

Some Observations on the Status and Distribution of Birds in Ayrshire, 1949-1960

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In the title of this Report the operative word is "some." It must be noted that all the records set down below are those of only one observer, usually working alone. Where I was accompanied by other ornithologists their names are stated. The records apply to the years 1949 to 1960 inclusive. But it is only from 1953 onwards that I have been making full-time observations in Ayrshire. Between 1949 and 1953 my records were made only during holiday visits to the county. Further, most of the Report has a coastal emphasis; between 1953 and 1956 I was resident in Girvan; from then to the present date I have lived in Prestwick. Landward areas have, therefore, been comparatively neglected in my observations, and as a result my remarks concerning some of the inland passerines in particular are perhaps less significant than those on waders, ducks and other shore-haunting species.

I have confined the Report strictly to birds I have myself recorded at least once in the county, and their non-appearance in my list does not necessarily indicate their non-occurrence in Ayrshire.

There has been no Ayrshire avifauna published since the appearance of the monumental work edited by E. R. Paton and O. G. Pike in 1929. It would have been both interesting and valuable if I could have undertaken a comparative estimate of the present status of birds in Ayrshire and that of thirty years ago. This has not been possible for two reasons. My observations, as I have already stated, are in many cases not sufficiently comprehensive, and, secondly, it would have involved far more time spent on research than I could afford to give.

I have covered 126 species in all, and although this compares poorly with the 234 dealt with by Paton and Pike and their numerous correspondents, I feel it is a sufficiently representative selection to have made the Report of some permanent value, if only as a basis for future surveys.

Ayrshire is most favourably endowed as regards its varied selection of avian habitats. Within the confines of the county can be found garden and parkland; meadow; deciduous and coniferous woodland; mountain, moor, glen and hill; loch, pool, river and burn; sandy shore and rocky shore; cliff and headland; and, of course, built-up areas that produce the species dependent on man. Moreover, nine miles out to sea there is the seabird breeding stronghold of Ailsa Craig.

The climate, too, is sufficiently mild to induce visitation by quite a large number of summer migrants, and in the colder months of the year the sizeable resident population is further augmented by winter visitors from the North and East.

The list follows the Wetmore revised order of species, and the scientific names are in accordance with those in the Popular Handbook of British Birds, edited by Hollom.

BLACK-THROATED DIVER (*Gavia arctica*).—In May, 1959, Fraser McIntosh (then of Prestwick) and I had a pair of these beautiful birds under close observation for twenty minutes on an Ayrshire loch. From reliable reports I understand that at least one pair is believed to have bred on lochs in the area for several years recently, considerably South of their normal range.

GREAT-CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*).—Two of the places in the county where these interesting birds breed are Kilbirnie Loch and Martnaham Loch. I have seen several pairs in full breeding plumage at the former site on more than one occasion. At Martnaham there seems to be only one or two pairs at most. In January, 1960, John Shanks (Kilmarnock) and I observed a pair in winter plumage just offshore between Troon and Barassie, and in February a single bird on Kilbirnie Loch.

LITTLE GREBE (*Podiceps ruficollis*).—Always a very shy and elusive bird, and probably commoner than believed for this reason. I have seen them at the mouth of the River Doon, on a pond at Muirkirk, on Belston Loch and on Kilbirnie Loch.

MANX SHEARWATER (*Procellaria puffinus*).—I have twice seen these seabirds in graceful flight from boats in the Firth of Clyde, on each occasion in large numbers, first off Largs and, secondly, between Girvan and Ailsa Craig. In "The Birds of Ayrshire"

(1929) Paton and Pike report the nearest known breeding station being on Rathlin Island, off the coast of Antrim. I am not aware whether they now breed on Ailsa Craig. My records were in 1949 and 1950.

