. The nest of the latter is placed on the higher ground; and if a railway embankment skirts the river or lake they frequent, this becomes a favourite place for building. Their four eggs are of a yellowish stone-colour, marked with darker spots; the smaller end of each egg always points inwards, and so takes up as small a space as possible. When the young are hatched, the parents are very much alarmed if one goes near them. The youngsters run about as soon as they leave their shells, and are exceedingly difficult to find in



ANDERSON'S NEST.

114 Birds of a Mountain Stream

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SANDPIPER'S NEST.



the vegetation: and while these are hiding, the parents try to attract intruders away from the hamt.

A stream without its Wagtails would be incomplete: it would have one of its chief charms missing. To see these graceful little birds running about the edge of a lake or river is a Bird-land scene not easily forgotten. One of the rarer species—the Grey Wagtail—is found on many mountain streams, and although not so frequently seen as the Pied Wagtail, he is none the less interesting. The nest is built in a hole in a wall, as in the accompanying illustration, or in holes in cliffs or rocks by the water-side. The hen sits very close, and will almost let us touch her. I almost managed to photograph one while she was in her nest; but I had to stalk her across the top of a roaring waterfall, and going from rock to rock and picking my way through the rushing water, where it was difficult to stand, made my enterprise very difficult, and I was not successful.

Along the sides of this same mountain rivulet we found the Ring-ouzel nesting. This white-

118 Birds of a Mountain Stream

breasted Blackbird arrives on the hills in April, and his wild trilling song makes even the merry falls more musical; for each watery dingle and



NEST OF SANDPIPER.

dripping glen has its pair of Ring-onzels. Theirs is a sweet, wild song, so much in harmony with their romantic surroundings that all who love such spots love the Ring-onzel;

Mysteries of a Mountain Stream 119

for he, like the Dipper, seems to belong to the running streams and rushing torrents. The Ring-ouzel lives on worms and insects peculiar to the water-side: but later in the year he is found eating berries, especially those of the mountain-ash.



RING-OUZEL'S NEST.

I hope I have said enough about the stream and a few of its birds to make those who see something more than mere water in such places take an interest in them. There are great mysteries associated with water, and especially mountain streams. The lines of an old song

120 Birds of a Mountain Stream

so well describe what I mean that they are worth repeating:

There's something in that ancient superstition,
Which, erring as it is, our fancy loves.
The spring that, with its thousand crystal bubbles,
Bursts from the bosom of some desert rock,
In secret solitude may well be deem'd
The haunt of something purer, more refined,
And mightier than ourselves.



A STREAM THE DIPPER LOVES.

CHAPTER IX

THE BIRDS OF OUR ANCIENT CHURCHES

THE bird which is chiefly associated with old parish churches is undoubtedly the Owl: and on many occasions the big, silent-flying White Owl has given rise to weird rumours that a ghost or some spirits of departed parishioners have haunted the church, or, at least, have walked about the surrounding graveyard. Nothing is more uncanny than to see a large white object move mysteriously about when you are walking past an ancient ivy-covered church on a dark night, or when the moon seems to look at you now and then through the clouds. I have seen an Owl sweep past my head when I have been walking along a lonely pathway, and unless I had known what it was I should certainly have felt a little bit nervous.

Any ancient tower or the crumbling ruins of an old church offer many ideal nooks and corners for White or Brown Owls to nest in. They will choose a deep hole in a wall, or sometimes they will get quite inside the church and construct their slight nest on a convenient ledge. There their eggs will be laid, and in course of time a not very agreeable stench surrounds the isolated home. The Owl feeds on rats, mice, beetles, and some small birds; the hard, indigestible portions of these, such as bones, the horny coverings of beetles, and the fur of rodents, are cast up through the bird's beak in the form of pellets about the size of small walnuts; and in some cases these actually form the nest.

The White or Barn Owl gives out a most unearthly kind of shriek; the note of the Brown Owl, a mournful, long-drawn hoot, is still more weird, and when heard in the silence of night it is quite terrifying to some people to whom a little knowledge would not be such a dangerous thing as Pope supposed.

The young Brown or Tawny Owl very closely





TAWNY OWL AWAITING THE DUSK IN THE HOLLOW OF AN IVY-MANTLED STUMP.

A Change of Expression 123

resembles a ball of wool. The bird's bill is a most conical-looking structure. The following photographs on page 123 show the bird's face during the change of expression from day to night.



SCREECH OWL

little creature's face in the course of a few minutes. In the above photograph, the screech owl is seen roosting in a tree during the light hours of the day.



TAWNY OWL AWAITING THE DUSK IN THE BELLOW OF AN IVY MANTLED
717-117

A Change of Expression 123

resembles a ball of white fluff, and is a most comical-looking little creature. The photographs on pages 81 and 85 give some idea of the change of expression which comes over this



TAWNY OWL.

little creature's face in the course of a few minutes. In the above photograph the mother bird is seen roosting in a tree, as she does during the light hours of the day.

The Swift, Swallow, and Martin all seem to prefer a church as a convenient nesting-site. The first-mentioned makes its nest on a small shelf or ledge under the eaves of the roof, or it will enter the bell-tower and make its home in any convenient nook or corner there. On some old churches rows of Martins' nests may sometimes be seen, and the twittering birds make the ancient building still more attractive with their merry music.

A most remarkable incident happened in a church in which an uncle of mine was preaching. Two Swallows had found their way into the church, and during the singing of a hymn and the first part of the service, these two little unwelcome guests sat contentedly on the organ-pipes. When my uncle rose to preach, however, these two Swallows left their perches and all through the sermon fluttered round the head of the preacher! The old folk present, a little given to superstition, said it was a bad omen; they did not like the look of the birds, and all said it was a warning that something was going to happen. The next morning, while my uncle

The Haunt of the Jackdaw 125

was writing a letter in his study, his head fell forward, and he died peacefully at his desk with the epistle he had only just commenced before him.

Of course, many of those who had been present at the Sunday service connected the Swallows with the good man's sudden departure. There is a lady now living near my home who actually watched these two Swallows with an interest never to be forgotten.

The church tower is a favourite haunt of the Jackdaw, and many of them build their nests in any open space inside. In a church at Enfield a large cartload of sticks was removed from the steeple, all of which had been taken there by the busy Jackdaws. When these birds have nested in a church undisturbed for many years, the accumulation of sticks is really marvellous.

The ever-present Sparrow, of course, builds in or about churches, and often during a service I have heard the continual, monotonous *Cheep-choo-cheep!* of a colony of my little friends in the roof, all being mixed up with the notes and the calls of impatient baby Starlings.

I have had many a climb up the belfry towers of ancient churches, where amongst the great thickness of dust, accumulated on the oak beams during many generations, I have presented myself with my camera in search of nests. These towers are about the blackest places I have been into during my travels in Bird-land if a church tower may be included in the territory. In one Welsh church tower which I ascended I expected to obtain some good pictures of Jackdaws' nests; but I learned, after I had descended without a single picture, that three days before my visit the folk all around who kept poultry had made an onslaught on the Jackdaws, and destroyed all their nests, and also some of the young birds.

To come back to the Owls, however. In a church in a neighbouring parish the worshippers were disturbed during their Sunday morning service by a large white object fluttering uneasily from beam to beam in the roof! I half believe that some of those present really thought it might be an angel, or some other unusual visitor who had come to see them. After the



LONG EARED HAI ANSEEE.

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LONG-EARED BAT ASLEEP



A Touch of Life 129

service a local ornithologist was sent for, and he at once recognised the intruder in the dark roof as a fine specimen of the White Owl.

It will thus be seen that apart from the interest which is inseparable from ancient churches there is something else which adds to their fascination. The presence of birds certainly gives to the somewhat sombre interior a touch of life, and, as it were, connects it with the outside world.

CHAPTER X
THE BLACKCAP AND GARDEN-
WARBLER

IT seems to be quite natural that two birds, each having a beautiful song, one very much like the other, should as it were be rivals. The Garden-warbler and Blackcap, the best singers of our woodlands in the daytime, are often to be found in the same roadside coppice or small wood, each, however, keeping to its own respective quarter, and seldom intruding into the domain of the other. Both are sweet little birds: one cannot help loving them.

The Garden-warbler especially is a confiding and trustful native of Bird-land. When the hen is sitting on her five eggs she will sometimes actually allow a visitor to approach close to the bush and gently part the branches: she will not fly away, and not until the hand,

moved slowly towards her, is almost on the nest will she rise.

On one occasion I was photographing a nest of this species, and when I put my head under



BLACKCAP (HEN) SITTING.

the cloth to focus, I was no less surprised than pleased to see the hen Garden-warbler sitting on the side of the nest. I focussed the scene, and then came from under cover, and there was my little bird-friend asking me, as plainly as any

132 Blackcap and Garden-Warbler

bird every spoke in its own language, to go away and not destroy her precious eggs. I soon procured a photograph, and then moved away, leaving the Garden-warbler still sitting.

A few days later a Carrion-crow, passing by, saw the same nest and took all the eggs. The Carrion-crow is the most destructive of all bird-robbers. He takes all the eggs he can find, and I have known nearly all the nests in a twenty-acre orchard to be systematically pillaged by him. I have watched the Crows at their cruel practice: they slowly 'beat' up and down the rows of trees and pounce on to any and every nest they see, so that dozens of nests of Garden-warblers are destroyed each year by the increasing colony of Crows in the district in question.

I was once sitting at an open window, when in a tree in the gardens outside I heard a great commotion. A pair of Missel-thrushes were giving out their wild, harsh cries, from which I knew they were in trouble. On looking again, I saw a black robber at their nest, swallowing the eggs as fast as he could, all heedless of the distressing calls of the owners of the home.



'So wondrous wild the whole might seem.
The scenery of a fairy dream.

132 Blackcap and Garden-Warbler

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'So wondrous wild, the whole might seem
'The scenery of a fairy-dream.'



The Richest Wild Songs 135

Hastened out and drove him away: but it was too late, for all the eggs were gone. This was the second attempt at nest-building which these Missel-thrushes had made that season, and each time they were robbed by the Crows.

Let us return to our two woodland birds. In the joyous spring-time, when wood-side paths are covered with fast-growing flowers: when sweet-smelling may-blossom perfumes the air, and orange-tip butterflies, with light and buoyant wing, are seen over the tall hedge-parsley, hovering over the flowers and seeming undecided which of all the other beautiful flowers to settle on: when the Chiffchaff calls his undulating song from the higher trees, and the sleek Willow-wrens chime from the fresh green bushes

there are two songs which for purity and beauty surpass all. Even the Blackbird's mellow notes, given out in turn from every holly-bush and pine-tree in the wood, have to yield the palm to these richer wild songs: that of the Blackcap and that of the Garden-warbler. The latter is not so rich as the former, nor is it so long sustained. The Blackcap's notes, however,

136 Blackcap and Garden-Warbler

are a triumph. They are so wild, so full of all that makes the spring-time what it is, that when listening to them I seem almost to be listening to music which belongs to a perfect world.

Have my readers ever been in the woods before sunrise, just when the birds give out their first notes on a spring morning? If not, they have missed the most beautiful concert of natural music that can be heard in this England of ours. First of all the Blackbird's notes ring out, soft and mellow at first, gradually increasing in volume; then the Thrushes reply. The first beams of the rising sun act like a talisman. With one glorious outburst all the birds of the wood sing their best and loudest notes; and in the wonderful chorus there are two songs which for sweetness and purity surpass all. The Garden-warbler and Blackcap, when singing, as it were, their welcome to the sun, are hardly to be excelled by the Nightingale. In fact, I do not think so much of the Nightingale's song when uttered in the day-time as I do of these. It is the silence of the night which makes that music what it is. The song of the day-time

A Chorus of Music 137

is the Blackcap's, and next to that the Garden-warbler's.

Let those who are fond of Nature's music, and wish to hear the best, go into the woods on a bright spring morning, and they will not be disappointed. In my Middlesex home the birds awaken me every morning, and through my open window comes such a chorus of music that it is difficult to distinguish any one song from the others.

CHAPTER XI

A GARDEN LAKE

A COLONY of Rooks are calling loudly from above, and a number of smaller birds cheer me with their songs as I sit hidden in a thick clump on the margins of a very picturesque small lake in a North Middlesex garden. A Cuckoo keeps up its call, and a Thrush with a very good voice sings out his love-song all the time I remain in hiding. Chaffinches and Willow-wrens repeat their own songs incessantly, until the former becomes almost monotonous, if indeed any bird's song can be so. Rooks, as they fly to and from their nests, make large dark shadows on the wind-rippled water. The lake is of irregular shape, and is surrounded with well-wooded banks. In the middle there is an island, and on this several trees of various kinds; and it is here,

A Dabchick's Nest 139

amongst the leaves, that song-birds are hidden as they pour out their music in the sunshine.

My camera is well concealed near a Dabchick's



NEST OF LITTLE GREEN, COVERED.

nest : and I am also myself in hiding not very far away, waiting for the bird's return. A moment ago I heard a splash in the water, and, dropping my pencil and paper, seized the shutter release : but it is a false signal. The bird is hiding

in the thick reeds, and has not yet shown herself near her nest.

Some people think that waiting thus for a bird must be very tedious work; but to a bird-lover it is most interesting. It is when one is hidden and still that one sees much of the bird-life around. Why, some of the very shyest of birds will come and settle quite close, and their interesting ways are then more than fascinating.

The Dabchick has called from the other side of the lake; and I fancy this is the male bird who has deserted me from the opposite bank, and is giving his mate warning. But no; here she comes. Yes, it really is the Little Grebe; she is swimming some distance away from the nest, surveying the strange pile of rubbish which has suddenly risen near her home. Will she approach nearer? Yes, she swims close and closer, touches the nest with her beak, and then quickly swims away. Again and again she does this, evidently testing the rubbish heap; for birds seem to think that when anything strange is near their home in the shape of a supposed enemy, it is directed against their nest and eggs.

Working under Difficulties 141

and is not so much of a personal foe. Once more the cautious bird comes closer, and this time she jumps on to the nest, carefully picks away the wet water-weed covering the eggs, and arranges



NEST OF LITTLE GREBE, UNCOVERED.

these around her, and then comfortably settles down, shuffling her little round body until the eggs are comfortably arranged beneath.

I now get ready to make an exposure. Will she never hold that little brown head still? It is

moved from side to side and in every direction, looking out for an enemy. Although I can see her clearly, it seems strange that she cannot see me; but such is the case. Now she is becoming more settled. I place the release in my hands ready for the exposure; now I have it, and the bird is not at all disturbed by my shutter, for the sound that this makes is not audible a few feet distant.

Very carefully I stalk out of my place of hiding, waiting until the wind rustles the leaves, to help drown any sound I may make. My cramped legs are drawn up; I creep out on hands and knees until I am quite out of sight of the Grebe; then I get up and approach the lake from a different direction, and see that the bird is still sitting. I walk down the path, and the clever little creature rapidly covers her eggs, and before I have gone many paces she has dived out of sight.

I performed this little ruse so that she should not discover my place of hiding; for if I had risen up from where I was, on her return she would first of all have looked to see if I was

there. I changed the plate as quickly as possible, set my shutter, and retraced my steps the way I had come: for the bird may have been watching me from the seclusion of the weedy bank: and when trying to outmatch the artful instinct of a bird, one has to be even more artful. Many of my lessons in bird-stalking have been learnt from birds themselves, most of which are past-masters in the art of woodcraft. In a few minutes I am back to my place of hiding and waiting for another picture.

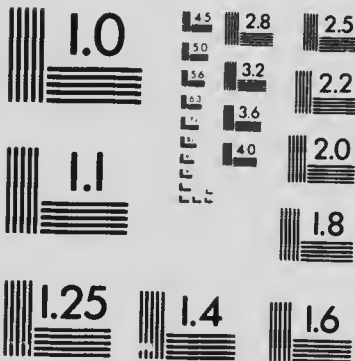
The Cuckoo has returned and called many times, while a noisy Great Tit, a few moments ago, almost settled on my head: but, being very much startled, flies onwards and does his best to tell all the birds around that a strange, unknown creature has entered their haunt and is hiding in a bush on the lake-side. However, he soon ceases his noisy talk, and goes back to his nest, which is near at hand.

A Thrush on the island still gives out his music to the sunshine: and a Blackbird with his sweet, liquid, flute-like notes sings short trills from a thick laurel-bush: presently he



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flutters on to a perch on the garden fence, once more sings, then 'drops' across the road, and no doubt is looking for food for his sitting mate.

The Grebe is back again on her nest: but instead of exposing a plate at once, I wait, and am well repaid by so doing, for about thirty minutes later the male bird swims across the lake and I see a pretty exercise. The hen rises from the eggs, and her mate is about to step into the nest to take his turn at sitting. I made an exposure at once: but directly I did so the male dived, and before the shutter could be released he was out of sight, leaving only a few ripples on the surface to show where he had disappeared. In a minute he was up again, however, and went back to the nest.

Five days have passed since I wrote the foregoing. Now I am back at my old spot by the lake-side, and am again waiting for my little water friend. The camera has only been in its place for a few minutes, when I hear a ripple on the water, and the hen rises to her nest. A curious thing is, that the Grebe often takes a danger signal from the Rooks which are above.

