

# A CATALOGUE OF THE BIRDS OF THE STOUR ESTUARY.

BY W. B. NICHOLS.

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## PART II.

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An \* before the name of a bird denotes that the species breeds, or has bred, in the district.

\***Wild Duck** (*Anas boschas*). A resident whose numbers are largely augmented in the winter by migrants. I saw a very light, almost cream coloured female off Bradfield on 13, vii., 17.

**Gadwall** (*A. strepara*). A winter visitor. Rare. Mr. Hope however, says (*Birds of Essex*, p. 203), "often shot near Harwich." I have notes of two, one male, xii., 1913; another 26, i., 17.

**Garganey** (*Querquedula querquedula*). Rare. One shot by Mr. Richardson, near Flatford, 19, viii., 16.

\***Teal** (*Q. crecca*). Fairly common, breeds round Harwich and on the Dedham marshes. I saw a male and two females, 28, vi., 11, near Judas Gap, Lawford.

**Wigeon** (*Mareca penelope*). Common winter visitor, very numerous in hard winters. On 13, ii., 17, about 1,000 wigeon flew up the river and dropped from a great height, like falling stars, on to the water opposite my house. There were at least 2,000 off Wrabness, 3, iii., 17: a most lovely sight in the bright sunshine.

\***Shoveler** (*Spatula clypeata*). Not very common but increasing in numbers. Breeds. Mr. Richardson found a nest in the Lawford marshes, 1916. A male in eclipse was shot on Mistley Place lake, 23, ix., 08. I saw pairs on the Lawford marshes, 4, v., 11, and 26, ii., 14; and two males and four females among a flock of coots off Bradfield, 10, i., 17.

**Pintail** (*Dafla acuta*). Rather rare. I saw a female, 8 xii., 99. On 4, viii., 16, three young pintails were shot by one of the Manningtree puntsmen. This is a very early date, and they may have been bred on some neighbouring pond in semi-domestication.

**Pochard** (*Nyroca ferina*). Common. I have shot them as high up the river as the salt water goes, at Lawford.

**Scaup** (*N. marila*). Common winter visitor on coast, but not many are seen up the estuary. I saw four males, four females, 2, ii., 17.

**Tufted Duck** (*N. fuligula*). Not uncommon winter visitor, though I seldom see an old male. One in perfect plumage consorted with a flock of coots on 26, i., 13, and the two following days.

**Golden-eye** (*Glaucion clangula*). Fairly common in winter. I shot an old male in the winter of 1879 at Lawford. Immature birds and females are most commonly met with.

**Long-tailed Duck** (*Clangula hyemalis*): A female in full plumage was killed at Harwich 9. xi., 87 (*Birds of Essex*, p. 209). The species is a rare winter visitor to the coast.

**Eider-Duck** (*Somateria mollissima*). An uncommon winter visitor. Has been killed in Harwich harbour.

**Common Scoter** (*Edemia nigra*). Common winter visitor off the coast.

**Velvet Scoter** (*E. fusca*). An uncommon winter visitor to the coast.

**Goosander** (*Mergus merganser*). An uncommon winter visitor. I have noted the following examples:—male, Jan., 1891; male, 24, i., 1891; female, 23, xi., 99; male, 5, ii., 12; male, 7, ii., 17.

**Red-breasted Merganser** (*M. serrator*). Common winter visitor. As an instance of what numbers of these and other ducks may be seen I transcribe my notes for Feb., 1912, during which month my son and I searched the river opposite my house nearly every day with a three-inch telescope:—

- Feb. 3. Seven Mergansers, males.
- „ 4. Nine Swans, 5 ad., 4 juvs., Whoopers or Bewicks.  
Many ducks, various.
- „ 5. Mallards, Wigeon, Pochards, Goosander, male.
- „ 6. Mergansers, 5 males, 4 females; several Wigeon.
- „ 7. Wigeon, Golden-eyes, Pochard, Mergansers.
- „ 8. Mergansers, Golden-eyes, Wigeon, Pochard.
- „ 9. Ten Golden-eyes, 35 Wigeon, Mergansers.