FULMAR PETREL (*Fulmarus glacialis*).—The remarkable spread from its original British breeding station on St. Kilda in the last 100 years of this graceful seabird did not miss Ayrshire. It can be seen during its long breeding season on the ledges of Bennane Head, near Ballantrae. My own records are as follows:—April, 1949—2; August, 1949—1; August, 1950—1 and 1 Juvenile; April, 1952—5; August, 1954—2; May, 1955—6; April, 1956—6; April, 1960—24. All these were at Bennane Head. In April, 1960, I also saw 12 at the Little Bennane and 12 at Kennedy's Pass a little further up the coast.

GANNET (*Sula bassana*).—These large white seabirds with their thrilling swooping dive can be seen up and down the coast. I have seen them in every month from January to October at Girvan, Doonfoot and Prestwick. There is a very large gannetry on Ailsa Craig.

CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).—Common along the whole length of the coast, especially at rocky points. More than one chain of offshore rocks is known as the "Scart Rocks," after this bird.

SHAG (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*).—Much less common than its larger relative the Cormorant, and difficult to identify for certain, unless the bird is near enough to see its metallic green sheen and the absence of any white patches on its plumage, plus its raised crest in the breeding season. I have recorded them definitely only at Girvan and on Little Cumbrae, usually in company with Cormorants.

HERON (*Ardea cinerea*).—Always an interesting bird to watch, with its slow flapping flight, and stately stride on the ground. I have seen heronries elsewhere, but have yet to find my first one in Ayrshire, where I have observed the birds usually singly, but occasionally up to four together, at Girvan, Doonfoot, Troon, Monkton, Mochrum Loch, Penwhapple Loch and on Little Cumbrae.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*).—Easily the commonest duck, and can be seen in any month of the year on any piece of water, whether the sea, especially at estuaries, large loch or small pond.

TEAL (*Anas crecca*).—A very interesting little duck, perhaps through being the smallest. The drake is certainly a very handsome bird in full breeding plumage. It is resident in the county, and I have seen it on Penwhapple Loch, at Doonfoot, Girvan, on Mochrum Loch, on Culzean Pond and on Martnaham Loch.

WIGEON (*Anas penelope*).—A winter visitor. I have observed this duck more frequently than the teal, namely, at Girvan, Doonfoot, Prestwick, and on Penwhapple and Mochrum Lochs.

SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*).—At a distance the white breast and less brilliant head distinguish the drake shoveler from the mallard. Close up the enormous spatulate bill makes identification certain—and exciting. In Ayrshire I have seen this duck only once, a pair at Troon in April, 1958.

SCAUP (*Aythya marila*).—In August, 1960, John Shanks and I saw a large flock of these ducks on Glenbuck Loch, near Muirkirk. The drakes were in eclipse plumage.

TUFTED DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*).—I have recorded this species at all seasons of the year in varying numbers on the following lochs—Penwhapple, Glenbuck, Mochrum, Kilbirnie, and on Culzean Pond.

GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*).—Paton and Pike in "The Birds of Ayrshire" (1929) state that "this frequent visitor may be seen on the shore and on inland lochs from October till May." The position is still the same. After the Mallard I have found this to be the commonest species of duck in the county from autumn to early spring. I have seen the Goldeneye in all the months mentioned with the exception of April, but with the addition of September, at Girvan, Maidens, Doonfoot, Prestwick, Troon, and on Loch Fergus, Martnaham Loch, Kilbirnie Loch and Penwhapple Loch. Almost always the flocks number about twenty.

EIDER DUCK (*Somateria mollissima*).—On 3rd January, 1951, I had the thrill of seeing a beautiful Eider drake just offshore to the north of Girvan harbour during a short spell of severe weather. Although I have seen large flocks on the east coast, I have only twice since recorded Eiders in Ayrshire, at Prestwick and off Little Cumbrae.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*).—My records of these handsome birds have been few and far between, but always

interesting. Near Girvan I twice observed single drakes in January, 1950. In the same locality in April, 1952, I saw nine birds together, and in April and May of 1954 I saw a pair there. In May, 1955, I observed a pair on the small reservoir on Byne Hill, near Girvan. In April, 1956, I saw a single drake in flight south of Girvan; at Prestwick, in January, 1958, there were three pairs together, and in June, 1959, I had my sole record of this species inland, when Fraser McIntosh (then of Prestwick), Michael Owens (Prestwick) and I spotted two female Mergansers flying up the glen just above Straiton. In 1960 John Shanks and I saw Mergansers on several occasions at Prestwick (three times), Little Cumbrae and Maidens.

