Lacerta bipes, Gmelin. *Seps lineata*, Harlan, *Journal Acad. Philad.*
iv. t. 18. f. 2.

Cape of Good Hope. Brit. Mus.

Bipes Gronovii. *Pygodactylus Gronovii*. Mus. Leyden.

ACONTIAS. Body cylindrical, apodal; eyes distinct, oblong, large, surrounded with a series of scales; scales with parallel white longitudinal internal lines, which are divided into two series by a central cross line (best seen in the white scales).

Acontias meleagris. White with the hinder edges of the upper scales dark brown.

Cape of Good Hope. Mus. Chatham.

Var. Above brown, beneath white.

Cape of Good Hope. Mus. Chatham.

XXXIX.—On the Breeding of the Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*, Linn.), in Ireland. By WM. THOMPSON, Esq., Vice-President of the Natural History Society of Belfast.

IN the 1st volume of the 'Annals of Natural History,' (p. 158.) I alluded to the circumstance of woodcocks having bred within the last few years in some of the northern, central, and southern counties; at the same time stating it to be my intention to reserve a detailed notice of the fact, until the species should in due order come to be treated of in my intended series of papers on the birds of Ireland. The subject being however interesting in more than a mere ornithological point of view, it is considered better now to publish my notes upon it, leaving the general history of the bird, independently of this part of its œconomy, for the place just mentioned.

Of the occasional breeding of the woodcock in England, instances have been recorded in the chief works on ornithology published in that country within the last seventy years. Thus Pennant informs us, that "in Case-wood, near Tunbridge, a few breed almost annually; the young having been shot there in the beginning of August*." He adds, "I do not recollect that any have been discovered to have bred in North Britain," p. 367. Latham states that "a brace of them were shot in Chellenden Wood by the gamekeeper to Horace Mann, Esq.,

* Brit. Zool. vol. ii. p. 366. ed. 1776.

May 1, 1769, and another brace the day before; they were sitting on their young*.” This author gives one other instance, in which a friend of his met with a woodcock on its nest, in a wood near Farningham, Kent. In his *Ornithological Dictionary*†, Montagu mentions his having received eggs of this bird from near Battel in Sussex; and in the *Supplement* to the same work, relates, on the authority of Mr. Foljambe, that in May 1802, a half-fledged woodcock was taken in Brodsworth Wood, near Doncaster, in Yorkshire; and that on the 5th of April 1805, a brood of four was hatched at Shireoaks, near Worksop, Nottinghamshire. Mr. Selby narrates, that “in Northumberland, the woodcock has been known to breed in the woods about Netherwitton,” and adds, “I have now in my collection eggs taken from a nest in Pigdon Wood, not far from Morpeth‡.” Within the last few years we learn from the ‘*Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*,’ and the periodicals devoted to Natural History§, that the number of woodcocks nestling in England and Scotland is greatly on the increase; and, as may be inferred, the number of these birds occurring during summer in Ireland has likewise been increasing within the same period.

Of the woodcock’s actual breeding in this country I have not seen any record, and of its presence here in summer only the following notice, which appeared first in a newspaper—the *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*—and subsequently in a more abiding place, having been transferred to the pages of the *Magazine of Natural History*. “On the 8th of August 1828, a fine woodcock was shot in Florida demesne, county of Down; as it was seen in the course of the spring, it is supposed to have remained in the country since last winter,” vol. ii. p. 87. By the late T. F. Neligan, Esq., of Tralee, a young and ardent naturalist (whose recent death is much to be deplored), I was informed that a woodcock had been seen in the county of Kerry in the month of July 1832||. In the county of Antrim,

* Gen. Syn. of Birds, vol. iii. part i. p. 130. 1785.

† Published in 1802; the Supp. in 1813: see article Woodcock.

‡ Illus. Brit. Orn. vol. ii. p. 108. 1833.

§ See *Magazine of Natural History*, vol. i. p. 83; vol. ii. p. 86; vol. v. p. 570; vol. viii. p. 612; vol. ix. p. 543.—*New Series*, vol. i. p. 52, 121, 337, 439.

