BIRD-NOTES FROM THE WESTERN FRONT (PAS-DE-CALAIS).

BY

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FROM the middle of March to August 1917 I was stationed at six or seven different places in the Department of Pas-de-Calais, and all my spare time (generally an hour or two in the evenings) was given over to bird observation round our various camps.

These notes refer only to this Department, and mainly to the eastern and central portions of it; as I was very rarely near the coast, few sea birds are included.

It seems to be the general impression in England that bird life is scarce in France. This is far from the truth. In suitable places in this area, I found more bird life than in similar localities in England.

The following were found *generally distributed as breeding species*, the dates, where entered, being those on which the first individual migrants arrived; where no dates are entered against migrants, the bird had probably arrived previously; in some instances, localities, where the species was seen, are also inserted :—

Carrion-Crow, Rook, Magpie, Jay, Golden Oriole (May 12th, Courcelles Wood), Starling, Greenfinch, Goldfinch (not very common), House-Sparrow, Tree-Sparrow (very numerous east and south), Chaffinch, Linnet, Yellowhammer, Cirl Bunting (common all over), Sky-Lark, Crested Lark (numerous), Tree-Pipit (May 13th, Bretencourt), White Wagtail, Tree-Creeper (rather local), Great Tit, Blue Tit, Marsh-Tit, Spotted Flycatcher (May 8th, Boiry St. Richtrude), Great Reed-Warbler (near Hesdin), Reed-Warbler (May 19th, St. Pol), Marsh-Warbler (May 19th, St. Pol), Chiffchaff (May 12th, Courcelles Wood), Icterine Warbler (May 11th, Adinfer), Blackcap (May 4th, Boiry St. Richtrude), Garden-Warbler (May 12th, Courcelles Wood), Common Whitethroat (May 4th, Boiry St. Martin), Mistle-Thrush, Blackbird, Whinchat (May 1st, Boiry St. Martin, cock), Redstart (May 13th, Bretencourt, cock), Nightingale (May 6th, Agny, May 7th, Adinfer), Robin, Hedge-Sparrow, Wren, Swallow (April 13th, Boiry Becquerelle), Martin (May 1st, Boiry St. Richtrude), Sand-Martin (May 13th, Boiry St. Richtrude), Swift (May 6th), Green Woodpecker, Cuckoo (May 11th, Adinfer Wood), Barn-Owl, Tawny Owl, Little Owl (near Hesdin, St. Pol, and Watou), Sparrow-Hawk, Kestrel, Wood-Pigeon (none seen till mid-April, when they gradually increased and became common), Turtle-Dove (May 4th), Moor-Hen, Pheasant, Partridge (Common, not Red-legged), Quail (May 23rd, near St. Pol).

The majority of the above nested within four or five miles of our front line trenches—Whinchats and Common White-

throats rejoiced in the wire entanglements and the rough grass which grew long amongst them.

The following species I cannot include under the above heading "generally distributed":—

HOODED CROW (*Corvus cornix*).—Plenty in the winter; none seen after mid-April.

JACKDAW (*Colœus monedula*).—I only noted them at one place (Steenvoorde).

HAWFINCH (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*).—A few pairs in the big beech and hornbeam woods near St. Pol and Hesdin—not at all common.

CORN-BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*).—Rather local, very common in the east and in places in the centre, but entirely absent in similar situations elsewhere—numerous near Arras in April, in large flocks of 100 or more. Local near St. Pol, Hesdin, and Watou.

MEADOW-PIPIT (*Anthus pratensis*).—A fair number seen on migration early in April; but only one pair suspected of having a nest.

BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL (*M. flava flava*).—Found nesting commonly, in the north-east of the department only (Watou district).

YELLOW WAGTAIL (*M. f. rayi*).—(April 27th, Boiry St. Richtrude) A fair number seen on migration—not proved to have nested.

GREY WAGTAIL (*M. cinerea*).—One pair only, nesting near St. Pol (Hernicourt).

PIED WAGTAIL (*Motacilla a. lugubris*).—Fairly common on migration in early spring: it was not ascertained for certain that it nested, but was suspected on two occasions of doing so.

NUTHATCH (*Sitta europœa*).—Not common—the few that were met with were in the large forest of Hesdin.

LONG-TAILED TIT (*Ægithalos c. europœus*).—Only one lot noticed, a newly fledged brood in the Forest of Hesdin: the continental form.

WOODCHAT SHRIKE (*Lanius senator*).—(May 9th, Ayette) One only seen, a passing bird.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE (*L. collurio*).—(May 19th, near St. Pol) Not very common; only about six pairs seen; all probably nesting.

WILLOW-WREN (*Phylloscopus trochilus*).—(May 13th, Hauteville) Not nearly so numerous as in England, not more than a dozen pairs met with altogether.

GRASSHOPPER-WARBLER (*Locustella nœvia*).—(May 23rd,

St. Pol) In one locality five pairs were found within a mile of each other; a commoner bird than in England—a few live in the withy beds, in swampy ground—the majority in the big woods on the high ground, where the underwood has been cut a year.

MELODIOUS WARBLER (*Hypolais polyglotta*).—Two pairs seen and one nest found, near St. Pol, first seen May 23rd.

