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ORNITHOLOGICAL NOTES FROM
NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK FOR 1885

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By T. E. GUNN, F.L.S.

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By T. E. GUNN, F.L.S.

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THE following notes, from October, 1884, to December, 1885, include the most noticeable ornithological occurrences, principally the results of personal observation.

As usual I have to notice one or more captures of the Peregrine Falcon. On the 2nd of January an adult pair were shot at Morton, near Norwich; the female, although severely wounded, managed to make her escape. Another adult female was sent in during the previous month, having been killed near Wells on the 16th. This enabled me to particularly notice the relative proportions in the sexes when placed side by side.

	Male.	Female.
Weight	26 ozs.	40 ozs. avoird.
Total length (bill and tail included)	17 inches	20 inches
Full expanse of wings . . .	38 $\frac{3}{4}$ „	46 „
Wing from carpal joint . . .	12 $\frac{1}{2}$ „	14 $\frac{3}{4}$ „
Bill along ridge of upper mandible	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ „	1 $\frac{1}{8}$ „
Tail from tip to root . . .	6 $\frac{1}{2}$ „	8 „
Tibia	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ „	4 „
Tarsus	2 $\frac{1}{8}$ „	2 $\frac{1}{4}$ „

The plumage of each was as nearly alike as possible. In the dissection of both I detected the presence of parasites, a circumstance I have invariably noticed in this species.

On December 17th last a local birdcatcher brought me a mature male Merlin, in good plumage, which he had caught in his nets at Cossey, near this city, during the afternoon, it having dashed in after his call-bird. This bird weighed five and a

quarter ounces avoirdupois. Prof. Newton, in his edition of 'Yarrell's British Birds,' gives the weight of the adult male as six ounces; Montagu says five ounces; the latter authority, in my opinion, being more correct.

On May 25th I found a nestling of the Long-Eared Owl sitting on the end of a fallen spruce. It had apparently just left the nest. Two days after I made a careful search in the same spot, and found a second young one sitting very quiet and close on a top branch of a tall fir, but could see no signs of the nest or old birds. I found a dead chaffinch without head or tail at the foot of a tree close at hand, freshly killed, and dropped by one of the old birds. The young had their stomachs quite full. In one I found the remains of a Thrush, and in the other the remains of a Bank Vole, and as many as three adult Chaffinches. On the 28th, the following day, I made another long and careful search for the nest and rest of the young without success; they had all evidently left the nest and shifted to another part of the wood. I have repeatedly noticed how quiet young Hawks and Owls are when being supplied with food by the parents.

The Little Owl, *Noctua passerina*, from its singular habits and grotesque actions, has for some years been a favourite with me. If taken from the nest when young it is easily reared, soon becoming very tame. I have kept some four and five years. In a state of nature their food consists principally of young birds, small mammals, and insects. In confinement, whenever any of the above are not easily procurable, I find that raw lean beef is a good substitute, of which it soon gets very fond, even preferring it to other food. I have occasionally varied its diet with beetles, moths, grasshoppers, butterflies, caterpillars, lizards, water-newts, and living as well as dead fish, such as minnows and small roach. Feathers and fur, as well as bones and other refuse, are (as usual with the Raptores) thrown up in pellets of an oblong shape. Mr. J. H. Gurney had a pair of these birds in confinement, in 1851, that nested, and laid four eggs about the middle of May. Two of these they soon broke, but hatched the other two early in June. These nestlings did not long survive, Mr. Gurney being unable to say how they disappeared; he is inclined to think the old birds devoured them. Although I have been the possessor of quite a number of Little Owls at different times, and rather successful in obtaining prizes for them as cage