|| It is thought proper to notice odd birds seen at this season, as they can

at the opposite extremity of Ireland from that of Kerry, a pair of these birds bred at Claggan, the property of Earl O'Neil in 1834. My informant, the gamekeeper, states that in the month of April in that year, a nest was found containing four eggs, all of which were successfully incubated; it was placed in a slight depression of the ground under a hazel, and had a little grass and moss in the bottom for the reception of the eggs: the bird was very tame when on the nest, and permitted the approach of my informant within a yard of her*. This same year (1834), I saw a young woodcock in the shop of Mr. Glennon, bird preserver, &c. Dublin, who "set it up"; he informed me that it was shot at Wilton in the county of Wexford, and was received by him in a recent state on the 8th or 9th of May: he at the same time stated, that in the preceding summer of 1833, a young bird of this species, shot in company with one of its parents at the seat of Lord de Vesci in Queen's county, was sent him to be preserved, and was likewise forwarded when recent. By Thomas Walker, Esq. of Belmont, near Wexford, I have been favoured with the following particulars under date of May 19, 1837. "As to the breeding of woodcocks in this country, I was in the second week of May sent a couple of young ones half-fledged†, that were taken out of a nest at Wilton in this county, the seat of Mr. Alcock. The nest was on the ground among brushwood, and the cry of the young birds like the sound produced by a child's whistle. At the time I received the young birds, there was at Ballyarthur, county of Wicklow, the seat of Mr. Bailey, a nest with four eggs in it; this is the third year they have bred at Wilton." Mr. Walker on another occasion mentioned the woodcock as frequenting for a similar purpose the covers of Killoughrim Wood in the county of Wexford, and remarked upon the young indigenous specimens he had examined, that "although fully as large as old birds, they had not got the strong feathers in the tail, but instead a soft curly down." In

hardly be presumed in every instance to have been solitary individuals, though their mates may have escaped notice.

* The tameness of the woodcock in its nest is mentioned by Pennant and Latham, and from the observation of many persons who have witnessed it, seems to be universal.

† For one of these I am indebted to Mr. Walker.

the month of June or July 1836, a woodcock was shot, and another seen about the same time at Springvale, county of Down, the residence of Major Matthews. On the 4th of June 1837, an old female bird was killed at the vale of Ovoca, county Wicklow. In May 1838, a woodcock was captured at Stormont near Belfast.

At Tullamore Park in the county of Down (the seat of Lord Roden), beautifully situated at the base of the mountains of Mourne, and possessing considerable variety of surface, abundance of wood of various size, and occasional moist and open glades, which even in the driest summer would afford food to the woodcock, this bird has bred of late years. From the intelligent gamekeeper I have learnt the following interesting particulars. In 1835 he first (though living here since 1828) became acquainted with their continuing throughout the summer in the park. The first nest he saw, which had just the appearance of a partridge's or pheasant's, was situated on damp ground in a young plantation, and at the root of a young larch fir. It contained four eggs, on which the old bird sat so close as to allow him and other persons to approach within a foot, but when they came near she was always observed to hide her bill to its base in the grass or withered ferns about the nest; the eggs were all productive, and were he thinks incubated for three weeks. The young left the nest just after birth, and were not again seen until able to use their wings, when they frequently appeared about the place: the male bird remained about a dozen paces from the nest during the incubation of his partner. From having seen other woodcocks in the park this summer, it was believed that they must also have nests, but this one only was discovered; eventually however, a second pair of woodcocks was sprung along with five young ones, the old birds taking first to flight: the young—completely feathered except on the head and neck, where down was still displayed—were now able to fly over the trees, whilst those produced in the nest first mentioned, were but three days "out."

In the summer of 1836, my informant saw in one day five old woodcocks in the park; and though he had not any of their nests this year, he on one occasion saw three young birds.

He is of opinion that woodcocks pair before leaving this country in the spring for more northern climates, and remarks, that in their evening flight at this season they "twist" amazingly, the hinder one following the foremost through every curve or sinuosity of its course, which is extremely rapid. Their call may now be expressed by the word *hisp*, and by the accurate repetition of which he has brought them back when flying past him; during the breeding season they, in addition to this, have calls which sound like *waap-waap-weep-weep*, succeeding each other, and repeated as here set down: both sexes are considered to make use of the two calls. At the season of incubation, they call at early dawn, and at this period their flight is very different from that in the month of March, being now slow or with the wings scarcely moving; but occasionally they may be seen circling about "as if in play," at all events, describing such a course as evinces that they cannot be in search of food. In winter, my informant believes woodcocks to have a regular line of flight from the covers to their feeding-ground, and acting upon his belief, has, by taking his stand at particular spots, shot many in flying over them.

In 1837 three nests were found at Tullamore, the first early in the month of April, when it was surrounded with snow; they were all sheltered by young trees, and one of them within twenty yards of where a nest had been the preceding year: in each were four eggs, all of which were productive, the young appearing in April. The nests here have in every instance been in slight hollows of the ground, with a little grass or dead leaves in the bottom for lining. To withdraw attention from one of these nests when containing young, the parent tumbled about as if wounded, thus feigning to a greater extent than the gamekeeper had ever before witnessed in any species of bird; and at the same time she gave utterance to a note distinct from those before mentioned, or as expressed to me, "screaching with rage*." The young birds are said to be beautiful in the down, being mottled with black where their parents are so, and cream-coloured where they are brown.