GOOSANDER (*Mergus merganser*).—In my experience much less common in the county than the Merganser. I have seen Goosanders only three times. In January, 1951, I saw a female at close range in Girvan harbour, and two days later I observed a male and three females nearby. In April of the following year, Commander (now Sir Geoffrey) Hughes-Onslow and I saw a pair on Loch Doon.

SHELDUCK (*T. tadorna*).—I have seen these handsome birds in most months of the year in Ayrshire, but as they seem to prefer large estuaries they are not met with in large numbers in the county. I have never seen more than fifteen together in our area. The sites have been Girvan, Doonfoot, Troon, Kilbirnie Loch and in flight near Straiton.

GREY LAG GOOSE (*A. anser*).—Carrick is the most likely part of the county in which to see Grey Lags in my experience. In the past seven years there are few winters when I have not seen there flocks of from 50 to 250. I have observed them at various locations between Maybole and Girvan, both on the ground and in flight, almost always at periods of severe weather both before and after the turn of the year. I have also seen them in smaller numbers on Penwhapple Loch, at Doonfoot and at Prestwick.

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*).—Most pieces of water and most harbours in the county can be guaranteed to produce their complement of Mute Swans at some time or another, usually in small numbers. Most of the birds are probably semi-feral.

WHOOPEE SWAN (*Cygnus cygnus*).—I have fairly often seen these wild swans outwith the county, but only three times within it. In February, 1960, John Shanks and I saw a pair at very close

range on Kilbirnie Loch, and in March, 1960, I saw a pair even closer on Penwhapple Loch. These briefly took to wing—the only time I have seen Whoopers taking off in flight. In December, 1960, John Shanks and I saw half-a-dozen Whoopers on Culzean Pond.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetus*).—I have been privileged to see the "King of Birds" twice, once in Perthshire in 1959 and once in Ayrshire in April, 1952, when Commander (now Sir Geoffrey) Hughes-Onslow and I watched a pair with two young at an eyrie in the county. For obvious reasons I shall not name the site, which, I understand, is still tenanted most years.

BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*).—Not a common bird in Ayrshire, my records being a pair on Byne Hill, Girvan, in August, 1951, one near Tairlaw Bridge in April, 1960, and a pair on Little Cumbræ in June, 1960.

SPARROW HAWK (*Accipiter nisus*).—This predator is not common either. I have observed it only five times in all within the period under discussion.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*).—My only record of this magnificent bird of prey for the county was in April, 1960, when John Shanks and I saw one at Tairlaw Bridge. Its behaviour suggested that it had a mate at an eyrie on the nearby crag, for it kept swooping up to drive away three persistent ravens. This provided a very exciting spectacle for the watchers.

KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*).—This is the commonest bird of prey within the county, and may be observed practically anywhere at all seasons, even in built-up areas.

RED GROUSE (*Lagopus scoticus*).—Most moorland areas in the county can usually be relied upon to provide their quota of Red Grouse, though not often in very great numbers.

BLACK GROUSE (*Lyrurus tetrix britannicus*).—I saw one cock bird beside Penwhapple Loch in August, 1950, the characteristic lyre-shaped tail being clearly visible.

PARTRIDGE (*Perdix perdix*).—Resident, nowhere very plentiful.

PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*).—Its status seems much the same as that of the Partridge, but whereas the latter is often seen in coveys the Pheasant usually occurs singly or in pairs. The ring-neck variety is commoner than the black-necked.