- Feb: 10. Eight Golden-eyes, five Mergansers.  
 „ 11. Four Golden-eyes, one splendid male ; three Mergansers.  
 „ 13. Mergansers, male and female.  
 „ 15. „ „ „  
 „ 16. „ „ „ (10)  
 „ 17. Five Mallard, 2 males, 3 females ; nine Mergansers, eight Golden-eyes.  
 „ 18. Seven Mergansers, two Shelducks, Mallards, male and female.  
 „ 19. Two Mergansers.  
 „ 21. Thirteen Mergansers, five Golden-eyes.  
 „ 22. Nine Golden-eyes.  
 „ 23. Five Golden-eyes, seven Mergansers.  
 „ 24. Twenty-eight Shelducks, 60 Wigeon, two Mergansers.  
 „ 25. Eight Mallard, five Golden-eyes, three Shelducks and six Geese.  
 „ 26. Five Golden-eyes, two Shelducks.

**Smew** (*Mergellus albellus*). Rare winter visitor. Mr. Brooks has one female shot below Mistle, and Mr. Dunnett shot a male on the Lawford marshes.

**\*Heron** (*Ardea cinerea*). Common and resident. The heron may be seen in numbers all up and down the estuary all the year round. I have seen as many as fifty together on some low trees on the Stutton shore. The nearest nesting places are Orwell Park on the north and Birch, near Colchester, on the south, though after the nesting season these birds will seek roosting places in woods in which they do not nest, e.g., in the wood close to Brantham Court, where I have seen thirty or more come in to roost in autumn. It is a grand sight to see them come in ; from a great height they will drop, at almost lightning speed, in spirals with closed wings, looking as if they must dash themselves to pieces on the tree tops, but with a sudden reverse, a few wild flaps of their huge wings and a shooting forward of their long legs, they alight on the topmost branchlets of the trees, where they sit as easily as their rivals for the roosting place, the rooks and jack-daws. Herons are most interesting to watch, too, while feeding, and must consume an enormous number of eels and dabs. When an eel of any size is caught it is pinched from end and much time is consumed, with many droppings and recapturings, before it is rendered into a fit state for swallowing, when with a jerk the heron gets it head downwards in his throat and slowly swallows it. Sometimes the end of the tail may be seen still protruding from the bill for some minutes

after the bulk of the eel has disappeared. After his meal the heron washes his bill and often rubs it against his legs, and then with a few long strides takes up another "pitch." When a heron has caught any prey it is often persecuted by gulls and shows wonderful power of flight in shifting from the rapid dashes of its pursuers.

**Night Heron** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). A very rare straggler. An immature female in spotted plumage, and weighing 27 ounces, was shot at Dovercourt on November 29th, 1880.

**Bittern** (*Botaurus stellaris*). A visitor which has been obtained several times in the neighbourhood. I have one shot by Chas. Porter near Manningtree, in Dec., 1879. One was seen at Lawford, 16, i., 01.

**Spoonbill** (*Platalea leucorodea*). A very rare visitor. Sheppard and Whitear say (Catalogue of Norfolk and Suffolk Birds), "it has been shot on the River Stour." Kerry records one shot Oct. 20, 1876, and another seen near Harwich, Aug., 1888. Bree records two shot out of a flock of nine, June, 1877. I saw one 29, vii., 18.

**Glossy Ibis** (*Plegadis falcinellus*). A rare straggler. Five out of a party of six were shot at Walton-on-Naze, 14, x., 12.

**Crane** (*Grus grus*). The only record of this species is of an example seen 26, ix., 89, by Mr. Gervase F. Mathew, R.N., at Little Oakley. It was repeatedly seen between Walton-on-Naze and Harwich up to Oct. 14th, 1889 (Christy, Birds of Essex).

**Little Bustard** (*Otis tetrax*). Yarrell records one, a female, killed at Harwich, Jan., 1823. Mr. Eagle shot two at Walton on or about Dec., 28th 1874, and one was seen for more than a week round Ramsey and Little Oakley about Nov. 21, 1882 (Christy, Birds of Essex).

**Stone Curlew** (*Edicnemus edicnemus*). One was killed in Bradfield, 10, x., 80, and another is recorded by Kerry as shot at Walton, no date given (Babington, Catalogue of the Birds of Suffolk).

