

THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS' EGGS.

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All lovers of birds in Hampshire were glad to see that the County Council have issued an order forbidding the taking or destroying of the eggs of the following birds:—Common Buzzards, Honey Buzzards, Kingfishers, Montagu's Harriers, Nightingales, Owls, Woodpeckers. Any person taking or destroying, or inciting any other person to take, or destroy the eggs of the birds above named will be liable to pay for every egg, a sum not exceeding £1. These are all beautiful and interesting species, and it would be a sad pity if any of them were to be blotted out of the list of British birds. Most of them must be called rare; and some so nearly extinct, that one almost doubts whether the Council are in time to save them. We hope that members of the Hants Field Club will do their best to see the order carried out.

The Buzzards and Harriers are somewhat inferior kinds of hawks, *i.e.*, inferior in strength, swiftness and courage, and never trained to pursue game. If you were ever lucky enough to see a Common Buzzard in England, the circumstances were probably as follows: you heard a melancholy screaming in the air, and looking up, you saw two big birds, with broad wings, sailing round and round in circles. The well-known Scotch naturalist—Sir William Jardine—calls the Buzzard "a fine accompaniment to the woodland landscape." Another authority says that there is no evidence that it destroys game-birds, its chief food consisting of rats, mice, moles, frogs, and reptiles.

The Honey Buzzard is the most famous of all New Forest birds, and Hampshire is the only county in Great Britain where this bird appears every year to spend the summer

and to try to bring up a family. A full account of its habits may be found in Wise's book on the New Forest, a book which proved disastrous to the poor birds, for it brought greedy collectors from all parts of England with handsome bribes for the keepers if they would obtain the skins and eggs for their collections. This bird lives chiefly on wasps and wild bees, and their grubs, so that it is not only ornamental but useful. It has been suggested that each County Council should take a bird as their crest; if our Council are able to save the Honey Buzzard from destruction, his picture would make a very handsome and appropriate figure for the purpose.

The next bird on the list is the Kingfisher, the most brilliant and tropical looking of all British birds. He unfortunately looks well stuffed in a glass case; but he looks a thousand times better flashing like a living jewel over the stream; his family, brought up on a bed of fish bones, in a hole in a bank, numbers seven or eight, so that the protection of the Council ought to be in time to restore his race to their old haunts.

Montagu's Harrier does not take its name from the noble family so well-known in the county, but from a naturalist who lived in Devonshire a hundred years ago, and was the first to distinguish this bird from the Hen Harrier. It is sometimes called the Blue Hawk, being of a very pale grey, looking at first sight almost like a Gull, and flying over our moors and heaths with a very graceful and buoyant flight, in search of adders, lizards, and larks' eggs. The late Lord Malmesbury would smile to see the eggs of this bird protected, for his keepers spent endless time and trouble in tracking and destroying the nests on the heaths about Bournemouth. This bird comes to us only in summer, and the only other counties which claim it as a yearly visitor are Devonshire and Norfolk.

There is no fear of the Nightingale becoming extinct in the Forest. When we lament the destruction of many interesting birds by the gamekeepers, we must remember that others are doubtless benefited by the strict protection of the coverts in the nesting season, and among them the Nightingale, though it appears to be more common in some years than

others. It is rather in the neighbourhood of London that this bird is in danger of extermination from persistent trapping, and we must look upon the New Forest as a kind of head-quarters of the species, whose overflow may help to replenish less fortunate regions.

We must now say a good word for the Owls. Lord Lilford, a distinguished naturalist as well as a sportsman, remarks that the fittest place for the wilful destroyer of any owl in this country would be an asylum for idiots. Their food consists almost entirely of the small gnawing animals that work so much havoc in our fields, farms, and gardens. Owls have a habit of spitting out the bones and fur of their prey, as a kind of silent witness to their good works, and those who have taken the trouble to examine these "castings," as they are called, have found hundreds of the skulls of rats, house-mice, field mice, shrew-mice, and moles, besides the remains of a few small birds and beetles. Farmers who are wise will protect owls as much as possible. Lord Cathcart has said that "our ancestors, wiser than we are, always made an entrance for owls into their great barns, an owl-hole, often with a stone perch."

We have four, perhaps five kinds of owls in Hampshire. The White or Barn Owl likes ruins and barns; it utters a loud screech and also a snoring noise.

The Brown or Tawny Owl is the commonest owl in the woods, nesting in hollow trees and hooting "Tu-whit, tu-who a merry note," as Shakespere calls it. The young of this species call "ke-wick, ke-wick."

The Long-eared Owl prefers thick fir plantations, using the old nest of a squirrel, pigeon or crow; it has a yelping or "barking" cry, and its young mew like cats, so that it will be seen that the owl tribe add some variety to our bird-concerts.

The Short-eared Owl has very different habits to its relations, haunting moorlands, marshes, and large turnip-fields, even sleeping and nesting on the ground. It comes to us in the autumn, when it is often disturbed by sportsmen, who call it the Woodcock Owl.

There is some reason to believe that we have in the New

Forest yet another Owl, called the "Little Owl," being about the size of a Thrush; but in any case they were probably brought from abroad and turned out here by way of experiment.

Of Woodpeckers we have three kinds in the County. The most common is the Green Woodpecker, also called Woodnacker and Yaffingale, whose loud laughing cry, "hew, hew, hew," we hear in all the woods; as he flies away, with dipping flight, we notice the patch of bright yellow on his back.

The two Spotted Woodpeckers, Greater and Lesser, are much less common, but their bold black-and-white plumage, with a touch of red, prevents our mistaking them for any other climbing bird, and has earned for them the name of Wood Pies. They make an extraordinary noise in the spring by tapping the bark with great rapidity, a noise which carries a great distance and seems to be used as a call between the cock and hen.

There have long been rumours that a still rarer species inhabited the Forest, the Great Black Woodpecker, black all over excepting a red crown; but the learned gentlemen in London will not believe it until they see a specimen, and they say truly that the skin of a British specimen is not to be found in any Museum in the country. If any of my readers have seen a bird answering this description I should be glad to hear of it.