birds at bird shows, I was never fortunate enough to get them to nest until last spring, when a pair hatched and successfully reared their young in my aviary. The following are the notes I made concerning them :—Early in the autumn of 1884 I bought three pairs of these Owls in immature plumage, and placed them in a cage I had formed in a recess in my back garden. I had just previously received a nest of three young of *Strix otus*, one of which I sent away for want of room. One of the two remaining ones came to an untimely end by breaking a leg and wing in a fight. The odd bird soon fraternised with the new comers, which continued for some time, when the Long-Eared Owl and one of the most pugnacious of its companions had a pitched battle which resulted in the death of the latter. Soon after two of the little owls had a sharp set to, and another victim was added to the death-roll. On dissecting the latter I found its breast pierced all over; the sharp claws of its antagonist in some instances penetrating the breast-bone. I have never kept birds that show such pugnacity. Two combatants will oftentimes fasten their claws into each other with such ferociousness that even a fall from the branch to the floor of the cage will not cause them to loose their hold. In the month of March a pugnacious survivor commenced a series of combats, and so I put her in a separate cage. I had now remaining three Little Owls and the Long-Eared Owl. Two of the former now gave signs of being on affectionate terms with each other; and all through the following month (April) this pair of birds kept well together, or calling and answering each other throughout the day and night, frequently during the day mating on the floor of the cage. On May 19th, about 9 p.m., the female deposited her first egg on the floor. This I took out for fear of being broken. On May 20th I removed the third Little Owl from the cage, and, having made a nesting-place by covering a box about a foot square with some pieces of cork bark, leaving an entrance in the front near the top, I placed a few small sticks and some hay inside, and hung it at one of the top corners of the cage. On May 21st the pair immediately took possession, and the female, having selected one corner, and made a depression in the nesting material, deposited the second egg during the evening, both birds removing some of the sticks from the box. On May 22nd the male bird determined to have the cage to himself and

partner, so engaged in a series of combats with the Long-Eared Owl, driving him about until he was compelled to take refuge by squeezing himself between the top of the nesting-box and roof of the cage. He seemed so intimidated by the fierce onsets of its smaller foe that he did not dare to leave even to get his food, so I relieved him of his anxiety, and let the pair have the cage entirely to themselves. I placed the first egg by the side of the other in the nest. The female seemed very busy in her nest for a short time, occasionally leaving and returning. Sometimes the pair were at home; the male generally kept guard, however, on a branch just outside, and would dart at any intruder with fury. On May 23rd, during the latter part of the day, the female kept closer to her nest, and in the evening deposited her third egg. On May 24th, as I entered the cage, the male bird flew into the box and barred the entrance by showing fight, and on removing him I found the female sitting hard on her three eggs, and unwilling to move when I touched her. On May 25th the female was sitting close, and left the nest a few minutes only in the evening. On the morning of May 26th I looked into the nest, expecting to find the fourth egg, but was disappointed; the female still sat close. She came off the eggs for a short time in the evening, the cock bird being as pugnacious as ever. The fourth egg was laid about 9 p.m. On May 27th the hen was sitting close, the cock carrying her food, which he placed in the box by her side. On May 28th she was still busy in keeping her eggs warm, leaving for a few minutes in the evening to stretch her wings and legs, the male supplying food as usual. May 29th to 31st no change in the position of affairs. And from June 1st to 17th the male kept his watch as usual, the female only leaving for a few minutes in the evening either to procure food or to expand her pinions, until June 17th, when, about 9 p.m. an usual commotion was caused by the female bird on the nest. She emitted a low, chuckling noise for upwards of half an hour. The male, meanwhile, was flying to and from his perch to the nest in an agitated manner. On the following morning, June 18th, I found the first young bird had been hatched during the preceding evening, hence the agitation of the parents. I lifted the box from the nail very carefully, and, having removed the cock (he having flown in as usual at my entrance to the cage), the female allowed me to lift her from the nest to the

