REDPOLLS LEAVING NEST.—On January 5, 1951, a nest of redpoll (**Carduelis cabaret**) was found in a fork of an old apple tree about six feet from the ground. It contained five partly-feathered young which completely filled the nest. The nest was partly in the sun. The weather being very hot, the chicks gaped in the heat and hung their heads over the side of the nest with their red mouths wide open. On January 10 and 11 they were very restless, wriggling, preening their feathers and scratching their heads on which there was considerable down. They were now pretty brown-flecked chicks. On January 12, they were still very restless. At about 11.10 a.m. one chick suddenly flew from the centre of the nest, landing on a plum tree about 20 feet away. Three minutes later another flew from the centre of the nest to a raspberry cane about 14 feet away. These two flew upwards and then horizontally. One of the remaining three in the nest now climbed out on to the side of the nest where it sat for a while. Then it made its way to a branch behind the nest. After stretching and preening for a while, it returned to the nest. Out again it went to the branch, and after more stretching and preening, flew to an apple tree about 30 feet away. The last two sat side by side in the nest for some time. Presently they clawed their way up the side of the nest and sat on the edge. The weaker chick slipped back into the nest, but the stronger climbed on to a branch, where it played and balanced and finally made its way on to another branch. Then, without warning, it flew into the plum tree, landing about the same place as the first fledgling. At 12 o'clock the last chick struggled again to the edge of the nest, where it sat for about 10 minutes looking a scared little bird. Presently it made its way to a branch where it stretched, flapped its wings and preened. At last, about 12.15 p.m., it glided downward to the raspberry canes about 10 feet away.—W. H. Davidson, Dunedin.

REVIEWS.

Taxonomic Notes on the Australian Butcher Birds (family Cracticidae), by Dean Amadon. (Amer. Mus. Nov. 1504.)

In view of the confusion at present existing in New Zealand concerning the taxonomy of magpies having white backs and those having black backs (usually termed **Gymnorhina hypoleuca** and **G. tibicen**) this important paper is of more than passing interest in this country. Much of the text concerns the genera **Cracticus** (the butcher-birds) and **Strepera** (the bell-magpies or currawongs), but the genus **Gymnorhina** is also reviewed.

In the black-backed magpie **G. tibicen**, both sexes have a band of black feathers across the back, and Amadon tentatively recognises five sub-species, increasing in size from New Guinea birds to the nominate form in New South Wales. He recognises three sub-species of white-backed birds, **G. h. hypoleuca**, the small Tasmanian bird; **G. h. leuconota** of Southern Victoria and South Australia, in both of which the females have the feathers of the mid back light grey margined with white; and **G. h. dorsalis** (usually given specific status) in south-western Australia. In this the males have white backs and are almost inseparable from **leuconota**. The colour of the basal half of the outer vane of the outer rectrix does not appear to be diagnostic as there are exceptions to the usual white in **dorsalis** (and **tibicen**—J.M.C.) and black in **leuconota**. Females are different in that they superficially resemble **tibicen** but may be distinguished by the black feathers of the mid back being margined with white (though Serventy and Whittell state this is sometimes absent).

There is some discussion as to the relationships of these forms, and the evidence for hybridising where the forms overlap. (Many "black-backed" birds in New Zealand, particularly where isolated among "white-backed" populations, have the black band reduced in width from typical **tibicen**, as is found also in southern N.S.W. and Northern Victoria, where **tibicen** and **leuconota** overlap). "The very fact that

two such distinct forms meet in an area where natural barriers are absent indicates that their differentiation occurred in isolation and that they have recently come into secondary contact with each other. If such is the case, it may well be that some interbreeding occurs but not enough to prevent the further differentiation of the two forms, in which case they would correctly be regarded as distinct species. . . . This greater ecological tolerance of **tibicen** can be taken to indicate that it is the older form. The plumage sequences, too, favour this view. The white-backed plumage is preceded by dark-backed immature stages and is limited to adult males. . . . Analysis of measurements of **tibicen** and **leuconota** favours the view that they are conspecific. . . As regards the relationship of **leuconota** and **dorsalis**, the fact that the males can be differentiated only by slight average characters suggests conspecificity. The difference in the females, while quite sharp, is one of degree. Both have the feathers of the back margined with white, but in **leuconota** the centres of the feathers are grey, in **dorsalis** black. . . It is quite likely that future field work will show that all forms of **Gymnorhina** are conspecific, especially since they are all said to have similar habits. . . . At present it would be premature to unite the white-backed and black-backed magpies.''—J.M.C.

The British Trust for Ornithology; Seventeenth Annual Report, 1950. Price, 1s. 6d. (Address: 2 King Edward Street, Oxford.)

As a focal point of ornithological investigation and research in Britain, the British Trust for Ornithology performs an increasingly important role and a perusal of this 40-page report gives impressive evidence of the work being accomplished. The contribution of the late B. W. Tucker, one of the founders of the Trust, is acknowledged. The membership of this trust shows an increase, field investigations have been well supported and more birds were ringed in 1950 than in any previous year. Among the inquiries was one on paper-tearing by birds and it is recorded that in 1950 there was no renewal of the ''sensational attacks on fabrics of all kinds reported in 1949.'' Excellent work was accomplished at the various bird observatories. For those who wish to keep themselves informed of what is being done in the ornithological world in Britain, a copy of this report is essential.—(R.H.D.S.)

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Asterisk indicates life member.

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Stewart Island School, Halfmoon Bay
St. Matthew's Scout Troop, Masterton.

SCIENTIFIC NAMES.

Except in the case of those given below, the scientific names of species mentioned in the text will be found in the summarised classified notes:—

Ibis, Glossy **(Plegadis falcinellus)**.
Shag, Black **(Phalacrocorax carbo)**.
Shag, Pied **(Phalacrocorax varius)**
Shag, King **(Leucocarbo carunculatus)**
Swift, Spine-tailed **(Hirundapus caudacutus)**

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