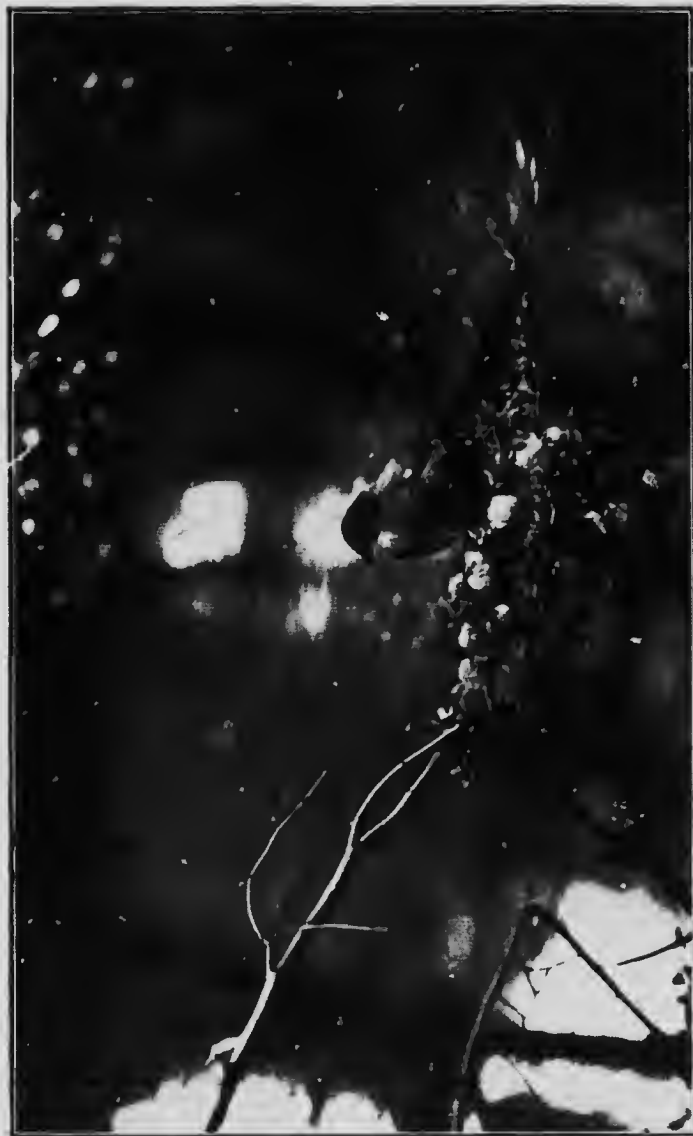


MALE SHRIKE PERCHED ON A BRANCH IN A DARK WOODS

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FEMALE DABCHICK ENTERING NEST SHOWING RIPPLES WHERE MALE DIVED



From her low position she is not always able to hear if an intruder approaches; but the Rooks all rise in a body if any one comes, and they give out loud calls. Whenever they do this, the Grebe very rapidly covers her eggs and dives, not even waiting to see if it is a false alarm.

As I sit in my tree shelter a hundred little flies are around; and, in spite of a pipe of strong tobacco, they refuse to let me alone. They are biting my face and hands most vigorously; but this is just one of the little inconveniences a bird photographer has to bear. It is but one, however; for when I went to my camera a few minutes ago, I found a spider had commenced to build its interesting web in front of the lens.

The Little Grebe sat for three weeks, and when this time had expired, four of the funniest-looking little birds imaginable appeared. They were not all hatched at once: one came out first; then a little later two more, and when about twenty-four hours had passed the fourth was released. Try to imagine four large walnuts with a short neck and beak, and two of the tiniest wings attached to each, and you will have some idea

of what baby Grebes look like when a day old. I must also mention their eyes: each is large, and gives to the youngster a most singular appearance. Although the young birds are so small, they are nevertheless exceedingly clever in the water: on land they are all but helpless.

Just a day after the last youngster had left its egg I found myself with my camera once more amongst the leafy paths surrounding this garden lake. Slowly I stalked towards the nest, and when about twenty yards away I thought it was quite empty; but as I looked through my glasses I saw something that looked like a leaf in motion. I slowly went closer, and then I saw two of these remarkable little creatures just described sitting on the edge of the nest. The other two, as I discovered by some faint squeaks, were actually sporting in the middle of the lake. One of those in the nest scrambled off when it saw me, tumbled into the water, and made the best of its opportunities by swimming away, not forgetting to dive in a most comical but skilful fashion. One look at me with its wide-open eyes, then under it

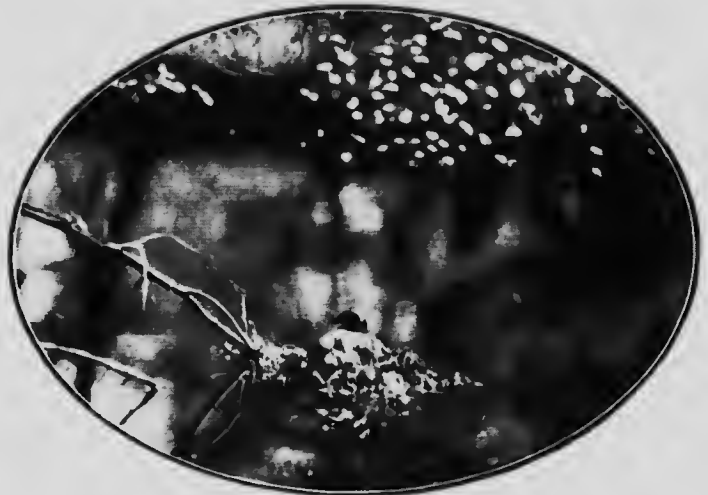
went, and came up six feet away, and swam very quickly across to where its brothers were.

The young Grebe on the nest, however, allowed me to get quite close; but at last left its home, and launched itself out into the spreading water around. This one also dived, but soon rose, looking rather scared, and one might have imagined by its comical expression that its conscience had troubled it for having left the nest against its mother's will. One or two squeaks were given; then it turned round and swam towards me, and tried to hide under the reeds on the lake-side.

I began wonder if I could catch this entertainin, juvenile bird, and determined to try. Slowly and carefully I crouched down in the reeds, pushed my hand through until it was immediately over the innocent young Grebe. I knew if I wanted to make a capture I must be rapid in my movements. I carefully lowered my hand until it was about six inches from the bird; then I dropped it down to where the youngster had been; but directly I struck the water I knew I had missed, and, guessing

that the fledgling had dived, I plunged my hand under the water, felt something soft, and carefully but quickly closed my fingers, to find that I had actually caught this wide-awake youngster.

Now for a photograph: I had just one plate left, fortunately having kept it for something



LITTLE GREBE SITTING.

which might turn up. How often have I been thankful for having saved 'that last plate,' and how often, after having exposed all, have I wanted 'just one more'! My friend Mr. Robertson came along the path at this moment, and between us we tried to photograph my

Patience Rewarded 151

capture. A stone pedestal was close by, and on this we placed the Grebe. I focussed the round top, placed my plate in the camera, and all was ready for an exposure. But at this stage the youngster did what all babies do, whether human or otherwise, when having their photographs taken. It wriggled and rolled about, squeaked, and refused to keep its head still, and behaved generally in a manner calculated to upset the equilibrium of any one but a bird-photographer. Would it never remain still? We kept it in our closed hands to try to soothe its spirits, placed it in the dark under my cap, but to no purpose; for on each attempt being made it wriggled and rolled still more energetically, until I almost gave the enterprise up.

But at times even bird-photographers are rewarded for patience; and at last the youngster became quite still, allowed me to give the necessary three seconds' exposure, and my readers are therefore, after all, privileged to look upon one of the most curious and funny little creatures that is to be found on a garden lake. Just look at this little bird's expression; it seems to

be saying, 'Well, this is a queer world,' and then, after a vacant stare around, adding, 'I do want my mother.' We soon gave it the opportunity of finding its parents; for a few minutes after placing it in the water it swam away, and soon the watchful mother was soothing it in a far more effective manner than the two Nature-lovers could do, who had just made such vain attempts in that direction.

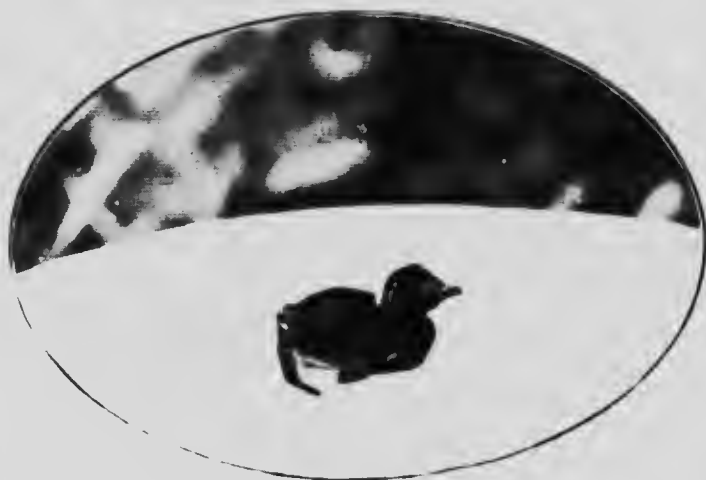
The young Grebes are dark brown, almost black, with a V-shaped lighter brown mark on the back, and one or two lines of a similar colour. The beak is yellow almost red. The legs and feet are remarkable, black and very long, quite as long as the bird, and when at rest on the water these float behind like two long tails; but when wanting to swim the bird brings them down below the surface and is able to paddle at a great pace for so small a bird. At twenty-four hours' old they can move a yard in a little less than four seconds.

The mother Grebe is very watchful over her young, and if danger threatens, one may often see her with the little ones pressing under her

Rearing Families 153

wings, when she will dive with her family in this position.

In less than three weeks after the first brood left their eggs, the two old birds had constructed another nest, and the hen laid another clutch of



YOUNG DABBING.

eggs, and at the time of writing this (June 24) she is sitting.

The bird sits for three weeks; so altogether a good part of the year is taken up by these birds in rearing their families, for on some occasions they have as many as three broods. It is surprising that the eggs hatch in some nests.

for I have known them to be actually in the water while the hen is sitting; other nests are built higher above the surface, and form a slightly drier home.

Of all the water-birds in this North Middlesex estate the Little Grebes are the most interesting, and each year I look forward to seeing them. They are increasing, for I am glad to find that a pair have built their nest on an adjoining pond, and there is every likelihood of these being successful in their labours of rearing a family.



HAUNT OF THE KITE.

CHAPTER XII

THE KITE AT HOME

IT was on one of the most beautiful days of a memorable fortnight spent amongst the Welsh hills that, as a party of four, we set off in search of the Kite. We started from the little roadside station, and journeyed several miles through most magnificent country. As the train sped on there was an ever-changing panorama on either side: deep dingles and fern-covered glens, with water trickling

down their sides, grey hills covered with patches of black heather, dense pine woods and vast green valleys, blue sky, with white clouds, and a hundred other changing scenes. At last our destination was reached. We made our way to the village inn, where we should have found a carriage in readiness; but for some reason this was not there, and we had to wait for an hour before we could proceed.

Included in our party were two Welsh bird-lovers, the Rev. D. Edmondson Owen and Mr. Gwynne-Vaughan, both genuine naturalists of the right sort, who like to study Nature from Nature herself. All who are interested in bird-life will be pleased to learn that these friends are doing all in their power to protect the Kite and other rare birds in the Principality. Any naturalist acquainted with these parts will know that there are some of the largest collectors about who will stop at nothing to satisfy their mania, or craving for filling their extensive cabinets collectors who are ashamed themselves to show their collections, owing to the quantities of rare eggs which

Castles in the Air 157

they contain, all taken from nests which they have wantonly looted year after year, and sometimes twice in a season. Therefore it will be realised that the fast-disappearing birds sadly need protection.

Readers may imagine the eagerness with which these two bird-lovers and myself drove away from this picturesque village towards that smaller village many miles farther on, where we knew there had been a pair of Kites some weeks previously. What castles in the air we built! How we hoped that the rare nest might be found! Would the birds still be there, or had their nests already been looted? I could not help wondering, as I often do wonder when starting out on such a day, what pictures my supply of plates would show when I again passed that bubbling roadside brook, or when I again looked upon that church standing all alone on the hill.

We enjoyed a delightful ride along a fine road amid many interesting signs of bird-life. Then at last we passed a solitary sentinel-like cottage, and a few minutes later we entered



KITE'S NEST.

the village. What could be in the air? The whole place was *en fête*. All the people were dressed in their 'Sunday best'; children were standing in the main street, folks were looking down from open windows, and as we passed along we were welcomed with brave cheers. Juveniles danced, and their elders waved their hands. One rosy-checked, curly-headed maiden especially rose to the highest pitch of excite-

A Humorous Mistake 159

ment : she jumped and danced until her pretty curls seemed as though they must be shaken from her head. Were they expecting the King? Had they mistaken one of us for His Majesty? We could not understand our distinguished reception.

But at last, when our carriage drew up at the only modest hostelry the village possessed, there was a great transformation scene. The faces of our friends changed their expression. Heads were still bending from open windows, but no patriotic smile lit up their features, no hands were waved. Children suspended their dancing, and that curly-headed child ceased trying to shake the curls from her head. She now opened her great expressive eyes, and sucked one of her fat fingers in a way not to be misunderstood.

What *was* the reason of this depressing change? As soon as we alighted and met the keeper, we inquired the cause of all this excitement: then we laughed with him, and heartily too, and I laugh now when I think of those villagers' sudden change of attitude.

160 **The Kite at Home**

It turned out that that day was a great occasion in that village. Work was stopped and a general holiday was proclaimed in honour of certain preachers who were coming to the church, and it had been our misfortune to be mistaken for the expected divines! The change from expressions of pleasure to expressions of disappointment was brought about by our halting at the inn instead of at the church.

However, after our horse had been stabled and fed, we set out for the haunt of the Kites. For some distance we climbed slowly up a long, slanting path, and at last we were on the summit of the hill beyond the village. Before us was a valley, with a wood on one side of its steep banks, and in this wood the Kites were believed to have their nest.

When an ardent bird-lover has at last tracked a bird like the Kite to its haunt, and when he first enters a wood where such a bird is known to have bred, he feels almost as though he were treading on favoured ground. Although only an ordinary wood, it seemed new to me. I had entered hundreds like it

before without noticing anything particular, but in them there was no Kite. As we entered the wood and looked round we saw several large nests, one of them tenanted by a Buzzard. At another time the discovery of this nest would have caused some excitement, but now we were after nobler game, and the Buzzard's nest was ignored, just as we have passed by in our schooldays a clutch of Blackbird's eggs when searching for a Wood-pigeon's or Turtle-dove's nest.

After a short stroll a nest which had been tenanted by a pair of Kites two years before was seen, and I climbed up to it, to find that there was no sign of this having been occupied during that season. It was here that the hen was shot while on her eggs, and the keeper vividly described how, when passing, he saw the magnificent bird dead on the ground, with her great wings stretched out on each side. It must indeed have been a sad sight, and if the nest had not been so overgrown with ivy I should have photographed it, to show the scene of this Bird-land tragedy.

162 The Kite at Home

Suddenly there was an awakening cry from one of our party: 'The Kite! the Kite!' We looked upward, and there, sure enough, was the great bird, not very far above the oaks, circling round majestically in the summer air. My Goerz binocular was unslung in a moment: I 'fixed' the bird in the next, and then followed her every movement. It was indeed a sight of a lifetime: for through such a powerful glass it seemed as though she were only a few yards away. The markings on her feathers were distinctly seen, and I could easily see the way in which the tips of the wings only were used to guide most of her movements, and how the tail was utilised as a rudder.

As we all watched, there sailed into the depths of blue above a Carrion-crow, which offered battle to the Kite. I have seen many Bird-land contests during the time I have intruded into the home-life of our birds: but this one lives in my memory as the most interesting. With a harsh *Kraaw!* the Crow flew up to the great bird and made a dash in passing. Then up and down, round and round

Crow versus Kite 163

they went, each trying to get uppermost. Once, when the Crow attacked, I saw the Kite's sharp talons outstretched ready to strike, and the formidable hooked beak was open and



KITE'S NEST.

ready to tear at the black adventurer should he come too near. The Kite's movements were graceful in the extreme: each sharp turn or sudden movement seemed to be guided by the long forked tail or by the mere tips of

the wings. It was not a silent battle; for the Kite gave out her wild whistle—a sharp, short *Whew-ehew-ehew, pee-e-oo!* the latter being something like the Buzzard's call; while the Crow retaliated with his harsh *Kraar-kraar!*

How long this aerial encounter would have lasted I cannot guess, for something happened which brought it to an end. Another Kite swooped up from the wood with a glorious curve and joined his mate. We seemed at last to be favoured by this sudden change in the situation; for if there were two Kites over one wood there must surely be a nest there. Our camera was picked up, and we proceeded at once to quarter the wood. Only a few minutes later we heard a shout come from higher up in the wood, and felt sure that the nest had been discovered; and this proved to be so. It was rough work running up that steep incline, and when we reached the tree where the nest was we were all 'puffed,' and could hardly speak for a few minutes through exertion and excitement.

With an insignificant little tree for a Kite

A Kite's Nest 165

to choose for a home! It was not much more than an ivy-covered stump, not more than twenty feet high; and on the top, nearly concealed by ivy-leaves, was the nest. By going a few yards higher up the wood it was possible to look into the nest, owing to the extreme steepness of the hill-side. With my field-glass I could easily make out its construction: large sticks outside, principally of oak, and evidently collected in the immediate vicinity. The interior was composed of smaller twigs and pieces of lamb's-wool, placed in patches, through which the sticks showed. One or two other materials were used in small quantities, such as pieces of horsehair and rabbit's fur, and also a piece of paper, which, curiously enough, one of our party had had his lunch wrapped in on a previous visit to this wood. The Kite is fond of finery, and any pieces of rag, paper, or any bright-coloured material which is at hand is always utilised.

