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XXI.—The Birds of Ireland

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from the fact of its having been collected at the Moluccas, there is little doubt but that it was procured somewhere about that locality.

I remain, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

LOVELL REEVE.

8 King William Street, Strand, March 5, 1842.

Representations of the well-known *Carinaria Mediterranea* are also given in the Plate, in order to exhibit the two species in comparison with each other.

PLATE II. Fig. 1, 2. *Carinaria Mediterranea*.

Fig. 3, 4, and 5. *Carinaria gracilis*.

XXI.—*The Birds of Ireland*. By WM. THOMPSON, Esq.,
Vice-Pres. Nat. Hist. Society of Belfast.

[Continued from vol. viii. p. 502.]

No. 11.—*Family Certhiadae (continued)*.

THE COMMON WREN, *Troglodytes Europæus*, Selby, prevails throughout the island; and though chiefly known as an inhabitant of gardens, plantations and farm-yards, is found in summer and autumn far distant from such localities, in the wild heathy tracts both of the lowlands and mountain-tops. In similar places it has been observed by a sporting friend in a fine grouse district in Inverness-shire, where the vicinity even of the dwelling-house is unfrequented either by the robin or sparrow.

The nest is generally composed of moss, and placed in hedges, and in trees and shrubs of various kinds. Warmer sites are not unfrequently selected; thus, once in a corn-stack, and four times within houses at our country place, nests of the wren were observed: of these, one was placed on the wall-top, just under the roof of a coach-house:—in the second instance, a swallow's nest of the preceding year (built inside a shed and against a rafter supporting a floor) was taken possession of, and fitted up with moss, of which a considerable quantity was introduced, though no attempt at a dome was made: for a proper construction of the kind there would not have been sufficient room:—the third, likewise, did not present any appearance of a dome; it was built in a hole in a wall inside a house, and the only entrance was through the broken pane of a window:—the fourth was constructed in a bunch of herbs hung up to a beam across the top of the garden house for the purpose of being dried; almost the entire of the nest was formed of the herbs, and the bunch altogether was very little larger than the nest itself; the door of this house was generally kept locked, at which time the only mode of entrance was beneath the door, where there was barely room for the birds to pass through:—in all these instances the broods were reared

in safety. About Whitehouse, on the shore of Belfast Bay, where the grass-wrack (*Zostera marina*) is abundant, and always lying in masses on the beach, it is the material (as I am informed by Mr. James Grimshaw, jun.) commonly used by the wren in the construction of its nest, which externally is entirely composed of it. My friend at Cromac remarks, that he has generally found upwards of a dozen of eggs in the nest of this bird, and notices, from his own observation, the well-known circumstance of its making two or three nests before laying. A gentleman of my acquaintance was once much amused at witnessing a wren purloining materials from a thrush's nest, which was built in a bush adjoining its own tenement, then in course of erection. When the thrush was absent in search of food for its young, which were nearly fledged, the wren generally contrived to steal from it "two or three good mouthfuls" to assist in the erection of its own edifice.

In a communication from Mr. R. Davis, jun., dated Clonmel, Nov. 1841, it is remarked,—“Being some years ago in want of the eggs of the spotted flycatcher, I had been watching a pair who had built in a garden near our house. The female had laid three eggs, and on my going two days afterwards hoping to find the full number, five, what was my surprise to see the nest crammed with young wrens just able to fly! they had apparently broken or thrown out all the eggs but one: the flycatchers were gone. I suppose the wrens, being ‘brought out’ for the first time, had taken refuge in the nest and expelled the rightful owners; but it was rather a curious and inexplicable circumstance.”

In a well-sheltered locality I have often in winter seen the wren frequenting the cow-shed (where it nightly roosted) and farm-stable in the forenoon of frosty days, when there was bright and warm sunshine out of doors. To the green-houses and hot-houses in the garden of a relative this bird often resorts, especially in winter; indeed, to wherever it can find the best shelter. Under the date of Sept. 23 is a journal-note to the effect, that on the yard-wall before my window a wren appeared, singing with extraordinary loudness, its tail and wings drooping all the time. Other birds were attracted to the spot by its loud song. First came a hedge-sparrow to buffet it, which was followed by a male and female chaffinch, also with sinister intent; but bold as FitzJames,

“Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I,”

it maintained its position against one and all, and sang away as fiercely as ever. A robin too alighted beside the songster, but, unlike the others, did not seek to disturb it. There was no apparent cause for this proceeding on the part of the wren. The uproar this species keeps by the loud utterance and repetition of its call *chit** when a cat appears in its vicinity is well known, and is of service to other birds by warning them of the presence of their enemy.