CORNCRAKE (*Orex crex*).—This interesting bird occurs very irregularly. It seems that there are infrequently-recurring "corncrake years." 1955 was such a year, when I heard its crake on ten different days at Girvan, at Ballantrae, at Old Dailly and near Minishant. This was in the months of May and June. Some of these records were actually during the hours of darkness, and one morning when I got up to time the dawn chorus the first notes I heard were the corncrake and the skylark at 3.58 a.m. It was still dark, and the corncrake seemed practically under my feet as I walked. I have yet to see my first corncrake; all my records have been aural ones. In June, 1956, I heard another through the open window of a train near Killochan, and in May, 1959, the process was repeated with a car. On that occasion I went back to make sure, and the bird obligingly gave an encore just when I thought I had been mistaken.

MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*).—Common on any suitable patch of water, however small.

COOT (*Fulica atra*).—Not as common as the previous species. I have seen Coots on Kilbirnie, Belston, Glenbuck and Mochrum Lochs, on a pond near Maybole, once in the river mouth at Girvan, and on Culzean Pond.

OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus ostralegus occidentalis*).—One of the commonest waders all along the coast, often in very large numbers. Also at suitable spots inland during the breeding season, particularly up the rivers.

LAPWING (*V. vanellus*).—Common everywhere. On Prestwick Airport I have frequently seen up to 2,000 at a time.

RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*).—Very common on sandy shores in Carrick. Northward it is often replaced by the Dunlin.

GOLDEN PLOVER (*Charadrius apricarius*).—It is always a joy to see this beautiful wader, particularly in its summer dress. On consulting my notes I find that I have seen it in every month of the year, except February, March and June, which does not mean that it does not occur in these months. It often seems to prefer wide open spaces of a dry variety, and I have frequently seen up to 500 at a time on Prestwick and Turnberry airfields, and at Sandyford. In summer I have often observed the species beside various lochs in small numbers, probably at its breeding haunts, though I have yet to find a nest.

TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*).—Another common wader in medium flocks all along the coastline, preferring stony beaches.

COMMON SNIPE (*Capella gallinago*).—Resident in any suitable marshy habitat singly or in small numbers. Occasionally on or near the shore.

CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*).—A common resident. I have seen flocks of up to 300 on or near the shore near Turnberry. In summer they breed on the moors.

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*).—I have only two records of the "lesser curlew" for the county—at Doonfoot in August, 1949, and at Girvan in September, 1951, when a single bird flew over calling.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*).—Present from August to March at Girvan, Doonfoot, Prestwick and Troon in small parties with other waders. I have once seen a male bird retaining his glorious red breast of the summer plumage.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Tringa hypoleucos*).—Can be seen by the riverside where it breeds throughout the county in summer, but never in very great numbers.

REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*).—One of the commonest waders, particularly on the north shore at Troon, where the flocks reach the biggest size. Here I have seen up to 50 birds together. Elsewhere the Redshank occurs regularly but in smaller numbers.

GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*).—John Shanks (Kilmarnock) and I saw a pair of Greenshanks on passage at Prestwick in October, 1959. They were resting on the shore at the mouth of the Pow Burn, along with other waders.

KNOT (*Calidris canutus*).—In January, 1960, I saw a lone Knot with other waders at the mouth of the Pow Burn. Otherwise their only other Ayrshire haunt from my own observations is on the north shore at Troon, where I have seen them half a dozen times on spring or autumn passage in flocks of up to 200.

PURPLE SANDPIPER (*Calidris maritima*).—I have seen this winter visitor and spring passage migrant in only four years, and always on the north shore at Girvan in small flocks.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*).—This common wader can be seen in practically every month of the year, particularly on the Kyle and Cunningham coasts. In Carrick the Ringed Plover normally replaces it. The Dunlin breeds sparingly in the uplands.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris testacea*).—Two records only for this wader, both on early autumn passage. In August, 1950, I saw eight on the shore at Maidens, and in the same month next year I saw a single red-breasted bird at the same spot.