The two eggs were not very strikingly marked: just a few spots and scratchings of reddish brown of varying shades sufficed for

166 **The Kite at Home**

their markings. The eggs were longer than those of the Buzzard, and not so rounded at the ends. I did not attempt to photograph the interior of this nest on this occasion, as the one who climbed the tree told us that the eggs were just on the point of hatching.

Eleven days later we again visited the haunt, quite expecting to see the young birds. As soon as we reached the tree we had the pleasure of seeing the great bird glide from her nest and shoot through the trees, and then up overhead, so that she could have a good view of the intruders. Not wanting to disturb the nest, I climbed an adjoining tree, and from that saw what there was to see. What was my surprise to find that there were still two eggs unhatched, instead of the young which we expected to find!

What, then, was the cause? The chip which was seen on one egg on our last visit was evidently a break, and not a sign that the youngster was about to leave the shell. The eggs were then examined, and it was found that a small pointed twig in the nest had



K. P. S. N. I.

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What, then, was the cause? The chip which was seen on one egg on our last visit was evidently a break, and not a sign that the youngster was about to leave the shell. The eggs were then examined, and it was found that a small pointed twig in the nest had



KITE'S NEST.

Protecting Kites' Nests 169

pierced one egg, so destroying it. The other looked healthy, however, and would undoubtedly have hatched had not something still more unfortunate happened. However, the end of the business was, that the poor Kites were disappointed; they did not rear a brood, as we hoped they would do. A Buzzard's egg was placed in the nest, and the hen sat on this for some days; but I never heard whether it was hatched or not.

We did what we could to protect these birds: a man was paid to watch, and he did his duty well; so that if the two unfortunate accidents had not happened, our efforts would have been crowned with success. We hope for better fortune this year (1904), as all nests discovered will be protected.

J. A. W. Bond, in his book *Bird-Life in Wild Wales*, says that he is sure that no hatch (of Kites) has come off in Wales during the past season (1903). It is always best not to make a definite statement like this without being certain that it is correct. I am able to tell bird-lovers that during that season there were five nests in

Great Britain. Three of these were in Wales, and one pair out of these three were successful in rearing a brood, so adding two young Kites to the small number now remaining. The three eggs in the other Welsh nest were taken by a collector. The collector is now the chief enemy of the Kite, and if these could be kept out of Wales for three or four seasons, these noble birds would once again become more numerous.

The Kite has been called a coward, and perhaps he is in some degree; but he can strike hard sometimes. On one occasion, when the watcher of the nest just mentioned approached the spot, the female Kite swiftly swooped down on his dog and struck her talons into the creature's back, making it cry out in pain! The Kite is a greater feeder of carrion than the Buzzard; but he will pounce down on any unprotected chicken or duckling he may see in a farmyard, and many a fine bird has fallen a victim to the old muzzle-loader fired by an angry farmer.

On our second visit to the nest I determined

A Photographic Adventure 171

to take a photograph if possible. I saw at once that it would be impossible to do this from the tree in which the nest was built: for if I had attempted to climb the rotten branches above, I and the camera might probably have fallen into the nest. The only thing to do was to ascend a neighbouring tree. I chose the one which is seen on the right of the nest in one of my photographs, and ascended to the branch which grows out on the left.

At the spot marked with a cross I fixed my camera, first strapping the tripod into position.



IVY-COVERED TREE IN WHICH THE
KITES BUILT THEIR NEST.

then fastening on the camera. I was in the tree alone; the others with me on this occasion did not like undertaking the task, so that the work was doubly difficult. The focussing was the hardest, for the thin branch supporting me swayed with my weight, and the slight breeze also helped to make success seem next to impossible. When at last I had focussed the nest, I managed to get the shutter set and the plate in position, and then waited until the tree was fairly steady. When I thought the camera lens was pointing at the nest, I squeezed the pneumatic ball, releasing the shutter, and exposed one plate. Two more were taken; then I unscrewed the front combination of my lens, and tried focussing with the single lens. As all photographers know, this meant extending the camera to more than double the first focus, but at last I was able to expose three more plates; then I packed up and came down the tree, and was not sorry once more to reach *terra firma*.

I have had to place my camera in some odd positions when working in trees, but I think this was the most difficult photographic task

Working under Difficulties 173

undertaken in the swaying branches of a tree-top. The photographs of the nest's interior are not very successful, but critics must bear in mind the extreme difficulties under which they were taken.

CHAPTER XIII

IS THE SPARROW A CRIMINAL?

SOME time ago a popular monthly magazine devoted several pages to the consideration of this question. Well-known scientists and bird-lovers were asked to give their opinion for or against this ubiquitous inhabitant of Bird-land. As was to be expected, museum naturalists spoke against this much-abused bird, while others who seemed to know the home-life of the Sparrow had some good words to say for him. I don't know why it is, but naturalists of the study always have been disposed to 'come down' on poor Cock-sparrow. Such friends seem to have had numbers of dead birds brought to them, and these specimens, in the majority of cases, have come from flocks shot in cornfields or in other places where the birds certainly are destructive.

But it is only fair to urge that naturalists should also examine some Sparrows shot at all other seasons of the year.

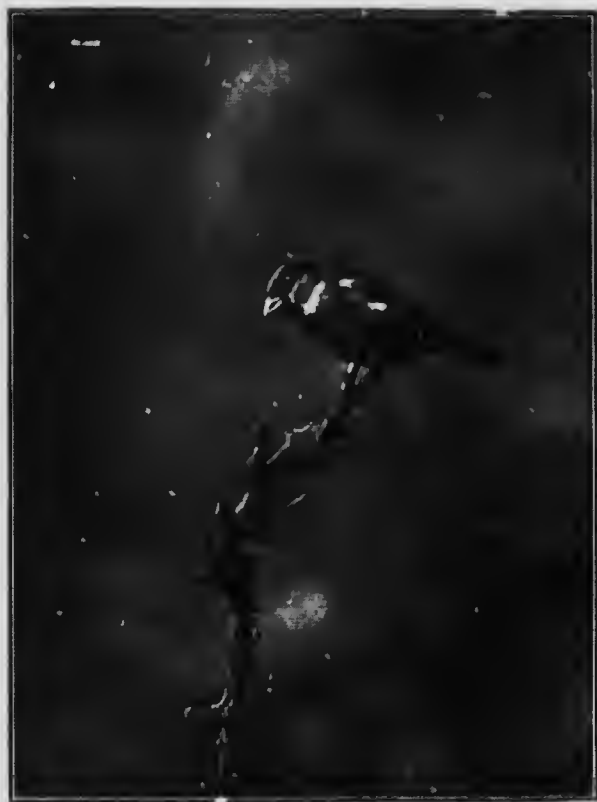
One of the best ways to discover what good the Sparrow does is to examine the young from a number of nests; the contents of their crops and gizzards suggest the credit side of the Sparrow's moral account. The young of the Sparrow are fed almost entirely on insects. While I am writing this chapter the busy little foragers are flying to the nests outside my open window, bringing supplies of insect food to their cheeping young. There are often four young in a nest, sometimes more, and these want a constant supply of food, and there is no doubt that during the nesting season, which lasts from February to August, one pair of Sparrows destroys countless numbers of hurtful insects. When other insects are scarce I have noticed how they hawk for flies in a manner worthy of the Spotted Flycatcher.

The so-called 'Sparrow Clubs' are a disgrace to a country where people are supposed to know what's what. If the members confined

176 Is the Sparrow a Criminal?

themselves to shooting Sparrows alone there would not be so much cause for complaint: for however much these 'sportsmen' (any man who can 'knock over' twenty-five Sparrows out of a flock, and leave another twenty-five badly wounded to die a miserable lingering death, is considered a sportsman nowadays!) may try, they will never exterminate the little brown bird. But the members of these clubs do not confine themselves to shooting Sparrows. Every bird smaller than a Thrush is a 'Sparrow' to them, and for every fifty Sparrows they shoot they destroy fifty other insect-eating birds that never touch grain nor do the slightest harm to farmers' crops. You will find three species of Titmice, many kinds of Warblers, including Lesser and Greater Whitethroats, Blackcaps, Garden-warblers, Weynecks, Whinchats, Robins, and a dozen or more other species, in their large 'bags.'

Just imagine what it means to a farmer to have five thousand insect-eating birds shot on his land in one year! Yet some farmers are even ignorant enough to boast that ten or twenty



SPARROW.

thousand 'Sparrows' have been shot during one year on their ground, while if these birds had been identified no less than five thousand, and in some cases a greater proportion, would be found to be species that live almost entirely on harmful insects.

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To those farmers who wish to get the greatest possible benefit out of their land I say, Let Nature alone. Don't shoot all the Hawks and Owls that come on to your farms. These birds keep down the Sparrows, and in an estate where there are one or two pairs of Owls for every fifty acres, Sparrows will not increase.

The Rev. Theodore Wood, one of the best-known naturalists, and son of the late Rev. J. G. Wood, says of the Sparrow: 'I used to be rather a champion of the Sparrow, and still have a good word to say for him. I was at one time a somewhat enthusiastic gardener, and was especially interested in growing peas. In 1880 scarcely any one but myself in the village where I lived succeeded in growing any peas at all. Every plant almost, they said, was destroyed by Sparrows: you could see the marks of their beaks all round the leaves. But these marks were really due to the attacks of *Sitona* weevils, which were exceedingly abundant that year. In my own garden I allowed the Sparrows unrestricted access to the pea-rows. Quite a flight of

A Sparrow Colony 179

them would rise from the beds every time I went into the garden; yet the peas flourished and bore splendidly. To finally settle the point I caught six of the Sparrows, and killed them, and opened their bodies. Not one had the smallest vestige of a pea-leaf inside it, but the crops of five were stuffed full of *Sitones* weevils.

The Sparrow has always been a favourite of mine, and I think I am specially able to say whether this much-abused bird does or does not do harm. I live where there is a Sparrow colony all round the house. They have nested for as long as I can remember in the thick ivy which makes my home so picturesque; and as long as I remain here the Sparrows shall remain also, for I would not be without their company. My home is surrounded with arable and grass land, while orchards and gardens stretch away in one direction as far as the eye can see, so that I have good opportunities of observing the behaviour of what is perhaps the 'cheekiest' and most knowing inhabitant of Bird-land.

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I have watched these feathered neighbours of mine throughout the ever-changing seasons: when the countryside has been joyful with the welcome return of spring: during the sultry days of summer: when Nature is clad in the many tints of fruitful autumn: and last, during the dull, cold days of winter. After much careful observation I have come to the conclusion that, taking the Sparrow's life throughout the year, he does not do harm: but, on the contrary, a great amount of good.

When the hens are sitting, and also when the young need to be fed, a hard-working little forager is the Sparrow. From sunrise to sunset two dozen or more are seen flying to and from their nests, those going thither carrying quantities of fat green caterpillars and enormous numbers of other insects. I have watched them on the orchard trees, and round about the roots of rhubarb and cabbages, diligently searching for destructive insects, and I can honestly say that without our Sparrows the crops of the farmers and of the gardeners would not be nearly so good as they are. I admit

The Sparrow a Benefactor 181

that when the corn is ripe the Sparrows eat the grain, but surely such beneficent labourers are worthy of their hire.

In the spring and early summer the Sparrows are of great benefit to the crops. By way of proof, shoot any number of Sparrows which are seen feeding in a cornfield in spring, and examine their crops: they will be found in the majority of cases to be filled with insects: and even



SITE OF NUTHATCH'S NEST.

182 Is the Sparrow a Criminal ?

in the time of reaping, amongst the grain will be found many pests which frequent cornfields, and which the Sparrows help to destroy. Then, later in the autumn, after the harvest is gathered in, Sparrows practically live on the seeds of wild plants that farmers call weeds. In the course of a fortnight a flock of Sparrows will consume the seeds of as many plants as, if allowed to grow in the usual way, would take a man a whole season to hoe up.

Sparrows are a boon to the farmer, providing there are not too many of them on his land. Their numbers must be kept within bounds, and man alone is to blame that they have increased to such an undesirable extent in some districts. For destroying the majority of our birds of prey, farmers have to pay a heavy penalty. In the districts where I live the number of Brown Owls keep down the Sparrow population; and often when lying in bed at night I hear a rustling in the ivy, and I know an Owl is reducing the population of my Sparrow colony. Then, when the Owls have finished their meal, they favour me with the familiar

Give the Sparrow his Due 183

notes of their musical hoots. When daylight comes, the parliament of Sparrows assembles, the members begin their debates, and in loud angry chirps discuss the tragedies of the night.

The Sparrow has been accused of all kinds of misdeeds the whole world over: yet, after all is said, those who thoroughly know him and his home-life, and can look on the two sides of his character, respect him for the vast amount of good he does, and forgive his few destructive habits, and never grudge him a fair wage for genuine services rendered.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PARTRIDGE AT HOME

As soon as the cold of winter has quite gone, Partridges begin to think of mating. The males are heard giving their love-notes during the month of February, and if favoured by the weather, well-filled nests are to be found in March. The courting of birds is always fascinating, and any one who has patience and a good field-glass may see the Partridges fighting for their mates.

It is a still, bright morning in early spring: crystal dewdrops deck the grass on the sloping hill-sides like sparkling gems. There is a chorus of bird-song from blue sky and budding hedge-row: for Larks and Blackbirds, and indeed all birds, give out their best love-songs before the sun dries up the dew which hangs on the grass-stems. Each tree and shrub seems to greet the

The Combatants Facing 185

sun: and although winter has not long gone, some of the more sheltered bushes are assuming their fresh spring-time dress.

With the exception of a few cattle in the distant corner, the meadow seems to be deserted:



NEST OF BUTCHER-BIRD.

yet on looking again, certain brown specks are seen, and these our glass shows to be Partridges. There are several birds assembled: some are feeding, while others are looking with interest at two of their fellows which stand facing each other, with heads bent low, almost to the ground.

186 The Partridge at Home

Then one raises his head, and seems as though he would spring at the other : but this threatened bird also raises his head, and prepares to receive the charge. For quite two minutes they stand facing each other in this defiant attitude, each raising and lowering his head, as though he were performing some comedy to amuse the more commonplace friends who are looking on.

One bird then steps forward a pace : the other steps backward, but in a moment dashes at his rival, the result being that both meet in the air, and each endeavours to inflict a wound with its claws. They then fall back on to the ground : again they charge, and this time beaks are also used to some purpose, for feathers are seen floating about. Round and round fly the determined combatants, claws and beaks being used with such rapid dexterity as is hard to follow : again and again they charge with mad ardour : and then at last falling back, they assume the attitude in which they were first seen.

All the birds except one hen of the assembly have flown off or wandered away, and are scattered over the field : but the hen in question

The Vanquished Suitor Flees 187

seems to take a lively interest in the progress of the battle. Well may this be the case, for she is the prize for whom these gallant feathered knights are fighting; and they well know that the one which is defeated in the fight will be rejected by the impartial hen. There is, after all, some similarity between wild nature and human nature.

Now the Partridges are hard at it again, and during the height of the scuffle one combatant draws back a short distance; and when the other runs forward he is met by a charge full in the breast from the artful fighter's feet. This shock knocks him over into the grass, and before he can recover he further receives such a shower of pecks and blows from his rival's claws that he runs off. The other now knows that he has won; and the vanquished suitor rises, and with a whirr of wings the winner and his well-won mate follow hard after. Over the hedge and away they go, round the next meadow, and then back again to the scene of the battle. However, the vanquished Partridge has had enough of fighting for one day, and makes the best of his

188 The Partridge at Home

escape: but if his heart is still set on love and mating, he will no doubt try again on a favourable morning.

The victor is now seen to be preening his feathers, but very soon gives up this and acts what we may call the fool before his lovely partner. He bows in conical fashion, runs round his hard-won mate, but never turns his back upon her. The hen takes but little notice: instead of recognition, she goes off in search of food, and her gallant mate, willing to learn, after a time engages in the same more prosaic business: but if he should find a special tit-bit, he holds it in his beak and gives a peculiar low chuckle, and the hen, running forward, is offered this gift of love—certainly not a very grand present, but really the best he can offer.

