

## BIRDS OF THE PERSIAN GULF ISLANDS

BY

CLAUD B. TICEHURST, M.A., M.R.C.S., M.B.O.U.  
(LATE CAPT., R.A.M.C.)

ASSISTED BY

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR PERCY Z. COX, G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., M.B.O.U.

AND

MAJOR R. E. CHEESMAN, M.B.O.U., F.R.G.S.

(With four plates and a map)

During the last four or five years a considerable amount of information has been gathered together about the bird life on various islets in the Persian Gulf, with a large collection of skins and series of eggs. The skins were presented to the British Museum and the Bombay Natural History Society and the eggs to the British Museum and Mr. E. C. S. Baker. Some islands were visited by Sir Percy Cox and Capt. R. E. Cheesman personally and to others Sir Percy Cox sent his collector Mr. La Personne to investigate. I have considered it best to refer to the avifauna of each island separately as the islets visited extend from the extreme north-west to the extreme south-east of the Gulf, a matter of some 550 miles. This paper is founded therefore on notes made by the above three observers and on specimens brought home. Notes on the eggs of the Tropic Bird and Cormorant have been kindly supplied me by Mr. Stuart Baker.

Starting at the south-eastern end at the entrance to the Gulf :—

### I. GREAT AND LITTLE QUOIN.

Two rocky islets, with a lighthouse, situated under Ras Masandan, the high rocky headland of Oman. Visited by Sir Percy Cox and Capt. Cheesman, September 23, 1920, who landed on Little Quoin. Several pairs of *Phaëton ætherius indicus* were flying round and in and out of crannies and probably had bred there. An Osprey and a pair of *Corvus corax ruficollis* seemed to be the only inhabitants. I may state that I have seen a clutch of three eggs of the Osprey said to have been taken on this island prior to 1914. On March 16, 1921, Swifts were seen doubtless, *Micropus murinus*, entering crevices in the cliff on the south side, the flock composed quite 200 birds but Capt. Cheesman could not be sure that they were breeding there. A few *Phaëtons* were seen near the island.

On May 6, some Persian Shearwaters were seen off the islands; on April 9, many were seen at sea off Ras-al-Hadd, Gulf of Oman, flying south, where also thousands of Red-necked Phalaropes were observed in flocks of 10 to 20. These flocks fly in the trough of the waves and just skim the crest. They swim with ease in a rough sea and are always very wild. (R. E. C.)

### II. HENJAM.

This small island, five miles long and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  broad, lies on the Persian side of the Straits of Ormuz under the lee of Kishim Island which itself is separated from the Persian mainland by Clarence Strait on the north. It is an important cable station of the Indo-European Telegraph Company and port of call for the B. I. Company's steamers. There is a native village with 30 houses and date groves on the western side and a larger village exists in the south.

Col. Butler was there for three days, May 17 to 20, 1877 (*S. F.*, vol. v) and Capt. Cheesman spent a few hours ashore on March 15 and 17, 1921. It is of volcanic formation with strata of shells, rocks and larva, and very little sand. At the south end there are a few bushes and about half a dozen *Sidera* trees (*Zizyphus* sp.) up to twenty feet high are dotted about the island. Hills rise 350 feet and are very bare. The following are recorded :—

Raven. *Corvus corax* subsp. A raven was seen on March 15 which Cheesman thought was *ruficollis*.

Crested Lark. *Galerida cristata* subsp. A few pairs are resident, noted by Cheesman and Butler. No specimens.

White-eared Bulbul. *Pycnonotus leucotis* subsp. A few pairs are resident. Cheesman saw old nests in the *Sidera* trees. No specimens.

Great Grey Shrike. *Lanius excubitor*. Butler records this in May as *lahtora*; more probably it is *aucheri* and it must be resident.

Osprey. *Pandion haliaëtus*. A pair were seen on March 15 by Cheesman; they were 'very agitated' so probably had a nest on the island.

Black Kite. *Milvus migrans*. Seen on March 15.