SANDERLING (*Crocethia alba*).—This wader does not breed with us. I have seen Sanderlins on passage at Girvan, Doonfoot, Prestwick and Troon in January, February, April, August, September and October.

GREATER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*).—A common resident everywhere, but in smaller numbers than its congeners.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*).—I have yet to note any wintering Lesser Black-Backs. In the other three seasons of the year it can be met with anywhere on the coast, and less often inland, but never in very great numbers.

HERRING GULL (*Larus argentatus*).—A very common resident.

COMMON GULL (*Larus canus*).—A common resident in smaller flocks than the last or next species.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Larus ridibundus*).—A very common resident, found inland more frequently than the other gulls.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*).—I have seen the Common Tern quite frequently in small numbers at Girvan, Doonfoot and Prestwick during the summer months.

LITTLE TERN (*Sterna albifrons*).—One record only, at Prestwick in July, 1957, when I saw two pairs at a distance of only fifty yards. Their small size, musical notes and quick wingbeats made identification certain.

SANDWICH TERN (*Sterna sandvicensis*).—Again only a single record. In June, 1956, I saw a pair at close range near Turnberry. Their large size and ruffled feathers at the nape of the neck made them unmistakable.

RAZORBILL (*Alca torda*).—In May, 1955, I saw a single bird on the shore at the foot of Bennane Head near Ballantrae. It did not appear to be oiled. As I approached it closely it waddled into the sea and swam away.

GUILLEMOT (*Uria aalge*).—In September, 1950, I found a partially oiled Guillemot at Woodland Bay, Girvan. In January, 1956, I saw another single bird at Kennedy's Pass, near Girvan. Its behaviour was similar to that of the Razorbill described above.

STOCK DOVE (*Columba oenas*).—I find it very difficult to identify this species and the Rock Dove for certain, owing to their close similarity to domestic and semi-feral pigeons. My only definite records for the county were a pair near Colmonell in May, 1955, a single bird near Maybole in July, 1956, and a pair on Little Cumbræ in June, 1960.

ROCK DOVE (*Columba livia*).—Also very difficult to identify for certain. I have seen what I thought were wild Rock Doves on the shore at Girvan and Doonfoot on a few occasions and also at Bennane Head.

WOOD PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*).—No doubt about this one, which is a very common species everywhere, no doubt too common for the farmers.

TURTLE DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*).—In August, 1956, I was cycling near Kilkerran when a pair of Turtle Doves rose up from the road just in front of me, affording an excellent close-up view. This has been my only record of the species for the county.

COLLARED DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*).—My sole record to date of this bird was most definitely a highlight. The presence of these birds were reported to me by Sir Geoffrey Hughes-Onslow, and in June, 1959, Fraser McIntosh and I had the good fortune to have a pair under close observation in Carrick for half-an-hour, and were able to observe at leisure every detail of their beautiful plumage. They were later seen by Professor M. F. M. Meiklejohn, Editor of "Scottish Birds," in which journal Sir Geoffrey's report of their occurrence appeared, along with photographs by C. E. Palmer of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. ("Scottish Birds," Vol. I., No. 5.)

CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*).—I have recorded the Cuckoo in May and June in every year from 1954 to 1960 inclusive, but there have been only one or two occurrences each year. Normally it is only an aural record, but occasionally the bird is also seen

BARN OWL (*Tyto alba*).—With regard to the Barn and Tawny Owls I have definitely found the latter to be commoner, though I have not recorded either very frequently in the county. I suspect that they are both rather more numerous than my records show, both normally being nocturnal species. In December, 1953, I saw a Barn Owl hunting at Stepends, Turnberry, at 8.45 one morning, and saw it perched at the same spot at 1.15 p.m.

TAWNY OWL (*Strix aluco*).—In September, 1950, I saw a Tawny Owl near Girvan during the daytime; in November, 1955, I saw one perched on a telegraph pole near Minishant; in September, 1958, I saw one in High Wardneuk Woods, near Monkton, in the early evening; and in May, 1959, I saw one in Troon Woods at 4.26 a.m., while timing the dawn chorus.

