was cross-examined, and asked if an application was not made to
him to give up these offices upon getting his salary for life, he
replied that "no such proposal was ever made, though there was a
clatter among other people about it, and some lad came and pre-
cented for some time in the kirk and he was paid by those who
employed him"; when he dropped it very abruptly, witness fell
to it again. Robert Brown felt hurt at the above proposal and he
replied that he should be allowed to continue to enjoy his salary and perquisites and to keep school for the purpose of teaching as many scholars as he could; that if an assistant was to be got, he should only be appointed his successor and he should teach where he pleased. Later, many persons had presented petitions to Mr. Hamilton, requesting that something should be done for a new schoolmaster, as they complained that their children made no progress under Robert Brown from age and failure. Nothing had yet been done, and Robert Brown continued to teach and present as formerly.

SALT SMUGGLING AND THE SALT TAX.

Reference was frequently made to the amount of smuggling carried on in Irish salt. It was said to be stronger than the salt produced at Saltcoats and fetched a higher price. It was also stated that for 8 or 9 weeks two of the four salt-pans were stopped, because an increase in the salt duties further reduced the demand for locally made salt. These points are borne out by two letters sent by Mr. R. R. Cunninghame to the Commissioners of Excise in February and March, 1799. He states that the smuggling of Irish salt was done openly in daylight, and even into the harbour of Greenock. The Irish were allowed to import rock salt duty free, and this enabled them to sell manufactured salt more cheaply than the West of Scotland manufacturers, who made salt from sea-water. The Scottish manufacturers were further handicapped by an additional duty of 5/- per bushel imposed from 1st May, 1798. Mr. Cunninghame pointed out that from these two courses his sale of salt had dropped from 12,304 bushels (May, 1797 to March, 1798) to 3,520 bushels in the corresponding ten months of the following year. In addition to his own loss, he reckoned that the government had dropped over £2,850 in tax. He suggested that rock-salt should be allowed into Scotland free of duty and urged that more effective measures be taken to suppress smuggling.

The foregoing notes give a glimpse of various sides of life in one corner of our county in the time of Robert Burns.

The Wild Birds of Ayrshire To-day.


The geographical features of Ayrshire are so varied as to render it suitable to many different species. Hill country, studded with lochs, wooded and cultivated valleys often also containing a loch or two, the rich coastal belt and the extensive coast-line, the great bastion of Ailsa Craig—not to mention Lady Isle and the Doon estuary—form a terrain full of interesting possibilities and one which will not disappoint an ornithologist.

Unfortunately the County lies rather off the main routes of bird migration, though one well-established avian highway does exist. Some of the great hordes of migrant birds which strike Scotland's eastern coasts every Autumn, from the Scandinavian and Baltic areas and beyond, reach the south-western districts of the British Isles via the Forth and Clyde and the Irish Sea. Many of these pass through or over our county. Migrants using the less clearly established west coast route from Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands to the south-west of Europe may also at times strike Ayrshire in some numbers, though they are more likely to follow the Kintyre peninsula to Ireland. It is felt that if reliable observers were more plentiful many interesting species could yet be added to the county's list and some which seem now to be but occasional stragglers might be found to be regular passage migrants.

Since the publication, in 1929, of Paton & Pike's "Birds of Ayrshire," the following species have been added to the county list:—


1937—Goose, White-fronted. A. Anderson in "Scottish Naturalist."

1939—Hawfinch. In all probability bred at Rozelle in 1939. A juvenile with some down still adhering to its plumage was seen to be struck down by a hawk by one of the Rozelle foresters. The bird was taken to Mr. J. McCleary, Glengall, by Ayr, who identified it and kept it alive until the following spring. It proved to be a female. This information came to me as a result of my lecture.
1947—Bittern, Little. J. McCXINDLE in daily press. This bird is now preserved in the Dick Institute, Kilmarnock.
1947—Bewick’s Swan. “We have been informed by Mr. ERIC ANDREW that a single Bewick’s Swan frequented the vicinity of the Pow Burn, near Monkton, at least from April 30th to July 25th. It had gone by August 14th.” — “British Birds,” Vol. xlii, p. 126.
1948—Redstart, Black. A female or first winter male was seen at Blackrue, Barr. on 12th December, by G. H. ONSLOW.

The discovery in 1942 of a colony of Roseate Terns—unquestionably the most beautiful of all Terns—breeding in Ayrshire was of outstanding interest. The colony is still firmly established and the employment of a watcher during nesting time has reduced the risk of human depredations.

Apart from these new records there have been many changes of status during the twenty years which have elapsed since Paton & Pike published their work. In my opinion, and in so far as my own observations go, there has been a marked decrease in numbers of the following species:—Lesser Redpoll, King Ousel, Sedge Warbler, Redstart, Stonechat, Nightjar, Bean Goose, Puffin, Razorbill, Green and Golden Plovers, Landrail, Red and Black Grouse. To balance this depressing list increases have taken place in quite a number of interesting species, notably:—The Raven, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Goldfinch, Wheatear, Woodpecker (Great Spotted), Short-eared Owl, Greylag Goose, Elderduck, Goosander, Fulmar, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwit and Knot.

Bird life in any given district seems always to be changing, the works of man being sometimes responsible and sometimes not. In Carrick the rapidly developing activities of the Forestry Commission should lead to many interesting changes in bird population. The Short-eared Owl has already established itself as a breeding species in some strength in the Commission’s property, and one visualises such birds as Buzzards becoming comparatively common—and why not the Capercaillie? The increasing number of large reservoirs to supply our urban population is another man-made development wholly favourable to the bird population.

FURTHER VOLUMES OF “THE COLLECTIONS.”

Members of the Society may be interested to know that work is already in hand for the second and third volumes of “The Collections.” The Society has undertaken to prepare a series of articles dealing with certain aspects of the history of the Burgh of Ayr to commemorate the 750th Anniversary of the granting of the town’s Charter by William the Lion, 1202-6. A de luxe volume is to be published by the Town Council of Ayr, but the material collected will also form the bulk of the second volume of our “Collections.” We have, too, commissioned articles for the third volume. The date of appearance of these volumes depends largely on the state of the Society’s finances. To ensure the publication of a volume every other year, we must double our membership.

Editor.