Egyptian vulture. *Neophron percnopterus*. Several seen on March 15. Possibly resident.

Macqueen's Bustard. *Chlamydotis undulata macqueeni*. Butler was told that a pair had been shot in the first week of April 1877 and that the female had an egg ready for extrusion.

Cormorant. *Phalacrocorax carbo*? Cheesman saw numbers in the vicinity on March 15.

Red-wattled Lapwing. *Lobivanellus indicus aigneri*. This Lapwing was noted by Butler and must have been resident.

Kentish Plover. *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*. Noted in March and May 20, is doubtless resident.

Little Ringed Plover. *Charadrius dubius curonicus*. Obtained on March 15.

Oystercatcher. *Hematopus ostralegus longipes*.

Curlew. *Numenius arquata lineatus*.

Common Sandpiper. *Tringa hypoleucus*.

Red-necked Phalarope. *Phalaropus lobatus*. Noted at sea in the vicinity in March and as late as May 17.

Reef Heron. *Demigretta sacra asha*.

Slender-billed Gull. *Larus genei* (= *gelastes*).

Black-headed Gull. *Larus ridibundus*.

Sooty Tern. *Sterna anæthetus fuligula*.

Lesser Crested Tern. *Sterna bengalensis bengalensis*.

Large Crested Tern. *Sterna bergii velox*.

Sandwich Tern. *Sterna s. sandwichensis*.

White-cheeked Tern. *Sterna repressa*.

Noted on May 17.

} Noted on March 15.  
} Noted on March 15  
} and May 17.  
} Obtained on March 15 at Kishim.

### III. TANB AND NABI-U-TANB.

Tanb Island situated at the eastern end of the Persian Gulf in Lat. 26° 16' N. and Long. 55° 19' E. will be familiar to those who have gone from Indian ports up to Basra, as the British India Company's ships pass within a mile or so of the island. As there is a lighthouse and water on the island it was chosen by Sir Percy Cox as a suitable place to send a collector in order to see to what extent migration could be observed and what species halted there during the spring passage. After a preliminary visit by Sir Percy Cox and Capt. R. E. Cheesman and with the kind co-operation of the Director, Royal Indian Marine, the collector was sent to live on the island during the period March 13 to April 14, 1921.

The island is about eight miles in circumference and consists of a volcanic nucleus with a large accretion of coral round it. On the east side is a flat shelving silvery strand and towards the centre of the island the land rises by a series of ridges of volcanic rock to 165 feet where the lighthouse stands. The light is visible for twenty-one miles. The western side is rocky with occasional sand beaches. On the north-east the land ends in a cliff thirty to forty feet high. At the south end there is an Arab village with three wells, a clump of date palms, two banyan trees and a small amount of cultivation. Most of the island is desert, the low parts support a certain amount of *Sueda*

bushes while in the valleys between the ridges there are dwarf acacias some of which attain the size of bushes fifteen feet high.

The lighthouse failed to add a single specimen; no doubt in the clear atmosphere of the Persian Gulf night, birds are not attracted to the lantern and I found the same thing at Manora Light, Karachi.

Nabi-u-Tanb lies seven miles south-west of Tanb and is one mile long and three and a quarter miles broad with a rocky hill 116 feet high; it is barren, uninhabited and without water.

Sixty-three species are now recorded from the two islands and in nearly every case the identifications are borne out by specimens; only seven species are resident—Raven, Great Grey Shrike, Crested Lark, Osprey, Norfolk Plover, Kentish Plover and Reef Heron. Three are breeding visitors—Sooty Tern, White-checked Tern and Tropic Bird. The rest are passage migrants except perhaps a few Waders, Chiffchaff, Isabelline and Desert Wheatears which may be winter visitors, while the exact status of several are doubtful:—

Brown-necked Raven. *Corvus c. ruficollis*. One pair inhabits the island, breeding on the ledge of a clay cliff. On March 24 they had three young.

Grey-backed Warbler. *Aëdon g. familiaris*. One on March 24; a few on March 29 in scrub on the hillside.

