

ILE D'OUESSANT
AS AN
ORNITHOLOGICAL STATION

WITH NOTES ON MIGRATORY AND OTHER BIRDS
OBSERVED THERE

BY

W^m EAGLE CLARKE F. L. S.

This Island appeared to me to occupy a singularly important geographical position for studying the phenomenon of bird-migration as observed on the shores of Western Europe.

It lies in the course of many of those birds of passage which annually traverse the northern and western shores of France ; and also in the track of those which having traversed the southern and western coasts of Britain, seek the atlantic littoral of France on their journeys southward in the autumn ; and northwards in the spring.

This belief in the singularly favourable position occupied by Ouessant, and the fact that we knew nothing about it ornithologically, induced me to apply to the Royal Society of London for a grant to enable me to visit the island for the purpose of investigating and observing the migration of birds as observed there. My application was fortunately successful.

Having secured the companionship and valued co-operation of my friend Mr T. G. Laidlaw, M. B. O. U. ; he and I arrived at Le Conquet, on the west coast of Brittany, *en*

route for Ouessant, on the night of the 7th of september 1898. The following day was ushered in of a dense sea-fog, and, as a consequence, the voyage to Ouessant had to be abandoned.

Fortunaty there is an estuary at Le Conquet, and here we devoted a few hours to observing the various migratory birds that were feeding on the muddy shores left exposed by the tide.

Here we noted : *Tringa canutus*, *T. subarquata*, *T. alpina*, *Totanus canescens*, *T. hypoleucus*, *T. calidris*, *Machetes pugnax*, *Strepsilas interpres*, *Numenius arquatus*, *N. phæopus*, etc. Le Conquet we believe to be an excellent place for observing the movements of birds of passage, especially of the *Limicolæ*. We also observed other species, and those will be enumerated in the annotated list which forms the concluding portion of this little contribution.

We arrived at Ouessant on the 9th of september; and had hoped to remain some weeks on the island. Unfortunately, however, the nature of our mission was misunderstood by the authorities, and we were obliged to leave Ouessant on the 17th, greatly to our regret.

During this short sojourn we observed the following Resident Birds on the Island : *Corvus corax*, *Passer domesticus*, *Linota cannabina*, *Emberiza citrinella*, *E. miliaria*, *Alauda arvensis*, *Anthus pratensis*, *A. obscurus*, *Erithacus rubecula*, *Accentor modularis*, *Troglodytes parvulus*, *Pratincola rubicola*, *Falco peregrinus*, *Ægialitis hiaticula*, and, perhaps, *Hæmatopus ostralegus*.

The only Summer Visitors were *Hirundo rustica* and *Sylvia cinerea*.

The Birds of Passage observed between the 9th and 17th of september — a period of phenomenally fine weather, and thus much against any pronounced migratory movement — were *Turdus iliacus*, *Saxicola ænanthe*, *Pratincola rubetra*, *Motacilla alba*, *M. melanope*, *M. Rayi*, *Circus cyaneus*, *Accipiter nisus*, *Falco tinnunculus*, *Pandion haliaetus*, *Ardea cinerea*, *Turtur communis*, *Eudromias mo-*

ILE D'OUessant AS AN ORNITH. STATION. 311

rinellus, *Vanellus cristatus*, *Strepsilas interpres*, *Calidris arenaria*, *Totanus hypoleucus*, *T. calidris*, *Numenius arquatus*, *N. phæopus*, *Sterna macrura*, *S. fluviatilis*, *S. minuta*, *S. cantiaca*, *Puffinus anglorum* and *P. gravis* (= *major*).

The following are, perhaps, best regarded as *Winter Visitors* to Ouessant : *Phalacrocorax carbo*, *P. graculus*, *Strepsilas interpres* (also a bird of passage) *Hæmatopus ostralegus* (ditto), *Larus canus*, *L. argentatus*, *L. fuscus*, *L. marinus*, and *Rissa tridactyla*. *Alcedo ispida* was also *abundant* all round the island, obtaining its food in the crystal clear waters that lave its cliffs : perhaps it, too, is a winter bird, arriving at the end of summer.

No sea-fowl breed on the cliffs, rocks, or islets around Ouessant ; while the absence of shores, whereon to feed, accounts for the absence of many species of *Limicolæ*, such as we had seen at Le Conquet ; and in this latter respect Ouessant resembles Heligoland.

