

ROOKERIES IN ROTHESAY

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Roger Ratcliffe undertook a count of Rooks' nests in Rothesay as part of the Junior Naturalists' display at the Rotary Hobbies exhibition in 1969. It seemed worth while to place this count on record. The diagram is based on the one Roger made for the exhibition. He made his last count about the third week in April, some nests were probably built after that date.

The largest rookery is in the Foley woods where 25 trees were occupied. Rooks have built for generations at the Castle. For some years attempts were made to drive them away on account of the mess they make but this year 6 nests were built in elm trees at the High Street - Castlehill Street corner of the Castle grounds. The two nests at Colbeck Place may be the start of a new rookery. Apart from the rookery at Ardmory House about a mile from Rothesay Pier, there are no rookeries outwith the town.

In his *Birds of Bute* (1927) J. M. McWilliam reports that there were only two rookeries in Bute, one on the outskirts of Rothesay, the other at Craigmore. One at Kingarth Manse had not been used since 1924.

The Rook Roost which was described by J. M. McWilliam in 1923 in the *Scottish Naturalist* still continues. His estimate was that perhaps 12,000 came to the roost in the evening. The wood used then has been cut down but the birds have moved a little further south. During the winter months they come by the thousand from their feeding grounds in Cowal, Ayrshire, Renfrew and Argyll, collecting in groups all over the island until they gather near Loch Ascog making the fields black before they rise and fly off to the roost. This coming in the evening and going in the morning is quite a feature of bird life in Bute. Starlings and jackdaws share the roost. Surprisingly many rubber bands and fragments of bus tickets litter the ground below the jackdaws nesting places beside the roost. I am grateful to Mr. R. A. Milligan for his observation about this.