Upcher's Warbler. *Hippolais languida*. Fairly common on April 2 when there was a small 'rush' of Warblers which took shelter under walls and in thorn bushes in the small bushy valleys; one secured April 3.

Eastern Orphean Warbler. *Sylvia h. crassirostris*. Noted from March 30 to April 2 during the rush.

Menetries' Warbler. *Sylvia mystacea*. Came in in numbers on April 1 and 2.

Desert Warbler. *Sylvia n. nana*. One obtained in bushes on the hill—top on April 2.

Chiffchaff. *Phylloscopus c. collybita*. A female W 58 obtained March 29 is quite indistinguishable from English specimens.

Brown Willow Warbler. *Phylloscopus c. tristis*. One obtained on March 30. Chiffchaffs were present on the island on arrival on March 13 and an influx took place on March 30. They frequented the date garden chiefly.

Great Grey Shrike. *Lanius e. aucheri*: Resident and one of the commonest birds on the island, frequenting the acacias. In about every fifth bush there were nests of varying ages. On March 19 a nest contained young already, but some were building yet and in some cases old nests appeared to be repaired. Eggs were found up to April 12 and four seemed to be the usual clutch. A larder discovered on March 21 close to a nest contained a chick of a Wader (probably Kentish Plover) and two shrike chicks belonging to some other pair. Shrikes were present on the island on September 23.

Bay-backed Shrike. *Lanius vittatus*. Two seen and one obtained March 24. Status doubtful. This is the most western record of this Indian species, of which a point from 100 miles W.N.W. of Bampur in Persian Baluchistan has hitherto been the western limit.

Masked Shrike. *Lanius nubicus*. Several noted and obtained on passage between March 24 and 28 frequenting low acacia bushes. This is an extension of this bird's range eastward; Blanford did not meet with it in Eastern Persia.

Isabelline Shrike. *Lanius isabellinus*. On passage from March 22 to 30.

Red-tailed Shrike. *Lanius phoenicuroides*. On March 28 and April 2 a few in the date grove.

Woodchat Shrike. *Lanius senator niloticus*. Single bird obtained on March 19 and 20. Scarce. The previous easternmost record of this bird is from Niriz (east of Shiraz) where it breeds.

Pied Flycatcher. *Muscicapa hypoleuca semitorquata*. On March 22, 1918, I saw a male on board when off Tanb Island; this is the most eastern record that I am aware of.

Indian Pied Wheatear. *Enanthe picata*. Noted as fairly abundant on March 27.

Pied Wheatear. *Enanthe leucomela leucomela*. Obtained on several dates, on March 27 to April 7, presumably on passage.

Isabelline Wheatear. *Enanthe isabellina*. Fairly abundant up to end of March, probably a winter visitor.

Desert Wheatear. *Enanthe deserti atrogularis*. Abundant on arrival on March 13; probably a winter visitor; last noted on April 2,

Stonechat. *Saxicola torquata maura*. One obtained on March 23.

Redstart. *Phoenicurus phoenicurus mesoleuca*. Obtained on passage on March 23 and 27, both males. The known breeding quarters and winter habitat (Abyssinia, etc.) of this bird lie well to the west of Tanb Island. Blanford did not meet with it in Eastern Persia.

Black Redstart. *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*. Several on passage on March 27 to 30. Breeds in Persia.

White-throated Robin. *Irania gutturalis*. A male obtained on March 29. Was the only one seen.

Rock Thrush. *Monticola saxatilis*. One obtained on April 6.

White-breasted Munia. *Uroloncha malabarica*. One obtained on April 7, the only one seen. This bird must, I think, have been a stray; it may possibly occur further west into Persia than is known. There are two in the British Museum from Muscat collected by Sir Percy Cox, but its occurrence on Tanb is the furthest west that I am aware of.

Ortolan Bunting. *Emberiza hortulana*. One caught in a rat trap in the date garden on March 27.