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*).—In April, 1952, I saw two Short-Eared Owls hunting separately between Straiton and Dalmellington, and in June, 1959, I again saw two individuals on the hill road from Straiton to Newton-Stewart. I was accompanied on that occasion by Fraser McIntosh and Michael Owens, and we were able to watch both birds closely as they quartered the ground while hunting for their prey. In April, 1960, John Shanks and I saw a single bird at the same spot.

SWIFT (*Apus apus*).—A fairly common summer visitor in suitable localities, usually arriving in late May and departing at the end of July.

SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*).—Common resident, its numbers being swollen by migratory birds in spring and autumn, the length of whose stay depends upon prevailing weather conditions.

SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*).—Common summer visitor, often staying quite late in the year under suitable weather conditions. I have occasionally seen swallows lingering in October, and quite frequently in mid or late September. At the other end of the scale, in 1954 I saw an exceptionally early swallow on 16th March near Turnberry, about a month before they are normally seen in the area. This occurrence was reported in the "Carrick Herald" of 19th March, 1954.

HOUSE MARTIN (*Delichon urbica*).—Almost as common as the Swallow in the summer months, sometimes arriving before that species, but seldom staying later.

SAND MARTIN (*Riparia riparia*).—This summer visitor can be seen throughout the county in waterside habitats offering suitable nesting sites. Occasionally it is met with at the coast.

RAVEN (*Corvus corax*).—In August, 1949, I saw a pair of Ravens flying over Byne Hill, Girvan, and in April, 1960, John Shanks and I saw three mobbing and being mobbed by a Peregrine Falcon at Tairlaw Bridge.

CARRION CROW (*Corvus corone*).—Common resident, usually met with in pairs or small flocks. I have never seen more than eight together.

HOODED CROW (*Corvus cornix*).—I have seen Hoodies on twelve different occasions in Ayrshire; occasionally on the beach at Ayr with Carrion Crows, also at Doonfoot, once in a garden in Ayr itself, at Girvan and by Penwhapple Loch.

ROOK (*Corvus frugilegus*).—Very common resident, the flocks sometimes numbering up to 200 birds.

JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*).—A well-distributed resident in small numbers.

MAGPIE (*Pica pica*).—Not common. Slightly more frequent in Kyle. One or two pairs of Magpies can usually be seen at any time of the year in the Loans area. I have also seen them around Girvan, Ayr, Prestwick, Monkton and Troon.

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*).—Resident, evenly distributed, but local.

BLUE TIT (*Parus caeruleus*).—Status and distribution similar to Great Tit, but slightly more numerous.

COAL TIT (*Parus ater britannicus*).—Less common than the previous two species. Usually confined to coniferous woodlands, and so its range is more restricted.

TREECREEPER (*Certhia familiaris britannica*).—This is a species which seems to prefer deep woodland, and so its range too is limited according to the availability of its habitat. I do not often see Tree Creepers in Ayrshire.

WREN (*Troglodytes troglodytes*).—Common resident.

DIPPER (*Cinclus cinclus*).—Another species limited according to habitat, but may be found in most rivers and burns providing good diving stones and not too great a depth of water.

MISTLE THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*).—Resident and migratory. The numbers of the home birds are greatly swollen by Scandinavian visitors in winter.

FIELDFARE (*Turdus pilaris*).—The number of these winter visitors vary from year to year, usually being greater in hard winters.

SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelos*).—Very common resident.

REDWING (*Turdus musicus*).—These winter visitors are also not seen in the same numbers each year. They only remain in localities providing plenty of berries for their food. In hard winters they become very tame, and may then be seen in gardens. The "seep, seep" of migrating Redwings can often be heard at night.

