

The Cuckoo's Egg Laying.

Editor of 'THE AUK:'

Dear Sir,

In your review of my book 'The Cuckoo's Secret' on pages 432-433 of 'The Auk,' July 1922, you state—

"The Cuckoo's exact method of depositing her egg seems not to have been even yet positively ascertained" and you proceed to place the theories of Mr. Stuart Baker, supported by no personal field work or observations whatever, vis-a-vis the proven facts of my own observations of several Meadow Pipit Cuckoos which have been carefully witnessed and confirmed by a score of well-known competent observers.

In opposition to my observations Mr. Stuart Baker at first considered that my film endorsed his, and the popular belief, that the Cuckoo always holds her egg in her beak, or even in her gullet, regurgitating it into the chosen fosterer's nest, of course having first of all laid it on the ground or some other convenient place.

At a meeting of the Oölogical Society held in Great Portland Street, London, on March 15th. last, when Mr. Stuart Baker's paper was discussed in the presence of over sixty members, Mr. Baker eventually withdrew his contention and unreservedly admitted that he was now fully convinced that the Cuckoo in my film actually laid her eggs in the nests of the Meadow Pipit fosterers. On account of the world-wide interest in the parasitic habits of the Cuckoo I consider that a report of this meeting should have been published.

I do not wish to dogmatise, nor do I claim, or have I ever done so, that I have solved all Cuckoo problems. In respect of the Cuckoo's method of egg deposition I have so far only *proved beyond dispute* that Meadow Pipit Cuckoos actually sit on the fosterers' nests and lay their eggs into these nests. At the same time I consider that it will eventually be found and proved that all Cuckoos deposit their eggs direct from the oviduct into the nests of their dupes, even when such nests are domed or concealed in very small holes. I am convinced that it would be just as easy for a Cuckoo to cling round the nest and lay her egg through the entrance hole as to place it there with her beak.

You will I know pardon me for saying so, but had your reviewer carefully examined my book he could not possibly have accepted Mr. Stuart Baker's interpretation of the Cuckoo's procedure after reading pages 160-161 of 'The Cuckoo's Secret.'

Capt. Oliver Pike, F. R. P. S., F. Z. S. has been several weeks with me this year (1922) and I cannot do better than enclose herewith an article he wrote for 'The Daily Mail' and which was published therein on the 12th July last. I have since seen his film and no one who sees it will ever again question the accuracy of his and my statements in respect to that particular Cuckoo's method of laying her egg.

For your further information I enclose herewith copy of an article which is appearing this week in 'The Graphic.' The Cuckoo which Mr. Pike photographed this year is the same bird as Cuckoo 'A' mentioned in 'The Cuckoo's Secret;' she therefore returned for a fifth season, and this year, besides being filmed by Capt. Pike, was subjected to similar treatment on two laying days by Mr. H. M. Lomas, on behalf of British Instructional Films, using a Debret ultra-rapid camera. These two films will probably be combined and issued as a complete film for distribution amongst the British picture houses in the spring of next year.

For your information, this particular Cuckoo this year set up a fresh world's record by laying no less than 25 eggs all but one of which were actually seen laid and in the majority of cases I correctly forecasted days in advance the actual nest in which the next egg would be laid. A report of this year's proceedings is likely to appear at a later date in one of the British ornithological journals.

Yours faithfully,

EDGAR CHANCE.

[We are perfectly willing to accept the accuracy of Mr. Chance's demonstration. In our position of reviewer, however, we felt bound to give place to Mr. Stuart Baker's statements after he had seen Mr. Chance's film, especially as they were so prominently published. We fully agree with Mr. Chance that Mr. Baker's change of view should have been given the same publicity as his original statements, in which case we should not have referred to them at all.—Ed.]

NOTES AND NEWS

IN STARTING upon a new year it is customary to look forward rather than backward, to make promises for the future and forget the failures of the past, but in the present case the Editor feels that some word of explanation is due the members of the Union and subscribers to 'The Auk' for many shortcomings during the past year,

Ever since the beginning the Editors and Managers of this journal have been busy men, whose time has been fully occupied with other duties, so that the editing and management of the magazine have, of necessity, been performed in evenings or such other spare moments as they may have had at their disposal. This fact is apparently not generally understood. The increase in the size of the journal with the inevitable additional correspondence has made it increasingly difficult to keep up to date with the editorial work.

During the past year illness and a combination of circumstances greatly increased these difficulties in the case of the present Editor with the result that much correspondence has remained unanswered and the revues