Grey-headed Bunting. *Emberiza cineracea semenowi*. One obtained on March 23 on passage. This must be about the most eastern record of this bird.

Black-headed bunting. *Emberiza melanocephala*. Several arrived on April 3; the next day a flock of 20-30 (nearly all males) were seen in some new wheat, by April 7 all had gone. The large east to west migration of this species therefore touches this island.

Common Swallow. *Hirunda rustica*. Several seen on April 4, and some passed over to the north on April 14. Apparently only a passage migrant.

White Wagtail. *Motacilla alba dukhunensis*. Plentiful in the date garden and in the lighthouse quarters on March 27. Breeds in Siberia.

Blue-headed-Wagtail. *Motacilla flava beema*.

Black-headed-Wagtail. *Motacilla feldegg melanogriseus*. An arrival of wagtails took place on March 22 and more on the next two days—they frequented chiefly the sandy plain and were gone by March 25. Several specimens of these two forms were obtained of both sexes.

Grey Wagtail. *Motacilla cinerea*. Several with the yellow wagtails were obtained. Tail 100-103.

Tree Pipit. *Anthus trivialis trivialis*. A few with larks on March 29.

Crested Lark. *Galerida cristata* subsp. Resident and common. Unfortunately no series of the Crested Lark was obtained. There are two freshly moulted specimens obtained on September 23, and two worn bleached birds on March 28 and April 2. The former of course are not necessarily the resident bird, they are both males with wing 109-105 which is small for *magna* nor do they resemble *magna* quite in colour. They are darker, not so grey as *chendoola*, though odd ones of the latter race come very near them; on the other hand I have seen no *chendoola* with a wing as long as 109. They do not appear either to be *tardinata*, not having the breast and back so coarsely marked. The two breeding birds have wing measurements ♂ 104 ♀ 98, much smaller than any *magna*, and they are far more worn and bleached than specimens of *chendoola* are at the same time of year.

Common Bee-eater. *Merops apiaster*. First seen on March 17, two on April 3.

Persian Bee-eater. *Merops persicus persicus*. First noted on April 1.

Hoopoe. *Upupa epops epops*. Two seen on March 14.

Pallid Swift. *Micropus murinus murinus*. A flock of about 20 was on the island on arrival and were seen on and off to the end of the month. Status doubtful.

Cuckoo. *Cuculus canorus subtelephonus*. One obtained, a female, on April 13; two had been on the island for some time; a very pale bird with wing 190. From an examination of Central Asian cuckoos I am inclined to think that Zarudny's *subtelephonus* should be recognized: the grey parts are distinctly pale, they are mostly finely barred and have short wings.

Scops Owl. *Otus scops pulchellus*. One caught on March 20, one on March 16; heard on March 24 and 27. Single birds on passage.