**Grey Phalarope** (*Phalaropus fulicarius*). An irregular winter visitor. Kerry records one shot at Harwich, 24, xii., 75; and two, 3, xi., 82. Mr. R. Brooks, of Mistley, has one shot on the Stour, Dec., 1896, and another, an adult female, shot in Jan., 1914.

**Red-necked Phalarope** (*Phalaropus lobatus*). Kerry records specimens shot near Harwich in August and September, 1876 (Christy, Birds of Essex).

**Woodcock** (*Scolopax rusticola*). A fairly common winter visitor.

**\*Common Snipe** (*Gallinago gallinago*). A resident and, sometimes; very numerous winter visitor.

**Great Snipe** (*Gallinago media*). A rare migrant in Autumn and Spring. I saw one on the Lawford marshes in 1888, which rose close to me just as I had killed a common snipe. It flew heavily and pitched again not a hundred yards away but across a stream. When I managed to find my way round to the spot where it had dropped, I could not put it up again. In 1881, I shot a snipe at Lawford which weighed 7. ozs., which may have been a Great Snipe, but, unfortunately, this was before the time when I began to notice distinction between the species of Snipe.

**Jack Snipe** (*Limnocryptes gallinula*). Fairly common winter visitor.

**Knot** (*Tringa canutus*). Common winter visitor.

**Little Stint** (*T. minuta*). A rather rare spring and autumn migrant.

**Temminck's Stint** (*T. temmincki*). Rare. Kerry records some shot at Dovercourt beach in the autumn of 1876, and another shot by himself near Harwich, in 1886 (Christy, Birds of Essex). I saw a specimen on the shore at Bradfield, 16, ii., 1902, which, from its white outer tail feathers, was most probably Temminck's Stint.

**Purple Sandpiper** (*T. maritima*). Not common. I have only met it once, 2, x., 15, at Wrabness Sluice.

**Dunlin** (*T. alpina*). Very numerous autumn, winter and spring migrant. My latest dates are 7, vi., 98, and 14, vi., 12.

**Curlew Sandpiper** (*T. ferruginea*). Rare. I have never met with it.

**Sanderling** (*Calidris arenaria*). Not uncommon about Harwich.

**Ruff** (*Machetes pugnax*). Not uncommon in spring and autumn.

**\*Redshank** (*Totanus totanus*). Common. I have occasionally seen flocks of 3-400. At least 500, 3, xi., 17.

**Spotted Redshank** (*T. fuscus*). Rare.

**Greenshank** (*T. nebularius*). Not uncommon spring and autumn migrant.

**Common Sandpiper** (*T. hypoleucus*). A fairly numerous spring and autumn migrant, generally arriving at Lawford about the first week in May. My earliest date is 24, iv., in 1909. I saw three on 24, vii., 16, but August and September are the usual months for the return migration.

**Green Sandpiper** (*T. ochropus*). Not uncommon spring and autumn migrant. I have many notes of it in April, May, Aug. and Sept.

**Wood Sandpiper** (*T. glareola*). A bird of passage much rarer than the last. I have not yet met it.

**Red-breasted Snipe** (*Macrorhamphus griseus*). Christy includes this species among the birds of Essex on the authority of Mr. Hope, who saw one in Harwich Harbour, 15, iv., 82.

**Black-tailed Godwit** (*Limosa limosa*). A scarce visitor. I have met with it only once, 3, xi., 17, when I saw two at Wrabness Point. Their note was a very loud "Chu-chu-chow-e-chow-e-chow."

**Bar-tailed Godwit** (*L. lapponica*). Fairly common visitor in winter, and passing migrant in spring and autumn.

**Curlew** (*Numenius arquata*). Is to be seen all the year round but does not breed. Flocks of several hundred may be seen occasionally. Among a flock of about thirty which I watched 17, iii., 17, were two which were only about half the size of the others, possibly *N. borealis*; they were not Whimbrel.

**Whimbrel** (*N. phaeopus*). Bird of passage in spring and autumn. Average of 16 years, 6, v. Earliest date, 28, iv.; latest, 15, v. The earliest return date I have is 17, vii., 1900. The usual date is the end of August and September.