* When disturbed during incubation, they merely fluttered off the eggs, and alighted at a short distance.

About the second week of June, a fourth brood was seen, of which the nest was not found.

In 1838, one nest containing four eggs (which may be considered the ordinary number) was observed in the park; the young appeared in April: by the middle of this month they have generally come out here*. Long after the general departure of the woodcocks for the north this year, the gamekeeper saw what he believed to be five distinct brace of these birds in one portion of the park, and considers that they were more numerous than in any previous summer. The nests were not discovered as usual, in consequence of boys, by whom they were all found on former occasions, not having been employed in the young plantations. Daily throughout the year, the gamekeeper now either sees or hears woodcocks without going out of his way or attending to them; indeed they fly very much about his cottage, situated in a beautiful open glade, and from about its door may be seen on wing every evening. I obtained this information when at Tullamore Park in the month of August 1836, and in June last†. On the 28th of this month I visited the park in the hope of seeing some of these birds, but the evening was so fine and light that they did not commence flying until it was very late, and then darkness suddenly came on. At half-past nine o'clock the first

* In the 9th volume of the 'Magazine of Natural History' (p. 543) it is stated of three nests found in a wood near Derby, that the young were hatched in the month of April. In vol. i. (New Series) of this same work, it is remarked, in a notice of its breeding in Ross-shire, that the woodcock "hatches early, often at the latter end of March, but generally by the first week of April." On the 10th of this latter month, the writer of the communication to the Magazine, saw woodcocks sitting on their nests, one of which contained eggs.

† Some few points on which naturalists are agreed have perhaps been unnecessarily introduced, but coming from an intelligent man who has had ample means for observation, it was considered better to include them. In proof of Tullamore Park and its vicinity being a favourite resort of the woodcock, it may be stated, that the gamekeeper has with a brace of pointers killed eight brace of these birds during a forenoon in the heath skirting the plantations, and with the aid of one dog and a boy to beat the covers, has shot ten brace within a similar time in the park. In the severe snow storm of 1827, three gentlemen on a visit here, and not going out before noon, killed and bagged seventy-five brace in three days; and giving themselves no trouble in looking after wounded birds, many more which had fallen by their guns were afterwards picked up. During the month of January 1838, about 100 brace were obtained by occasional shooting. The gamekeeper considers that he has seen so many as eighty brace in one day.

were heard, when a pair swept past within about thirty yards, uttering the two calls before described, and in the order in which they have been set down. From this time, and until half an hour had elapsed—when it was in vain to attempt seeing them—several were heard, and all, I think, single birds, which gave utterance only to the other call stated to resemble in sound the word *hisp* quickly uttered.

The description of the habits of these birds about the period of incubation, given by the gamekeeper at Tullamore Park, strongly reminded me of the first good account I had read of them, which is contained in a highly interesting notice of the breeding of woodcocks in Ross-shire, communicated by Sir F. Mackenzie to the Zoological Society of London*. The manner of flight is so different after the birds are paired, from what the sportsman is accustomed to witness at other periods, that I am induced to call attention to the similarity of testimony in the two cases. “Than the flight of the woodcock before and after incubation, Sir F. Mackenzie states that he knows nothing more rapid, as for an hour or two about dusk he (probably the male, though two have been seen pursuing each other) flies in large circles over the tops of the trees.” To a sportsman, at least, words could not better convey an idea of the velocity of its flight than those of my informant, who, an experienced “shot,” describes it to be such on these occasions that he cannot “get his gun upon them,” or in other words, if the uninitiated require explanation, a velocity so great as to prevent his taking aim.

In a communication made by my friend Mr. Selby to the ‘Magazine of Zoology and Botany,’ on “the woodcock breeding in Scotland,” it is asked, “What reason is to be assigned for this change in their habits? Is it to be attributed to a change in our seasons, or are we to look for it in the great increase of woods or plantations so general over all the island, affording these birds additional and secure retreats, as well as an abundant and constant supply of food?” vol. i. p. 201. Although it is not for me to attempt an explanation of that, respecting which Mr. Selby appears dubious, it may perhaps be allowed me to offer a few observations on the most

* Proceedings of Zool. Society, 1832, Part II. p. 133.

interesting points in connexion with the subject, or, to speak more particularly, on the causes which have influenced these birds to remain through the summer with us.