If the weather should continue fine, the hen commences egg-laying a few days later. No nest is built: just a hollow is scraped in the ground underneath a furze-bush or in some other sheltered spot. More often than not, Partridges' eggs are laid amongst dead leaves, and as incubation proceeds, the eggs are covered

Thirty Eggs in a Nest! 189

over with these if the sitting bird goes away from the nest. The hen is very devoted to her eggs, and will sometimes even allow a person to stroke her: yet if thoroughly frightened by any sudden visitor, she flies away, and in that case seldom returns to her eggs. It is surprising



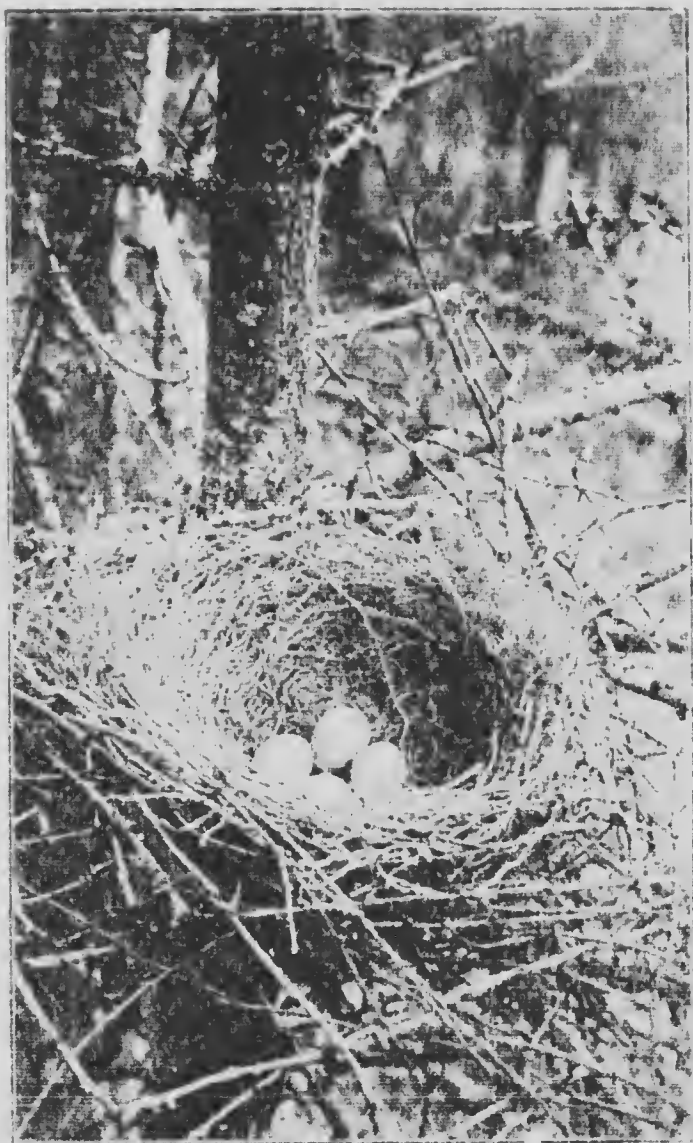
BLUE TIT.

the number of eggs which are sometimes laid in one nest. Fifteen is a common number, while sometimes as many as thirty are found! In the latter case it is usually two hens which do the laying: for the male Partridge sometimes has two mates.

190 The Partridge at Home

When the eggs are hatched, the parents are very much attached to their young chicks, and will protect them against enemies to the best of their ability. The youngsters—funny, fluffy little balls—run about as soon as they leave the shell. It is marvellous how they can conceal themselves on almost bare ground. I have had a whole brood hiding at my feet in the stubble, and yet I could not see a single one. On raising my foot carefully, I saw one fledgling squatting underneath my instep, and after a lengthy search one or two more were seen. If the ground is bare, such as a ploughed field, the hen Partridge can hide almost as well. When lying flat on the earth, as they do if alarmed, they are most difficult to distinguish from their surroundings.

If a dog goes near the youngsters they all at once scuttle in different directions, and the parents throw themselves in front of the creature and drag themselves along the ground, always keeping just out of the dog's reach. Of course the dog follows, and in this characteristic fashion enemies are attracted far away from the brood. The parent birds often also feign lameness or





NEST OF JAY.

a broken wing so perfectly that nine out of every ten people, who did not understand their specious little dodges, would follow and try to catch them.

It is really most amusing to notice how the birds always keep just out of reach of their pursuers : and when the latter are attracted about one hundred yards from the young, the old birds fly up with a great clatter of wings, betokening their satisfaction, and thus they considerably surprise those who cannot see through a Partridge's *ruse de guerre*. The young follow their parents for the greater part of the summer : and at night a number congregate together and roost in parties. All ground birds have a number of enemies, such as stoats, weasels, and prowling cats. To guard against attacks from these the birds roost closely packed together, with their beaks all pointing outwards, and they are thus able to give the alarm if an enemy approaches from any direction.

Of all our game-birds, the Partridge is the one we could least do without. It does not fall to the lot of all sportsmen to go to the

194 The Partridge at Home

moors for Grouse, or to shoot by the covert side : yet most can have their day with this little grey game-bird. Some sportsmen have had their best days of sport in the Partridge's haunt, and what sport can come up to a day's walk with dogs amongst the 'roots' ? At the end of the day one may not count the bag by hundreds : if it totals eight brace we are satisfied, for we know that none are missed. In the big drives a great number are only half hit by a charge of shot, and get away to die a lingering and painful death underneath a hedge-row.

In the opinion of many old sportsmen the modern method of killing Partridges by driving is poor sport compared with the old way of 'walking up' the birds. The Rev. F. O. Morris in his *British Birds* says that an acquired taste is a proverbial expression, and he adds that there is such a thing as an acquired scent : and although that of a turnip-field, the rendezvous of the Partridge, is not particularly agreeable, yet to the sportsman it is of a most exhilarating and pleasant nature, and those who have 'walked the roots' will know that his statement is very true.

CHAPTER XV

SOME BIRDS OF THE HILLS

In the wild hill districts of this country, far from the haunts of men, we meet with quite a different variety of birds from those found in more open and cultivated areas. Birds of the hills are those which love freedom in an unlimited sense; and a wild kind of freedom it is theirs to enjoy. They live far away from the traffic of city, town, or even village: so that the birds themselves are, as might be expected, as wild as their romantic surroundings.

The Wheatear is in some places the first of our spring migrants to arrive. A sprightly little fellow he is, always welcome. The bare hills become more interesting when he flits from stone to rock, and his merry call makes the wide moors joyful. I have met with the



YOUNG WHEATEAR.

Wheatear in many of my Bird-land rambles, yet nowhere did he seem more at home than among the bleak western hills.

I was for some time last spring in one of the very wildest parts to be found in the whole of the British Islands; and while searching for Ravens' nests I came upon several Wheatears. As I stopped to look at these

The Wheatear's Nest 197

birds, they also remained still on a lichen-covered rock and looked long at me, seemingly much surprised to see such an intruder in their mountain home. I think they could not quite understand what I wanted there, though they seemed free from fear. I approached a little closer, and one flitted on to an adjacent rock, uttered his note, *Tick-tick!* and looked at me again. What bright little birds they proved to be! How sleek and neat, and not as unkempt as one would expect them to be after a thousand miles' flight across continents and seas! Yet nearly all our migrants appear at their best after their long aerial voyage! As I slowly went towards these birds, they hopped or flew from boulder to boulder. A Raven flying out from a dingle near at hand diverted my attention, and when I looked again the Wheatears had disappeared.

The Wheatear makes its nest in curious places. A favourite site is underneath a rock or tuft of grass in the hill district; but in some other parts I have known it to build underneath old tins, pans, hats, and in disused fish-

boxes on the sea-coast. I have even known of one nesting in a piece of an exploded shell on an extensive stony stretch where gun-practice is common. The Wheatear is like that homelaud bird the Redbreast: few places come amiss to it for nest-building purposes.

On some of the higher table-like hills the Curlew is found breeding. Many people, when listening to the male Curlew's spring call, have wondered what strange creature could be uttering that far-reaching musical note. I first heard it on one of Scotland's romantic hills, and, looking in the direction whence the note came, I saw a large bird flying low over a green pasture many hundred feet below where I stood. Since then I have searched for their nests on many of the hills of Scotland and Wales: but they are always difficult to discover, although the eggs are so large, some measuring about three inches in length.

The first nest I found was on one of the Welsh hills. We had heard Curlews calling here, and though rather late for their nests, I sallied out early in the summer morning

The Golden Plover 199

to find a nest, if there was one to be found. After a toilsome climb up the steep dew-covered grass slope, and thence over a bog on the summit, I reached drier ground: and as I walked over the brow of the hill and descended on the other side, I saw the male Curlew. He too saw me, for he at once gave out his inimitable call, which caused the hen to leave her nest: but not before I had 'marked' the spot, some hundred or more yards ahead. After a tedious search about the wet grass, I at last found the longed-for nest: and although a strong wind was blowing, as is always the case on these lofty hills, I secured a series of pictures. Four eggs is the usual number laid, though in this nest there were only two.

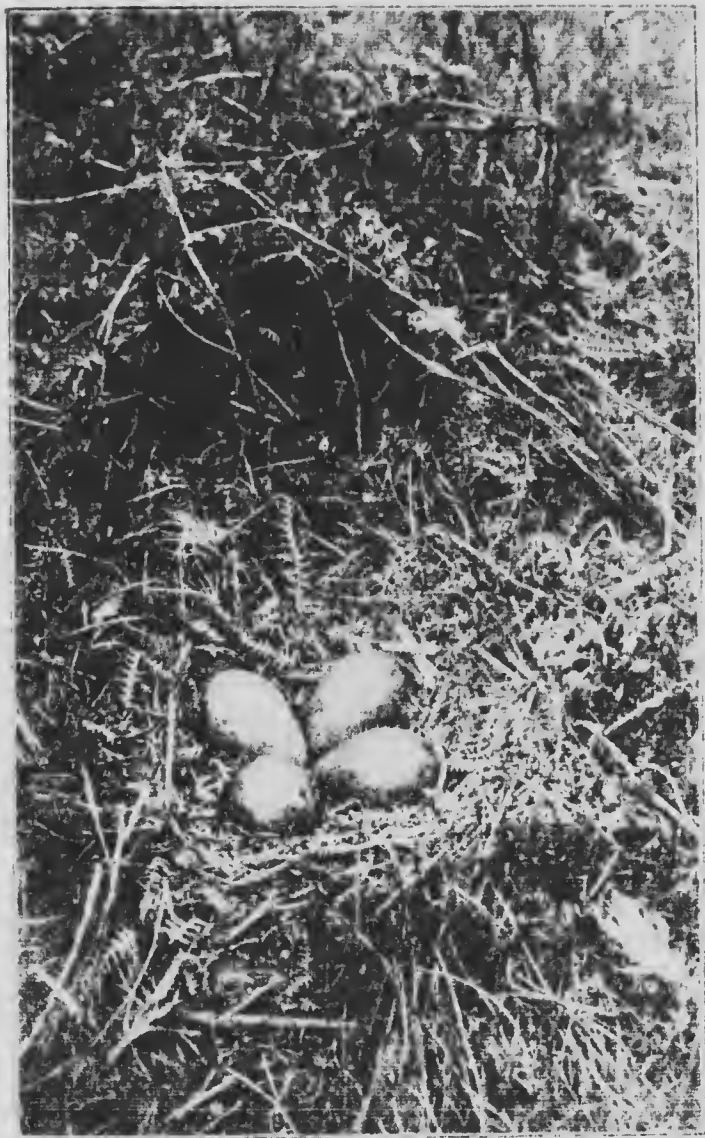
On the hills where the Curlew breeds we sometimes find the Golden Plover also. This is another bird which has a note or song which is in harmony with its surroundings: that is, a song which speaks wildness. I have spent many hours searching for Golden Plovers' nests, and I have watched the birds for as many more, hoping they would go back to

their nest and so show me the whereabouts of the site; but I have never been fortunate enough to find a nest. When the young Golden Plovers are about (they run as soon as they leave their eggshells) the parents are very clever in attracting enemies from the spot. Nearly all birds of the Plover tribe show great affection for their young; indeed, it is surprising to take note of the courage some will show.

I have heard egg-collectors remark that it is not cruel to take eggs, because birds have no feelings, and they will soon lay again. I have had ample proof that birds do show the possession of feelings, and that they love their eggs and young with a love that is akin to human affection. I have found a hen Redstart dead in its nest a few hours after its eggs were stolen; and I have known a Carrion-crow to die of grief shortly after its mate was shot. But one of the most touching incidents which have come under my notice was that of a Redpoll, which actually alighted on the fingers of a person who was taking its precious

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I have heard egg collectors remark that it is not good to take eggs, because birds have no feelings, and they will soon lay again. I have heard simply point out that birds do show the possession of feelings, and that they love their eggs, and are very watchful, that is akin to sentimentality. I once found a hen Redstart guard its nest for some days after its eggs were stolen, and I have known a Curlew cry as the egg was broken after its mate was lost. But one of the most touching incidents which came under my notice was that of a Redpoll, which actually alighted on the breast of a trespasser who was taking its parents



CURLEW'S NEST.



Do Birds Really Love? 203

eggs, and pleaded in its own language for them to be spared to her! And I have been almost attacked by a Willow-wren when going too near its young; and often have I been pecked by our smaller birds when putting my hand into a nest.

Nevertheless, there are people who say birds do not know what affection is. There is a great deal more real love and affection to be found in the birds' world than in many homes of our own; and any one who wishes to prove this can easily do so by going into any wood or country lane in the spring-time; even the wild, isolated birds on the bleak mountains show that they know what it is to love their young, and to be willing to make sacrifices for them.



TUFTED DUCKS.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOME-LIFE OF THE TUFTED DUCK

WE had a long railway journey before we reached the little Shropshire station which was about four miles from our destination. Along a dusty road we perseveringly tramped on a scorching hot day. At last, however, we reached the estate on which the Tufted Duck breeds: we met the keeper, and soon found ourselves by the large lake, fringed with reeds. Far out on the water I could see with my field-glass several pairs of the Ducks. They are smaller than the Wild Duck or Mallard. The body of the male is black

The Tufted Duck 205

above and white at the sides and underneath : the head is a metallic blue. The female is brown, and nothing like so handsome as her mate.

The Ducks had their breeding-quarters in a large osier-bed at one end of the lake. The osiers were growing on long strips of marshy land about fifty yards in length, and there were a great many of these side by side. Between each was about three to four feet of deep black slime, covered with a thin layer of water. We had to jump across these evil-smelling ditches - no easy matter, as the osiers were very thick, while there was no really firm foothold from which to leap. Besides, we had our cameras and plates to carry. It was rough work pushing our way through the thick bushes while searching for nests : but we were soon rewarded by finding one very fine nest with a full complement of eggs.

It was almost smothered with down from the sitting bird, and I had to move a quantity of this aside before a photograph could be taken. A nest like this amongst thick grass makes a poor picture if it is taken while the

sun is shining, because shadows from the grasses falling on the plain eggs look like markings in the finished photograph, and give a false rendering of the nest altogether. On the eastern horizon there were clouds rising: I waited many minutes for these to soften the light, so that I could expose the plate while it was shady: but when these did come over they seemed to melt away in the strong beams. Waiting seemed to be in vain: but there were other heavier clouds coming up, and when at last these arrived it seemed a long time standing there in the heat I was able to make an exposure.

When this was accomplished, one of those little incidents happened which, if they afflicted any one but a bird-photographer, might help to turn the hair grey. My slide in some way opened, and my plate was spoilt by the light getting to it! I changed my plate in my changing-bag (the sun was sending down even still greater heat), and then I placed the slide in the camera once again, and looked hopefully at the sky. The clouds were nearly everywhere



sun's shining, because shadows from the grasses falling on the plain eggs look like markings on the finished photograph, and give a false rendering of the nest altogether. On the eastern horizon there were clouds rising; I waited many minutes for these to soften the light, so that I could expose the plate while it was shady, but when these did come over they seemed to melt away in the strong beams. Waiting seemed to be in vain, but there were other heavier clouds coming up, and when at last these arrived, it seemed a long time standing there in the heat. I was able to make no exposure.

When this was accomplished, one of those terrible rains appeared which they afflict so often in the country. My camera might help me to see the rain, but my photograph might help me to see the eggs. My slide in some way or another, however made, was spoiled by the light getting to it. I changed my plate in my changing box, the sun was sending down even still greater heat, and I again I paid of the slide in my camera once again, and looked hopefully at the sky. The clouds were nearly everywhere



TUFTED DUCK'S NEST.

but covering the sun, and I had another long spell of waiting, but at last succeeded in making one or two exposures.

At this point our adventures in the haunt of the Tufted Duck may be said to have merely begun. We went on searching, and I was on some way ahead when I heard a cry behind. My companion had slipped while jumping from one osier-bed to another, but he had happily just managed to catch hold of a thick stem on the bank on which he wished to land. Then he fell backwards, and the picture I saw on turning round was that of my friend clinging with hands and knees to the osier, which, gradually bending with his weight, was lowering him into the unpleasant black slush beneath! The whole scene reminded me of one of the ancient modes of torture, but having no leisure for comparisons, I hurried back, and was just in time to effect a rescue, but not before my friend's camera, which was slung on his back, had sunk into the dark slimy water. However, we were glad that nothing more serious had

happened. We resumed our work, but my unfortunate friend soon afterwards had another adventure. One leg slipped into one of the unpleasant ditches while he was jumping across.

Once more we went on, and found another nest, in not quite such a pretty situation, but I took one or two photographs before we went back. At this nest, and also at the first which I photographed, I had good views of the Tufted Ducks, for they swam quite close to me, and engaging little birds they seemed to be. The males, in their black and white dress, were particularly attractive, and were a cheerful contrast to the plain brown hens.

I have met with and photographed this Duck in other parts of the country, and he always has been one of my favourite Bird-land friends. He looks such a cute, knowing little fellow, with his small bright eye taking in everything around. How he dodges about in the water, and dives like a thorough native of the flood! When not feeding he is always preening his plumage. When cleansing his breast-feathers he will almost lie on his back

Another Accident! 211

on the water, with one foot pointing upwards, and his neck turned round, while his black beak smooths the feathers. He seems very devoted to his brown mate, and when swimming about keeps close to her, his sharp yellow eye turned in all directions on the look-out for danger; and if an alarm is given, both birds are under in a moment, and rapidly swim away to shelter and safety.

On our way back from the haunt of the Tufted Ducks still another mishap befel my adventurous friend. I heard a cry proceeding from the direction in which I thought he was, but could not see him. However, I presently observed him rising slowly from between two



HAUNT OF THE TUFTED DUCK.