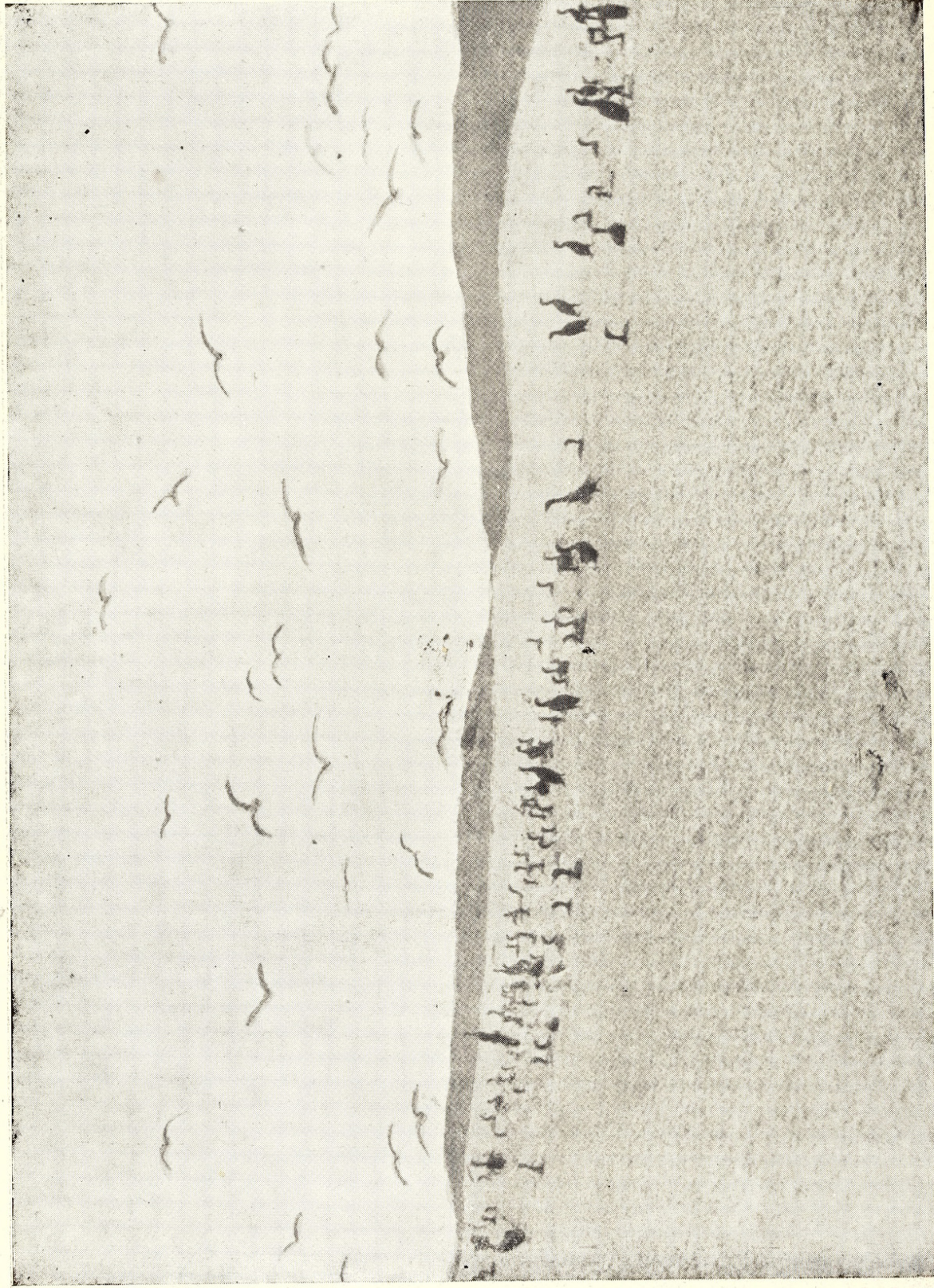
Osprey. *Pandion haliaëtus*. A pair frequented the island and were obtained; the Osprey does not breed on Tanb and the organs of these birds were minute. Another pair however frequents Nabi-u-Tanb and nests on the



The home of a Crab Plover Colony, Warba Island.

May 19, 1907.

(Photo by Sir P. Z. Cox).



Cormorants nesting on Halul Islands.  
(Enlargement from a photo by Major R. E. Cheesman.)

top of the islet (100 ft). Two nests were examined there, both were empty on April 9 and appeared to be alternative nests.

Black Kite. *Milvus migrans*. Two seen on April 11.

Harrier. *Circus* sp. Two seen on September 23.

Kestrel. *Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus*. Odd ones seen from time to time, one obtained on March 26. Probably a winter visitor.

Turtle dove. *Streptopelia* sp. A Turtle Dove was seen on April 13. Probably *S. t. arenicolor* or *S. senegalensis*.

Spotted Sandgrouse. *Pterocles senegallus*. Flock noted several times between March 13 and April 7; on being disturbed they flew out towards the Persian mainland and may have been visitors thence. No evidence of breeding could be obtained.

Stone Curlew. *Edicnemus edicnemus astutus*. At least one pair resident on the island. A male obtained on March 29 had an incubation patch. W. 225.

