

Under the title Snake-bird in Newton's Dictionary of Birds we read: "Its speed and skill under water are almost beyond exaggeration, and it exhibits these qualities even in captivity, taking—apparently without effort—fish after fish that may be introduced into its tank, however rapidly they may swim and twist." In this note Prof. Newton was no doubt referring to the Diving Birds' House in the London Zoological Gardens, where the sight of the Darter pursuing and capturing the live fish placed in its tank at feeding time has for years been witnessed daily by hundreds of people. These spectators would take a lot of convincing that a Darter is naturally a vegetarian.—EDITOR.

### Stray Feathers.

**The Devonport Crested Penguin.**—There has been some discussion among Australasian ornithologists as to which species to refer the Penguin which came ashore near Devonport, Tas., in 1913. In a paper contributed to the *Ibis*, Jan., 1915, I referred the specimen to *Catarrhactes chrysocome*, Forst., but the white throat and very small amount of yellow crest indicated that maturity had not been reached. Since then Mathews and Iredale, in "A Manual of the Birds of Australia," Vol. I., p. 12, have referred the Devonport specimen to *Eudyptes schlegeli*, Finsch and have queried it as "Adult"; in the *Ibis* paper I stated that "he evidently had another moult to undergo before reaching maturity."

In Feb., 1910, Dr. Brooke Nicholls kept for some time in captivity a Crested Penguin which came ashore at Lorne, Vic., where he was holidaying at the time; the bird was quite tame, but sulked in a bathing-box for the first fortnight, during which it underwent a complete moult, "his new crest being of a bright sulphur-yellow." Dr. Nicholls' photo taken after the moult, indicates a long crest, and a very black throat sharply defined from the white of chest below; this photo may be seen in the admirable little "School Paper" (Melb., Oct., 1910), and was reproduced by A. F. Bassett Hull in "Records of the Australian Museum," Vol. XII., No. 6, with the Devonport specimen figured in the same plate. There is no doubt that the Lorne bird was *C. chrysocome*, Forst.

The dusky hue showing through the white-tipped feathers of extreme upper-throat in the Devonport specimen, for about one inch and a quarter below base of bill, seems to indicate that the throat would eventually have become black had the bird lived to attain maturity.

In one of his interesting letters to me, Mr. R. Stuart Sutherland of N.Z. remarked: "I consider your specimen *chrysocome*, but of course would require to see it before being positive. . . . A point worthy of notice in *schlegeli* is the larger bill:—

<i>pachyrhynchus</i>	2.1 ins. to 2.90 ins.
<i>chrysocome</i>	2.0 ins. to 2.75 ins.
<i>schlegeli</i>	2.7 ins. to 3.10 ins."

The bill in the Devonport specimen is very slightly over 2 ins., so this seems to put *schlegeli* out of court, as it is extremely unlikely that that feature would have developed so greatly in the comparatively short time before its owner would have reached maturity.

These two points appear to indicate the correctness of my identification ("Ibis" 1915) as *Catarrhactes chrysocome*, Forst.—H. STUART DOVE, W. Devonport, Tas.

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**Size of the Wedgetail Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*).**—Eagles received in Taronga Park from various parts of New South Wales vary somewhat in size; and wing measurements—tip to tip—have been recorded from 6 feet 1 inch to 7 feet. The largest specimen in the collection is an albino, deposited in 1915 by Mr. H. L. White, and still alive; this bird has not yet been measured. Mathews in his *Birds of Australia* quotes many measurements taken from birds killed in various parts of Australia varying from 6 feet to 7 feet 4 inches, and Mr. H. L. Berney records having heard of one which measured 9 feet (*Emu* III p. 123). In this connection a letter received from Mr. A. G. Bolan, Station Master at Ooldea in South Australia is of interest. He states: "Wedgetail Eagles grow very large upon the Nullarbor Plain, and sizes of 9 feet have been measured frequently, but one certainly was measured over 10 feet by me personally, and to do so I had it brought home alive. This bird got caught in a dingo trap, and I brought bird and trap home in a cart to photograph—10 feet 3 inches—this bird was large and strong enough to drag a heavily weighted Dingo trap away."