LESSER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia curruca*).—A rare bird; why, it is difficult to say: everything seemed suitable for them: the first arrival noted was on May 30th, at Gauchin Verloignt, near St. Pol; this individual passed on: near this place also were found nesting later on, possibly two pairs; at Aubin St. Vaast, near Hesdin on July 31st, young ones just out of the nest, were being fed by the mother; these were the only individuals seen; only once was the familiar and monotonous "zip-zip-zip" note heard, and this is not easily overlooked.

SONG-THRUSH (*Turdus philomelus*).—Nowhere common—less than a dozen pairs were observed during the whole period—these were in the big woods, not in the gardens as in England. More frequent in the centre, near St. Pol, and west, near Hesdin, than in the north and east. I attribute their scarcity to the very severe late spring, which took heavy toll of the Redwings and Fieldfares also.

WHEATEAR (*Œnanthe œnanthe*).—(May 3rd, Adinfer) Only about ten seen—two pairs nesting in old German big-gun emplacements—the rest passing. No rough warrens or rabbit holes for them!

STONECHAT (*Saxicola t. rubicola* ?).—Three only seen—all passing, the first two in March, our own familiar bird—the third seen on May 26th at Gauchin Verloignt, near St. Pol, had sooty black upper-parts and tail, exceptionally black; very conspicuous white collar all round the neck, meeting at the back of the neck—large pure white wing-spots—deep brilliant red breast—pure white rump like a Wheatear. Taking the date into consideration and the brilliancy and markings of this bird, I think this is probably a different race of Stonechat than usually occurs in Great Britain.

BLACK REDSTART (*Phœnicurus o. gibraltariensis*).—Only one pair seen on July 11th, which was feeding young on the top of the highest hill in the Department, about 175 metres (Mont des Cats).

NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus europœus*).—Only twice noted; at Houtkerque.

WRYNECK (*Jynx torquilla*).—Seen and heard on six occasions, first arrival May 21st, St. Pol.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dryobates major*).—Not so numerous as the Green Woodpecker: seen about six times; at Wail, at St. Pol.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*D. minor*).—Two records only: both in the St. Pol district.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*).—Four records, three in March and April near Wail, one in June near Watou.

HOBBY (*Falco subbuteo*).—First seen April 25th; a wood at Wailly, near Arras, was taken possession of by a pair as their summer residence; on several occasions here, these Hobbies gave me a good display of flying, stooping at and buffeting a pair of Kestrels, half in earnest, half in play—the Kestrels eventually had to clear out.

MERLIN (*Falco c. œsalon*).—Two seen in March at Wail.

COMMON BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*).—Two broods seen, able to fly, and the old birds, in the forest of Hesdin.

MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus œruginosus*).—Only one seen, on July 28th, an old bird at Contes, near Aubin St. Vaast, Hesdin.

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus pygargus*).—One only, a female, stayed, while on migration, for three days in the same large stubble field about three miles behind the front trenches near Boileaux-au-Mont—she was always to be found standing on the ground at exactly the same spot.

GOSHAWK (*Accipiter gentilis*).—Two seen in Hesdin Forest.

KITE (*Milvus milvus*).—One bird, immature, seen: being called by its parents: it could just fly from tree to tree and keep sixty yards ahead of me. A clear view of the old birds was never obtained, even after prolonged watching: this was in a great wood of splendid oak and beech.

HERON (*Ardea cinerea*).—A fair number seen at Wail, Watou, and Hesdin. One was observed trying to cross "no man's land" when much firing was going on. I watched him with a telescope—he made the attempt six times during a morning but I never saw him get across.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhyncha*).—I only saw three small lots.

SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*).—One only noted.

LAND-RAIL (*Crex crex*).—(May 20th) Not common: seen or heard about a dozen times (St. Pol and Hesdin).

STONE-CURLEW (*Burhinus œdicnemus*).—Several heard flying very high on March 28th at midday.

GOLDEN PLOVER (*Charadrius apricarius*).—Two small

flocks seen April 12th, Henin, and May 4th at Boiry St. Richtrude. Several arrived during the week ending August 6th near Hesdin.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Tringa hypoleuca*).—(May 17th) Not many; a few seen, probably nesting, in June, on the river banks near St. Pol: numbers slightly increased about July 28th on the river Canche.

REDSHANK (*T. calidris*).—A great flock heard going over at 11 p.m. on August 13th: there must have been hundreds by their clamour.

CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*).—Seventeen seen flying south on June 25th (Watou). Several heard going over at midnight July 21st and 22nd (Hesdin)—several passed eastward during the week ending August 6th (Hesdin).

WOODCOCK (*Scolopax rusticola*).—One only seen, flighting in the evening in Hesdin Forest, in August.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Larus ridibundus*).—One seen on the Canche.

Of the above, many, such as the Nuthatch, Pied Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail (possibly), Corn-Bunting, Hawfinch, Meadow-Pipit, Red-backed Shrike, Nightjar, Stone-Curlew, Land-Rail, Common Sandpiper, Mallard, Hobby, Goshawk, Lesser and Greater Spotted Woodpecker and Wryneck could have probably been found actually nesting, had one had the time to watch.

The above notes are from my own observations only, and were written up in August 1917.

Total number of species recorded for the months March to August 1917 is 106.