Smith, in his ‘History of Cork,’ written about a century ago, re-

* Hence popularly called ‘chitty wran’ in Ireland.

marks—"as the wren makes but short flights, and when driven from the hedges is easily run down, to hunt and kill him is an ancient custom of the Irish on St. Stephen's day." The late Mr. T. F. Ne-ligan of Tralee communicated the following note upon this subject in 1837:—"To hunt the wren is a favourite pastime of the peasantry of Kerry on Christmas day. This they do, each using two sticks, one to beat the bushes the other to fling at the bird. It was the boast of an old man who lately died at the age of 100, that he had hunted the wren for the last 80 years on Christmas day. On St. Stephen's day the children exhibit the slaughtered birds on an ivy-bush decked with ribbons of various colours, and carry them about singing the well-known song commencing

'The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,' &c.

and thus collect money." Mr. R. Ball* informs me that "this persecution of the bird in the south is falling into disuse, like other superstitious ceremonies." In Dr. Wm. H. Drummond's 'Rights of Animals' the cruelty practised towards the wren in the south of Ireland (for in the north the practice is quite unknown) is dwelt upon, and a tradition narrated, attributing its origin to political motives. In the first number of Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall's 'Ireland,' a very full and well-told account of the "hunting of the wren" appears. The legend there given as "current among the peasantry" is not however confined to them, for Mr. Macgillivray, apparently without knowing anything of the Irish fable, relates the very same as told by the inhabitants of the Hebrides (Brit. Birds, vol. iii. p. 19); and a detailed account of the wren being called a "king-bird" over a considerable part of the European continent will be found in one of the volumes of the Library of Entertaining Knowledge, entitled the 'Habits of Birds,' p. 49. Much the fullest description of the wren I have met with is from the pen of Mr. Weir, and published in Mr. Macgillivray's work just mentioned.

THE HOOPOE, *Upupa Epops*, Linn., was recorded about a century since as having been met with in Ireland: it has occasionally appeared in all quarters of the island.

Smith, in his 'History of Waterford,' published in 1745, remarks of the hoopoe—"I never heard of above one being seen in this country; this was shot upon the ruins of the old church of Stradbally, during the great frost of 1739, and was long in the possession of Mr. Maurice Uniacke of Woodhouse." The same author, in his 'History of the county of Cork,' observes, that "the hoopoe is with us a very rare bird," but gives no particulars of its occurrence. In McSkimmin's 'History of Carrickfergus,' it is related that "one was shot on the shore near the town, Sept. 21, 1809;" and Mr. Templeton records another example as obtained there in 1818. By W. R. Wilde, Esq., of Dublin, I have been informed, that about the year 1819 an individual of this species was killed at Cloverhill, near the

* This gentleman mentions that the hedge sparrow (*Accentor modularis*) is called *wren's-man* in the south of Ireland, and that it often falls a sacrifice to the hunters of the wren.