This measurement gives the Wedgetail the distinction of having a longer wing than any other bird of prey in the world, and it is only beaten among flying birds by the Wandering Albatros, at 11 feet 6 inches. The Condor has a wing measurement of 9 feet 2½ inches.—A. S. LE SOUEF, C.M.Z.S., Taronga Park, Sydney.

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**Large-billed Stone-Curlew (*Orthorhamphus magnirostris*) in Moreton Bay.**—On March 15, 1925, I saw some Stone-Curlews on Fisherman's Island at the mouth of the Brisbane River, which had whitish throats, distinct white patches on the wings and long bills. They did not stand so high as the common species and were undoubtedly Large-billed Stone-Curlews. In the *Emu*, Vol. XXIV, p. 233, the occurrence of this species on North Keppel Island is said to be the most southerly record. The present record extends their range much further south.—(Mrs.) L. M. MAYO, R.A.O.U., Brisbane.

It is satisfactory to have a definite record for this species so far to the south of the habitat ascribed to it in ornithological text-books. In the *Emu* Vol. XIX p. 223 it is "reported as having been seen" on Stradbroke Island, Moreton Bay, during the visit of the R.A.O.U. to Queensland in 1919, but without the name of the observer such a record could not be accepted without confirmation.—EDITOR.

**Birds and a Snake Tradition.**—For many years small birds used to build their nests in the creeping vines—Wistaria and roses—round the verandah of this house; they included robins and Spotted-sided Finches. About fifteen years ago a snake found them out and raided their nests one summer.

We killed the snake, but the birds have never built there since—not one nest thought they have nests in dozens in the surrounding garden. During the late droughts we have had birds from the hot dry parts of the country as refugees here in the cooler and moister country, amongst them the Double-barred Finch or "Bandy" (*Steganopleura bichenovii*) which I had only seen before in Queensland. These little birds have settled here and formed a flourishing colony and this summer they have built and reared a family in the verandah vines. We suppose that as they are strangers here, and probably do not understand the language of the natives, they have not yet heard the tradition of the snake.—C. MAY WRIGHT, Wongwibinda, Armidale, N.S.W.

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**Spine-tailed Swifts (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) feeding on Grasshoppers.**—At the beginning of this year—after an unusually wet summer—myriads of grasshoppers appeared. They flew—carried by the wind—from one area to another in immense swarms, usually well over a mile long by half a mile thick, flying at any altitude up to twenty feet from the ground.

On 31st January I noticed a large flock of Spine-tailed Swifts numbering from two to three thousand flying through and feasting on one of these travelling swarms. Some birds were mere specks in the sky but most were flying very low, swooping, darting and sometimes just skimming the ground in their pursuit of the grasshoppers, until the air was literally thick with birds and insects. They followed the grasshoppers for three days and then disappeared leaving only a few hundred which left on the fifth day.

Early in April I noted a small flock of some eighty birds, a hundred miles to the south-west, but in this case saw no grasshoppers excepting a few, which keeping to the ground, were safe from the Swifts.

Some people in this district affirm that they have seen these birds alight on the horizontal limbs of tall, dead trees, from whence they fly by throwing themselves off. However I do not credit this, as not being close observers they most likely confused them with some other birds. I had the birds under observation while they were here and did not see any alight.—F. V. McMICKING, R.A.O.U., "Kinkora," Tootool, N.S.W.

