

**THE BIRDS OF DORSETSHIRE;
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE
NATURAL HISTORY OF THE
COUNTY**

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The birds of Dorsetshire; a contribution to the natural history of the county by J.C. Mansel-Pleydell

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VIEW IN THE SWANNERY AT ABBOTSLURY. CHESLE BEACH IN THE DISTANCE.

Montgomery

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116

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BIRDS OF DORSETSHIRE

A CONTRIBUTION

TO

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE COUNTY

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

THERE never was a more favourable time than the present for the study of the history of the habits of birds. During the last ten years there have issued from the press, in parts, no less than four important ornithological works, three of which are now complete. (1.) Dresser's "Birds of Europe," in 8 vols. 4to, 1871-81, supplies a want which was only partially satisfied by Bree's "Birds of Europe not Observed in the British Islands," being, as its title implies, much more comprehensive. (2.) Yarrell's "British Birds," 4th edition, in 4 vols. 8vo, 1871-1885, of which the first two volumes (including the *Accipitres Passeres* and *Picariæ*) were edited by Professor Newton, and the last two (dealing with the remaining orders) by Mr. Howard Saunders. The important additions made to our knowledge since Yarrell's first publication on the subject, and embodied in this edition, makes it practically a new work. (3.) Seebohm's "British Birds," with coloured illustrations of their eggs, 3 vols. 8vo, 1883-85, an excellent work, containing much new and interesting information derived from the author's

personal experience, gained not only in the British Islands, but in many parts of Europe, and notably in European and Asiatic Siberia, where the nests and eggs of many so-called rare birds were discovered. (4.) Booth's "Rough Notes on the Birds Observed during Twenty Years' Shooting and Collecting in the British Islands," a folio work, which has been appearing in parts with coloured plates since 1881, and of which the last part has been now published, details the results of the author's own experience, and supplies much information concerning the breeding haunts and habits of birds generally accounted rare as observed in Scotland. The "Handbook of British Birds," by Mr. Harting; the article "Birds" by Professor Newton and Professor W. K. Parker, and "Ornithology" by Professor Newton, published in the ninth edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," may be mentioned as indispensable aids to those who would acquire a thorough knowledge of the British avifauna, and a key to its literature. As regards nomenclature—a difficult subject—the "Ibis List," which should be authoritative (having been published in 1883 by a committee of the British Ornithologists' Union), unfortunately contains many errors which, considering the reputation of the compilers, ought to have been avoided.

It has long been known that there are certain species of birds which reside only a portion of the year with us, arriving from the south in spring, and, after rearing their young in this country, depart southward again in the autumn. The males arrive first,

followed shortly afterwards by the females, and lastly by the young birds, which do not usually take so long a flight, some perhaps not getting farther than the European shores of the Mediterranean. Roughly speaking, there are three lines of migration taken by birds whose route lies southward in autumn, namely, the Spanish coast in the neighbourhood of Gibraltar, the Italian coast by Sicily, and the Greek coast by Cyprus. The first lands them on the opposite coast of Barbary, the second on the shore of Tunis, the last on the Asiatic coast at Tripoli. It is remarkable that these three routes cross the sea where it is narrowest and the most shallow, and were probably dry land in comparatively recent times.

Several birds, such as the Ring-Ouzel, Golden Plover, &c., pass through Dorsetshire on their migration northwards to breed. The migratory line of the Dotterel being outside our border, the bird visits us rarely; its last occurrence was in 1883.¹ A vast number of birds push their way as far north as the ice-line, a course which some naturalists assign to an hereditary instinctive impulse to return to the breeding-homes of their progenitors, which had an equable climate before the rigours of the glacial period had set in, and had forced them southward to seek food and shelter. Thus it is supposed the migratory habits of birds originated, and continue to the present day.

Seeing that the course of many birds on migration lies far east of these islands, any casual visitor

¹ See *Proc. Dorset N. H. Field Club*, vol. vi. p. 29 (1885).