In the first place, it must not be overlooked, that during the last few years, the number of woodcocks stated to have continued throughout the year has increased so much in England and Scotland, that, during the same time, there has been greater attention bestowed on such facts than at any former period, and in consequence, there have been periodical publications—the Magazine of Natural History leading the van—in which any isolated instance of the kind might be recorded, that would hitherto have been unpublished. But even taking this circumstance into consideration, there cannot I think be the least doubt that there has been an increase in those countries; and in Ireland there unquestionably has been*.

That this originated from wounded birds unable to undertake the vernal migration seems the most untenable of all reasons which have been assigned for it, inasmuch as the same cause existed previously. Why should the number of wounded birds have been greater over the British Islands generally within the last few years than at any former period? Did our sportsmen become at once more numerous, and is their aim less sure? Of what avail are all the “appliances and means” of modern “warfare,” as the patent cartridge, patent wadding, and percussion caps, if more wounded and unbagged birds are left behind than formerly?

The spread of plantations over the face of the country appears to be the predisposing cause, though insufficient to account altogether for the circumstance. These countries certainly had always abundance of places adapted to the nestling of the woodcock; and though plantations, chiefly in tracts unsuited to cultivation, have been very much extended of late years, others again, especially in Scotland and Ireland, of native growth, and from the excellent cover they afforded, admirably adapted to this end, have been swept away, and the

* This fact appears the more singular on account of the number of woodcocks that winter in the British Islands having diminished rather than increased of late years.

ground they occupied been converted to purposes of pasture or tillage. It may be remarked, that plantations of very different character are selected by the woodcock for its nest: thus Sir F. Mackenzie observes, "the soil where the nests were found (at Conan, Ross-shire) is gravelly and rather dry; the grass tolerably long, *without underwood*, and the trees, oak, birch, and larch, not exceeding 30 years' growth." In another instance, where three nests were found in the same wood near Derby, we learn that "the underwood was thin and of not more than from seven to ten years' growth*." Again, we are told, that of two nests at Brahan Castle, in Ross-shire, the one "was in withered grass, partially screened by spray and brambles," the other "amongst pruned branches at the root of a large larch tree†." The nests before mentioned, in the counties of Antrim and Wexford, are said to have been in thickets. The sites pointed out to me at Tullamore park were all in an extensive young plantation, consisting chiefly of larch fir, apparently of about eight years' growth; here there is not much other cover, the place having originally been a heath-covered tract: it however joins a park rich in fine timber and a profusion of underwood. A friend just returned from shooting in Inverness-shire informs me, that in an indigenous birch wood, on the banks of Loch Ruthven, and containing but little coppice, some pairs of woodcocks have nestled for the last few years.

Our "change of seasons," or more equable climate of late years, by reason of the milder winters, and the summers being colder and more humid, speaking in general terms, than they were even at a recent period,—although the nearer they approximate, the more widely they, in this very respect, differ from those of high northern latitudes, to which the woodcock chiefly resorts to breed, seems to have had much influence on the increased number of these birds, which at all events breed, and it may be, remain permanently in the British islands‡. It appears evident too, that it was not caused by the peculiar suitability of any one, two, or three summers, as

* Mag. Nat. Hist., vol. ix. p. 543.

† Mag. Nat. Hist., vol. i. p. 121. New series.

‡ It is very obvious, that warm dry summers in *these* countries, as for instance those of 1825 or 1826, would be ill adapted to the woodcock's feeding.

for the last few years woodcocks have been gradually increasing at this season. The general augmentation cannot, I conceive, be attributed merely to the circumstance of the first young birds bred in the country having continued to multiply therein. That they have done so, however, may be fairly considered as evinced in the annual increase of the species about its chief habitats, but is not, I think, sufficient to account for the presence of these birds in the widely distant localities in which they have occurred. Most migratory birds appear to be in some degree affected by latitude in their movements, as well as by the isotherial and isothermal lines, or those under which the mean heat of summer and of winter is the same. From them the woodcock apparently differs, in being influenced solely by climate in the selection of its summer haunts. In the warmest countries it frequents, this species is believed merely to ascend from the plains to the highest mountains to breed*. It is so in the extreme south of Europe, if my informant be correct in stating that they nestle in summer in the mountains of Albania, where in the lowlands they are abundant during winter. To the Alps they resort in numbers in the breeding season; but here another question arises, which will apply to all but the most southern countries, to which allusion has just been made.