other corner of the box, when I picked up the newly-hatched young bird, which had been squeaking at intervals all the morning. It was about the size of an ordinary walnut, and pure white in colour, resembling a ball of cotton-wool. I looked round for the empty shell, but found that it had been pounded by the old bird into minute fragments (this will probably account for the disappearance of the egg-shells of raptorial birds, which I have sometimes been puzzled to account for after the young are hatched). The male bird became more particular in the choice of food he carried to the nest; one sparrow he plucked entirely before conveyance, and another he neatly disjointed. During this evening, at the same hour as before, 9 p.m., the female made the same chuckling noise, and I therefore concluded a second young one was hatching. On the following morning, June 19th, I examined the nest and found she had the young well covered by one wing, the two remaining eggs being close under her. I noticed a few fragments of egg-shells on the bottom of the cage. Later in the afternoon the female made the same kind of noise, which was continued at intervals throughout the evening. I therefore looked into the nest at 9 a.m. the following day, June 20th, and found the third young one with half the egg-shell still attached to it. On the morning of June 21st I saw the third young one quite hatched. All three nestlings had their eyes closed. The first one, hatched on the 17th, and now four days old, was, I found, much improved, showing a remarkable difference in size on comparison with the others. On June 23rd, the three young, being well nourished, were rapidly increasing in proportions; the fourth egg (probably the first one laid) I found was addled, so I removed it, blowing it for my cabinet. Seven or eight sparrows, or food in proportion to this bulk, was now daily consumed by the family. The young were still unable to open their eyes, lying in their nest, and asleep like little pigs, very fat and plump. Having to leave home for a time on business, my diary of daily events became interrupted, and therefore does not contain any details relating to the growth and development of the first plumage in July; and the assumption of the second plumage in October, which took place at the same time as that of the parent birds, and which are scarcely distinguishable from each other. Not having to work for their daily sustenance they became very fat, the

parent birds weighing $8\frac{1}{4}$ oz. and 10 oz. respectively, the three young being $7\frac{3}{4}$, 8, and 8 oz. Six ounces is said to be the weight of this bird in a state of nature. The above is the weight of the living birds as scaled by myself on the 31st of December. A female adult bird (one of my odd ones), having died on Nov. 24th, weighed 10 ozs. This, I believe, is the first occasion on which this Little Owl has bred and successfully reared its young to maturity in confinement in England. I hope to record some further proceedings on the part of my pets in my next notes.

In the stomach of an adult female Short-Eared Owl, killed 27th October, 1884, I found the feathers, bones, and other remains of a young Thrush, including the gizzard, which, having been swallowed whole, was unaffected by the gastric juice. On October 29th I received four Long-Eared Owls, three males and a female; the former weighed respectively 8 oz. 8 dr., 8 oz. 10 dr., and 9 oz.; the female, 10 oz. Two of their stomachs were crammed with the bones and fur of Field Voles; in that of another were portions of the skulls of seven Voles, and a mass of refuse sufficient to form nearly a dozen pellets of the size usually cast up.

An immature female Black Redstart, killed at Blakeney 22nd October, 1884, weighed 4 dr. The food had consisted of small beetles.

On September 17th, 1884, a male specimen of the Great Snipe was shot near Stalham, and, although exceedingly fat, weighed but $6\frac{1}{2}$ ozs. The gullet contained half a lobworm, and in the stomach I found four or five small white worms.

A Grey Phalarope was killed at Burgh St. Peter, in Great Yarmouth, on October 30th. Its stomach contained some small pebbles, two univalve shells, remains of a fly, and some vegetable refuse, including two pips not unlike those of the ordinary raisin, but much smaller.

At 6 a.m. on October 9th I took a walk on the Yarmouth Denes from Caistor to the Harbour's mouth. Large flocks of Twites were continually passing during the whole morning, sometimes alighting to feed on the seeds of various grasses and plants growing on the sandy soil; large numbers of Sky Larks, Meadow Pipits, and Starlings, were also constantly moving southwards. The local birdcatchers were apparently out in full force, and netted a great number of birds, principally Meadow

Pipits, Lesser Redpolls, and Twites. The birdcatchers call the Twite the "French Linnet," to distinguish it, I presume, from our familiar Brown Linnet. I saw a solitary Golden Plover, a few Wheatears, and Grey Crows; these latter birds had probably just arrived. A female Ring Ouzel was killed the day before; also a brace of Woodcocks, being the first birds of the season in this neighbourhood.

Two Shore Larks and a Snow Bunting were shot on October 6th, and a few other Buntings seen, but this date is somewhat early for these two species to be over in any number. Two swallows passed southward, flying very low, and a single bird passed later on in the same direction. I also saw a solitary Short-Eared Owl.