Cream-coloured Courser. *Cursorius cursor* (= *gallicus*: auct.). Seen between March 14 and 25. Status uncertain.

Turnstone. *Arenaria interpres*. Flock on the shore during last half of March; one windswept bird was blown into the loose folds of an Arab's garment and captured.

Grey Plover. *Squatarola squatarola squatarola*. Two obtained on March 20 were the only ones seen. ♂ W. 197, B. 30; ♀ W. 191, B. 29.; obviously belong to the typical race.

Little Ringed Plover. *Charadrius curonicus dubius*. A few inhabited the sandy plain away from the seashore up to April 6.

Kentish Plover. *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*. Common, resident and breeding. Nest with 3 eggs on March 15, five yards from edge of sea cliff four feet high. Another nest with three eggs was made of a few twigs and a single goat's-dropping in sandy soil amongst short scrub, also near the cliff's edge on March 28. 3 ♂♂ W. 110-115, B. 15.5-17.5 (exp). 7 ♀♀ W. 108-112, B. 15.5-17.5. This series is not distinguishable from a series from Egypt.

Mongolian Sand Plover. *Charadrius mongolus atrifrons*. Winter visitor; one obtained from a flock September 29 and another on April 11.

Geoffrey's Sand Plover. *Charadrius leschenaultii*. Two obtained out of a large flock on September 23; probably also a winter visitor.

Sanderling. *Caladris alba*. A flock frequented the beach most of the time.

Oystercatcher. *Haematopus ostralegus*. Flock seen on March 13.

Red-necked Phalarope. *Phalaropus lobatus*. Seen near the island on April 3 and 9.

Hemprich's Gull. *Larus hemprichi*. Three seen, two obtained on Nabi-u-Tanb on April 9. No sign of breeding.

White-cheeked Tern. *Sterna repressa*. Many on the island at the south end on September 23; Sir Percy Cox found a colony of 2-300 preparing to breed on the sandy plain on the south-east promontory on May 28, 1905; natives say they breed in great numbers. Another large colony were beginning to breed on Nabi-u-Tanb on May 28, 1905. La Personne does not record any terns so that presumably none arrive at the nesting ground as early as April 14. Many breeding on Nabi-u-Tanb on June 30, 1923.

Sooty Tern. *Sterna anæthetus fuligula*. Sir Percy Cox found a colony on Nabi-u-Tanb on May 28, 1905. Breeding there on June 30, 1923 in numbers.

Cormorant. *Phalacrocorax* sp. ? Seen on March 13 near the island.

Tropic Bird. *Phaeton ætherius indicus*. This Tropic Bird does not breed on Tanb itself, but on Nabi-u-Tanb, an islet seven miles west of Tanb; young and old birds were brought to La Personne by fishermen in the first week of April 1921 and on the ninth he paid a flying visit to the islet. The islet is about a mile in diameter and except for a short beach is girt by high cliffs, which, on their interior face slope down to the centre, forming a bowl where at that time there was a swamp. There are no trees, but there is some scrub on the plain. At the base of the sea cliffs are many water worn fissures, mere cracks at the top and eight inches to two feet wide at the base and going in some six feet some ending in an enlarged chamber; it was in these fissures that the Tropic Birds were breeding. A good many were seen to be flying in and out of the fissures entering and leaving close to where the fissures met the beach. It seems that only one pair occupied each fissure; most nesting sites held one young bird but from one two young and a rotten egg were taken as well as a pair of adults. The egg appeared to be a year

old, and it is not recorded whether the two young were together or not. The young taken varied in size, a few were just feathering, but most were nearly ready to fly. On March 24, 1923, La Personne paid another flying visit and obtained one egg almost ready to hatch.

The young in down is well covered with greyish-white down, darker grey on the occiput. The young fully feathered resembles the adult except for colour of bill and feet and that the central tail feathers are short and tipped with black. 4 ♂♂ W. 282-295, B. 52-55 (exp.); central tail feathers exceed the rest by 225-235. 5 ♀♀ W. 284-293, B. 52-56.5 (exp.); central tail feathers exceed the rest by 176 (worn) to 235. Bill orange; feet blue and chrome yellow.