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**White-winged Black Terns (*Chlidonias leucoptera*) in Moreton Bay**—When crossing Moreton Bay between Myora, Stradbroke Island, and King Island on Easter Monday, 1925, I observed a pair of birds whose colouring looked unusual. A closer view showed that they were the black tern, rare in these latitudes. The velvety black bodies of the birds and the under web of the wings had a few oval greyish white spots on them (more on the wings than the bodies)

making it look as though the plumage was in some transitory stage. The seas in that part of the bay were heavy after a long spell of south-east weather, and the birds swooped down and over the seas picking up food after the fashion of the Gull-billed Tern. I did not see them dive at all.

About ten years ago I observed several of these birds in Moreton Bay, close to the mouth of the Brisbane River, but I have not seen them since until this year.

In addition to the Black Terns, other species observed in Moreton Bay during the Easter excursion of the Queensland Naturalists' Club included Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*), Lesser Crested Tern (*S. bengalensis* = *media*), Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*), Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) and Little Tern (*S. albigrons* = *sinensis*).—(Mrs.) L. M. MAYO, R.A.O.U., Brisbane.

On Good Friday when crossing from King Island to Stradbroke Island to join the camp of the Queensland Naturalists' Club I saw some birds on Moreton Bay which I thought were White-winged Black Terns, the bird which came nearest to my boat looking quite black underneath, but I did not get a sufficiently good view to be certain and thought the black appearance might be a shadow effect. In the *Emu* Vol. XVII p. 95 I gave a full account of the only other recorded occurrence of this species in Australia in recent years. On that occasion thousands appeared in south-western Australia at Easter, 1917. It is worthy of note that on this occasion also the birds were seen at Easter. Mrs. Mayo's statement that she saw these birds about ten years ago is also interesting. Possibly it may have been in 1917, eight years ago, when the birds visited Western Australia.—W. B. ALEXANDER.

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**Nankeen Night-Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) in the Riverina.**—The accompanying photograph is of a young bird, taken during February last.\* I often see young ones in the swamp, but during the last twelve months I have not seen more than two adult birds. The adults are always seen in the trees in the day-time, but I generally flush the young from among the reeds, when they flap off in a most ungainly manner into the trees. The bird in the photo had wandered up to the house, probably in search of grasshoppers, which were numerous. I returned it to the swamp next morning.—F. V. McMICKING, R.A.O.U., Kincora, Tootool, N.S.W.

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**Colour Varieties of the Budgerigar (*Melopsittacus undulatus*).**—Having been in a position to see many Budgerigars in captivity, and also having bred them for some years I have never noted any variation from the ordinary wild type. This species is however bred extensively in Europe, where first the canary yellow and then the light blue forms were reared. When in France in 1921 I saw some sage green birds in the collection of Madame Le Calier. Now Mr. Hubert Ashley, the well known ornithologist and aviculturalist of

\* See Plate 5, Fig. 2.

Brinsop Court, Herefordshire sends news of additional colours. In a letter dated 25.2.25 he states, "I have two pairs of the Cobalt Budgerigars (the deeper blue). There seems to be no end of the colouring to be obtained in this species, a friend of mine has lately bred from a blue and a grey, young ones grey above, with yellow foreheads and green underparts."—A. S. LE SOUEF, Sydney.

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**Black-backed Magpie** (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) in the Riverina. —During the last twelve months I have noted these birds with pure white backs on three occasions. In two instances they were young birds, in separate localities, each attended by black-backed parents. In the third instance the white-backed bird was an adult with a black-backed mate. I have seen several cases where the dark grey back of the young bird was replaced by such a pale grey as almost to be called white.—F. V. McMICKING, R.A.O.U., Kincora, Tootool, N.S.W.

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**Gold-finches** (*Carduelis carduelis*) at Armidale, N.S.W. We now have very many Goldfinches; they live on the English cocksfoot grass seed which is plentiful here. I hope they will not become a pest.—C. MAY WRIGHT, Wongwibinda, Armidale, N.S.W.

Notes on the spread of introduced birds in Australia seem well worth recording in the *Emu*. For some years Goldfinches have been plentiful about Tamworth, N.S.W., but we have not noticed them further north. Last summer we were surprised to find that the Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) was plentiful at Bathurst, N.S.W.—Editor.