Are the birds which breed in the mountains of the extreme south of Europe the same individuals which frequent their base in the winter, or are they from a greater distance, those from their base migrating further northwards, and is this "the order of their going" from south to north throughout Europe? According to this view, the British Islands would be looked upon as the most northern limits of the flight of such individuals as nestle here, and we may readily in such case imagine the birds to be attracted in their vernal flight by the first suitable places, in these islands or elsewhere, that may occur, and at once take possession of them. The two following statements, although they may not go far enough to establish this point, yet seem to favour it in regard to some localities. Sir F. Mackenzie remarks, with reference to Conan in Ross-shire, "It is probable that the parent birds sought this spot for the

* Latham, loc. cit.

purpose of breeding, as they must have arrived in the spring from other localities; for those who shot in the covers till February declare that they did not know of a single woodcock being then left in them, and had there been two or three the keeper must have been aware of it*." In the 'Magazine of Natural History' for 1832 (vol. v. p. 570) it is stated in connexion with their having bred every season for the few years preceding in the woodlands about Darnaway Castle, the seat of the Earl of Moray, "that when the winter set in, the woodcock almost entirely deserted the Darnaway forest." The following extract from an admirable memoir by M. Necker on the birds of the neighbourhood of Geneva, illustrates this further. "La Bécasse (*Scolopax rusticola*) ouvre la marche des oiseaux voyageurs, et c'est déjà vers la fin de Février ou le commencement de Mars que l'on voit arriver dans les forêts au pied des montagnes, ces troupes qui viennent probablement de l'Italie, de l'Espagne, et du midi de la France; où elles ont trouvé un hiver doux, une terre humide et non durcie par les gelées; elles attendent que les neiges des montagnes basses soient fondues, et nous quittent encore au mois d'Avril pour nicher dans les lieux élevés et froids†." But proof is wanted, and it would be difficult to be procured, whether the woodcocks generally, that breed in the British Islands, constantly abide therein, or are of that vast number which leave the more southern countries in the spring in search of suitable climates in which to rear their broods, and where they remain during the summer only. When, however, I consider that the climate of Ireland of late was not unsuitable to this bird at any period of the year, and as it became the more suitable, that in localities otherwise favourable, the number of woodcocks remaining during summer increased the more; that in their chief haunts the species was always to be met with in the interval between which the young broods had strength enough to wing their way to more southern coun-

* In the spring of 1836 numbers of woodcocks were met with in Tullamore park after the ordinary time that the eggs are considered to be laid. On the 7th of April the gamekeeper killed $4\frac{1}{2}$, and on the 11th $3\frac{1}{2}$ brace of these birds. In such quantity they had never been known to remain so late.

† Mémoires d'Histoire Naturelle, &c. de Genève, tom. ii. part 1, p. 35.

tries, and the great body of migratory individuals arrived from the north; I am disposed to believe, as in the case of their ally the common snipe (*Scolopax gallinago*), that the small proportion of woodcocks which breed in this country are permanent residents.

I have not touched upon the subject of any change in the great breeding haunts of the woodcock in high northern latitudes, from my inability to learn anything satisfactory about the matter. It has been stated indeed that the eggs have been much used in Sweden of late years, but it seems improbable that any change in regions so far remote as the ordinary summer haunts of the woodcock can affect the question of its breeding within the British islands.

XL.—On the Botany of the Channel Islands. By CHARLES C. BABINGTON, M.A., F.L.S., F.G.S., &c.*

HAVING last year had the pleasure of submitting to this Section an account of my botanical observations in the islands of Guernsey and Jersey†, I should not have ventured to occupy the time of this Meeting with anything further on the subject had I not been so fortunate as to make several additions to the Channel Islands Flora during the last few weeks.

I will proceed to mention the names of those plants which had not been noticed in the islands before the present year.

Ranunculus ophioglossifolius. In a very wet marsh in Jersey.

Orchis laxiflora. Common in wet places in Jersey and Guernsey.

Linaria pelisseriana. In one place upon a dry hill side, amongst *Ulex europæus*, in Jersey.

Myriophyllum alterniflorum. In marsh ditches in Guernsey.

Polygala oxyptera. This is probably a variety of *P. vulgaris*, but has been distinguished by several eminent continental botanists. It is frequent in all the islands, and has been gathered by myself near Liverpool.

Ononis reclinata. This plant is very common in Alderney, but has not been noticed in the other islands. It was found several years since on the coast of Galloway in Scotland, by Dr. Graham.

Potamogeton plantagineus. In damp pits from which peat has been

* Read before the Nat. Hist. Sec. of the British Association, at Newcastle, Aug. 20, 1838, and communicated by the Author.

† Published in Mag. of Zool. and Bot., ii. 397.

1839. "XXXIX.—On the breeding of the woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*, Linn.), in Ireland." *Annals of natural history* 2, 337–348.

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