The Tufted Duck

osier-beds, and then guessed what had happened. When I got closer and looked at him my worst fears were realised, for he had had a ducking and no mistake. A sudden cold-water bath is not unpleasant the bird-photographer looks on one of these as a thing to be expected in rough work; but a fall into thick, evil-smelling mud, and black mud too, is a very different thing. My friend looked the very picture of dejection; but when we at last got him on *terra firma* we could not help laughing, and he laughed too, for there was no doubt he did look comical. If you dip your hand into a bowl of thick cream, it clings to your fingers, and you cannot get it off without scraping. That was the condition of my friend; but the 'cream' was black, and it covered almost the whole of his body. What a sorry object he looked, and what a much more sorry object he must have felt! The keeper took out his jack-knife, I also took out mine, and we scraped him down; we emptied his pockets of their contents, wrung his coat, and did our best to make him look as



TUFFED DUCK'S NEST

The Tufted Duck

osier-beds, and then guessed what had happened. When I got closer and looked at him my worst fears were realised, for he had had a ducking and no mistake. A sudden cold-water bath is not unpleasant to the bird-photographer looks on one of these as a thing to be expected in rough work, but a fall into thick, evil-smelling mud, and black mud too, is a very different thing. My friend looked the very picture of dejection; but when we at last got him on *terra firma* we could not help laughing, and he laughed too, for there was no doubt he did look comical. If you dip your hand into a bowl of thick cream, it clings to your fingers, and you cannot get it off without scraping. That was the condition of my friend; but the cream was black, and it covered almost the whole of his body. What a sorry object he looked, and what a much more sorry object he must have felt! The keeper took out his jack knife, I also took out mine, and we scraped him down; we emptied his pockets of their contents, wrang his coat, and did our best to make him look as



TUFTED DUCK'S NEST.

Gull versus Tufted Duck 215

much like his former self as possible, and were at last fairly successful. Then we turned towards home, feeling as we went that we had had a very successful, if an adventurous, day in the haunt of the Tufted Duck.

I once saw a most interesting encounter between a Gull and a Tufted Duck. The Duck had captured a fish, and when it came to the surface the Gull immediately pounced down and endeavoured to pull the fish away. The Duck, not to be worsted so easily, quickly dived, but, the water being clear, the Gull could follow the Duck's movements from above. Presently the diver had to come to the surface for breath, when the Gull was, of course, ready to receive him, almost pulling the fish from his beak. In the nick of time, however, the clever diver, having taken in a supply of air, again dived, travelling fast under water, so as almost to succeed in getting away; but immediately he rose the Gull was once more ready to receive him. I almost thought that my little friend would be half-drowned, so determined was he that the Gull should not have

the prize; for he became quite exhausted through being so long under water.

Again and again he dived, while the angry thief hovered over the water, always waiting to receive him on his coming to the surface. He came up once, however, some little distance away; and this gave him time to get firmer hold of the fish, and also to take a larger supply of air. But the Gull now came forward as fast as his wings could carry him, and made a violent dash, but only struck water; for my clever Bird-hand friend was under before he could possibly be touched. Away he went as fast as he could, near the bottom of the lake, the Gull meanwhile in his excitement losing view of him. When at last the Duck came up it was ten or more yards away, and with a big gulp the fish was swallowed.

Before the Gull could reach him he was now calmly taking a view of the situation from the surface of the water; and one could imagine, as he looked at his foiled adversary and raised his black tuft, that he was ironically wishing the Gull good cheer and better luck next time.



LLANELWEDD RECTORY.

CHAPTER XVII IN A RECTORY GARDEN

ONE of the most enjoyable holidays I ever had was spent with my bird-loving friend the Rev. D. Edmondes Owen, Rector of Llanelwedd, Radnorshire. I shall long remember the delightful days which we passed together amongst the birds in roaming the hills of that wild and romantic country. Of the birds we found and photographed there I have written in other chapters; in this I want to give a description of some of the birds which were found nesting in the old Rectory garden, or in the immediate vicinity.

218 In a Rectory Garden

The Rectory stands in a charming spot on the high ground on the banks of that ever clear and always musical river, the Wye. At the very thought of the Wye, memory carries me back to scenes of springtime splendour, while I seem to hear once again the picturesque river as its waters bubble over the rounded pebbles, and to see once again in my mind's eye the sunbeams kissing the ripples. The river winds about amongst the old hills: the more distant are black on their summits with patches of heather, the nearer being green with the touch of oncoming spring.

The Rectory is surrounded with the most charming scenery in every direction: it would be almost impossible for any one to live amid such delightful surroundings without becoming a lover of Nature.

The ancient church of Llanelwedd, close to the Rectory, is of great interest. Llanelwedd is one of the original Welsh parishes dating back to pre-Norman times. The first church was dedicated to a Welsh saint, Elaeth, so that the real name ought to be Llanelaeth.

Dedicated to Elaeth 219

The original church was no doubt built on the hills above the present church; but when the Normans came and conquered the people of Builth and the surrounding parishes, they destroyed the earlier sanctuary, which was dedicated to Elaeth, and built the present structure, which they dedicated to St. Matthew. The most striking pre-Reformation feature in the architecture of the church is the old priest's-door on the south side, so narrow and so low that a tall stout priest would have had all his ingenuity exercised to effect an entrance.

About the time this church was built,



LLANELWEDD CHURCH.

220 In a Rectory Garden

Bishop Bek was appointed to the See of St. David's, and finding the Dean and Canons slow, sleepy, and slovenly, built a kind of rival cathedral at a place called Llangadock. The tithes of several Radnorshire parishes were taken from their real owners to keep this great pro-cathedral going. Only £6 a year was left to carry on church work in Llanelwedd, with the result that for many hundreds of years this little parish was held in plurality with one or more other parishes. The old vicarage house became the village inn, called the 'Carpenters' Arms,' and occupied generally by the sexton, who as a rule was richer than the parson.

All this is changed now. The tithes have been restored to the parish. A large Rectory house embraces the old 'Carpenters' Arms.' The church has been renovated, and is crowded every Sunday.

Round about the Rectory some fierce battles have raged in the old days. On the hills there are a number of large mounds—probably the burying-places of the dead after these conflicts. While I was at the Rectory Mr. Owen had

Charcoal, not Gold! 221

permission to open one of these mounds. One hot Saturday afternoon a small party of us ascended a hill, taking with us one or two stalwart navvies, and we proceeded to open one of the best of these mounds.

We dug down a great depth, and found nothing, much to the disgust of the workmen; but after careful examination we discovered that a row of stones ran along the whole length of the mound about two feet below the surface, and beneath these were a few pieces of charcoal, this going to prove that after these battles the armies burnt their dead and then buried the ashes. It will be a long time before I forget the looks and the remarks of the navvies when they found, instead of the gold which they expected—mere charcoal!

Living as he does amid such delightful scenes, one can understand my friend being a true bird-lover, who loves to learn of Nature from Nature herself. The reader can imagine what a pleasure it was to have as my guide among the hills one who was so much in sympathy with my aspirations and with my work.

222 In a Rectory Garden

One did not have to search long in such a garden for nests: for I believe birds know when they are protected. In and around the



FORTY WINKS

garden as many as forty species of birds have bred—that is, within one hundred yards of the house; thirty-one of these species have actually had their nests in the garden.

The Parish Rooks

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Close to the house there are three sycamore-trees, and before Mr. Owen came into the parish, Rooks used to build in these. A young



'WHO SAID MICE?'

man living in the house, however, drove them away by shooting at them with an air-gun. The Rooks did not return to their old home until this disturber of the peace had left the

neighbourhood. Then, later, the tall branches of the old trees had to be cut off; and this helped to postpone the return of the Rooks, though one or two of the colony visited the place with the intention of building. In a recent letter from Mr. Owen he says: 'Now the Rooks have studded the three sycamore-trees with nests, where they will be left unmolested as long as I am here.'

Jackdaws for many years have built their nests in the chimneys; but as this is somewhat of an inconvenient place to have a nest, the chimney was wired. When the birds showed signs of persistence, some one climbed to the roof and drove them away, and now they breed in a neighbouring wood.

On the old tree-trunk seen on the left of the Rectory a very interesting thing once happened. A young Tawny Owl was seated on the top of the trunk in full view of the garden birds. Of course, as soon as it became known that an Owl was present, all the birds made a great ado, and flew round and about the intruder, giving out their alarm-cries. The most amusing

Denizens of the Garden 225

thing, however, was the conduct of a Tree-creeper. This little bird flew to the bottom of the great trunk, and worked its way up until close to the Owl; then, stopping and peeping for a moment at the large bird, it dived to the foot of the tree; and then up again it went, had another look, and so on always taking care, when it got close to its big enemy, to dive quickly to the foot of the trunk.

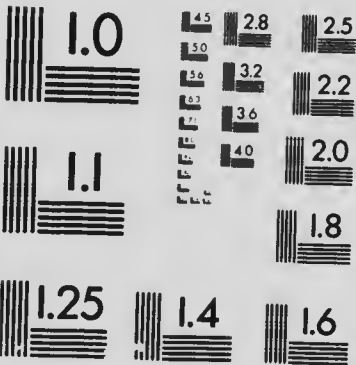
The Goldfinch, Golden-crested Wren, Sand-piper, and Dipper have also nested in this favoured garden; and this short list gives some idea of the variety of birds which may be attracted by protection. Just outside the grounds the Kingfisher has made its home on the river banks; and sometimes the swollen summer stream has washed the bank away, leaving the eggs exposed to view.

I take a few extracts from a letter recently received from Mr. Owen: 'My garden birds have not been quite so numerous this year as last. A Redstart built under the roof of an outhouse at the end of the garden. The strange part is that, though I watched this



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bird carefully until the young ones left the nest and grounds. I never saw the cock bird. I am sure he did not help in the building of the nest or in the feeding of the young. This I know is an exception, and it is just possible that he was killed soon after the nesting site had been chosen. If so, I can only say that his widow did not look for, or at least did not find, another mate, but reared up her little family in a manner worthy of the best traditions of the old Rectory ground.

A pair of Spotted Flycatchers last year built their nest in a Thrush's old nest. They did not shirk their duty because an old nest was utilised, but carried quite as much material and built quite as carefully as they would on any other foundation. I have noticed that Spotted Flycatchers make more ado about choosing a site than any other birds I know. I have watched several pairs, examining no fewer than a dozen or twenty likely places, chattering away in the most excited manner all the time. Every suitable site was carefully and excitedly discussed, and when the best



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TREE-CREEPER'S NEST, WITH PLACE OF BARK PROPPED OUT TO SHOW EGGS.

A Thrush's Nest 229

positions were chosen the birds worked hard until the nests were ready.

· You will remember last year a Thrush built



GOLDFINCH'S NEST.

in a solitary box-bush quite near the great yew-tree in the churchyard. I carefully watched this nest, and drew Mr. Gwynne-Vaughan's attention to one point of interest. On the

230 In a Rectory Garden

Tuesday there was only one egg in the nest. On Wednesday, about noon, there was still that same solitary egg; but on Thursday afternoon, about 2.30 o'clock, there were three eggs in it, and the following day four, the full clutch.

The very day the young ones were hatched, a Sparrow-hawk took up his position on one of the uppermost branches of the yew-tree. For some time he remained there, apparently half asleep. I watched him from my study window, but something took my attention away from him. In about ten minutes I heard the loud distress-call of a captured Thrush. I rushed out, but was too late. The nest was tilted; downy feathers were flying about; the young birds were badly mauled, and one of them was dying. The heartless villain of the plot had disappeared beyond the railway, carrying his victim with him to a secluded nook. I mention this incident because some naturalists have told me repeatedly that a Hawk will not attack a bird on its nest.

The Missel-thrush builds every year in the



SWALLOW NEST IN LOG-SHED

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Five Mosses thrush builds every year in the



SPOTTED FLYCATCHER'S NEST IN THRUSH'S OLD NEST.

The Old Birds in a Panic 233

yew-tree on one of the lower branches. When the Rectory was undergoing repairs, some three or four years ago, the workmen were much entertained by the agitation and noise of the



KINGFISHER'S EGGS AT END OF NESTING HOLE.

two old birds. As soon as I arrived on the scene they drew my attention to the matter. It was not difficult to guess the reason. A cat or Sparrow-hawk was in the tree. I called all the men from their work; we

encircled the tree, and then I threw in a stone. Like a flash of lightning, the Sparrow-hawk dashed out and flew across the Wye. He had been there for nearly two hours tantalising these poor birds, sitting, no doubt, in a pensive fashion, biding his chance to pounce upon his prey.'

The Corn-crake, with its harsh croak, may often be heard calling the whole night through, and the note becomes very monotonous. The schools are near the Rectory, and the school-master was so annoyed at the noise made by the Corn-crake that, after school, he went into the little meadow next to the churchyard and tried to drive the Corn-crake away. But the Corn-crake is gifted with ventriloquial powers, and on this occasion it seemed to call now from one end of the field, the next from the other; and the poor distracted man, after wildly chasing this bird, at last thought he was successful, for the calls ceased, and he went back to the school.

Judge of his surprise, on entering the room, to see a bird running about the floor. Not

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THE BIRDHOUSE AND THE EGG.

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FIELD FLYCATCHER'S NEST IN A BOX.

being acquainted with the Corn-crake, he caught this visitor, not knowing that it was the one he had been chasing, and took it to Mr. Owen to have it identified. His surprise must have been still greater when it was pronounced to be a Corn-crake. This little episode struck me as being one of the comedies of Bird-land. The schoolmaster, distracted by the calls of the bird, went into the field to drive it away. The bird, in its turn, being scared by the master's vigorous rushes about the field, retreated to the schoolroom, evidently thinking that change of scene would be beneficial to both sides.

In spring and summer this very entertaining garden resounds with bird-song, and this sweet music around the house, added to the fascinating habits of the feathered inhabitants, repays a hundredfold for the protection accorded the birds.

CHAPTER XVIII

MY WHITETHROAT

I FIRST made the acquaintance of my Whitethroat on a piece of waste ground just outside my garden. I heard an angry, chatty song in the tall hedge-parsley, and then a perk little bird popped out from the rustling stems, looked at me for a moment, lifted his crest, then as quickly popped back, and again gave out his sharp, angry song. Why was he so nettled? I could see he was still in the tall vegetation, for as he hopped from stem to stem the leaves moved, so I went forward and parted the parsley. Then I found out why he was in such a scolding mood.

Down amongst the tall, thick grass I saw a few pieces of dry hay placed in a bunch, and I knew that this pert, lively visitor, with his attentive brown mate to assist, had commenced

A Loving Pair 239

their nest. No wonder they scolded an intruder, for this loving pair on their arrival in this country, after perilous travel across continents and seas, had chosen this hedge-side



SITE OF MARSH-TIT'S NEST.

bank for their home. I had not been standing there long before the hen appeared, and she, too, seemed very much annoyed at my presence in their sacred domain.

Yet they could not have made a happier choice, for a bird which builds a nest under my protection is always safe from human robbers. I wish sometimes I could tell the birds that such is the case. If ever I should have the good fortune to own an estate, I should make it a birds' paradise, and do all in my power to induce birds to breed there; and once there they would be safe from all human enemies. It is wonderful how soon birds discover a protected area, and I wonder those who have extensive grounds round their homes do not do more to protect the fascinating little creatures that people Bird-land.

Day after day I watched the building of their home. Very interesting it was to see them at their work. One Whitethroat would bring a piece of dry grass and give it to the one in the nest, or lay it at the side; and the operator inside would first use her beak, then

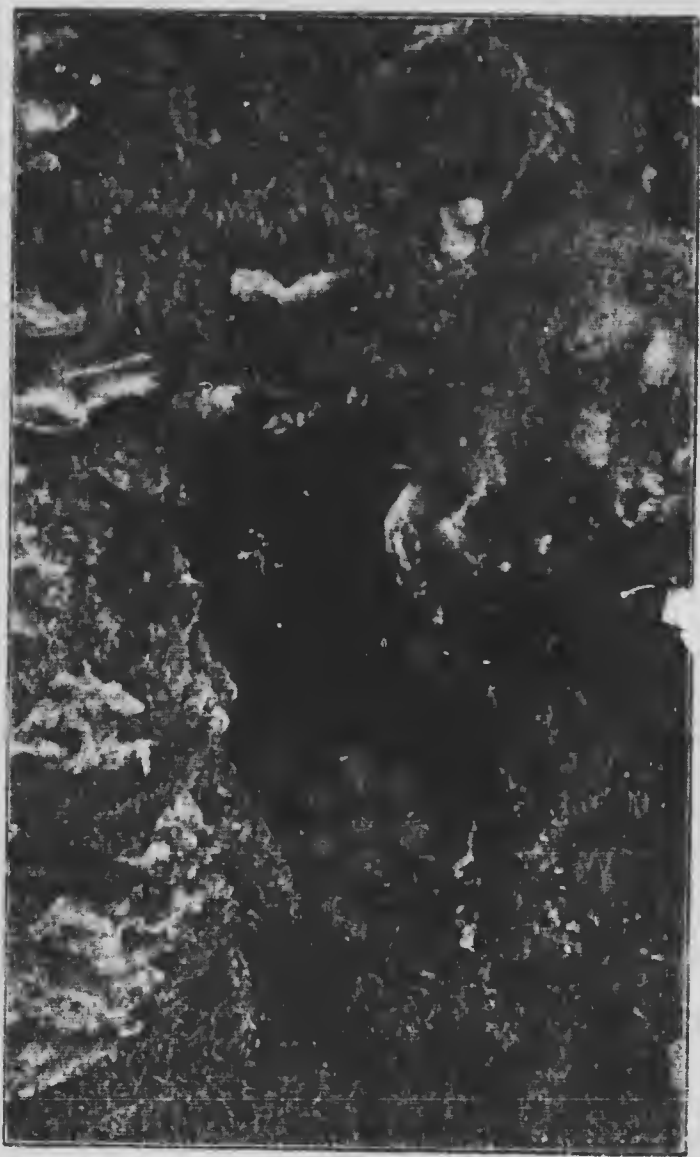
twist and turn about until the nest was worked into shape. When sufficient grasses had been collected, pieces of horse-hair were brought, and these longer pieces caused more trouble than the short grass; but at length the persevering workers managed to get all these securely fastened in, and a very cosy nest they made.