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**Summer Migrants in Tasmania, 1925.**—The most notable point about the migrants this summer has been the total absence of the Spinetailed Swift (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) from the district. For the first time in over twenty years of observation, not one has been seen by me, and whereas at the beginning of this century they used to muster in myriads towards migrating time, for the last few years they have been getting scarcer and scarcer. One would be inclined to think that the great seismic disturbance in Japan had shaken up the breeding-grounds there, and caused an alteration in the birds' movements, but a correspondent in Southern N.S.Wales noted plenty there during the summer, and a young Hobart observer whospent a holiday at Falmouth on our East Coast, gives Swifts among the species seen there ("Tas. Mail," 8.4.25). Our North West Coast, at any rate, appears to have lost favour with the Spinetail as a "jumping-off" place when leaving for its flight to the North.

All the Welcome Swallows and Tree Martins, also Wood-Swallows (*Artamus sordidus*) seem to have left us by the end of March, and only one or two Pipits (*Anthus australis*) were seen after that; it was a dry season, and yet there was plenty of insect life, and Cuckoos

stayed longer. I heard a Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) calling on the afternoon of 29th April, very late for this species, and on 9th May no less than three Fantailed Cuckoos (*C. flabelliformis*) were trilling and whistling in the White Gums at the back of my cottage, just as in the spring. On 31st May one of this kind was again calling in the same trees, using both varieties of note.

The Bronze Cuckoos (*plagiosus* and *basalis*) are seldom heard here now, and then only after arrival in spring, as they appear to like inland resorts better than coastal localities. The young of these are often quite late in leaving, although the adults seem to go about the end of February, I have noted the immature birds feeding about in short grass until well on in April. They seem to stay here a week or two, where it is less dry than inland, and capture many caterpillars and small insects on the ground; they are no doubt gaining strength for the flight across the Strait.—H. STUART DOVE, W. Devonport, Tas.

## Library Notes.

By F. ERASMUS WILSON, Hon. Librarian.

The following publications have been received since the beginning of the year :—

*Royal Society of Tasmania. Proceedings, 1924.*

*Annual Report of Smithsonian Institution, 1922.*

*Condor*, Vol. 27 (1). "The nest and eggs of the Black Rosy Finch," by Frederic W. Miller. Even in the United States with its large band of active oologists, the nesting habits of some birds are unknown. The account of the finding of the first nest and eggs of this species on the Wapite Ridge in Wyoming at an altitude of 11,000 to 12,000 feet makes interesting reading. This bird breeds in rock crevices in very inaccessible places, and the author and his collecting companion were fortunate in securing three sets of eggs.

"A Report on the Birds of North-western Alaska and Regions Adjacent to Behring Strait." Part I., by Alfred M. Bailey.

*Victorian Naturalist*, Vol. 41, Nos. 9, 10, 11.

*Proceedings of the Linnean Society of N.S.W.*, Vol. 49, Nos. 4, 5.

*Queensland Naturalist*, Vol. 4, No. 6. "The Blue-faced Lorileet, also called Coxen's Fig Parrakeet," by R. Illidge. Some notes on this extremely rare bird about which so very little is known.

*El Hornero*, Vol. III., No. 5.

*Avicultural Magazine*, 4th series, Vol. II., Nos. 11, 12, Vol. III., No. 1. Part 11 contains a fine coloured plate of an Indian Yellow-naped Woodpecker by Gronvold. The following items, taken from dealers price lists may be of interest as showing the value placed by British Aviculturists upon some of our aviforms :—King Parrots £10 pair, Rosellas 40s. each, Pennants Parrakeets 50s. each, Bare-eyed Cockatoos 70s. each. One dealer advertises Laughing Jackasses but does not quote prices. Part 12, "Honeyeaters," by J. Delacour.