town of Roscommon. Mr. R. Ball, during the many years of his residence at Youghal, saw five of these birds, which were at intervals procured in the neighbourhood, and heard of others;—in his collection are two specimens from that locality. In 1827 I was informed by a naturalist that he had seen a hoopoe which was obtained in fine adult plumage a few years before that time in the month of February near Ballynahinch, county of Down. Dr. J. D. Marshall has recorded “one which was shot [at Balbriggan] in the county of Dublin, and another [at Lord Llandaff’s] in Tipperary, in 1828.” In a letter from Dr. Harvey of Cork, written in March 1837, it was stated that “a hoopoe was shot by Mr. Wilson, jun., about four years since at Cape Clear, and sent to the Cork Institution.” On Sept. 19, 1833, one which I saw was procured at Kirkcubbin, county of Down. In February or March 1834, as I am informed by Dr. Burkitt of Waterford, one of these birds was obtained at Kilbarry, near that city: at Banbridge (county Down) another was killed on the 6th of October, 1834*, and sent to the Belfast Museum; its weight (according to Dr. J. D. Marshall) was 3 oz. 1 dr.; the contents of the stomach were caterpillars and other insect food. Captain Walker of Belmont, near Wexford, has written to me that “in the winter of 1834 two hoopoes were seen at Killinick [in that county], but neither was shot, although a gentleman was constantly after them.” At the beginning of September 1835, a specimen which was submitted to my examination was procured near Coleraine, in the north; and on the 26th of the same month another was shot within a few miles of Killaloe, and sent to the Rev. Thomas Knox of Toomavara: in its stomach were found “caterpillars and a beetle.” Mr. H. H. Dombain has informed me of his having seen a hoopoe which was shot in the county of Galway on the 20th of October, 1837. One was killed in the county of Kilkenney on the 1st of April, 1838. The following paragraph was copied from the Limerick Chronicle into the Northern Whig, a Belfast newspaper, on Sept. 13, 1838:—“A few days past a bird rarely, if ever, known in this country was seen at Fairymount, O’Brien’s Bridge, the residence of H. Orlando Bridgeman, Esq., pursued by magpies, to whom the new visitor appeared a perfect stranger. The same bird was found dead a day or two after in that vicinity, having, it is thought, fallen a victim to its pursuers. Its wings were marked by regular streaks of white and black; the bill long, like that of the snipe, but very slightly curved; the head and neck of a light brown or yellow, with a beautiful tuft or crown of feathers on the head, the extremity of which was also coloured like the wings. The little wanderer was of delicate and graceful symmetry. We presume it had escaped from some aviary. The bird is not indigenous to these countries.” The hoopoe is doubtless meant; the date of the paper in which the notice first appeared was not mentioned in the Northern Whig, but it may fairly be presumed to have been early in September. One of these birds, which was procured at the begin-

* A hoopoe flew on board the Shannon steam-packet when on the passage from London to Dublin in September 1831, and on the arrival of the vessel at the latter port on the 20th of that month was seen by my informant.

ning of October in the same year, near the city of Londonderry, came under my inspection. In March 1839 a second example was obtained at Kilbarry, county of Waterford, as I learn from Dr. Burkitt, who likewise adds, that the hoopoe has been met with at Tramore and Woodstown, in the same county, on three or four occasions. In a letter from Mr. R. Ball of Dublin, dated October 30, 1840, it was stated that a hoopoe had been shot at Cork a few days before. Mr. T. W. Warren of Dublin informs me that late in the autumn of 1841 two specimens of this bird, killed in the counties of Westmeath and Wexford, were sent to the metropolis to be preserved; and I received intelligence of another being obtained on the 17th Oct., 1841, at Saunder's Court, near the city of Wexford, about which place this species has been met with several times*.

From the preceding notes it appears that the hoopoe has visited Ireland for the last five years—from 1837 to 1841 inclusive;—in 1836 there is no record; but this may have arisen from mere omission: in 1833, 1834 and 1835 it was obtained. All these birds, except some two or three said to have been met with in winter, were evidently on migration, a few of them in spring, and by far the greater number in autumn—in September, and October. I am not aware of the species having been noticed here during summer, though it may be expected rarely to occur at this season: it generally appears singly. It seems strange that individuals should frequently wander so far west of the direct line of their migration as this island, either when moving towards the north of Europe for the summer, or towards Africa for the winter.

On the 24th and 25th of April last (as particularly noticed in 'Annals,' vol. viii. pp. 126 and 127) two or three of these birds alighted on H.M.S. Beacon, when on the passage from Malta to the Morea. When travelling from Aix-la-Chapelle to Liège, on the 17th of July, I was gratified with the sight of a hoopoe, which alighted on the road before the carriage.

[Some instances of the occurrence of the hoopoe are recorded in our pages, vol. vi. and viii: see also p. 148.—Ed.]

[To be continued.]

PROCEEDINGS OF LEARNED SOCIETIES.

ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

September 14, 1841.—Prof. Owen, Vice-President, in the Chair.

A letter was read from William Ogilby, Esq., H.B.M. Consulate, Charleston, announcing a present from that gentleman of seven living Water-Tortoises for the Society's Menagerie.

A letter from R. Hill, Esq. was next read. In this letter, which is dated Spanish Town, Jamaica, July 28, 1841, Mr. Hill relates some interesting facts respecting the nests of the birds of Jamaica.

* Since the above was sent to the Annals, Mr. R. Davis, jun., of Clonmel has communicated two other instances of the occurrence of the hoopoe—one shot on the grounds of Mr. Parker, near Cork; the other, obtained within the last few months, near Waterford.

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