In no case were the long central feathers perfect: either one was broken or moulting or missing.

The first absolutely authentic egg ever taken of this bird was one procured by La Personne on April 9, 1921, at Nabi-u-Tanb Island. The ground colour of this egg is a pale reddish cream and it is densely covered all over with freckles and tiny specks of darker reddish brown. Towards the broader end these spots become larger; much more numerous and much darker, forming a blackish red cap at the extreme end, the spots running into one another and forming big patches. The texture, like that of all Tropic Birds, is very coarse, the surface being rough to the touch and altogether glossless. In shape, it is a long and blunt oval, and it measures 58.0 × 42.6 mm.

The other egg in the Cox-Cheesman collection and labelled 'Unknown' is undoubtedly also an egg of this species. It was taken on Nabi-u-Tanb Island on April 23, 1923, and like the last described egg, was very hard set, in this egg the bird being almost ready to hatch. The egg differs considerably from the last. The ground colour is a dull white, only very faintly tinged with cream. The markings consist of deep red-brown blotches, numerous and large at the extreme larger end, very sparse and much paler elsewhere. The texture is the same, but it is a small, proportionately rather broader egg, measuring 54.6 × 41.6.

'I have a third egg of this species in my collection taken by Major Pitman in April on one of the small islands in the Persian Gulf. This is a much larger egg, measuring 64.0 × 48.1, and was not identified by Major Pitman, who thought it might be that of an Osprey laid by accident on the ground. It is, I think, however, undoubtedly the egg of this Tropic Bird. It differs considerably from either of the two eggs already described. The ground colour is dull white, with hardly any markings at all over the greater part of the surface, but with a broad scattered ring of dull light brown blotches and smears at the larger end.'

These three eggs will probably be found to represent the extreme range of colouration in the eggs of this Tropic Bird, and they can be exactly matched with eggs of *Phaëthon rubricaudus*.

Persian Shearwater. *Puffinus persicus*. Seen on March 14 off the island; apparently does not breed on Tanb. The breeding ground remains unknown though it must be in this neighbourhood somewhere. The type was obtained between Gwader and Muscat on February 21, 1872 and is moulting its wings. The only other specimen in the British Museum was obtained between Gwadar and Henjam by Butler on May 17, 1877, when he found it common but very shy. On March 22, 1918, I found it swarming in the Straits of Ormuz and saw one flock of over 200 birds, but saw none west of Tanb. At the same place on November 17, I saw none. Until it can be ascertained what month this bird breeds in it is hopeless to try and find its nesting place.

Reef Héron. *Demicregretta sacra asha*. Two seen. A nest with three eggs was found by Sir Percy Cox on Nabi-u-Tanb on May 28, 1905.

#### IV. NABI-UL-FARUR.

Is 4 miles long and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  broad and rises in dark volcanic hills to a height of 465 feet. The firm belief that this might be the breeding ground of the Persian Shearwater led Sir Percy Cox to send La Personne to investigate the island in 1923. Visited by La Personne on July 6, 1923. 45 miles W. by S. of Tanb Island.

Sooty Tern. *Sterna anaetheta fuligula* and White-cheeked Tern. *Sterna repressa*.

Were nesting in large numbers; eggs fresh. Between this island and

Abu Musa several flocks of Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus*, 22-30 in each flock, were seen by Cheesman on March 18, 1921. The birds appeared to be feeding on surface fry.

#### V. SIR-BU-NA' AIR.

Sixty-five miles south of Nabi-ul-Farur. Visited by Sir Percy Cox on May 29, 1905. Northern half is a waste of volcanic debris; southern half holds some scanty *salsola* vegetation.