I took with me to Ouessant a carefully prepared series of questions relating to the migration of birds. I left a copy of these with the Gardien chef of each of the Lighthouses — the Phare du Stif, and the Phare de Creach — and was fortunate enough to obtain from those obliging observers two most excellent reports.

From these we learn that the Isle is annually visited of vast numbers of birds of passage and others. That on dark starless nights, with an easterly wind, in autumn, from 500 to 600 birds dash themselves to death against the lantern at Creach, fewer at Stif. On *one night* in the autumn of 1888, no less than 1500 migrants perished miserably at the lantern of the Phare de Creach, an extraordinary number, but the correctness of the statements is vouched for of the Engineer to the Ponts et Chaussées.

The greatest number of migrants appear in october ; and the following are the species which have come under the notice of these observers : Corneilles, Étourneaux, Pinsons, Tarins, Linots, Moineaux, Chardonnerets,

Alouettes, Grives, Merles, Fauvettes, Roitelets, Martinets, Hirondelles, Coucous, Chats-huants, Éperviers, Faucons, Hérons, Cormorans, Canards sauvages, Oies sauvages, Sarcelles, Tourterelles, Cailles, Vanneaux, Pluviers gris et Pluviers dorés, Bécasses, Bécassines, Alouettes de mer, Chevaliers, Pies de mer, Corlieux, Râles de genêts, Poules d'eau, Goélands and « God ».

Both chefs des Phares agree that there are fewer birds of passage seen in the spring, though the same species are observed.

They tell us that in winters of great cold, and when the mainland, is under snow, that great numbers of Oies sauvages, Canards sauvages, Sarcelles, Pluviers, Vanneaux, Grives, Étourneaux, Bécassines, Pinsons, Linots, Corbeaux noirs et gris, Râles d'eau, Poules d'eau et Éperviers de différentes espèces, seek the island, and usually remain there until the end of February.

In moist and rainy seasons few birds visit Ouessant.

According to the same authorities the following are the birds which breed annually on the island: Alouettes, Hirondelles, Martinets, Rouges-gorges, Merles, Moineaux, Fauvettes, Corbeaux, Linots, Roitelets (Troglodytes) et Motteux.

In addition to the various species just enumerated M. Lucas, gardien-chef du phare du Stif, very pertinently remarks: « L'île est encore visitée par d'autres espèces d'Oiseaux, particulièrement de l'ordre des Passereaux, mais dont les noms me sont inconnus. »

My best thanks are hereby tendered to these most excellent and obliging observers for their valuable reports they have so kindly furnished — reports that all both of them infinite credit.

I think enough will be demonstrated by this contribution to prove that Ouessant is an ornithological station of the first importance, and that it is probably second to none as an observatory from which to witness the movements of migratory birds. As such I have much pleasure in bringing it under the notice of my brother ornithologists,

more especially of my French friends, whom I trust will pay to it the attention it so well merits. There are two most excellent observers on Ouessant at the respective Lighthouses. Would it not be well to supply them with schedules for their observations? to receive and examine the wings of the birds killed against the lanterns? and to report annually the results of their investigations to the pages of « Ornith »?

Corvus corax (Grand Corbeau).

Ouessant. A pair nest on the cliffs of the island. We saw them together daily during our sojourn.

Corvus corone (Corbeau corneille).

Ouessant. Common.

Corvus frugilegus (Corbeau freux).

Le Conquet. An abundant species in the neighbourhood.

Corvus monedula (Corbeau choucas).

Le Conquet. Common.

Pica rustica (Pie vulgaire).

Le Conquet. Several observed.

Garrulus glandarius (Geai glandivore).

Le Conquet. Appeared to be a very common species

Sturnus vulgaris (Étourneau vulgaire).

Ouessant. This species occurs in great numbers as a bird of passage. It is also a winter visitor to the island.

We picked up the withered wings of an unfortunate of the past season, near to the Phare du Stif.

Linota cannabina (Linotte ordinaire).

Ouessant. A common resident. We saw great numbers, many of which were autumn immigrants.

Le Conquet. Also an abundant bird.

Passer domesticus (Moineau domestique).

Ouessant. A common resident.

Le Conquet. Common.

Fringilla cœlebs (Pinson ordinaire).

