

1930.

127.

The Dartford Warbler is fairly common in the large gorse patches on their downs, most big patches holding a pair. A severe winter severely reduces their numbers, but they recover after a mild winter, such as the last.

We beat out a very large area of low bramble interspersed with coarse grass, and found three Crankopper Warbler's nests with 6, 5, 5, one of the latter being too hard set to blow & the other 5 incubated four or five days. This is a very late, cold spring, too!

The Crankopper Warbler must be flushed from the nest, or, when disturbed, may sometimes be watched back again. The cock ceases to sing as soon as nest building commences, & we have always found it useful to look for a nest in the vicinity of a singing cock.

The Crankopper Warbler is abundant on these downs near the sea, and I hear afterwards (20.5.30) that J. W. B. and Percy Smyth with D. C. Bryant subsequently beat off nearly 30 nests in this locality, but not on the same ground.

16th May. Staying for a few days at The Swan Inn, Dallington, Sussex (J. Humell, proprietor) I took a rather nice Linnet 5 and Meadow Pipit 5. The district looks suitable for Hobby, but I saw none, nor did local keepers know this falcon. Dallington is about 5 miles from Robertsbridge, side 12.5.30.

1930.

Notes about Willow-Tit's Nest. P. atricapillus K.

The nest & eggs described on page 125 were exhibited at the meeting held on 26 November of B.O.C., and there compared with other nests of both Willow-Tit and Marsh-Tit exhibited by O.W. Musselwhite. The meeting was definitely of the opinion that this nest was Willow-Tit. Except for J. Walpole-Bondy who dissent, it is thought that the nest is absolutely typical of Willow-Tit. The birds cannot be distinguished except by minute comparison together.

In the field this is practically impossible. All the Willow-Tit's nests shown contain two eggs bare, were not felted as are Marsh-Tit's. Willow-Tit nests are quite differently put together, and are loosely constructed, much like Creeper or Spotted Flycatcher, & contain wood-chips & feathers, the latter being absent from Marsh-Tit's nests. While it is now known that Marsh-Tit will sometimes entirely, or partially excavate their nesting hole, & frequently use a natural hole, the Willow-Tit never uses a natural hole and always entirely excavates its hole, like a Woodpecker. Unlike Marsh-Tit, the Willow-Tit is not demonstrative at the nest, and disappears when flushed from eggs.

According to O.W. Musselwhite the clutches of Willow-Tit are usually greater than Marsh-Tit. He puts 7, & more rarely 8 or 9 as Marsh-Tit's clutch. Willow-Tit averages 9 & runs to 12 eggs, instead of in Marsh-Tit. Colonel Smead said that out of about thirty

Marsh-tits taken by him in last ten years or so, not one resembled the nest of Willow-tit exhibited by me, & those shown by Munnellwhite tonight. On the other hand J. Walford-Road asserts that he has seen complete intergrading of the nests of both species, but has not kept them. It is difficult to reconcile these opposing statements from such excellent field-oruithologists. There is no doubt that the notes & song of the two species are entirely different. The alarm note at the nest appears to be, in the case of Marsh-tit a note resembling Tsit-su, whereas Willow-tit is "Chee-chee-chee" or "Char-char-char". Both species use a note like "tit" or "sit", but Willow is said to have a note "te-wit" not used by Marsh-tit.



The Rowans, 247 Vale Road, Ash Vale.

Home of Douglas Meares from December 1938
until his death in June 1949.

He had to walk only a few hundred yards
to reach the Ash Common Ranges.

1931.

1931.

14th March. Edgar Chance & I left with our host O.R. Owen, in S.P.C.'s Austin 6 from Bank House, Knighton about 10 A.M. for Radnor Forest. The first Ravens' nest we visited was at a great altitude at a spot known as Blackyatt, near Glanfihangel-nant-Melan, New Radnor, near Knighton. We turned up off the main road by a mountain tarn, on which a solitary swan was swimming in a hole in the ice, & proceeded for about a mile up a rough fern track. A good deal of snow lay on the moors, but weather was sunny & bright. We followed a wire fence over the crest of the mountain until it descended into a small rocky gully, in which the nest was built about 30 ft. from top and bottom. From opposite side of the gully we saw the bird sitting on the nest & could count several eggs. The gully was not quite precipitous, & Owen clambered along the side to within a yard or two of the nest, but ground was steep & slippery, & I got Edgar to lower me on a short length of rope right to the nest, from which I took clutch 5, incubated 5 days.