**Golden Plover** (*Charadrius apricarius*). Common in winter.

**Grey Plover** (*Squatarola squatarola*). Fairly common.

\***Ringed Plover** (*Ægialitis hiaticula*). A common resident. I have found it nesting on low lying fields at Lawford and on the Bradfield shore.

**Kentish Plover** (*Æg. alexandrina*). Kerry recorded that two were seen and one shot on the beach at Dovercourt, on Aug., 23rd 1876. At Landguard Point one was observed on Aug. 12th, 1884; two on June 30th, 1885, and two on Nov. 27th, 1885 (Christy, Birds of Essex).

\***Lapwing** (*Vanellus vanellus*). Common.

\***Oyster-catcher** (*Hœmatopus ostralegus*). Not uncommon near Harwich, where it probably breeds. I have only seen it twice up the estuary.

**Turnstone** (*Arenaria interpres*). Fairly common in spring and autumn migration. I saw several on the Dovercourt shore, 17, viii., 01; ten, 28, iv., 09; and five, 29, iv., 14, at Bradfield.

**Common Gull** (*Larus canus*). Though it does not breed with us it may be met nearly, if not quite, all the year round.

**Herring Gull** (*L. argentatus*). Common.

**Greater Black-backed Gull** (*L. marinus*). Common. This and the preceding species may be seen in immature plumage all the year round.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** (*L. fuscus affinis*). The same remarks apply to this species.

**Glaucous Gull** (*L. glaucus*). Rare, but has been shot at Harwich, 25, xii., 85.

\***Black-headed Gull** (*L. ridibundus*). Very numerous. At the end of March and the first half of April, 1896, hundreds of immature Black-headed Gulls frequented the pond at Mistleley Place, feeding on the fry which swarmed in the pond.

**Little Gull** (*L. minutus*). An irregular and rare visitor. Has been killed occasionally at Harwich. One was obtained by one of the Manningtree puntsmen in Dec., 1913.

**Kittiwake** (*Rissa tridactyla*). Fairly common on the coast. I found one dead at Lawford in 1890.

\***Common Tern** (*Sterna hirundo*). Summer visitor. It breeds near Colchester, and on one occasion, I believe, on the Stutton shore, where I saw young ones which could scarcely fly, being fed.

**Arctic Tern** (*St. paradisea*). Mr. Kerry shot an immature specimen at Stony Point, Sept., 1889 (Christy, Birds of Essex).

**Roseate Tern** (*St. dougalli*). Mr. Owen Boyle saw one at Landguard Point, 1, vi., 83 (Brit. Ass. Reports on Migration).

**\*Little Tern** (*St. minuta*). Fairly common summer visitor, arriving at the beginning of May and leaving in Sept.

**Sandwich Tern** (*St. sandvicencis*). Sheppard and Whitear (Trans. Linu. Soc., xv.) write, "We saw two of these birds swimming in the Stour, one of which we shot." Kerry reported it as rare at Harwich. It used to breed in the county of Essex, but does not now do so.

**Black Tern** (*Hydrochelidon nigra*). A not uncommon passing migrant in spring. I saw some, 8, v., 12, and 21, -22iv.; 13; there were a dozen or more on a flooded meadow to the north of the Stour, near Brantham Mill. The puntsmen tell me that they see them most years. Mr. H. Saunders, puntsmen, informed me that he once saw five black terns which were not "these hully black ones, I've seen thirty of them together one year." Could these have been White-winged Black Terns?

**Great Skua** (*Catharacta Skua*). Rare off Harwich.

**Richardson's Skua** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). Rare off Harwich. An immature bird was shot on Dovercourt beach, Oct. 12th, 1879; whilst others were shot or seen in Nov., 1879.

**Buffon's Skua** (*S. longicaudus*). A young bird was obtained near Harwich in 1870.

**Pomatorhine Skua** (*S. pomarinus*). Kerry says that a few are seen near Harwich most autumns.

**Razorbill** (*Alca torda*). Common off Harwich most winters.

**Common Guillemot** (*Uria troile*). Not uncommon. It has been shot well up the estuary. Both this and the variety, the Ringed Guillemot, have been brought to me by puntsmen.