RING OUZEL (*Turdus torquatus*).—This member of the Thrush family is a summer visitor, normally preferring the high tops in mountainous areas. I have had the good fortune to see it once in Ayrshire. In June, 1959, Fraser McIntosh, Michael Owens and I saw a cock and later a pair 2,000 feet up on the moors about ten miles south of Straiton.

BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*).—Very common resident.

WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*).—Common summer visitor all along the shore in suitable localities, often one of the first summer migrants to arrive and one of the last to leave. Its normal period of stay is from April to September, but in 1960 I saw my first Wheatear in the last week of March. It is also met with inland.

STONECHAT (*Saxicola torquata*).—Resident, haunting heathland habitats usually close to the shore, where it is commoner than inland. I have seen it at various spots from Ballantrae to Barassie, and also beside Mochrum Loch.

WHINCHAT (*Saxicola rubetra*).—The Stonechat's cousin is a summer visitor and is not as common. I have seen it at three localities in the county—Muirkirk, Tairlaw and Waterside. near Patna.

ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*).—Very common resident.

SEDGE WARBLER (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*).—Summer visitor, local. I have seen it near Girvan and Muirkirk, and around Martnaham Loch.

GARDEN WARBLER (*Sylvia borin*).—One occurrence only for the county. In May, 1955, I heard a Garden Warbler singing in thick cover at 5.06 a.m. near Girvan, while timing the dawn chorus. I have no doubt that it was indeed this species, having been very familiar with its song in England, where it is common in some parts.

WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*).—Summer visitor, plentiful in some years than others. I have recorded it at Girvan, Doonfoot, Monkton, Troon, Muirkirk, Martnaham and on Little Cumbrae.

WILLOW WARBLER (*Phylloscopus trochilus*).—Fairly common summer visitor in wooded localities.

CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*).—Its status and distribution are about on a par with those of the Willow Warbler. Both species tend to be overlooked after their fairly short season of song is finished, and are then almost impossible to differentiate in any case. They are both among the earliest of the summer visitors to arrive but also among the first to depart, though their departure is much less obvious than their arrival, as the latter is heralded by their characteristic songs.

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*).—As this species prefers coniferous woodlands its range is limited. I have recorded it near Girvan, Troon and Muirkirk.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Musicapa striata*).—Not a common summer visitor. I have seen it near Girvan, Straiton, Kirkoswald and Muirkirk. A favourite perch of this species is on a headstone in a graveyard from where it darts forth in pursuit of a fly. The snap of its beak as it seizes its prey is clearly audible. A frequent identification pointer is its characteristic note, which is reminiscent of the squeaking of a small wheel needing oil.

HEDGE SPARROW (*Prunella modularis occidentalis*).—Common resident, tending to be overlooked on account of its rather drab plumage and retiring habits. It has a pleasant thin little song in the breeding season and sometimes outwith it.

MEADOW PIPIT (*Anthus pratensis*).—Common resident. On warm summer days the moorlands abound with Meadow Pipits.

ROCK PIPIT (*Anthus spinoletta petrosus*).—Resident. Common on suitable rocky shores. In places its range and that of the previous species overlap.

PIED WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*).—Common resident, evenly distributed throughout the county.

GREY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*).—Resident, but as this species prefers an aquatic habitat its range is more restricted than the Pied's. A convenient stone in any fairly shallow, slow-flowing river or burn will generally mean that a pair of two of Grey Wagtails can be seen, often in company with a Dipper or two.

YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flava flavissima*).—Unlike the previous two, this Wagtail is a summer visitor or bird of passage. It also prefers drier haunts and is much less common than either of its congeners. I have seen these beautiful birds, even more colourful than the Greys, in only two years in the county. In August, 1950, I saw one on the golf course at Girvan, and three weeks later three at almost the same spot, and in August, 1951, I saw a pair on the beach near Girvan Mains, quite close to the previous year's location.