I expected then to see an egg laid; but over a week elapsed before this event came to pass, and during that time small additions were made to the lining, and one or two pieces of down were placed over the horse-hair. But at last all was ready, and one morning when I reached the spot there was no mistake about the male bird's delight, and on looking inside I saw the first egg.

How my Whitethroat did sing, as it seemed, for joy: why, he made almost as much fuss over that one little egg as a mother makes over her firstborn! Perched on one of the thin branches of the hedge, he called out his loud notes, and so pleased was he that it was not until I was almost at the nest that he

became uneasy. If angry notes could have frightened me away, I should have fled at once; but instead of retreating I looked at my little vicious friend, and was more amused than concerned as he became more and more excited. From branch to branch he hopped, his brown crest raised and lowered as he sang, and until I moved away his loudest threatening notes were hurled at me with all the force and passion he could command.

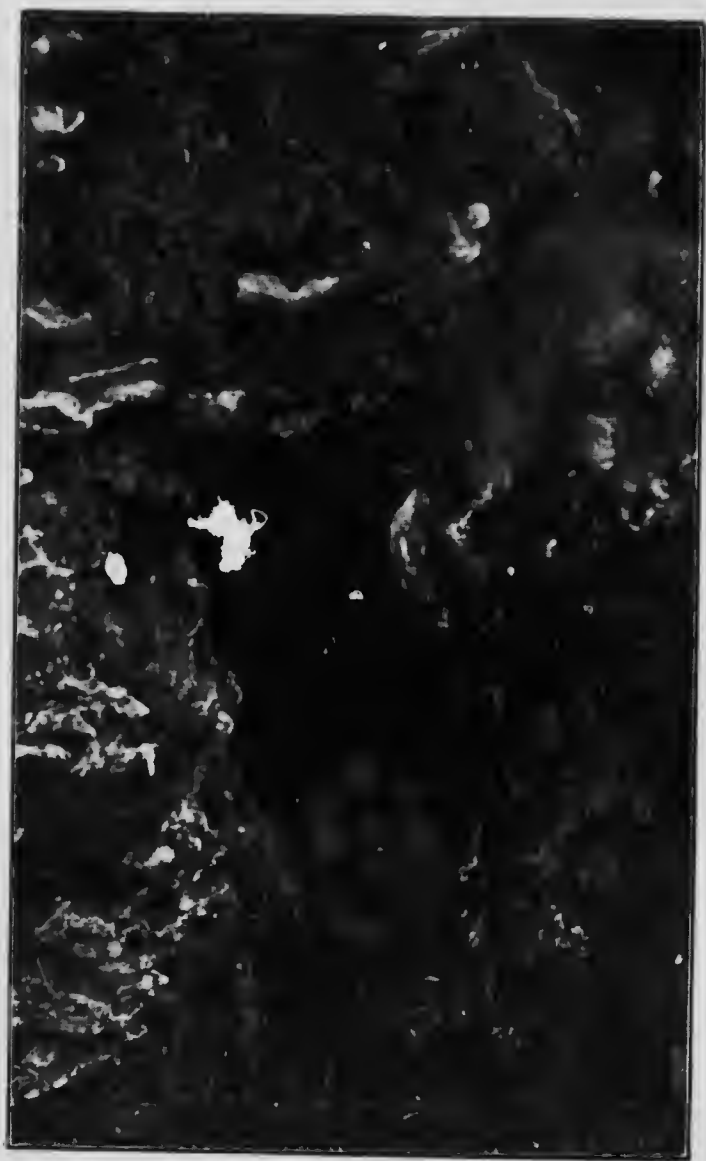
A few days passed, and the full complement of eggs were laid, and perhaps the most interesting phase of their lives was reached. For the usual time the hen sat, while occasionally her mate would bring a caterpillar, or perhaps some other insect, and then tenderly offer this for her kind acceptance. What a charming picture of home life in Bird-land—a bird's love-gift! Yes, merely a gift of love; but after offering this he would fly up into the sunshine, and sing a song as bright and as merry as the summer day itself, full of gladness, hope, and love. When the hen had sat for several hours she would leave, giving out



NEST OF MARSH WREN WITH PIECE OF CORAL

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NEST OF MARSH-TIT WITH PIECE OF BARK REMOVED.

her low call: then the mate would make his way through the undergrowth, and dutifully take his place on the eggs.

When the five young arrived there was indeed a busy time: from sunrise to dusk, day after day, the parents worked unceasingly in bringing food to their young family: and these grew apace, and soon became feathered, and then were left to seek their own fortune in the great adventurous world around them.

All this happened seven years ago, and since then my Whitethroat and his mate have returned regularly to their hedge-side home. Each year I have watched their manners, and customs with unceasing interest. Only once have they been unsuccessful, and the cause of this I never could discover. The nest was built, the eggs were laid, and the chicks hatched: but two days later I went to the nest and found the hen sitting on her brood, all of which were dead! A little tragedy had occurred, the cause of which I never discovered. I removed the dead birds, but whether the pair commenced another nest I did not find out.

As I write, the days of spring are once more with us; other warblers that came with my Whitethroat are making the country around more joyful. The orchard once more is bursting out into a sea of bloom, the hedges are again green, and the tall hedge-parsley is growing up and almost hiding the lower grasses. The winsome hours of sunshine are made more happy by the Skylark's music, but, best of all, my Whitethroat has returned to his well-loved home on the small piece of waste ground near the garden. Thus again I hear his happy song, and listen to his threatening notes of anger, and watch with unabated interest another phase in the life of one of my much-esteemed Bird-land friends.

CHAPTER XIX

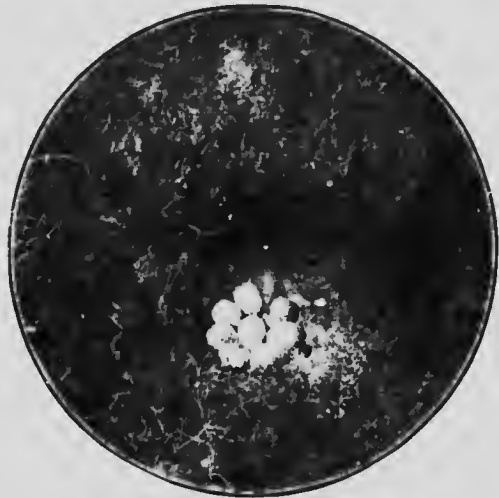
THE PRIVATE LIFE OF THE GROUSE

AMONGST the black heather on a rising mound, which is surrounded as far as the eye can reach with sloping moors of the same dark covering, there stands a bird. He raises his head above the short heather, and as the morning sun of this day in early spring lights up his brown speckled plumage, he gives out a startling, far-reaching, oft-repeated call. *Go back-back-back! go back! go back!* After uttering this he listens for a moment, when from the distance there comes a response. Our bird then ducks his head, runs forward a few yards, lifts his head again, repeats his war-cry, and listens for the reply challenge. At length the two birds come nearer each other: and one notices that not far behind the new-comer

248 The Private Life of the Grouse

there is a comrade following, but still keeping at safe distance.

The two combatants meet on a small grassy knoll amongst the heather; and there, where there is nought to disturb them, they fight for a mate. Their heads are lowered, their wings



NEST OF RED GROUSE.

are raised, as they circle round and round, each daring the other to strike. Notice how the rising sun lights up the fierce gleaming in the eye of one and then of the other as they slowly shuffle round the 'ring.' Suddenly, without further hesitation, they both make a dash

A Conflict to the Death 249

forward, and in the scuffle it is hard to distinguish what their tactics really are: wings, feet, and beaks are striking fast and furiously: feathers are floating slowly away on the cold light air, and, falling, fasten themselves to the dew-covered heather. For some minutes this desperate battle is continued until both combatants seem somewhat exhausted. They draw away for a moment, and one will viciously strike the ground with one foot, and then dash again at his rival. The fight is soon over, however: for one of the grouse is left bleeding on the grass. He drags himself slowly and painfully to the heather, crawls under a thick clump, and there, unnoticed, he dies.

The conquering bird looks as though he had had a fair thrashing: but he pulls himself together, shakes his feathers, and makes one or two poor attempts at preening them: then he walks towards the hen, which is close at hand, and performs some most extraordinary antics in order to prove attractive, thinking in this way to win the affection of the one he has fought for and won.

250 The Private Life of the Grouse

The Red Grouse is content with one mate: but his relation, the Black Grouse, is seldom satisfied with less than four, and in the early spring, when grass patches amongst the black heather-stalks are covered with hoar frost, a number of Blackcocks assemble on the small hillocks and fight for the Greyhens. When this 'lek' is over they retire with the females they have secured, and they seem as proud of their train as any farmyard cock of his numerous following.

When the weather becomes warmer the hens select a cosy place amongst the heather, and make a slight scratching in the ground: and there, in such an apology for a nest, they deposit their eggs as many as ten being often laid, while in exceptional cases fifteen have been found. The male Red Grouse remains during incubation very near to his sitting mate: and when searching for their nests amongst the heather, I have found them by placing a stick in the ground whence the male rose, and then working round in circles.

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NEST OF THE FIELD MOUSE

250 The Private Life of the Grouse

The Red Grouse is content with one mate; but his relation, the Black Grouse, is seldom satisfied with less than four, and in the early spring, when grass patches amongst the black heather stalks are covered with hoar frost, a number of Blackcocks assemble on the small hillocks and fight for the Greyhens. When this "tick" is over they retire with the females they have secured, and they seem as proud of their train as any forward cock of his numerous following.

When the weather becomes warmer the hens select a cosy place amongst the heather, and make a slight scratching in the ground, and there, as yet an apology for a nest, they deposit four or five eggs, as may be imagined, and, in some cases, fifteen have been found. The Red Grouse remains during nearly the whole year to his sitting mate, and when searching for them, nests amongst the heather, I have found them by placing a stick on the ground whence the male rose, and then working round in circles.

The male rises from the ground with a loud



NEST OF THE RED GROUSE.

The Young Grouse 253

whirr of his wings, giving out a loud warning *Kok-kok-kok!* When the hen hears this, she crouches over her eggs, and very difficult indeed it is to find her. She will sit until almost trodden upon. I remember on one occasion searching over a piece of heather about twenty-five yards square, and although I knew that a nest was there, I had to give in to the Grouse, for I could not discover the spot.

When the hen has sat for twenty-four days, the young make their appearance: they leave the nest at once and follow their parents, but before they depart the halves of every egg that has been hatched are carefully placed one inside the other, and left in the hollow in the ground which served as a nest. The tiny fluffy balls of feathers, for that is what the young of Grouse most resemble, wander about and soon learn to find food for themselves, although the parents, when they find a tit-bit, give a low, gentle call, and the youngsters all hurry towards the prond mother, who points to the food she has found. They feed on the leaves and fruit of the bilberry and the tender tips of tiny heather

254 The Private Life of the Grouse

shoots. If the season be fine and warm, these young birds grow very quickly, so that when autumn arrives they are strong on the wing, and afford good 'bags' to sportsmen.

Blackcocks in the early autumn have a short 'spel' that is, they leave their mates and flock together. No doubt they are as glad as some human husbands we have heard of, to get away for a short time from their wives. In my favourite study of the private lives of birds I often come across little incidents which remind me very forcibly of the everyday manners and customs of men and women. Many a curious incident I could relate of the doings of my feathered friends.

The call of the Grouse sounds exactly like the words 'Go back,' and several curious stories about this call are current in the western and northern counties, where these birds are found. One of these is to the effect, that two men went out early one morning to fight a duel in a secluded spot on a large moor. As they each walked from different starting-points to the meeting-place they incessantly heard the



NEST OF RED GROUSE.

warning call '*Go back! go back!*' and such an effect did these human-like sounds have upon them that they went back; and instead of one or both being shot, as they might have been, they both lived to tell the tale how a bird, by its far-reaching call, sent them

256 The Private Life of the Grouse

home and turned them from enemies into close friends.

From time immemorial the Grouse has been a favourite in this country, especially in the north; but its habits in private life are a later revelation. Thus, what did Boswell know about 'mir-fowl' beyond its being a dish that Dr. Johnson would appreciate when he arrived in Edinburgh in 1773?

CHAPTER XX

HOW I WAS OUTWITTED BY A BIRD

I KNEW it would be a difficult task. I had searched for the Golden Plover's nest before, but always in vain; but on that hot May day I felt sure I was on the right track, and I had every hope of being successful in photographing a nest which I was very keen on finding. So I and a companion who, I regret to say, was an egg-collector sallied out at 4 a.m. to discover a Golden Plover's nest, if such a feat was possible. We had to cycle a good part of the way to the distant Welsh hill on which we knew the birds bred. About 8 o'clock we arrived at a small inn, and, having breakfasted, met the keeper, and then went out for a very long tramp on to the rough hill-tops to search

for the four large brown eggs of the Golden Plover.

What a search that was! It seemed to be one of the hottest days we had ever experienced as the unclouded sun sent down on us his strongest beams. How we drank at each hill-spring as we passed! Refreshment never before seemed more delightful; and very frequently was I down on my hands and knees at some tiny stream of cold, clear water.

After a tiring climb we at last reached one of the roughest hill-tops I have seen, and I gazed around on a barren stretch of territory. As we came suddenly upon a wide open break in the grass, disclosing an area like a former lake-bottom, we saw a Golden Plover fly quickly from a grass tuft, and we felt sure a nest was there. But Golden Plovers are not easily taken with guile; they are not caught napping like some other birds. On hearing our approach the bird evidently ran about fifty yards from the nest, and then, when we came in sight, it rose from the ground and thoroughly baffled us. After

A Plaintive Whistle 259

searching for an hour we gave up, and went in search of other haunts, and at last found one where we were certain there was a nest.

It seemed as though we searched every inch of that ground several times over. I went up and down a portion of it until I was familiar with each grass-tuft: yet no eggs of the Golden Plover could I see. The keeper and my companion also searched their portion without success. How aggravating it was, under these conditions, to hear the call of the birds! One moment the short, plaintive whistle would die away almost to a whisper; then suddenly, as we approached a likely grass tuft, the two birds would give out louder calls and seem most excited, so that we believed we were near the right spot. But no; that whistle, which was almost maddening, slowly dropped again, and no nest could be found!

Then on we went, and presently the birds ran closer to us and grew again excited; their plaintive call became still more plaintive, until it seemed that their hearts would break with grief; and this time we were quite certain

that the nest or young must be near. But no! That aggravating call calmed down, and it seemed exactly as though it said, 'Done again! Done again!' I began to feel quite cross with the birds: one moment they seemed to encourage us, the next they laughed at our failure. We gave up at length, and, lying down in the grass at some distance, we watched them through powerful field-glasses.

What did those two birds do now go back to their eggs or young? Nothing of the kind. They led us to believe they did: for after waiting in the broiling sun for over an hour, the hen made herself very comfortable on a grass tuft settled down to look exactly as if she was on her nest while the male walked around looking for food! At last, then, we were to find their home! I took careful bearings of the grass tuft, ran forward for three hundred yards, reached the spot, and quite expected to come on the eggs: but the hen was sitting on a dummy nest, and once again that plaintive call rang out over the bleak moor, 'Done again! Done again!' I



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COOT'S NEST.

A Mocking Cry 263

was 'done' indeed; successfully baffled by two of the most artful birds I had ever encountered in Bird-land.

I went away and searched for one of those Welsh springs, and this was not so difficult to find; and as I drank and drank again of the delightful water, I still heard that mocking cry of the knowing little creatures that had kept me off the right scent.

We had now to tramp the whole of the distance back again, and the only thing I was able to photograph was a Buzzard's nest with three eggs, built on a cliff-side. Our inn was reached at last, and after refreshment we rode back to our homes, and reached these some hours later, tired out and disappointed in not finding a Golden Plover's nest. But after a good meal I felt more resigned; and as I sat in a comfortable arm-chair and smoked a pipe, and again went through the adventures of the day, I still seemed to hear that plaintive call of the Golden Plover which so successfully deceived us on the moor.

And as I again seemed to see the scene

through rings of smoke, I began even to feel glad that we had not found the nest; for had we done so, my companion would have put the eggs in his collecting-box, and two very interesting little friends would have had all their season's work in vain, while my companion's collection would only have been the richer by four eggs. Yes, as I sat and smoked, I actually felt very pleased indeed that the Plover had so cleverly deceived us.

I can find the Golden Plover's nest and photograph it some other day, when there is no egg-collector with me. I shall then enjoy the satisfaction of securing my pictures, while leaving the eggs to their lawful owners. Long life, then, to the Plovers on that wild Welsh moor! May they live there happily without being disturbed by egg-looters or other enemies of Bird-land homes.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HOME OF THE GREAT CRESTED GREBE

THE last day of the 'merrie month of May' found Mr. Percy Hanson my companion on most of my Bird-land rambles and myself *en route* for the haunt of the Great Crested Grebe. We have searched for the nests of this remarkably fine water-bird on many of the lakes and broads of England; but we have always been unfortunate by being in such places when the young had left their home. However, as the train sped on its way from the Welsh village near which we were staying to the place in which the Grebes were known to breed, our hopes rose; for we had been told that about twenty pairs nested in the particular lake we were to visit.