The whole site was extremely picturesque. The nest was built behind a small mountain ash tree growing out of the rocky bank. Both birds flew about on the opposite hill-side, but were not very demonstrative. The spot is very remote & desolate, and few but sportsmen would be likely to know it.

Thence we proceeded about three miles by car & left it by the roadside. A heavy walk of about two miles brought us to Glan Ewan, a desolate rocky gorge up on the top of Radnor Forest. A number of Buzzards were flying over.

1931.
14 March.

131.

The hillsides, we saw a last-year's nest in an ash tree, on our way up the valley. We also saw a well-built Dipper's nest. The Raven's nest was about 40 ft. down a steep gully, & could not be reached without a rope, although the eggs might possibly have been taken with a long scoop from one side. A thirty-foot drop below the nest was precipitous. I tied myself into a single rope, & Owen & P.C. lowered me over a crowbar right onto the nest, only the last 10 ft. being precipitous. The nest contained 6 eggs, incubated 2 days. It was built behind a stunted mountain ash tree, & could be very clearly seen from the side of the gully.

After lunch by the car, during which a number of Buzzards were wheeling & soaring all about the mountains we left this district & proceeded via Landriddon Wells to the Doldowood - Phayader district. Half way between these two stations we found a Raven's nest with one egg, placed on a ledge of rock almost at the top of the long, sloping ridge of outcrop rock above the quarries. These birds were extraordinary tame & bold, due no doubt to the proximity of working quarries, & repeatedly came within easy gun-shot, as we toiled up the steep hill-side towards the summit. This nest was only about 12 ft. from the ground, although at a great altitude, & I reached it without assistance, except for a long crooked stick.

Thence we continued along the old Aberyst-with road about 3 miles N.W. of Phayader, through beautiful rocky mountain scenery, until the road came out on to the open elevated moorland above. A quarter of an hour's walk took us to the magnificent

1931.

14 March. Precipice called on the map Craig-g-Groch, towering about 600-700 ft above the valley with its stream, road, and railway far below. Towards the top of this precipice, above the fringe of stunted trees clothing the lower parts of the almost perpendicular slopes was a Raven's nest in a very awkward place. Owen managed by a daring climb down and along the cliff face to approach within about 12 ft. of the nest, from which he took a lovely clutch of 6 small, pale greenish pointed eggs, hardly as large as some Crow's eggs. This site has been used for many years, with alternate sites near by, Owen has often taken it this way before, but I could not see the nest! It could be taken by a direct descent from above, but this would require long ropes. The eggs were incubated five days. About a mile or two further back (towards Rhayader) we found another nest building on the bold rocks at Clawr-dderw, but this was a very late nest, was not even lined.

Probably a second attempt, as the first had may have come to grief.

A pair of Peregrines were courting above these rocks, & were stooping and tumbling in the air in a wonderful manner.

On Sunday morning I saw two old Raven's nest in Scotch firs, about 25 ft. high, in a ridge of stunted trees on the top of the moors north of Knighton, and about 12-14 miles away.

1931. 15 March.

These are the first tree nests I have seen & I climbed to one very early. We did not see the birds at all to-day, but they have been seen about this neighbourhood frequently of late.

4th April 1931. Jack Beddell Smith met me at Godalming station with his little car at 11 A.M. & we proceeded along the Portsmouth Road for some four miles to a straight, level stretch of road bordered by Scotch pines & heather country, to look for Crossbill's nests. After a dark, wet & dreary Good Friday, to-day was warm & sunny, & the pines were alive with swarms of goldfinches & siskins, the latter all in pairs, but we did not see any actually building. There was plentiful evidence of Crossbills about, by the opened fir-cones under all the trees, & we soon saw a pair by the main road, still flying about together. At the end of the day we found the nest, about 30 ft. up at the top of a Scotch-fir, & it contained four young about 2 days old. The birds were very demonstrative at the nest when I was examining it. I also climbed to two other Crossbill's nests, one had the lining disturbed & was apparently forsaken, at the very top of a Scotch fir about 25 ft. high; the other was about 20 ft. up, out at the end of a lateral branch of a pine, so that I could not examine it, but the birds were not in evidence. We heard Woodlark singing out on the heath.

