

Tasmanian Swamp-Quail is altogether a larger and more handsome species than *Synæcus australis*. Both species are found in Tasmania, sometimes frequenting the same locality, but *S. diemenensis* is not found in Australia.

"Typically the eggs of this species can be distinguished from those of *Synæcus australis*, which in Tasmania may be found breeding in the same district, by their larger size, the prevailing yellowish-olive hue of their ground colour, and their more distinct markings."

Colonel W. V. Legge, C.M.B.O.U., &c., author of "The Birds of Ceylon," and for many years a resident in Tasmania, can confirm Mr. North's statement. It is therefore evident that *S. diemenensis* is more than a "race." This demonstrates the mischief that can be done by a "cabinet" man abroad intermeddling with the home work of Australians, where local field knowledge is so indispensable.

"The Birds of Australia."

As Mr. G. M. Mathews has apparently some invincible objection to sending his work (save two odd parts of vol. ii.) to *The Emu* for review—a journal probably more interested in Australian ornithology than any other—the following notice from *The Field*, 31st May, 1913, may be taken as a fair and unbiased criticism on the progress of Mr. Mathews' important work:—

"Since our last notice of this finely illustrated work (*Field*, 1st February), three more parts have appeared. Part 5 of vol. ii. includes a continuation of the Gulls and Skuas, and contains also the title page of the volume and index. The first part of vol. iii. includes the Plovers, amongst which are some very remarkable forms which are peculiar to Australia. Amongst them is the Red-kneed Dottrel (*Erythronys cinctus*, Gould). The account given of it by Mr. Mathews is very meagre compared with that published by Gould forty-eight years ago in his 'Handbook to the Birds of Australia.' Mr. Mathews describes it from Parry's Creek, North-West Australia, and gives its distribution as 'West Australia, Northern Territory,' mentioning no other localities in which it has been found, not even those recorded by Gould. It has a much wider range than he supposes. We happen to know this little bird very well, and have received specimens from Queensland, North-East Australia, and seen others which were sent from the Gomm Station on the Murray River, South Australia. The name which he gives it in his text, *Erythronys cinctus mixtus*—which does not correspond with the lettering of his plate, a fault frequently noticed in this work—suggests that he considers the north-western example which he describes to differ in some way from the type. But as he does not indicate in what respect it differs, and the plate gives a good representation of the bird described by Gould, we fail to see why any change of name is necessary. Similarly, the so-called Eastern Turnstone is separated from the well-known species which is commonly to be met with on our own coasts, and its geographical distribution—stated to be 'Eastern Siberia to Alaska, wandering to Australia in the non-breeding season'—is very much wider than this. The Turnstone, in fact, is well-nigh cosmopolitan, as may be seen by looking at the list of localities given by Sharpe in his 'Catalogue' of the *Limicola* in the British Museum (pp. 99-103), the only other species of Turnstone recognized by him and other authorities being the Black-headed Turnstone (*S.*

melanocephalus), found in Western North America from Alaska to Monterey in California. We are aware that certain American ornithologists separate the common Turnstone of the Old World from that found in North and South America, giving them different sub-specific names; but the difference relied upon appears to be nothing more than individual variation, and anyone who is familiar with the appearance of the Turnstone at all seasons of the year will be aware that the plumage of the old and young both in summer and winter shows considerable variation. Mr. Mathews would have done well to point out that the larger of the two figures on his plate is an immature bird. The same remark applies to his plate of *Charadrius geoffroyi*. The well-known Grey Plover, Australian specimens of which were properly recognized by Gould, Sharpe, Ramsay, and others, as *Squatarola helvetica*, is renamed by Mr. Mathews, although, like so many others of the wading birds (*Limicolæ*), it is found nearly all over the world, and the variations of plumage to which it is subject may be safely attributed to the age of the bird, and the time of the year at which it may happen to be obtained. As in the breeding season it has the whole of the under parts jet black, and in the winter pure white, naturally the intermediate stages show great variation.

"Some very beautiful Sand-Plovers are figured in part 2 of vol. iii., including the Red-capped Dottrel, the Hooded Dottrel, and the Black-fronted Dottrel. Amongst the larger Sandpipers two very striking species are the Banded Stilt—with pure white head and neck, a chestnut pectoral band, back and wings black, and flanks white—and the Red-necked Avocet, which has the whole of the head and neck chestnut, the wings black with a white bar, the back, tail, and under parts pure white. The last-named is widely distributed in Australia, being found in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania. Why it should receive a new name in Western Australia, as proposed by Mr. Mathews, will puzzle those of his readers who happen to be acquainted with the species.

"The smaller Sandpipers may be conveniently grouped in two genera, *Totanus* and *Tringa*—the former characterized by having a hard bill, semipalmated toes, and a barred tail; the latter a soft, sensitive bill, toes cleft to the base, and the tail not barred. Familiar examples of *Totanus* are the Greenshank, Redshank, and Green and Wood Sandpipers; amongst those of the genus *Tringa* are the Knot, Purple Sandpiper, Dunling, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, and many others. These are ready marks of distinction, yet we note that Mr. Mathews, contrary to the general practice, places the Green Sandpiper (with a barred tail) in the genus *Tringa*, thus upsetting one's preconceived notions respecting the classification of these birds.

"It seems very ungracious to find fault with an author who has bestowed so much labour in the preparation of a very beautiful work (so far as the plates are concerned), but he so often deliberately runs counter to the accepted opinions of naturalists more experienced than himself, and creates so much confusion by changing names that have been in use for many generations, that it is not possible to give unqualified praise to the result of his undertaking."

Stray Feathers.

Charcoal in Finches' Nests.—Mr. H. G. Barnard, who is collecting for me on the west of the Gulf of Carpentaria, has lately forwarded several clutches of eggs of *Poephila personata*, and he mentions the curious fact, which I have not previously seen recorded, that in every case the birds place pieces of charcoal in the nest along with the eggs. The charcoal is in small lumps,