WAXWING (*Bombycilla garrulus*).—In one or two years I have heard or read in the local press of reports of Waxwings being present in the county, but it was not until November, 1959, that I had the good fortune to see any myself. There were four of them eating berries in gardens in the centre of Ayr. I had a very close view of them and noted that they were very exotic-looking birds, with a very tall crest, queer mask-like facial pattern and having a bright yellow band across the extended tail in flight. I did not see the red "wax" quills that give the birds their name. According to a reliable observer there was a party of about eight in the area for about a fortnight. They moved on when the supply of berries was exhausted.

STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*).—Abundant. The flocks sometimes reach enormous numbers. I have sometimes estimated them to be in the region of 5,000.

GREENFINCH (*Chloris chloris*).—Resident, evenly distributed. Flocking with other Finches and Buntings in autumn and winter.

GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis britannica*).—In each of the years 1949 to 1957, with the exception of 1952, I saw this beautiful Finch usually only once and in small numbers. Since then I have seen it elsewhere but not in Ayrshire except once in 1960.

LINNET (*Carduelis cannabina*).—Resident. Much more numerous on the coast than inland. In winter it is gregarious, but again the flocks prefer the coastal areas.

TWITE (*Carduelis flavirostris*).—Resident. Numbers increased in winter by visitors. I have observed the Twite's haunts and habits to be very similar to those of the Linnet, and I find it very easy to confuse the two species. At close range the yellow bill of the Twite is a sure pointer at all seasons, and in summer the cock's bright pink rump and the male Linnet's red breast and head flashes further serve to differentiate the two species.

REDPOLL (*Carduelis flammea*).—I have had only four records of the Lesser Redpoll in the county. In January, 1951, I saw one female at Glendoune, Girvan; in March, 1955, I saw another female at the same spot; in June, 1958, I had a close view of a pair at Muirkirk; and in April, 1960, John Shanks and I saw a pair near Straiton.

BULLFINCH (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*).—This beautiful, but retiring, Finch is one of my favourite birds. In Ayrshire I have recorded it only twice. In February, 1952, I saw a small flock in a wood near Old Dailly, and in May, 1955, I saw and heard one at 5.20 a.m. near Girvan, while timing the dawn chorus.

CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*).—Common resident, flocking with other Finches and Buntings on the stubble in autumn and winter.

YELLOWHAMMER (*Emberiza citrinella*). Common resident, evenly distributed. It flocks with Chaffinches, Greenfinches and other Buntings and Finches after the breeding season.

CORN BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*).—Resident, local, frequenting agricultural land and the shore. Also migratory. I have seen the Corn Bunting quite frequently at various seasons of the year and in various parts of the county. Normally I have observed it singly or in pairs, less frequently in flocks.

REED BUNTING (*Emberiza schoeniclus*).—The bird's name gives a clue to its habitat, which is much more restricted than that of the other Buntings, with the exception of the Snow. But I seldom visit a marshy spot without seeing a pair or a small flock of these attractive little birds, and I have occasionally seen it flocking with its congeners in winter.

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*).—Two records only. In December, 1959, John Shanks and I saw a flock of 15 - 20 at close range on the north shore at Girvan, and in January, 1960, we saw three pairs on the north shore at Troon. This little flock were very tame, taking off and alighting three times very near to us, and we were able to observe them closely at leisure. I have heard several reports of Snow Buntings being seen in small numbers at various points along the Ayrshire coast during the winter of 1959 - 1960.

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*).—Very common resident, preferring the haunts of man to open country.

TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*).—In February, 1956, I saw a small flock of Tree Sparrows at Shalloch, Girvan. I reported this unusual occurrence to Commander Hughes-Onslow, who himself saw the birds at the same spot next day, and to Professor M. F. M. Meiklejohn, who reported it in the monthly news letter of the Glasgow Branch of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, and in his report for the Clyde Area for 1956. There was a report of Tree Sparrows nesting in the Springside-Cunninghamhead area in 1959, but although I spent a whole morning in the area searching I was not fortunate enough to see either the birds or their nests. This latter occurrence can, however, be taken as reliable.