An immature female Honey Buzzard was shot on September 17th, 1884, in Gunton Park, and sent to me the following day. During the last few years this bird has become almost a regular autumn visitor to the Eastern Counties, and (as in this instance) generally in its first year's plumage. Occasionally (as in 1882) one is killed in the plumage of second year. The last obtained measured 23 inches in length and 4 feet 4 inches across its fully expanded wings. Weight 1 lb. 14 oz. The bird proved very plump in condition, and (as testified by the contents of its stomach and crop) had recently visited a bees' nest.

A male example of *Picus major* was shot near Norwich on October 23rd, 1884. The red of the vent extended over the abdomen, and was of a more brilliant tint than usual; there were also a few scarlet feathers on its chest, and several other feathers were tinged with the same hue; this is rather unusual, and, I am inclined to think, indicates age. In its stomach I found a spider and a large quantity of the white kernels of hazel nuts and a few pebbles. The presence of vegetable food of any kind in the stomach of a Woodpecker is (according to my experience) very unusual. Twenty years ago a somewhat similar instance came under my notice (Zool., 1865, p. 9468), the stomach of a Green Woodpecker which I examined in October being filled with oats and the fragments of two or three acorns. Naumaun states that acorns form an occasional article of diet with *Picus viridis*, and Bechstein asserts that this bird will crack nuts.

A cock Linnet (*Linota cannabina*) was brought to me on 8th

May last which had just died, after living as a caged bird just seventeen years in the possession of a Mr. Lincoln of this city. I have kept Goldfinches from eight to ten years, and have known canaries to live even twenty years.

At page 480 of 'The Zoologist' for 1885 I recorded the capture of a female Roller near Norwich, and, having twenty years previously received a male bird, I have compared the two, with the following result:—The principal measurements were—In total length (beak and tail inclusive), male $12\frac{1}{2}$ in., female $13\frac{1}{4}$ in.; expanse of wing, male 25 in., female $25\frac{1}{2}$ in.; wing (from carpus), male $7\frac{5}{8}$ in., female $7\frac{3}{4}$ in.; bill to gape, male $1\frac{3}{4}$ in., female $1\frac{3}{4}$ in.; tail, male 5 in., female 5 in. The female, being slightly the larger of the two, weighed $4\frac{3}{4}$ ounces.

A Blackbird was shot at Fleggburgh, near Yarmouth, Dec. 8th, 1884, which had the head, neck, and under parts of a rufous brown; crown of head, back, wings, and tail of a brownish ash; bill and legs brown; irides pale brown. Another, in similar plumage, was killed at Narford, near Swafham, on 9th January, 1885; it had the tips of the primaries dirty white; bill deep yellow; irides paler brown than usual.

A white Sparrow was shot on the 16th October, 1885, at Banham, near Attleborough, and proved on dissection to be a male. It was not a true albino, however, the eyes being of a pale brown. The bill, legs, and toes pale brown. Two varieties of the Greenfinch were brought me by a local birdcatcher, who had netted them with others near Norwich in December, 1884, and January, 1885. They were exactly alike, and may have been from the same nest, as they were caught in localities not three miles apart. The plumage was of a pale uniform cinnamon colour, with pale green rump. Bill, eyes, and legs pale brown.

A pure white Skylark was caught on December 5th, 1885, in this neighbourhood, and was kept alive in an aviary with other birds. I have previously known, and have had in my possession, both white and albino varieties; also sandy coloured and piebald examples; and on one occasion a peculiar melanoid variety, which was also caught by a birdcatcher, neither the plumage nor feet showing any trace of previous confinement.

An old cock Blackbird with a white face was killed at Witchingham on the 28th of October.

Mr. Harward, jun., informed me (October 19th, 1885) that a Robin with a white crown had frequented his garden at Bracondale all the summer, and had mated with a bird of ordinary plumage. A nest was built in some ivy, and a brood of young were hatched which did not vary at all from the normal plumage.

A young hen Partridge was shot at Wells, on October 1st, having the entire plumage sprinkled with white feathers.

In the case of the Rook I have seen buff, cream-coloured, albino, and pied varieties, the last named by far the most common. The most singular variety I have seen (shot at Leiston, in Suffolk, in January, 1885) had the whole of the plumage a mauve tint, deeper in colour on its head, neck, breast, throat, thighs, and under parts generally. Irides pale brown; bill, legs, and feet deep brownish black.

