

THE CATHEDRAL WILD BIRDS' SANCTUARY, 1932

By ERIC HARDY

AS a haven for city birds in severe and adverse weather, as a calling station for food and rest for birds migrating over the city, and more especially as the only suitable nesting sanctuary for wild birds in the centre of the city, the Cathedral Wild Birds' Sanctuary continues to fulfil the purposes for which it was established in 1927. During the five years for which it has existed as the only Cathedral bird sanctuary in the world, twenty-seven species of birds have been recorded there by the writer, twelve of which have nested, while the amount of propaganda to induce visitors to established similar sanctuaries in their own gardens, and to show a general consideration for the rights of wild birds, has been invaluable.

During the past year, the success of the sanctuary has been most encouraging, and eleven species have nested, including house-sparrow, hedge-sparrow, robin, blue tit, starling, song-thrush, missel-thrush, blackbird, wren, domestic pigeon and greenfinch. Of these, missel-thrush and greenfinch are new records for the sanctuary. I found the broken shell of a missel-thrush's egg on May 5th, while two or three pairs of greenfinches nested in the elder shrubbery below the Chapel, where their rippling songs were a characteristic feature of the early summer. These two birds have long been known as winter visitors. Robins have increased from two to three or four pairs, and wrens from one to at least two pairs. The single pair of great tits which nested in a hole in the wall in 1931, for the first time, unfortunately did not do so this year, though I noticed one at the feeding tables on December 12th. The number of nesting blue-tits is about twelve pairs, of hedge-sparrows, fifteen to twenty pairs; song-thrushes, five or six; blackbirds, two pairs and possibly one non-breeding bird, while the pigeons are increasing in the Cathedral structure. A count of the starlings carried out in the sanctuary, December 12th, revealed 57 birds then present. The starlings seem very numerous in the cemetery, but it must be remembered that though the figure is low, bird-flocks always seem more numerous than they actually are. I hope to carry out a more complete census during the 1933 season.

Two birds were added to the list during the year. On September 9th, a kestrel hawk passing over the city paid a visit to the sanctuary, where I watched it hovering a short while before it passed on across the river. On September 27th there was a pied wagtail, the first I have

noticed, and it had no doubt come across the river. I have frequently watched these dainty little birds, the smallest British birds that walk, at Canning and Salthouse docks, where they rest after crossing the river before passing through the city parks to open country. The willow-warbler has now been established as a regular passage migrant through the sanctuary. The spring passage was first noticed in May, and one bird stayed nearly a week in the elders below the Chapel, where its delicious little cadence of melting melody charmed us all during the whole of its stay. It is quite possible these birds may nest in the future. The autumn immigration of missel-thrushes for the berries began the third week in September, the winter flocks of chaffinches and greenfinches came in in mid-November, and the great tits and linnets in the first week of December. The lateness of these latter was due to the unusual mildness of the winter.

Of song-birds, greenfinch, blackbird, song-thrush, blue-tit and hedge-sparrow were in full song by the second week of February, while the last of the winter missel-thrushes was singing on February 16th. The hedge-sparrow had resumed its song by September 10th and songs of the robin, wren and hedge-sparrow were constant throughout the winter.

Sparrows were building as early as January 15th, the hedge-sparrows were courting on April 29th, and the greenfinches nesting by April 21st. A technical note on some original observations on the courtship of the house-sparrow, as observed in the sanctuary, appeared in the scientific journal "British Birds," in March. As usual, there was at least one partly white house-sparrow born in the sanctuary. I think these scattered notes, brief though they are to the wealth of observation available, illustrate how valuable is the sanctuary as a means of studying the way birds adapt themselves to city conditions, for the sanctuary is over five miles from open country.

Finally I wish to place on record the work of the late Mr. William J. Bunn, who regularly fed the birds, twice daily, until his death in February last. I paid my tribute to him in the *Liverpool Echo* at the time, and I need not repeat it. He loved his birds with a genuine desire to be their friend, and it was particularly enjoyable to watch his two favourite song-thrushes clamour noisily as he entered the sanctuary with food, to land on his head, shoulders, or arms, and do their utmost to get the food first. The wild birds were surprisingly tame in his presence and they recognised him as their friend. Mr. Parkinson, of St. James Road, is continuing Mr. Bunn's good work.



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