Le Conquet. Abundant.

Emberiza citrinella (Bruant jaune).

Ouessant. Resident and common.

Emberiza miliaria (Bruant proyer).

Ouessant. Resident and common.

Alauda arvensis (Alouette des champs).

Ouessant. A common resident. Vast numbers visit the island on passage.

Alauda arborea (Alouette lulu).

Brest. Several seen a few miles west of the city on september 19th.

Motacilla alba (Bergeronnette grise).

Ouessant. Very abundant on passage during our visit. We sometimes saw as many as 200 in a single day, and often saw parties of 20-30 individuals.

Motacilla melanope (Bergeronnette boarder).

Ouessant. A few seen on the 10th et 11th of september, and carefully identified.

Motacilla Rayi (Bonaparte) = *M. FLAVEOLA* Temm.

Ouessant. Very common during our stay on the island. A few birds in adult plumage were seen, but the great majority appeared to be young of the year.

Le Conquet. Many seen on the 8th of september.

Anthus pratensis (Pipi des prés).

Ouessant. Very common, most of the birds seen were on passage.

Anthus obscurus (Pipi obscur).

Ouessant. A very common resident.

Le Conquet. Also common on the coast.

Parus cœruleus (Mésange bleue).

Le Conquet. Several seen.

Sylvia cinerea (Fauvette grisette).

Ouessant. A few summer on the island.

Le Conquet. Several seen.

Phylloscopus rufus (Pouillot vélocé).

Le Conquet. I heard the familiar notes of this bird in a garden in the town on september 8th.

Another was heard near Brest on the 18th.

Phylloscopus trochilus (Pouillot fitis).

Le Conquet. Several seen, sept. 8th.

Turdus musicus (Grive musicienne).

Le Conquet. Several observed.

Turdus iliacus (Grive mauvis).

Ouessant. Four were seen, and their notes, heard on september 10th — an early date on which to find this boreal breeding species so far to the south.

Saxicola œnanthe (Traquet motteux).

Ouessant. Very abundant on passage during our sojourn-September 9th to 17th. A few only bore traces of their summer dress.

Le Conquet. A few noted.

Pratincola rubetra (Traquet tarier).

Ouessant. A young male seen on september 11th.

Pratincola rubicola (Traquet pâtre).

Ouessant. Extremely abundant everywhere on the island. It is probably a resident; but receives additions to its numbers in the autumn.

Le Conquet. Several seen.

Erithacus rubecula (Rouge-gorge).

Ouessant. Common and resident.

Le Conquet. Common.

Accentor modularis (Accenteur mouchet).

Ouessant. A fairly common resident.

Le Conquet. Observed.

Troglodytes parvulus (Troglodyte mignon).

Ouessant. Common and doubtless a resident.

Le Conquet. Several seen.

Hirundo rustica (Hirondelle de cheminée).

Ouessant. A summer visitor and fairly common.

Le Conquet. Common.

Chelidon urbica (Hirondelle de fenêtre).

Le Conquet. Common.

Cotile riparia (Hirondelle de rivage).

Le Conquet. Several observed.

Gecinus viridis (Pic vert).

Le Conquet. Common in the woods.

Alcedo ispida (Martin-pêcheur).

Ouessant. Very common all round the island, each little bay having its pair. This bird is surely only a visitor to the island in autumn and, perhaps, winter.

Le Conquet. Common.

Circus cyaneus (Buzard St.-Martin).

Ouessant. A female haunted the cliffs from september 9th to 14th. It frequently made excursion inland in search of food.

Le Conquet. One in brown plumage observed on the 8th of september.

Accipiter nisus (Épervier vulgaire).

Ouessant. Single females were seen on september 10th, 11th and 16th.

Falco peregrinus (Faucon pèlerin).

Ouessant. A pair seen daily. We were told that they nested in the cliffs of the island.

Falco tinnunculus (Faucon crécerelle).

Ouessant. Several seen daily on passage.

Le Conquet. A few seen.

Pandion haliaetus (Balbuzard fluviatile).

Molène. One seen just off the island on september 9th, on passage.

Phalacrocorax carbo (Cormoran ordinaire).

Ouessant. Common but does not breed.

Le Conquet. Common.

Phalacrocorax graculus (Cormoran huppé).

Ouessant. Fairly common, but not nesting.