The Jackdaw is much less subject to variation than the Rook. Two piebald varieties only have come under my notice, although I have heard of others both pied and white. On November 11th, 1885, a chocolate-coloured Jackdaw was shot at Middleton, near Lynn, and sent to me to preserve for the Lynn Museum. It was a female bird, and had irides of a French grey; the back, upper wing coverts, crown of head, throat, and under parts, are chocolate. The usual grey mask is in this specimen of a slaty tint; primaries sandy brown, tipped and margined with grey; secondaries and tail-feathers sandy brown, with broader, greyish margins; the bill, legs, toes, and claws, dark chocolate.

An adult female Waterhen, of piebald colour, was caught by a fisherman in a marsh drain at Drayton, near Norwich, and brought to me alive on December 5th, 1885. A peculiarity in the colour of the irides of this bird was remarkable, one eye being of a deep red, the other hazel. Mr. Booth tells me he has seen a Great Crested Grebe which had eyes of different colours, a peculiarity in bird life seldom noticed.

The Waterhen, although so common in the eastern counties, is subject to but little variation in colour. I have seen but two piebald examples in addition to the two sandy ones already recorded.

Two very large Partridges, both cock birds, were killed in October, 1885, weighing 19 and 19½ ounces, that is three or four ounces heavier than usual.

The Eider Duck is of rare occurrence on the Norfolk coast, but has been met with on three occasions to my knowledge. In the latest instance an immature female was shot at Burgh St. Peter on December 30th, 1884, and weighed 2 lbs.

A fine male Gadwall was killed at Merton November 11th, 1885, and an immature male Long-tailed at Moulton, October 23rd, 1885.

A fine male Spotted Redshank was killed on the marshes at Burton Turf in August, 1885, and sent me by a friend; weight 4 oz. 6 dr. avoirdupois.

In the month of August an unusual number of Wood Sandpipers made their appearance, and were shot in various localities. I had a male on the 13th, a second on the 17th, another on the 23rd, and a male, killed at Thuxton on the 28th, and lastly a female on the 10th of September. All these birds were in immature plumage, and very fat. Their food had consisted principally of small insects.

Two female Water Rails were obtained at Hingham and Horning, December 26th, 1884. The females are much smaller than the males. Their food consisted of aquatic insects and vegetable matter. On the 23rd of May a nest of seven fresh laid eggs were brought me from Hickling; and a live bird on the 28th of October that had been caught in a marsh drain leading into the Wensum near Norwich. It was apparently a male, and had eyes of a brick red colour.

An adult Great Black-backed Gull was caught at Cromer by being entangled in some fishing gear, and was brought to me alive on December 16th, 1884. The irides were grey, speckled with fine irregular blotches of brown; the eyelids were of a beautiful reddish orange; gape of mouth same colour, but not quite so deep in tone. Upper mandible of bill yellow on the anterior half, pale horn the basal half; lower mandible horn-colour, with fleshy tinge, with the red patch covering the anterior half at the sides, extreme tip pale horn-colour; legs, pale flesh colour, with slight tinge of pink on the front of the tarsus.

Two small examples of the Bittern came to hand in January. The first, a male, was shot on the 19th at Aylsham by Mr. Purdy. It seemed very tame, allowing the shooter to approach within twenty-five yards of it before it took to wing. It was

very fat, and the stomach contained the remains of a water-beetle (*Dytiscus marginalis*), which, judging from previous dissections, seems a favourite prey. The second example, a female (also of smaller dimensions than usual) was killed near Lynn on the 26th. It weighed just 18 ounces, and measured $26\frac{1}{2}$ inches in total length, beak and tail included; $45\frac{1}{2}$ inches across the fully extended wings, and $12\frac{1}{4}$ in the wing from carpus.

Solitary individuals of the handsome Greenbacked Porphyrio have been met with in Norfolk on five different occasions, and four out of the five were sent to me for preservation almost as soon as killed. The last procured (Zool. 1885, p. 482) was shot on October 16th, 1885, on the River Bure, near Horning, as it rose out of some reeds near one of the entrances to Hoveton Broad.

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