After walking along dusty roads and travelling

266 The Great Crested Grebe

in stuffy trains, it is indeed a refreshing relief to find oneself near an expanse of water. It was a magnificent lake, an ideal spot for Great Crested Grebes to frequent: for nearly the whole of the silvery sheet of water, two and a half miles long, was surrounded with a wide margin of reeds inviting the birds to build. The lake was sheltered by green hills, a big glistening sheet of silvery sunshine, sparkling with the beams from the great hot sun. The farms and fields with their dividing hedges gave the hills a chequered appearance: but the little homesteads on these fertile slopes made a sweet and lovely scene. The farthest hills were covered with a tinge of blue, which seemed to melt gradually into the hazy summer sky.

The blue heat-mist of our summer landscapes makes them some of the most beautiful scenes to be found the wide world over. There are greater and grander views in the mountainous districts of Europe and America, but for a calm, peaceful picture of home-life you must see the English and Welsh meadows bathed in the summer sun, and covered with

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266 The Great Crested Grebe

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THE HAUNT OF THE GREAT CRESTED GREBE.

The Shimmering Water 269

the flowers, and filled with the songs that make the hours spent amongst them so winsome.

A great number of Swifts were calling from above as we rowed away from the embarking-stage out into the open lake. One minute they were screaming over our boat the next their long crescent wings had borne them away over the farmsteads on the hills: then back again they came, as though glorying in their wing-power and in the delight of flight. Curlews were calling from some of the more wild hills, and their strange wild cry was exceedingly striking as it came to us across the shimmering water. Reed- and Sedge-warblers were calling out their loud, chatty songs, and one little reed-bird seemed to be particularly angry because we attempted to row near his home. He scolded us as severely as he could, and long after we had passed his nest he still hurled threatening notes at our retreating boat.

A mass of green reeds surrounded the lake, some of them being of a much lighter green than others; these were the young shoots. It was in this thick reed-bed that we had to

270 The Great Crested Grebe

search, and only twenty pairs of Grebes in a circumference of seven miles of reeds! We hardly knew where to begin; but almost as soon as we pushed our boat into the reeds we found a Coot's nest, and also many pretty homes of the Moor-hen.

Our method of working was to push our slender boat as far as possible into the reeds, and then to stand and look around for any masses of floating water-weeds, for the nest of the Great Crested Grebe exactly resembles a lump of roots or leaves collected together on the surface of the water; and when the birds leave their homes they always cover the eggs, so that they are in consequence doubly difficult to discover.

We had a good stock of plates with us, so photographed the Coot's nest; but a slight breeze which came over the water made the tall grasses move about, and a quick exposure was necessary. Many times we moved our boat into the reeds, and at last were rewarded by finding a nest of the kind we wanted, but this contained only one egg. However,

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NEST OF GREAT CRESTED TITHEA IN CO.

270 The Great Crested Grebe

search, and only twenty pairs of Grebes in a circumference of seven miles of reeds! We hardly knew where to begin; but almost as soon as we pushed our boat into the reeds we found a Coot's nest, and also many pretty homes of the Moor-hen.

Our method of working was to push our slender boat as far as possible into the reeds, and then to stand and look around for any masses of floating water weeds, for the nest of the Great Crested Grebe exactly resembles a lump of roots or leaves collected together on the surface of the water; and when the birds leave their homes they always cover the eggs, so that they are in consequence doubly difficult to discover.

We had a good stock of plates with us, so photographed the Coot's nest; but a slight breeze which came over the water made the tall grasses move about, and a quick exposure was necessary. Many times we moved our boat into the reeds, and at last were rewarded by finding a nest of the kind we wanted, but this contained only one egg. However,



NEST OF GREAT CRESTED GREBE UNCOVERED.



A Handsome Water-bird 273

we photographed this, covered as we found it, and also uncovered. A little later in the day we found another nest of the Grebe, and this made a better picture, because it contained four eggs. After a little trouble we succeeded in securing some pictures: and there are, after all, many easier places in which to photograph a nest than from a moving boat.

After taking this series of photographs we turned attention to the Grebes, and watched them on the lake with our field-glasses. The Great Crested Grebe is one of the most handsome water-birds we have; his rounded body, long neck, and fine-shaped head with the beautiful crest make him really a splendid fellow; and for a long time we sat and watched the many birds, admiring them as they passed in the sunshine, every now and then diving under water and coming up many yards away.

Having a little time to spare, we searched about a large meadow, and found several nests, including those of the Pheasant, Whinchat, Meadow-pipit, Lapwing, and Yellow Wagtail. Then I had the good fortune to discover a young

274 The Great Crested Grebe

Lapwing. I first noticed it crouching in the grass; and finding it almost impossible to get a successful picture of this youngster on the ground, I took him down to the lake-side, and stood him on the little island which is seen in the photograph. When in this position he insisted on rushing down the slope and taking a 'header' into the water, and then running ashore. We therefore once more placed him on the top, and one companion stood on one side, and another stood opposite, while I, with the camera, took the centre. In a short time we were able to get our youngster to stand on the top, and I took the photograph. Afterwards the young Lapwing seemed very glad to get back once more to its native meadow.

The sun was sinking towards the hills as we went homewards. After a most enjoyable row across the whole length of the lake, we made our way back to the railway, and were soon at home in the cosy cottage in which we were staying, hidden in the larch plantation on the picturesque banks of the river Wye.

CHAPTER XXII

MY MARTINS

WHEN my Martins returned from their southern winter retreat to spend a cheerful summer with me, the many acres of orchard at the back of the house showed one great expanse of coloured bloom. Fleecy white clouds, sunshine and blossom, blue sky and flowering meadow, budding trees and leafy hedgerow made glad with the songs of spring-time - such was the world to which these migrants returned; and for beauty and attractiveness it could not be surpassed by the distant region of the south that they had only just left for a season.

Some few years ago a pair of Martins built their nest under the eaves of my home, and I was delighted to see them do this. They were successful in rearing a family; but to my

disappointment none of these returned the following spring. Two or three years passed before Martins again came back to build in the house; but at last they returned, and one nest was built.

Now the many-tinted blossom in the orchard is fading; green leaves have taken its place. There is still just a little spray of apple-bloom left here and there; otherwise the trees are quickly putting on their summer dress. The Martins, however, are busy, and four or five nests are in course of construction. I am not the only one glad to see the return of these favorites. The mischievous Sparrows, which ought in common fairness to keep to their own side of the house, where ivy grows for their accommodation, have gone round to the other side in force, and unless I watch them very closely they will soon eject the Martins from their finished home, to make their own nests inside. Only a few minutes ago I had the courage to eject a noisy Sparrow from a Martin's half-finished nest.

In a place like my home, where there is a number of Sparrows about, the Martins show

a remarkable sense of having a good deal more reason than some people would give them credit for possessing. When a pair of Martins have finished their nest, the Sparrows will often eject them and take possession. But I have noticed that the whole colony of Martins will set to work and construct one nest, and in this way numbers tell; and the disappointed Sparrow dare not enter, but will sit dejectedly on the rain-gutter and cheep sadly to himself. This seems to me a remarkable case, and I should like to know if other observers have ever seen the same thing. I first noticed the practice a few years ago on a house quite close to mine, and then I watched the knowing colony of about eight birds all busy constructing a single nest. When this was finished one pair took possession, and the hen was very soon found to be sitting. Then the colony collected more material, and another nest was constructed, and in this novel and interesting way the Sparrows were completely defied and baffled.

Day after day the Martins are busy, and I have noticed that more than one pair are

building some of the nests. Twenty-one skilfully made mud houses now half surround the house, and between many of the nests there are convenient mud ledges built for the Martins to settle upon when they come to the nest. I think it is a usual habit of the Fave-swallow to make such little platforms.

I was watching one nest after it was completed, and the hen was sitting inside while her mate was courteously bringing supplies of food. While looking, another Martin went to the nest and entered, and immediately it did so I heard the most agonising screams proceeding from the intruder. This, I expect, was a strange bird which had entered the wrong nest. Anyway, the sitting bird did not show that common civility and friendship which seemed to be a bond of union while the nests were being constructed, for she must have given her visitor a most vicious reception.

Presently I saw a head appear at the small entrance, and the little beak was opened wide as it screamed out in evident pain. The tenant inside had got hold of one of the unwelcome



PHEASANT'S NEST.

A Martins' Colony 281

visitor's feet, and was no doubt biting with some effect. Out the intruder shuffled, but still screaming, until her whole body appeared. Then, to my surprise and evidently to her terror, the sitter within still kept hold of the captive's foot, and even held her suspended outside the nest. How vigorously the victim of misadventure cried and struggled! The revengeful bird within may have had a grudge against her visitor; and, if so, she was doing her best to exact a penalty in full. With one more agonising cry the intruding Martin wriggled itself free, and seemed more than pleased to find itself once more skimming through the flower-scented air of spring.

Just after this uninvited guest had escaped the rightful mate arrived, and was allowed to enter, and, to judge by the agreeable twittering of the couple, there could not have been a warmer reception.

I think a Martins' colony is now assured on my home. I have always wanted them to come as summer tenants, and I have every hope that they have really come to stay, so

that they will return in force next season. They add very much to the enjoyment of summer: their merry twittering and attractive ways make the hours passed in the garden more enjoyable for all.

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO FEATHERED FISHERS

ONE hundred years ago the number of Heronies existing in this country was much greater than at the present day, but still there remain many colonies of these birds, and they breed year after year in the same trees, repairing their old nests. When they revisit their breeding haunt, they make almost as much ado as a colony of Rooks on their first return. We may all have noticed the consultations which Rooks will hold when they come back to old haunts. Herons manifest very similar emotions—that is, they are quite as demonstrative.

I have visited several Heronies in the British Islands, and on one occasion I had good opportunities of photographing both the nests and young birds. The nests are enormous structures, made for the most part of thin twigs,

284 Two Feathered Fishers

all of which are pressed flat inside ; and although hard, these form, no doubt, a comfortable bed for the fledglings. These large nests, with their complement of five pale blue eggs, make a very pretty picture. A photograph does not do it justice, for it is the contrast of colour which makes the scene so striking and beautiful.

After much trouble I was able to lash my camera and tripod to the thin branches above a certain nest and take a series of photographs.

All the time I was in the tree the builders of the nests were circling above with their great wings outspread, every now and then giving out their loud, harsh cry - *P'raank!* The sights and sounds around this Herony were very interesting. From my high coign of vantage I could see the large number of birds flying above, and also hear their anxious cries and the lesser calls from their hungry young in the nests near by.

The young birds are funny creatures ; they seem to be all feet and beak. When their parents are away, they lie all huddled together ; but as soon as they hear their mother coming they raise themselves to the best of their ability



YOUNG HERON IN NEST

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YOUNG HERON IN NEST.



An Unpleasant Experience 287

and open their beaks wide, expectantly waiting for the food. This consists of fish, eels, frogs, toads, rats, and almost anything small in the animal way.

When very young, Herons are ugly, skinny little creatures, covered with a few spikes of down. If we go up to a nest and look in, the first thing they do is to stand up; but, their legs being weak, they soon fall back. However, they try to wobble up again. Then, as we get closer to them, they crawl to the farther side. At this time, when the nest contains young, there is a most offensive stench all around, almost reminding one of the evil smell characteristic of a colony of Cormorants.

One cannot remain long near a Heron's nest without feeling sick, and our presence seems to have a corresponding effect on the young Herons. Then, after we have looked at them, and have stretched out a hand to touch them, one and all open their big beaks and bring up their last meal! This has the effect of making us feel still more 'queer,' and the sooner we leave the nest the more pleasant seems the purer air beyond.

288 Two Feathered Fishers

Cormorants, Gannets, and some species of Gulls vomit if very much excited or frightened; and it is no doubt fright which causes the little Herons to repel an intruder in the way they do.

Let us now watch one of the parent Herons seeking for food. I reached the lake-side on one of those quiet autumn mornings while yet the mists of night were hardly cleared away. The distant trees of the landscape were yet enveloped in haze, imparting to the scene a touch of softness which made the outlook still more charming. Through a halo of light the sun made the surface of the lake sparkle with silver-like light, while all around the tall oaks were clothed in their autumn garb of russet brown. A herd of deer standing knee-deep in the fallen bracken caught sight of me and scampered off up the hill, then turned round and looked at the intruder. The harsh, silence-breaking call of a Carrion-crow makes some rabbits feeding under a far-spreading oak raise their heads to listen, and they too run off and hide. But I am scaring the inhabitants of this lake-side, and to avoid so doing I retire to a

Nature always Fascinating 289

place of concealment, where I hope to have the opportunity of seeing the Heron at home.

I love these calm autumn days : they seem to invite one to study Nature. The silent trees are so still, and the slightest motion of bird or beast amongst the foliage can be seen. When summer seems, as it were, to be dying and passing away, we see all that is most beautiful in Nature. The changing of the autumn trees, the many-tinted glories of the landscape, the beauty of the heather-covered hills, the soft calm of the sky, give one the impression that Nature is giving a farewell show of beauty before the coming of winter, just showing us that her resources are by no means exhausted. Nature is always fascinating, always having some new thing to reveal : yet these autumn days, which pass away too soon, would be as happy as the spring-time hours, if it were not for the regrets which are inspired by falling leaves and by the going of the Swallows.

A large shadow passes over the surface of the water, and the next moment I see that great bird-fisher, the Heron, settle on the low

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bank skirting the lake. As motionless as a stone statue he stands, taking in with his keen eye every movement in the landscape. For ten minutes he stands thus, only turning sharply once, when a rabbit near the old oak fence on the margin of the wood pops his head from a burrow.

When the tall, thin bird is satisfied that no enemy is lurking about, he feels himself to be quite at home as he walks slowly to the extreme edge of the lake. For some time he looks eagerly over the surface, and then moves slowly on, keeping a sharp eye on the water. How skilfully he moves along! We see stalking brought to perfection while watching this Heron. Now one foot is lifted, but slow and still more slowly, and is placed down quite as carefully, while at each step the foot is lifted high to prevent any rustling of the grass. The Heron never hurries at his work. He now enters a small bay, and wades knee-deep into the lake. When in the water he is still more careful in his movements. His feet are lifted even more slowly than ever, so as not to disturb the surface in the slightest



DARWIN'S KESTREL WITH FIVE EGGS.

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LAPWING'S NEST WITH FIVE EGGS.

degree: indeed, it is difficult to realise that the bird is moving at all unless we watch him very closely.

Now his sharp eye has caught sight of something in the water a few feet away, and by degrees he approaches closer and closer to his prey. The other foot is now lifted and placed slowly down again, and several minutes elapse before he ventures to take another step forward. At last he is near his prey. His long neck is raised still very slowly; he leans forward until he is in danger of overbalancing; then, in a flash as it were, his beak goes under water with half his body. How triumphantly he marches out to the shore with a wriggling fish in his beak! Not slowly and carefully now, but splashing water around as he walks towards the bank. Once on shore he makes short work of his capture, the fish being quickly swallowed.

The large bird-fisher walks back to the water's edge, washes his beak, wipes it on the grass like a well-bred feeder, and then walks onward and enters the water again. He pushes his way slowly through the reeds until in clean

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water, and takes up his station there; and one would imagine him not to be a bird at all, for only his breast really shows. His long legs are quite under water, and his ample neck is folded; his head is pressed into his feathers, and in this attitude he watches and waits; and before I leave this lake-side where I have been hidden, the Heron catches several more small aquatic creatures, and then flies to another lake a short distance away.

On another day I once more watched the home-life of this great feathered fisher. The whole outlook differed from that on the former occasion. The lake was clear of reeds and grasses around its shores, and the bank in places rose two feet above the water. Along the margins of this lake the Heron stalked; he was even cunning enough to choose that part where his shadow was cast on the grass and not on the water. He took about ten minutes to cover half as many feet, so slowly did he proceed.

Now it seems as though his sharp eye had caught sight of something in the water, for

The Heron's Cleanliness 295

he remains perfectly still for some time, then leans more and more over the bank. When it seems that he cannot go much farther without falling in, he makes a bold jump of two yards into the lake; his beak enters first, and then with a mighty splash his body goes under also. For a few moments there is a heaving of the water; one wing appears, then the other wing, and at last the great bird rises to the surface. The water being too deep for him to wade ashore, he rises at once, and flies to the bank. How satisfied he seems to be with himself, for in his beak is a large fish!

First the fisher shakes himself, sending spray in all directions; then he turns his attention to his captive. The struggling fish is squeezed in the powerful mandibles, from which there is no hope of escape, and when its body is somewhat crushed it is tossed into the air, then swallowed, and as before the Heron washes his beak and wipes it on the grass. Whenever a Heron catches anything, it always wipes its beak on the grass, or rinses it in the water before catching anything else.

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The Heron has given me many a lesson in stalking lessons, too, that I have been glad to have received, when engaged in the business of photographing birds.

The Heron will spend hours in 'working' round the margins of a pond, and very few living creatures will escape his keen sight. When the bird has seen a fish in the water, and it swims away, he will stand perfectly motionless waiting for its return, and more often than not will catch that fish as a reward for his pains. The Heron will take anything as large as a full-grown water-vole, and, after killing and bruising it, will swallow the creature whole, and as this goes down the bird's long neck can be seen swelling.

The Heron is not so rare as some people are disposed to think: a pair of these birds may be found on almost any secluded lake or large pond in this country: but owing to their wary habits are not often seen. Those who wish to see some interesting sport, such as I have described, should go into hiding near a lake frequented by Herons, and after a few

A Lonely Rock in the North Sea 297

hours' watching will probably not be disappointed at the entertainment provided for them by this king of stalkers.



