

The Wiglesworth Bird Manuscripts.

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AFTER the Annual Meeting of the Ornithological Section on May 18th, 1920, the Secretary sent me a part of the Wiglesworth MSS., and later on Mrs. Wiglesworth sent me a larger parcel, and asked me to keep them so long as I had any use for them, intimating that she would like to have them deposited ultimately at Taunton Castle. To go through all these MSS. very carefully and minutely would entail a vast amount of labour, but most certainly it should be done by anyone who may in the future contemplate a work on the Birds of Somerset. Though I never heard the late president of the Section definitely say that he was engaged upon such a work, it is very evident from the MSS. that he *was* contemplating the publication of a book on the county avifauna, on a large and exhaustive scale. The MSS., however, show that the work was, at the time of his greatly lamented death, far from being ready for the press, and that a great deal of condensing and arranging of facts and records still remained to be done. The present time, owing to the heavy cost of printing, may be unpropitious for the publication of such a work, but it would be a great monument to the late energetic president if such a work could be accomplished some day; and it seems to me that a committee of the Section would be the right body to edit such a work, if at some time the funds should be forthcoming, as it seems doubtful whether the sale would cover the cost.

The MSS. may be classified as follows :—

I. *Those relating to our County Birds.*

(1) A large note-book in red boards, entitled "Bird Notes, Somerset, communicated by different observers."

This consists of 309 pages, and contains a large number of classified notes on Somerset birds from many of Dr. Wiglesworth's correspondents.

(2) A foolscap indexed note-book of 318 pages, in purple boards with leather back, containing apparently Dr. Wiglesworth's notes on his personal observations of the birds of Somerset from 1913-1919.

(3) Foolscap in dark green covers, entitled "Topographical Notes, etc., and Local Bird Lists."

This comprises descriptions of various portions of the county by Dr. Wiglesworth, and also descriptions copied from other writers. It contains also interesting lists of birds observed by the doctor in the various districts he had visited and described.

(4) "Completed articles," on loose foolscap, in dark green tied-up case.

These refer to *rare* birds, and seem to be strong evidence that a book was in contemplation. Among the species mentioned are :—White-tailed Eagle, Slavonian Grebe, Pallas' Sand-Grouse, Bee-Eater, Egyptian Vulture, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Snowy Owl, Purple Gallinule, Black Stork, American Hawk-Owl, Sooty Tern, Wall-Creeper, Tengmalm's Owl, Crane, and White's Thrush.

(5) Loose foolscap, in green boards, entitled "Bibliographical Extracts."

These relate to Somerset birds from the pages of *The Field*, 1856-1907 (70 pages); *Proceedings, Bath Nat. Hist. and Antiq. Field Club*, 1873-1909 (18 pages); *Proceedings, Bristol Naturalists' Society*, 1866-1914 (19 pages); *Montagu's Ornithological Dictionary*, 1802 and 1813; and extracts from many other sources.

(6) "Bibliography" References, to *Field*, 1856-1907; *Zoologist*, 1843-1916; *British Birds*, 1908-1919; and many others. Loose foolscap, in green boards.

(7) Foolscap Diaries, for 1913, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917 and

1918, containing Somerset Bird Notes, many of which were apparently cancelled, and the important records copied out elsewhere.

II. The above relate solely to our county. There is also foolscap, bound in black boards, called "Bird Notes, Book A," containing various bird notes, but not many from Somerset; and a large pile of foolscap MSS., chiefly consisting, apparently, of the original MSS. of his various published papers, such as "St. Kildan Bird Notes, 1902," "The Heronries of Somerset," "The Little Owl in Somerset," and several others.

Also "Notes on Birds and Eggs," which appear to be personal observations, few if any referring to Somerset.

I leave to the end Dr. Wiglesworth's truly marvellous catalogue of his very fine Collection of Eggs, now in the Society's Museum. This is written on loose foolscap, in a dark green case, and refers to 165 species of eggs. A reference mark is on each egg, which refers to an entry with a similar mark in the catalogue. The entries give the fullest possible details about the collecting of the clutch of eggs to which they refer. Precise date and locality, state of incubation, nesting-site and material of nest, and behaviour of parent birds are always given, together with many other interesting remarks. For instance, it is noted that in a certain nest of the Long-tailed Tit there were 2,112 separate feathers, and in the nest of a Red-breasted Merganser there were 2,806 separate pieces of down. Delightful little descriptions taken down, his widow informs me, on the spot in shorthand, are often added.

I cannot refrain from quoting an extract from one describing the site of a colony of Red-necked Phalaropes in the Shetland Islands. "The marsh in which this small colony has taken up its quarters might be roughly computed at from 300 to 400 yards square. It comprises pools of all shapes and sizes, with a fair expanse of open water in the centre and a good deal of wet marshy ground round it. Many of the pools were completely choked with aquatic vegetation, such as broad patches of 'caltha,' now in full bloom and presenting a very beautiful appearance; others were thickly studded with

‘menyanthes,’ the flowers just now in perfection of beauty. The birds were mostly in pairs, swimming about in pools, the female in her brighter colours contrasting definitely with the male. They paddled about unconcernedly and allowed a close approach ”; and so the description goes on, covering four pages of foolscap!

Altogether the catalogue is most fascinating reading, and, were it possible to publish it, would create quite a sensation among ornithologists. Very exact descriptions, however, of the localities are given, and it would not be wise, in the case of very rare birds, to make these public knowledge, as harm to the species might result.

Just a word as to the collection of Eggs itself. It is an almost complete collection of the various species of the regular British breeding birds. A curious omission appears to be the Cole Tit (which I cannot find in the catalogue); and others which might have been added are,—Dartford Warbler, Siskin, Willow Tit, Montagu’s Harrier, and Pochard; and, if we add Black-necked Grebe, Kite, Osprey and White-tailed Eagle, we include practically all the species of birds which breed in the British Isles. The doctor wished to make his collection complete if possible, and very shortly before his death was corresponding with me about a Dorset haunt of the Dartford Warbler; so, if it should be possible to fill up any of the very few gaps, through the members of the Section, I feel that we should be doing that of which our late president would have approved.