White-cheeked Tern. *Sterna repressa*, Sooty Tern. *Sterna a. fuligula* and Lesser Crested Tern. *Sterna b. bengalensis*. Were seen in numbers, together with a few Large Crested Tern. *Sterna bergii velox* and Hemprich's Gull. *Larus hemprichi*. No birds were as yet breeding.

#### VI. HALUL ISLAND.

Is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles long and 1 mile broad and about 115 miles W. by N. of Sir-bu-Na' Air and 75 S. E. of Ras Rakan. Visited by Sir Percy Cox on July 25, 1906 and by Capt. Cheesman, March 19, 1921.

A rocky island with small cone-shaped hills rising to 100 feet, rocks dark red with iron oxide; at the north end a gravel plain half a mile across ending in small cliffs to the sea; at the south end there is some scrub (*Halopeplis perfoliata*).

The following birds were recorded:—

Common Wheatear. *Enanthe enanthe*. Pied Chat. *Æ. leucomela*.

Blue-headed Wagtail. *Motacilla flava*. White Wagtail. *M. alba*.

Common Swallow. *Hirundo rustica*. Red-rumped Swallow. *H. rufula*.

Tawny Pipit. *Anthus campestris griseus*. Sand Martin. *Riparia riparia*.

Hoopoe. *Upupa epops*. All halting on passage March 19, 1921.

Tropic Bird. *Phaeton indicus*. Three seen on March 19.

Black-headed Gull. *Larus ridibundus*. Few.

Slender-billed Gull. *Larus genei*. Thousands; on March 19.

Lesser Black-backed Gull. *Larus fuscus taimyrensis*. A good many round the island; these birds appeared over the cormorant colony as soon as the latter were disturbed, swooping down to devour eggs and chicks as well as regurgitated food thrown out by the young and the parent birds.

White-cheeked Tern. *Sterna albigena*, Sooty Tern. *Sterna a. fuligula* and

Lesser Crested Tern. *Sterna b. bengalensis* are recorded by Sir Percy Cox on July 25, 1906, but apparently their eggs had been recently taken by Arabs. Cheesman saw many terns off the island during his visit.

Osprey. *Pandion haliaëtus*. Two pairs were breeding during Cheesman's visit; from one nest the young had already flown and the youngsters were found on the shore. The nest was situated on the top of a cone-shaped hill and held only fish remains and remains of young cormorants. The other nest, also situated on a cone-shaped hill, held two young almost ready to fly. The nest was made of sticks of a dead salt bush (*Salsola*?) and was about 1 foot thick and 5.6 feet across; by the nest were the remains of a tern, a slender-billed gull and fish. On January 21, 1919, Capt. Poyntz, R. I. M., took 3 eggs from one of the nests. Another disused nest was probably an alternative site.

Socotra Cormorant. *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*. The most interesting discovery made during the exploration of the Persian Gulf Islands was the finding of the breeding quarters of this cormorant. This species was first discovered on the island of Socotra on December 7, 1898 (see *Birds of Socotra*, p. 49) since when little or nothing seems to have been published about it. On March 19, 1921, R. I. M. S. 'Nearchus' anchored off Halul Island and Capt. Cheesman was able to go ashore. Ten miles distant from the island a thin cloud of Cormorants could be seen wending their way towards land and from the numbers subsequently seen it was surmised that a vast colony must here exist. Capt. Cheesman timed one flock which was leaving the island for the fishing grounds and found it took 8 minutes to pass a fixed point at the rate of 20 per second—roughly 10,000 birds in a flock. The colony was located on the gravel plain at the north end with no difficulty—indeed it could be smelt half a mile away! Here cormorants were standing about like black ninepins in thousands while another army were esconced on the cliff's edge. On being disturbed the colony began to walk towards the sea, some rising on the wing



Ticehurst, Claud B., Cox, Percy, and Cheesman, Robert Ernest. 1925. "Birds of the Persian Gulf Islands." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 30, 725–733.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/185227>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/154363>

#### **Holding Institution**

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

#### **Sponsored by**

Biodiversity Heritage Library

#### **Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In Copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions/>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.