YELLOW WAGTAIL'S NEST.

Let us now leave these sylvan lakes of the country-side and journey to a wild, lonely island rock in the North Sea. There all is life and excitement, for a great colony of

298 Two Feathered Fishers

Gannets breed here. Thousands of the birds are circling around, some far below and others above, while thousands more are sitting on their eggs. In the course of an hour we may see perhaps one hundred fish brought to the sitting birds by their dutiful mates. Some of these fish are caught by the birds by diving from the surface while swimming; and, in fact, that is the only way in which I have seen fish caught round this great rock.

But in that beautiful river the Clyde I have seen them catch fish in a very different manner. I was there fishing myself one summer evening, and as my little rowing-boat was gently rocked on the still water, with my fishing-line over the side, I had many opportunities of watching Nature. That summer evening was indeed one to be remembered, for the natural outlook was at its best. The broad river flowing so slowly between the undulating hills was a picture of peace and calm not often seen. The hills, the more distant blue with the haze of evening, were at sunset lit up with a tinge of crimson, and the white sails of the boats cutting their

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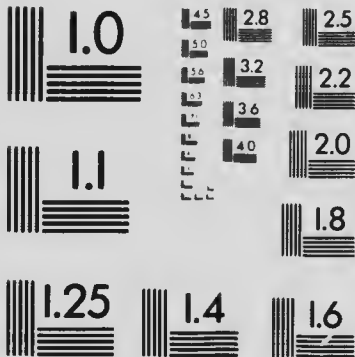


BOOBY ON THE ROCKS
SEA GULLS



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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298 Two Feathered Fishers

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GANNET 'AT HOME' ON THE LEDGE OF A PRECIPITOUS CLIFF ON A WILD
SEA-GIRT ISLE.



way slowly through the water also caught a touch of this evening glow. For a few minutes it remained thus, the whole earth around—sky,



GANNETS.

land, and water—tinted by the setting sun's resplendent rays: then all was grey and silent.

About two hundred feet above the water several Gannets were circling, and great birds they seemed to be, even at that height. The

300 Two Feathered Fishers

higher a bird rises, the farther under the water it can see, and from their height a good view of the fish below could no doubt be obtained. For a second, one of the Gannets stopped in its flight: its wings were brought to its side, its head pointed downwards, and then like a heavy feathered dart it dropped to the water. As it touched the surface a great shower of spray was thrown up, and the noise could be heard for a good distance.

For some time I waited for the bird to rise to the surface, but it seemed to be long in coming: at length it appeared a long way from where it had gone down, showing what a distance it had moved while chasing its fish. Several times these Gannets repeated this striking performance: and they were thus far more successful in their captures than I was myself!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WEST COAST OF SCOTLAND

'Mountain and mist, lone glen and murmuring stream,
The shaggy forest and the grey hill-side ;
These are thy features, Scotland, these the pride
Of those that love thee.'

SCOTLAND is a land of contrasts. Every one who visits her romantic and wild glens, mountains, and rivers, must love her. During one day it is possible to see almost every kind of scenery, marsh and hill; fern-covered glens and snow-capped mountains; great forests and rushing streams; fresh green meadows and slowly flowing brooks; and all are so attractive, there is so much restful quiet in the ever-changing country-side, that one feels in a different world from that of the South.

The scenery of Scotland cannot be surpassed by any in our Islands. Round and about the

302 The West Coast of Scotland

western coast the photographer is in a paradise: in one short fortnight he can secure the greatest possible variety of pictures.

It was the best time of the year, the spring, when I saw Scotland's western coast for the first time, and I shall always remember the all-too-short days spent there. I like to be among the hills when the primrose is in bloom, and the blue-bell, with its nodding petals, covers the grassy slopes with patches of blue. Some of the glens are fine beyond description, ornamented as they are with ferns, primroses, and blue-bells, while a stream, showing many waterfalls in its impetuous descent over the well-worn rocks, supplies music to what would otherwise be silent hills.

I shall never forget the change of scenery I saw when taking a trip from Dunoon to Oban, and from thence to the historic old island of Iona. Dunoon itself is a delightful little town, in a bay on the banks of the Clyde, surrounded at the back by grey and brown hills, whence a very fine view of the river may be enjoyed, with its many lochs and steep banks. The country

A Flock of Gulls 303

hereabouts is rich in associations of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns.

We leave Dmnoon about 9 a.m., sailing to Ardrishaig; here we leave the boat and go to the Crinan Canal, only a short walk. The sail along this canal is exceedingly interesting; and while the small screw-steamer, the 'Linnet,' passes through the numerous locks fifteen in all we can land and take some good photographs from the tow-path. The journey occupies about two hours, the boat taking us almost up to the pier, from which the steamboat goes for Oban.

The day we sailed to Oban was windy, so that we saw the wild islands with their rugged sea-worn shores to the very best advantage. It was a day of changes—one moment sunshine, the next shadow. While our boat toilsomely ploughs her way through the wind-swept waves, we have following us a large and expectant flock of Gulls, keeping about twenty yards astern, waiting for the food which is always brought to the surface when a large boat goes through the water. The islands on our left

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between us and the sun are black, tinted on their tops with grey and dull green. On our right are many more islands, also the mainland, and the contrast is remarkable. A tiny silver stream falls for one hundred feet down the emerald green hill-side: green dingles and brighter glens are lighted on one side with fitful bursts of sunlight, while the other sides are bathed in, as it were, sombre shadow.

Dark clouds with silver borders travel fast across the sky, and, from the deep blue openings between these, gleams of sunshine come down and make moving silver patches on the spray-covered water. On the larger hills are spots of the brightest green, that lovely tint which the larch plantations alone give when the sunshine of spring brings out their drooping leaves. Beyond these are a dozen blue peaks and snow-topped mountains, now hidden as a small rain-cloud passes near. Sea-spray is cast up high as our boat pursues her way, and the sunbeams shining through the falling drops of water make a rainbow on the dark green surface of the ocean. One

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EGGS OF KESTREL ON A ROCK

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EGGS OF KESTREL ON LEDGE OF ROCK.

The Freshness of Springtime 307

hill is overshadowed, and its watercourses look like streaks of silver, while the next hill is covered with sunlight; then, as the clouds move on, the order is reversed. Dozens of small islands are all around us. One is covered with a colony of Terns, those graceful birds which are hereabouts called Sea-swallows; and as these all circle up and fly round and above our boat, we can notice the elegance of their flight. A Guillemot darts past, and others follow, and many other birds are observed flying towards their homes on the distant cliffs.

Some of the rocks take fantastic shapes, altering as it were every minute, as now sunshine and then shadow is cast upon them. One green dingle is spanned by a rainbow; but almost before the colours are seen, it is gone, and a drifting shower has taken its place. Then we pass islands and hills green with the glorious freshness of northern spring-time, and flocks of sheep are seen on the sloping greensward, and lower in the valleys are the well-sheltered, whitewashed cottages of Scottish shepherds. Passing by these, we come

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upon many more wild scenes, made even more beautiful by the contrast of sunshine and rain: green waves and white-sprayed breakers: distant blue hills with snow on their summits: brown heather-covered slopes with here and there a larch-wood: black rocks and fast-growing grass, and a hundred other changing pictures make up the panorama until we reach Oban.

We stayed at Oban one evening, and then went to the island of Iona, perhaps the most interesting place in the whole of Scotland, on account of its sacred memories. One really needs a fortnight on this historical isle: the one and a quarter hour's visit allowed by the steamer is not long enough to visit a tenth part of what ought to be seen, and which, once seen, lives in memory. I was sorry to see a modern roof being put on the old cathedral. I hoped to obtain a photograph of the interior, but found this to be full of scaffold-poles, bricks, mortar, and workmen. The latter very much wanted to have their photograph taken, and seemed somewhat hurt when I told them I wanted my plates for other things.

The sail back to Oban is almost as full of interest as the one from Crinan to Oban: the



WOOD-LARK'S NEST.

coast scenery is as wild, although there are not so many islands to take account of.

Oban itself is a fine centre for a photographer. Close at hand is Dunollie Castle, and at a distance of about four miles is that

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grand old pile Dunstaffnage Castle. It was evening when I visited this ancient site, and when standing on the time-worn walls, and looking on the far-stretching landscape before me, I think I never before saw such an expanse of calm sunset hovering over Nature.

On one side the sun is going down amid golden strips of floating cloud, lighting up with strange vividness the snowy peak of Ben Cruachan on the distant horizon. The water is as smooth and silent as the sky, and the trees, now showing signs of leaves, are as still as though they were carved in stone. There is a silence over all the country-side that is only known to those who have been alone with Nature amidst Old Scotia's hills and valleys.

To the north-east are the twin snow-tipped peaks of Ben Cruachan, towering towards the tinted sky of evening. Not far from this romantic ruin is Loch Etive, an arm of the ever-restless Atlantic flowing into the Linnhe Loch. Opposite is the charming island of Lismore, with the hills of Mull and Morven

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ROCK CAVE, CALIF.

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YOUNG LARVING—'ALONE IN THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD'



A Romantic Scene 313

beyond. These silent hills, almost hidden in the pale mists of evening, with their reflections thrown in the more silent water, make up a picture of the sublime and romantic in Nature never to be forgotten by any keen observer.

There are but few sounds to be heard in this vast stretch of country—only now and then the notes of birds. Redshanks and Sandpipers whistle from the reedy borders of the lochs, and from the hills comes occasionally a familiar call as a Lapwing flies onwards. Then there may be heard that wild, far-reaching call of the Curlew on the hills—a cry altogether in harmony with such a romantic scene, and a note which I dearly love to hear: for where the Curlew calls there we see Nature in her very wildest dress.

Before we leave Dunstaffnage night is almost upon us; but in driving round the bay we catch glimpses of the western sky, coloured with the changing hues of sunset, while the old castle, which has stood for many centuries and looked on so many of Scotland's historical scenes, is almost lost amongst the

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trees dark in the gloom of approaching night. Some white-winged sea-birds rise as we leave the banks of the loch; we watch them slowly flap towards the old castle; another Redshank utters his note of alarm and follows the Gulls, leaving behind, as it were, a dead silence that could almost be felt.

I do not think there is anything more impressive than to be alone with Nature in a lonely place; and although I have seen some of Scotland's grandest scenery, there is no picture which so lives in my memory as that evening scene round and about old Dumstaffnage.

All photographers that love Nature should certainly visit the western isles and shores of Scotland, and, having gone once, they will go again; for who could help loving

'A land of rainbows spanning glens, whose walls
Rock-built, are hung with many-coloured mists;
Of far-stretched meres whose salt flood never rests;
Of tuneful caves and playful waterfalls;
Of mountains varying momentarily their crests.'

CHAPTER XXV

BIRD-STALKING

IN previous volumes on Bird-life I have said something about my work ; and the number of kindly appreciative letters I have received induces me in this volume to add something further about my methods of photographing my feathered friends.

During the last few years a large number of correspondents have asked me which is the best apparatus for photographing birds. As in my opinion there was not a suitable camera in the market for such work, I set about designing one to my own mind ; and after a good deal of thought and patient work the 'Bird-land Camera' was the result of my labours.

The two illustrations show this camera closed and extended, and it will be seen that when shut it is very compact. It extends to about



THE BIRD LAND CAMERA CLOSED,
INVENTED BY THE AUTHOR.

four and a half times the length of the plate, and when at the fullest extension is as rigid and firm as when closed. The chief feature of this camera is that, while the plate is in position

and quite ready for exposure, the photographer is able to go on focussing the object through the hood at the top, so that the image is seen the same size as it is on the plate. This is a much superior contrivance to the old form of 'finder' or twin lens cameras. Only one lens is used, and the image is seen through the hood by means of two mirrors inside.

With a telephoto lens fitted to such a camera, the bird-photographer is fully equipped for successful bird-stalking. When using a telephoto lens one finds that the amount of light passing on to the plate is very much decreased:

Telephoto Attachment 317

and it is absolutely necessary to have a very rapid lens. The best telephoto attachment for bird-photography I have found to be that made by Messrs. C. P. Goerz; and when fitted to their lens working at F 4.5, it is really as serviceable as one could desire. It is useless to have a telephoto attachment fitted to a lens working at F 8 or slower that is, if instantaneous photographs of bird-life are required. On a very bright day it would be possible to give an instantaneous exposure with such a lens, but bird-photographers cannot always rely on such favourable days.

However, if a rapid lens is used and the



THE BIRD-LAND CAMERA HALF EXTENDED.

one mentioned above is by far the best for practical work—instantaneous exposures are possible in ordinary weather; and I consider that by producing such a lens a great boon has been conferred on bird-photographers generally.

For photographing nests I still use the 6.8 lens by the same maker. I find that this gives such remarkable definition that without it my photographs of nests would be far less satisfactory than they are.

Bird-stalking with a camera is far more fascinating and profitable than bird-stalking with a gun. One now and then actually comes upon wild birds in the woods and fields which will allow the photographer to take a picture without their flying away; but the majority of birds are naturally wild, and it requires all of one's ingenuity and careful thought to compete with their artfulness, in order to secure successful pictures of them.

If one thoroughly knows the habits of the birds he wishes to photograph, the task becomes much easier. If possible it is of great advantage to be hidden with your camera, but



MAGPIE'S NEST

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MAGPIE'S NEST.

Photographing Wild Birds 321

this may often mean making a goodly pile near the bird's nest or haunt. With the Bird-land camera and Goerz telephoto lens it is not necessary to get so close to your shy sitter, for in photographing a bird of the size of a Rook one may even be twenty yards away, and still secure a fair-sized portrait.

It is always better, I think, when photographing a sitting bird, to stop the lens down and give a longer exposure: and I have also found in the case of restless birds that it is of advantage to have a shutter which makes a slight 'click' when open—for however disposed the bird may be to move about, on hearing the opening of the shutter it will remain still to listen; thus the shutter may be kept open as long as the bird stands still or until the necessary exposure is given. When photographing some of the wildest birds, I have succeeded in securing good pictures by using a shutter in the way mentioned, and thus giving a long exposure.

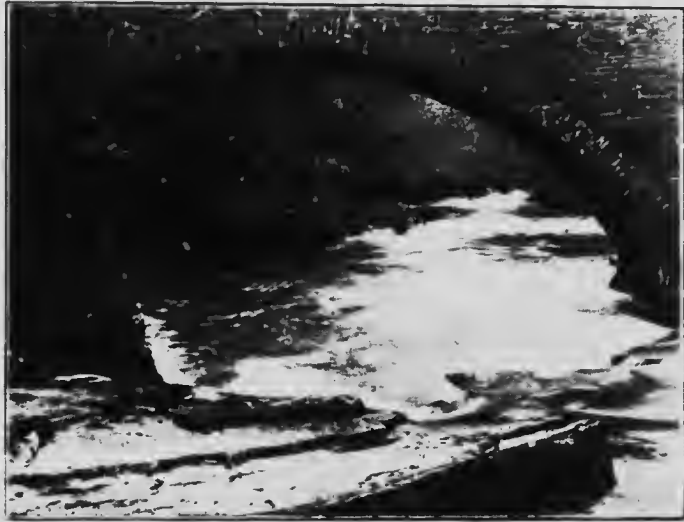
I am now taking up colour photography for photographing nests, and the results I have

obtained have induced me, wherever possible, to photograph each nest I find by this interesting process. The majority of my readers will have heard of the Sanger Shepherd process of colour photography, but probably few will realise how great is the advantage of obtaining a photograph of a nest with all its springtime charms. Of course, in a book it is impossible to reproduce these; but I use the pictures for illustrating my lectures, and it seems very fascinating to me to be able to reproduce on the screen, on a winter evening, pictures of spring's rarest charms, and to show stories, as it were, of summer sunshine. Colour photography is to me the most fascinating process of a fascinating hobby.

The number of bird-photographers now practising, compared with the few of some years ago, is legion, and this fact alone proves what a charming hobby they have found. I am pleased to think, that many people who once stalked birds only with a gun, now add a camera to their equipment. These find that this kind of bird-stalking and 'shooting' them

Colour Photography 323

in a bloodless way is far more satisfactory than killing our Bird-land friends. I am glad to find that some are using the gun less and less and the camera proportionately more.



THE HAUNT OF THE DIPPER.

I shall always be glad to hear from bird-lovers, and if they wish to know anything about the photographing of the inhabitants of Bird-land I shall be pleased to give all the information in my power.

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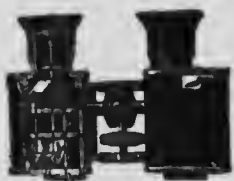
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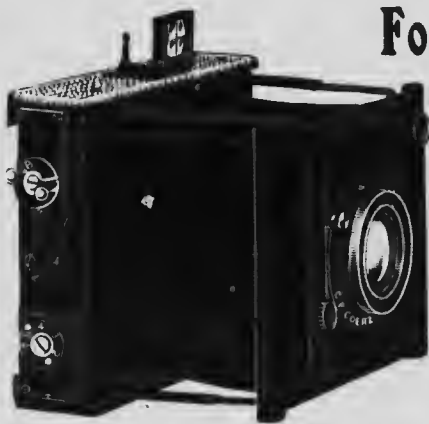
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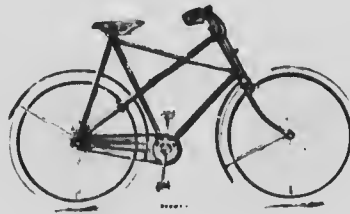
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