Greenwich for the six months April to September was 22.21 in., whilst for the following summer, 1904, it was 8.69 in. "British Rainfall," dealing with observations from 1726 to 1891, shows that during the first forty years the rainfall in only nine years reached the average, and from 1738 to 1762, a period of twenty-five years, there is only one year above the average; this is a more persistent drought than has occurred in the nineteenth or twentieth century. There was a succession of wet years ending with 1882, and this was followed by a very dry period. In the twenty years 1883 to 1902 the Greenwich observations show an aggregate deficiency of rain amounting to more than 40 in. During this period there were sixteen years with a deficiency, one year

with the average fall, and three years with an excess. Each year from 1895 to 1902 had a deficient rainfall, the total deficiency in the eight years amounting to 25.5 in.

The question of interest is now: When will the exceptional heat and drought of the present year cease? The absence of rain is continuing well into July, and each week the drought is becoming more serious over the whole country. The increased interest in meteorology, brought about by the late war, has added much to the staff and efficiency of the Meteorological Office. Every effort is being made to improve our knowledge of the weather changes, and probably in a few years it will become possible to predict the chief characteristic features of a season.

The Scarcity of Swallows.

By DR. WALTER E. COLLINGE.

FOR some years past certain ornithologists have directed attention to the decreasing number of swallows seen in the British Isles during the months from April to September. This diminution was particularly marked in 1918 and 1919, less so in 1920, but is still more apparent in the present year. For a time the scarcity was denied by many, or stated to be only of local occurrence, but the condition of affairs during the present season is sufficiently well marked to convince the most sceptical.

The swallow economically is one of our most valuable birds, its food consisting practically entirely of insects, and any scarcity of these birds removes a most important factor in the destruction of injurious insects. The causes which have led to this scarcity are not at present all known, but there are some which have been operating for a considerable time past, and their effects are now making themselves felt.

First, there is the deplorable mortality of migrants which takes place around our coasts in connection with the lighthouses and lightships, and, as has previously been pointed out, a considerable percentage of these birds might be saved. Something towards minimising this danger has already been done, but the swallow is

a day-migrant, and so largely, if not entirely, escapes this danger.

The enormous increase of the house-sparrow during recent years has undoubtedly had much to do with the decrease of the swallow. Not only do the sparrows take up their abode in the swallows' nests, but they molest and persecute the birds during the whole period of incubation. In the United States there has of recent years been a very serious decrease in the number of house-martins due to this cause.

There are, however, other causes for the present scarcity which do not arise in this country. In 1918 and 1919 the continuous waves of June migrants were unobserved or of very short duration, and during the present season they have been still fewer, all of which clearly indicates a diminishing immigration. Moreover, in 1919 and 1920 the majority of the swallows commenced their southern migration early in August.

In view of the importance of the swallow economically, the question is one calling for immediate attention and investigation, and until we know more about the matter it might be well to place this bird and its eggs under stricter protection.

The King George V. Dock, London.

A FUNCTION of special interest and importance in the history of the Port of London was performed on Friday last, when the King visited North Woolwich for the purpose of opening and naming the new dock of the Port of London Authority which has been under construction since 1912.

The addition to the enclosed water area of the port amounts to 64 acres, and as the depth of the dock is 38 ft., the new accommodation will prove extremely useful for large ocean-going vessels of the present day. The dock is entered by a lock

800 ft. long and 100 ft. wide, having a depth of 45 ft. over its sill at high water, and 20 ft. less at low water. The capacity of the chamber can be increased to a maximum length of 910 ft. by placing a *caisson* in a special recess instead of using the innermost pair of gates. The dock averages 600 ft. in width, but tapers from east to west. On the north side there is a concrete quay wall of the ordinary type. On the south side a somewhat novel arrangement has been adopted. Projecting into the dock, and parallel with the quay line at a distance of 54 ft. there-