1st May 1931. Dartford Heath.

I found 3 Stonechats' nests, two just hatched and one with 5 eggs nearly hatching. Also found Meadow Pipit building.

But hatch. One nest on Cliveston Common in oak, but difficult to reach owing to its proximity to public road & path.

Another nest in grounds of Lamorbey Park Hotel, 25 ft. up, & impossible to reach without a ladder.

16th May 1931. Tollesbury D'Arcy. Essex.

I met Colonel R. Sparrow soon after 11 o'clock at Marks Tey and together we motored down to the Old Hall Marshes, where the keeper W. Fell was awaiting us. The morning was overcast and dull, & at 1 o'clock rain started & continued all the afternoon. I had permission from the owner Mr. W. H. Horton to take one clutch of Pochard's eggs.

After a three mile walk to one of the big "fleets" under the sea wall over against Mersea Island, where there is a gully in the reeds, I crossed to the reed-patch in a leaky old punt & saw four Pochard's nests all within 100 yards of one another, & no doubt many more could have been found if we had thoroughly worked the reeds. The nests contained 10, 9, 9 & 7, all incubated nearly a fortnight, I should think.

In each case the sitting birds had left the nests & covered the eggs with "chopped up" reed stems. Only one of the nests, the clutch of 9 which I took (being the first found) was actually in water. Two others were built on ground on water-level,

but not actually in water, although very wet. The clutch of 7 was in a grass patch at the end of a slightly raised strip of land, surrounded by shallow water. The nests were well in the reeds, some 15-20 yards from the open water. In two cases we found an egg, still warm, kicked out a yard or so from the nests. If these nests had been in water, as is more usual, the eggs would have sunk & been lost. This may account for some rather small clutches, 10-13 eggs being often laid. (see ante). A number of pochards were swimming about in pairs on the "fleet" near the reeds, having probably been alarmed by the gulls.

As we walked across the marshes to this fleet, we came across a Short-eared Owl's nest with 3 young about a fortnight old. There were 6 young in all, three smaller than the others, when Fell first found the nest. The 3 young we saw were in the long grass some yards from the old nest. One old bird flew excitedly round us all the time we were near the nest.

We calculated that incubation must have begun about first week of April. This is one of the very few, if not the first, authentic records of Short-eared Owl breeding in Essex.

We saw one pair of Garganey, the drake alone in the morning & the duck flying alone about 3 pm., close to where Treesham took a nest last year. We spent some hours in pouring rain closely searching the grass for the nest, but without success. We thus came across one Common Teal's nest & several Shorelarks, Hummers, Redshanks, several Wheatear Pipits & Sky-larks. Series of Shell-duck were flying about in pairs.

1st to 21st June 1931. Sidcup & district. Revt.

I took my holiday this year at this time & spent most of the time in this neighbourhood.

On 2nd June I found three Redpoll's nests on Chiselhurst Common, two in Hawthorn bushes, which were robbed, & one high up in Silver birch, which contained 5 newly-hatched young.

On 5th June a red-backed-strike was building in a thick Hawthorn bush on the same Common.

On 6th June I found a garden-warbler building, & a chiff-chaff with young just-hatched, in a nest in low brambles only just off the ground.

On 4th June a Turtle Dove was sitting on one fresh egg in an apple orchard at St. Mary Bay.

Earlier, on 23rd May I took a beautifully marked clutch 5 Hawfinch from a white thorn bush on Chiselhurst Common, incubated nearly a week; and on 24th May a Redstart had 7 eggs, incubated 4 days, in a nest on the ground, beside an old fir stump covered with broken, and sheltered only by a small piece of loose bark. Quite an exceptional situation, & one which is more like a normal Robin's site.

On 6th June I had a look at a number of swallow's nests in various bars, & took a clutch of 5 and 4. Some had not laid, and other nests contained large young.