Le Conquet. A few seen.

Ardea cinerea (Héron cendré).

Ouessant. A single bird seen in Lampaul bay on the 12th and 13th of september.

Columba palumbus (Pigeon ramier).

Le Conquet. Common in the woods.

Turtur communis (Tourterelle vulgaire).

Ouessant. Single birds seen on the 10th and 13th of september.

Perdix cinerea (Perdrix grise).

Le Conquet. A covey seen on september 8th.

Ægialitis hiaticula (Pluvier à collier).

Ouessant. Very abundant, and doubtless a resident species.

Le Conquet. Common.

Eudromias morinellus (Pluvier guignard).

Ouessant. Single birds were seen on the 1st and 15th of september. On the latter date we approached one closely as it rested on the west side of the island.

Vanellus vulgaris (Vanneau luppé).

Ouessant. Five seen on the island on the 10th of september and following days.

Streptopelia interpres (Tournepieuvre à collier).

Ouessant. Common. A bird of passage and winter visiter to the island.

Le Conquet. Numerous on the estuary.

Hæmatopus ostralegus (Huitrier pie).

Ouessant. Not uncommon, and possibly breeds on the island.

Le Conquet. Common.

Tringa alpina (Bécasseau brunette).

Le Conquet. Common on the estuary. A bird of passage and winter resident.

Tringa subarquata (Bécasseau cocorli).

Le Conquet. Abundant on the shores of the estuary on september 8th.

Tringa canutus (Bécasseau maubèche).

Le Conquet. A number seen on the shores and moist islands of the estuary on september 8th.

Machetes pugnax (Chevalier combattant).

Le Conquet. September 8th several seen on the estuary.

Calidris arenaria (Bécasseau des sables).

Ouessant. A few seen throughout our sojourn on the island. Probably a bird of passage only.

Totanus calidris (Chevalier gambette).

Ouessant. A few only seen on the island. There are no suitable shores on which to feed, and this fact accounts for the absence of many species of waders from Ouessant.

Le Conquet. Fairly common.

Totanus hypoleucus (Chevalier guignette).

Ouessant. Very abundant on passage, flitting about at the foot of the cliffs. On the 10th of september we saw no less than sixty of those birds on the coast of the island.

Totanus canescens (Chevalier aboyeur).

Le Conquet. September 8th not uncommon on the rivers at the head of the estuary.

Numenius phæopus (Courlis corlien).

Ouessant. Common on passage daily throughout our sojourn on the island.

Numenius arquatus (Courlis cendré).

Ouessant. Common on the island, often seen in parties of 100 on the land.

Le Conquet. Numerous.

Sterna fluviatilis (Sterne Pierre Garin).

Ouessant. Very common off the island during our stay. Old birds were still to be seen feeding their young.

Sterna minuta (Petite Sterne).

Ouessant. Not uncommon off the island.

Molène. A few seen on septembre 9th.

Sterna cantiaca (Sterne caugek).

Ouessant. Fairly common on passage.

Le Conquet. A few observed september 8th and also at Molène the next day.

Sterna macrura (Sterne de paradis).

Ouessant. We were not able to identify this species until the 14th of september, when we observed many on the south side of the island. Among them were ten individuals in the adolescent stage of plumage — the *Sterna portlandica* of Ridgway.

Larus ridibundus (Goëland rieur).

Le Conquet. Not uncommon.

Larus canus (Goëland cendré).

Ouessant. Fairly numerous on the coast and off-lying rocks.

Larus argentatus (Goëland argenté).

Ouessant. Common, also at Le Conquet and Molène.

Larus fuscus (Goëland brun).

Ouessant. Common, also at Le Conquet and Molène.

Larus marinus (Goëland marin).

Ouessant. Fairly abundant; also observed off Molène.

Rissa tridactyla (Goëland tridactyle).

Ouessant. This species was observed for the first time on the 14th of september, on which day *Sterna macrura* also arrived, old and young birds were not uncommon on and after this date.

Puffinus anglorum (Pétrel Puffin, Buffon).

Ouessant. Very abundant off Ouessant and Molène on september 9th and 17th.

Puffinus gravis (O'Reilly = P. major, Temm).

Ouessant. On september the 17th we observed six of these birds between Ouessant and Molène.

Museum of Science and Art, Edinburgh.
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