**Little Auk** (*Alle alle*). A not uncommon, but irregular, visitor. I have notes of the following: one shot near Catawade in 1870 by my father's coachman; one shot, 1, i., 95, by Mr. H. N. Dunnett, at Lawford; one brought to Mr. Brooks, Mistley, in Dec., 1900;

one brought to me, 20, i., 12; one or more were seen by G. Porter in Feb., 1917. He told me "they were doddy little things, and sat like a tossel of silk on the water."

**Puffin** (*Fratercula arctica*). Some are seen every year off Harwich.

**Storm Petrel** (*Thalassidroma palagica*). Is seen most years in Harwich harbour, and has been brought to me, and more often reported to me, from up the estuary.

**Leach's Petrel** (*Oceanodroma leucorrhea*). Mr. Hope says that it is sometimes seen in winter time in Harwich harbour (Christy, Birds of Essex).

**Fulmar** (*Fulmarus glacialis*). One was caught alive 14, ix., 94, by a shepherd near Cooks Hall Mill, W. Bergholt, and killed on account of its sharp bites.

**Black-throated Diver** (*Colymbus arcticus*). Pettitt, bird stuffer, at Colchester, has had several examples from the Manningtree puntsmen. One, shot Jan., 1914, in almost perfect summer plumage is in the possession of Mr. R. Brooks, of Mistley.

**Gt. Northern Diver** (*C. immer*): Not uncommon in winter.

**Red-throated Diver** (*C. stellatus*). Not uncommon. An adult was brought to me Dec., 1914.

**Great Crested Grebe** (*Podiceps cristatus*). Fairly common, autumn to spring. I saw two with nice ruffs off Wrabness, 24, ii., 17.

**Red-necked Grebe** (*P. griseigena*). Not common. One caught at Dovercourt, 26, xi., 75, and another killed near Manningtree, Nov., 1888.

**Slavonian Grebe** (*P. auritus*). Pettitt had one from Mistley.

**Eared Grebe** (*P. nigricollis*). Two were shot on the Stour, Dec. 3rd and Dec. 10th, 1875.

\***Little Grebe** (*P. fluviatilis*). Common.

\***Water-rail** (*Rallus aquaticus*). Not uncommon, though not often seen, on the Lawford and Dedham marshes and reed beds.

**Spotted Crake** (*Porzana porzana*). I watched one for an hour on the Mistle Place Pond, 13, iv., 05. It was very confiding, much more so than the Moor-hens, and permitted me to stand within a few yards of it while it fed on the mud at the edge of the pond, or swam about, bobbing its tail and head very much as its larger relation does. One was picked up dead near Harwich in Oct., 1879.

\***Corn Crake** (*Crex crex*). Most commonly known as a migrant in spring and autumn, but a few breed.

\***Moor Hen** (*Gallinula chloropus*). Numerous everywhere.

\***Coot** (*Fulica atra*). Common. In winter very large flocks, numbering sometimes thousands, may be seen.

\***Stock-Dove** (*Columba ænas*). Common.

\***Wood Pigeon** (*C. palumbus*). Common.

\***Turtle-dove** (*Streptopelia turtur*). Common summer visitor. Earliest date of arrival, 22, iv.; latest, 18, v.; average of twenty years, 7, v.

**Pallas' Sand-grouse** (*Syrhaptes paradoxus*). Has been reported from the district in its erratic invasions, the latest report being for 7, ix., 08, when fourteen were seen by the gamekeeper on Pewit Island, Oakley.

\***Pheasant** (*Phasianus colchicus*).

\***Red legged Partridge** (*Caccabis rufa*). I saw several white examples at Tattingstone some years ago.

\***Partridge** (*Perdix perdix*). Pettitt showed; 11, iv., 96, a hen partridge shot during a "drive" at Paglesham, in Dec., 1895, which weighed only 7½ ozs. It was little bigger than a quail. On Oct. 25th, 1915, I twice, while driving along the road from Ardleigh, saw partridges which had risen, apparently unalarmed, at some distance away, settle on the hedge at the road side.

**Quail** (*Coturnix coturnix*). Very seldom met with now. Shepard, in his list of arrival of summer migrants at Wrabness, 1818 1880, notes its appearance on April 2nd, 1819, and April, 7th 1822. I have notes of one killed at Langham, and one near Harwich, both by telegraph wires.