

## RINGING BIRDS IN HUNGARY.

## A NEW AND VALUABLE METHOD.

BY

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DURING a recent visit to Hungary I had the pleasure of inspecting, by the kindness of the Director, Herr Otto Herman, the Royal Hungarian Central Bureau for Ornithology.

This institution has done and is doing, as is well known, excellent biological work. It is now housed in a fine new building in Budapest, and has a most efficient staff.

I was particularly interested in the section devoted to the ringing of birds, which is under the control of Herr J. Schenk. Ringing was started in 1908, and from then until and including 1914 some twenty-four thousand birds have been marked. Most of these were ringed as nestlings, but recently a number of adults of certain species have been marked. The best results have been obtained from Storks, Herons, Waders, Gulls and Starlings, the percentage of recoveries in Storks, Herons and Gulls being from three to five, while in other species the recoveries have been from one to two per cent.

Herr Herman very kindly made arrangements for me to accompany Herr Schenk on one of the marking expeditions which he constantly makes. The first day we visited Lake Velenceze—a large, shallow, rush- and reed-grown lake not far from Budapest. Here, nestling Black-headed Gulls, Black Terns and Redshanks were ringed, as well as one or two Black-necked Grebes, which were exceedingly common but impossible to catch except when very young, and also two Pochard ducklings.

This lake, which is well known to several English ornithologists, is crowded with bird-life and is a most

fascinating spot to visit, especially in June when many young ones are hatched.

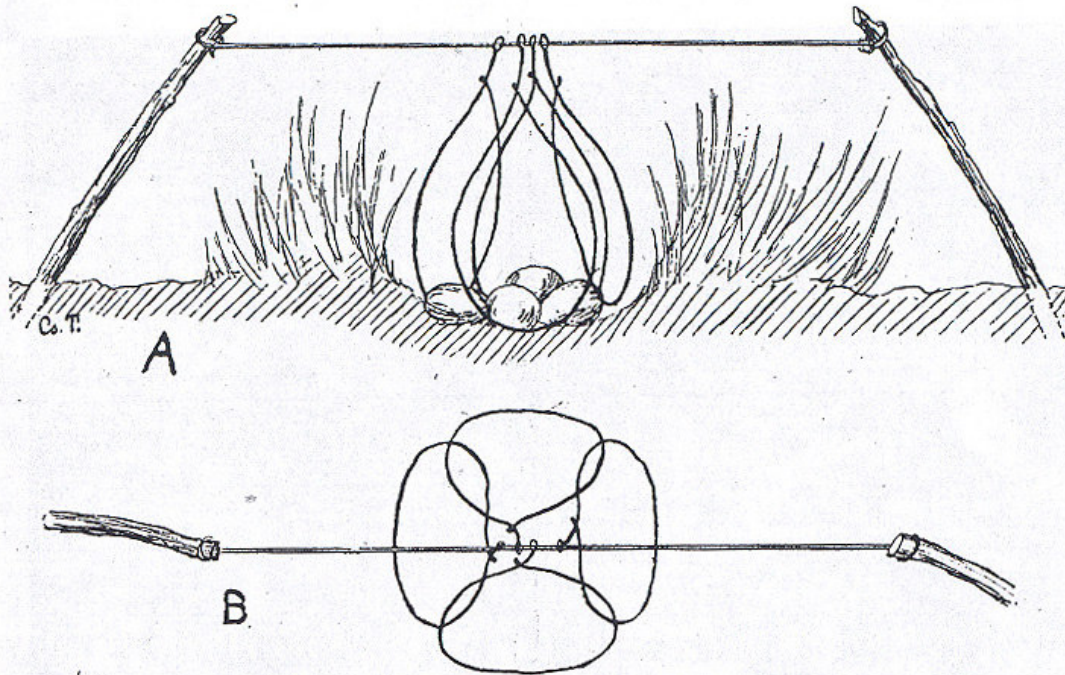
On the two following days we were at Ürbö where, on a great plain of rough grass, marsh and shallow rush-grown water, Black-tailed Godwits, Ruffs, Redshanks, Lapwings, Kentish Plovers, Black Terns and other birds were nesting.

Here Herr Schenk introduced me to a method of marking birds which was quite new to me, viz. by snaring the birds at the nest. I had often wished that we might be able to do this because it should lead to results very difficult to arrive at by other means. With our present methods we are unable to obtain a sufficient series of facts to show whether the larger birds nest year after year in the same place, and when and where the young breed. The last point is no doubt the more important as it bears directly on the question of how birds become distributed, and if sufficient facts could be collected by snaring and ringing combined much light might be thrown on such difficult questions as range extension and the way in which birds choose their breeding-places. Take, for instance, the case of the Black-headed Gull, of which we have ringed many thousands of young ones, unfortunately we have very few records to show when and where these young ones breed, and if we could snare the nesting-birds at a number of colonies on a large scale we should no doubt catch some of our ringed birds and thus obtain some very useful facts.

Herr Schenk has used this method successfully in Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Reeve and Black Tern, during the last three seasons. Most of the birds so caught do not desert their nests—the same Redshank, for instance, has been repeatedly caught on the same nest; some, however, desert the nest but breed again in the same season, so that this would do no harm in common species.

As to results, Herr Schenk has not yet gone far enough to get many recoveries, but in the second year he caught three birds which he had snared and ringed in the same place the year before, and in the third year he caught eight ringed birds.

Although he has ringed many young, he has not yet caught one of them as a breeding-bird in a subsequent year, but it is only since 1912 that he has been ringing



SHOWING METHOD OF SETTING SNARE.

A.—Side-view. B.—From above.

in this locality, and it is probable that most waders do not breed in their first year.

The snare itself consists of two pieces of stick, one end of each being sharpened to enable its being pushed into the ground. The length of the sticks may vary according to the nature of the ground and the site and height of the nest. They are connected together by a piece of string about fifteen inches long, tied firmly to the top of each stick. In the centre of the string four horse-hair nooses are fastened by means of slip knots. A noose consists of a strand of ten or twelve horse-hairs about fifteen inches long and fastened together by a knot at each end.

The sticks must be pushed firmly into the ground one on each side of the nest, so that the middle of the string is over the centre of the nest. When so fixed the string must be taut. The snares are then arranged in large loops reaching from the string to the nest, so that the eggs are completely surrounded and the bird cannot get to them without passing through one of the snares. How the snare should be set is very clearly shown in the accompanying drawings, which have been very kindly prepared for the purpose of explaining the method to English ornithologists by Herr Titus Csörgey, the Secretary of the Royal Hungarian Central Bureau for Ornithology.

Sometimes a bird will push aside the snares without being caught, in which case they must be readjusted. If there is a wind each snare should be fixed by stalks of grass or small twigs to prevent its being blown out of place. The places where the snares have been set must be carefully marked, and they must be visited every hour or two. If the weather is very hot the snares should be visited more frequently, as if a bird is left long in a snare in very hot weather it is likely to be suffocated. This, however, would seldom happen in this country, and Herr Schenk informs me that of two hundred birds snared this season only one—a Lapwing—has been killed.

I am afraid it is now too late to practise this method this year, but I hope that next year some of our "ringers" will take it up, and we may look forward to some interesting results. In any case, I am much indebted to Herr Herman and Herr Schenk for their kindness in giving me the opportunity of seeing this method worked, and of bringing it to the notice of the readers of BRITISH BIRDS.