25th March 1932. Beddell Smith & I visited the pine belts at Port Ley (vide p. 133) where we found the Cornbill with four young on 4th April last year. Three or four crows were singing in the same vicinity, but an intensive search failed to find the nests, or, indeed to see most of the birds. When we sat down to lunch a hen flew down on to the ground close to us, & began collecting dried grass. Presently she flew up to a tree about 30 yards from us, being joined by the cock, & we found a beautifully concealed nest at the extremity of a fir branch, 9 ft. from trunk and about 20-25 ft. high. It will need the support of a rope to get to this nest. We found no other nest, nor could we see other pairs building, but the crows were "chirping" all round.

A few siskins were feeding with goldfinches in the firs, and we also heard Woodlark & saw Dartford Warblers.

2nd April 1932 Mr. Phillip and I motored over in the afternoon to the Pooling Marshes near Cliffe Kent & visited a large lookery in small willow trees from 20-30 ft. high. I climbed about 15 trees & looked into 30 or 40 nests, but only saw 2-5s, one of which I took for the collection, and a great many 4s, 3s, 2s and 1s, of which I took a selection for P.. All the 4s were slightly incubated, and one 3 was incubated. Many nests were extremely easy to reach, but more than half were inaccessible without a ladder, owing to

to the rottenness of the decaying willow trees.
 About 60 nests could be reached with a 25ft
 ladder.

3rd April 1932 J. Reddall Smith met me at
 Guildford at 10 AM. & we motored to Witley to
 try to take the Crowsbill. We were up the
 tree with ropes, & I was within 1ft. of the nest,
 bird still sitting on, when two forestry com-
 missioners appeared & ordered us down from
 the tree. Smith also had a 6ft. bamboo
 pole for scooping, with which he touched the
 nest, and the hen then got off and sat for
 a moment on the edge of the nest. We could
 see four well-marked eggs. We had to leave
 them, & during the day saw Woodlark and
 Dartford Warbler on the neighbouring commons.

This same day Mr. Phillip took a Stonechat
 with 5 eggs near Addlestone.

4th April (Monday) J. Smith revisited Crowsbill
 alone, & without ropes. He scooped 2 eggs
 successfully, but the hen then returned to
 the nest & clawed up the lining, mixing
 the remaining two eggs with lining so that
 they were broken.

16th April. We found Creeper building in the
 Chiselhurst woods. Subsequently laid five very
 poor eggs & then forsook.

7th May. In the morning I took Cole-tit with 9
 eggs which Stanley had found building in a
 hole in the decayed root of a fir tree stump in
 the fir plantation by the railway in Petts Wood,
 Chiselhurst. Incubation 4 days.

In the afternoon I went to Hove, to spend a
 fortnight with J. Walpole-Bond.

8th May. Hove beach We took a curious clutch of four Ringed Plover, nearly fresh by the big woods about a mile to west of Hove. Saw several pairs of Wheatears also probably nesting.

About noon we took train to West Brinstead, and found Willow Tit, clutch 9 behind the bark of a rotten oak tree in a small wood. (See detailed notes attached.) Later, at

Maplehurst we took clutch 7 Marsh Tit, in a natural hole in an old apple-tree in one of the big orchards there. Also a 9 Pole-tit in hole in apple tree, too hard set to blow.

At West Brinstead we also took Tree-creeper, clutch 6, fresh, behind loose bark on an old oak tree. Dr. Bryant accompanied us.

In the old orchards at Maplehurst we took cl. 4 Little Owl, incubated 10 days, from a hole in an apple tree. We found a Keener-spotted Woodpecker boring in apple about 12 ft. up (see 20th May), a Nuthatch with 7 eggs, bird not sitting, and another with one egg, in a hole in apple only 3 ft. from ground; also Tree-creeper with 3 eggs (see 12th May).

9th May. We revisited Maplehurst in bitterly cold spouring rain, which numbed me to the bone & wet us so thoroughly that I had to give up and go home about 2 o'clock. The coldest-May day I ever remember down South. We took the Nuthatch with 7 found yesterday, from a prepared hole in an apple-tree. A section of the wood had been sawn out & tacked up again with nails.

10th May. We went by train to Crawley, via Three-Bridges, & visited some marshy plantations near

a lake along the Horsham railway where we located two pairs of Willow-tits. One nest about 5 ft. up a slender alder tree, in a rotten patch, contained 7 eggs, not sitting, the other was only building in a rotten willow stump, about 4 ft. high. (For detailed notes of these, see numbered sheets.)

