

The Wild Birds of Ayrshire To-day.

A summary of a lecture given to the Society on 15th January, 1948,
by Cmdr. G. Hughes-Onslow.

The geographical features of Ayrshire are so varied as to render it suitable to many different species. Hill country, studded with lochs, wooded and cultivated valleys often also containing a loch or two, the rich coastal belt and the extensive coast-line, the great bastion of Ailsa Craig—not to mention Lady Isle and the Doon estuary—form a terrain full of interesting possibilities and one which will not disappoint an ornithologist.

Unfortunately the County lies rather off the main routes of bird migration, though one well-established avian highway does exist. Some of the great hordes of migrant birds which strike Scotland's eastern coasts every Autumn, from the Scandinavian and Baltic areas and beyond, reach the south-western districts of the British Isles via the Forth and Clyde and the Irish Sea. Many of these pass through or over our county. Migrants using the less clearly established west coast route from Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands to the south-west of Europe may also at times strike Ayrshire in some numbers, though they are more likely to follow the Kintyre peninsula to Ireland. It is felt that if reliable observers were more plentiful many interesting species could yet be added to the county's list and some which seem now to be but occasional stragglers might be found to be regular passage migrants.

Since the publication, in 1929, of Paton & Pike's "Birds of Ayrshire," the following species have been added to the county list :—

- 1936—Teal, Garganey. One pair seen at Burnfoot Reservoir, Fenwick, 16th April. GARNETT.
- 1937—Goose, White-fronted. A. ANDERSON in "Scottish Naturalist."
- 1939—Hawfinch. In all probability bred at Rozelle in 1939. A juvenile with some down still adhering to its plumage was seen to be struck down by a hawk by one of the Rozelle foresters. The bird was taken to Mr. J. McCLEARY, Glengall, by Ayr, who identified it and kept it alive until the following spring. It proved to be a female. This information came to me as a result of my lecture.

- 1942—Redshank, Spotted. G. H. ONSLOW in "British Birds," Vol. xxxvi, p. 241.
- 1942—Dotterel. G. H. ONSLOW in "British Birds," Vol. xxxvi, p. 241.
- 1942—Tern, Roseate. G. H. ONSLOW in "British Birds," Vol. xxxvi, p. 241.
- 1947—Redpoll, Arctic. G. H. ONSLOW in "British Birds," Vol. xl, p. 340.
- 1947—Bittern, Little. J. McCrindle in daily press. This bird is now preserved in the Dick Institute, Kilmarnock.
- 1947—Bewick's Swan. "We have been informed by Mr. ERIC ANDREW that a single Bewick's Swan frequented the vicinity of the Pow Burn, near Monkton, at least from April 30th to July 28th. It had gone by August 14th." — "British Birds," Vol. xlii, p. 126.
- 1948—Redstart, Black. A female or first winter male was seen at Blackrue, Barr. on 12th December, by G. H. ONSLOW.

The discovery in 1942 of a colony of Roseate Terns— unquestionably the most beautiful of all Terns—breeding in Ayrshire was of outstanding interest. The colony is still firmly established and the employment of a watcher during nesting time has reduced the risk of human depredations.

Apart from these new records there have been many changes of status during the twenty years which have elapsed since Paton & Pike published their work. In my opinion, and in so far as my own observations go, there has been a marked decrease in numbers of the following species:—Lesser Redpoll, Ring Ousel, Sedge Warbler, Redstart, Stonechat, Nightjar, Bean Goose, Puffin, Razorbill, Green and Golden Plovers, Landrail, Red and Black Grouse. To balance this depressing list increases have taken place in quite a number of interesting species, notably:—The Raven, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Goldfinch, Whinchat, Woodpecker (Great Spotted), Short-eared Owl, Greylag Goose, Eiderduck, Goosander, Fulmar, Bartailed and Blacktailed Godwit and Knot.

Bird life in any given district seems always to be changing, the works of man being sometimes responsible and sometimes not. In Carrick the rapidly developing activities of the Forestry Commission should lead to many interesting changes in bird population. The Shorteared Owl has already established itself as a breeding species in some strength in the Commission's property, and one visualises such birds as Buzzards becoming comparatively common—and why not the Capercailzie? The increasing number of large reservoirs to supply our urban population is another man-made development wholly favourable to the bird population.

Such species as the Pied Flycatcher, Hawfinch, Siskin, Goosander, Pintail Duck, Gadwall and the Quail seem to be extending their breeding range in Britain, and a sharp lookout should be kept for each and all of them during the breeding season. Curiously the Hawfinch though nesting as near as Galloway and Dumfriesshire does not seem ever to have been observed in Ayrshire.

FURTHER VOLUMES OF "THE COLLECTIONS."

Members of the Society may be interested to know that work is already in hand for the second and third volumes of "The Collections." The Society has undertaken to prepare a series of articles dealing with certain aspects of the history of the Burgh of Ayr to commemorate the 750th Anniversary of the granting of the town's Charter by William the Lion, 1202-6. A de luxe volume is to be published by the Town Council of Ayr, but the material collected will also form the bulk of the second volume of our "Collections." We have, too, commissioned articles for the third volume. The date of appearance of these volumes depends largely on the state of the Society's finances. To ensure the publication of a volume every other year, we must double our membership.

Editor.