11th May. Balpate Pond & I motored over with Gen^l Clarke to Wittersham, near Rye, to see the nest from which J.W.B. had taken clutch of Garganey fresh on 7th May. It was on the eastern bank of the river in long grass. Clarke found a lovely 4 of Redshank.

12th May. Mapplehurst. Took a Cole-tit with clutch 8, incubation advanced, from a hole in apple tree, also a Marsh-tit, clutch 8, which proved too hard sat to blow.

J.W.B. found another New Nemer-spotted Woodpecker's boring (see 20th May) in an apple stump about 6 feet high. We took the creepers with 6 eggs found on 8th May, and found Pied Wagtail with 3 eggs forsaken, and a Little Owl with 3 eggs. The little owl is common in these orchards, & must take a very heavy toll of such bird life.

13th May. Peacelaven & Newhaven Head. We took away via set of 5 Linnets' eggs, and found a Nestrel with 5 eggs and a Peregrine with 3 eggs (second attempt) both of which could be seen sitting on ledges about 10 feet down the cliffs. We saw several pairs of Grasshopper Warblers, but found no nests.

14th May. Lancing. D^r Bryant motored us out to the downs inland, where we took two sets of 6 Wheaten, which proved too hard sat

to blow. We also found a nest building, which was probably a second attempt, as rabbits destroy some of the nests built in the warrens on their downs. The birds were fairly common. We saw several flights of Greenland Wheatear on migration. Saw two or three pairs of Stone Curlew, & found one nest with 1 egg, a second laying, Bryant having taken the clutch a fortnight earlier.

15th May. Crawley. I revisited the two Willow-tit nests (see 10th May). The nest which had 7 eggs had been tampered with and was forsaken with 3 eggs in nest, which was bedraggled. The other nest now had 6 eggs, and the bird was sitting on the nest (see 18th). I took a good Robin, clutch 6.

16th May (Whit-Monday.) Hesthaven head. After noon. We beat all afternoon for Grasshopper Warblers, & took clutch 6, 6, 5 and found a nest with 4 eggs, which subsequently laid 6. They were all in the dried "white" grass growing through thin, low bramble patches. Several other pairs were singing, which means that eggs are not laid yet. We also located another Peregrine's erie with one egg (second attempt) which we later took with 3 eggs. (See 21st).

18th May. J.W.B. went to Crawley & Mapletunst in Genl. Clarke's car. He took for me the Willow-Tit, still sitting on 6 eggs only (see 15th) and the Nutcracker with 7 eggs (see 8th). He saw 4 eggs with very light & minor in one of the Red-tailed Woodpecker's nests, but could not see eggs in the other (see 20th) although the nest appeared to be ready & complete.

18th May 1932. (Continued). Newhaven Head.

Meantime, to save valuable time, I went over the Peacocks - Newhaven beach again, & took the Grantopper Warbler with 6 eggs found on 16th with four eggs. I also found & took the third set of a very rare variety of Stonechat with 5 Thrush-blue eggs with very few markings on. Walpole-Bond had the first clutch & General Clarke took the second. Found Reed Bunting with 5 eggs, & by means of my large mirror on a walking stick I could see 2 eggs in the Peregrine Falcon's eyrie to-day. Found no more Grantopper warblers, despite a most rigorous search.

19th May. Launceing. We spent the day about the lanes looking for Cuck Bunting, but had no luck, & neither saw nor heard them. Took a nice variety of Linnet with 5, an unspotted wren with 6, & a good variety of Yellow-Bunting with 3 eggs.

20th May. Mapplehurst. We cut out both the Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers which were sitting on 4 eggs each. The birds were in the holes, but eggs were quite fresh.

Took a nice 10 Great-tit with a wire scoop, from a fairly large hole in an old apple tree, found Tenre-whitethroat with 3 eggs, which J.W.B. took for me later with 5 eggs, also a Linnet with 5 eggs, unspotted.

21 May. Newhaven Head. A dense fog lay over the Downs. We scooped the Peregrine Falcon with 3 eggs (see earlier) with a fishing rod & a bag, from 11 ft. down the cliff. Later I found a Grantopper warbler's nest ready for eggs.