

Stray Feathers.

Summer Migrants (1926).—The Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) left us unusually early, perhaps owing to the many months of heat and drought from which the island suffered. This species appeared to have departed from this district by 22nd March, and about the same date from Launceston; a couple were reported from the latter locality in mid-May, but these were doubtless the "resident" Swallows which have been observed for many years. The Bronze Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx plagosus*) was still calling in the middle of January, and about the same time young Pallid Cuckoos (*Cuculus pallidus*) were noticed sitting on overhead wires and on fences, the beautiful silvery plumage rendering them very conspicuous; they were quite silent. These young Pallids, as well as those of the Fantailed species, were seen through February and most of March, after the old birds had crossed the Strait to the mainland. Wood-Swallows (*Artamus sordidus*), as well as Pipits (*Anthus australis*) were seen in grass-paddocks at Cartside, in the limestone district of Northern Tasmania, on 4th April, a warm, sunny day. I did not see any Pipits here at Devonport from 19th April until 28th of that month, when four (probably parents and offspring) suddenly appeared at a grassy spot by the roadside, which is a favourite resort. Since then a pair, in fine spruce plumage as if newly moulted, were seen at the same spot on 18th May. Every season I notice this late appearance of a few, and think it probable that they have come up from the midlands and south of the island, after our coastal-breeding Pipits have departed. Not a single Spine-tailed Swift (*Chaetura caudacuta*) was seen in this district during the past summer; the same absence was noted last season. Small parties of Summer Birds (*Graucalus parvivostris*) moved leisurely towards the north-west through the latter part of March and the first three weeks of April, alighting in the groups of gums to feed.

When in the limestone district mentioned above, I was shown a specimen of the Lesser Golden Plover (*Charadrius dominicus*) which had been obtained on a flat by the creek there, so that these migrants sometimes go inland; the bird was in fine feather, spotted here and there with gold, and must have been developing its northern breeding-suit. The same man had one of the beautiful little males of the Sparrow-Hawk (*Accipiter cirrocephalus*), which was the first of that sex he had come across.—H. STUART DOVE, West Devonport, Tasmania.

* * *

Strepera in Tasmania.—The following notes on the localisation of *Strepera* may be useful. On the north-west coast forty to fifty years ago *S. fuliginosa* was very abundant; during ploughing time the high bush on the outskirts of the farms would ring with their joyous calling as they collected in readiness to descend upon the newly ploughed furrow. That was at sea level. In the Huon

hinterland, hilly and more or less heavily wooded country, both *S. fuliginosa* and *S. arguta* are in evidence, the latter being the more common. On the north-east coast and in lightly-wooded country further inland *S. arguta* is the more common; but both are seen. In the midlands, a few miles south of Lake Echo, *S. arguta* was heard. At Lake St. Clair and in heavy timber about the Cuvier River, *S. fuliginosa* was in large flocks; it was also met with in the open country, at an elevation of 2,700 ft. At the Great Lake (3,000 feet) both species are about equally distributed in the lightly wooded areas. In the high timber nearer Deloraine, *fuliginosa* was seen in a large flock. So far as my observation goes, that species seems to prefer high timber and *arguta* the more open country, both irrespective of elevation. I have never seen *arguta* in flocks. Wing and tail markings cannot be used as a means of identification by field observers. One has to judge by the note, colour, general appearance, and size. *S. arguta* is the larger, slightly browner, more loosely flying and utters a single note, "tullock."—G. MURRAY ANDERSON, Newtown, Tasmania.

* * *

Prolific Breeding.—Single broods in a season may be more or less of a rule in South Australia, as suggested in *Emu* correspondence, but it is certainly not a general rule. There are striking exceptions, chief among which I name the Soldier-Bird (*Myzantha garrula*) in my district. Here is a record of one pair for twelve months (1924).

BROOD 1. Situation, a trellised grape-vine on house verandah. Two young ones left this nest on February 5. BROOD 2. Same situation; new nest. Three young left it on April 8. BROOD 3. Nest 2 used again. Two young left on June 17. BROOD 4. Same situation; new nest. Three young left on August 18. BROOD 5. Orange tree close to house. Two young left nest on October 7. BROOD 6. same situation as 5; new nest. Three eggs on December 19; nest destroyed.

There is no doubt about the identity of the parents in this case. Their repeated use of the same situations in such close proximity to my house, and their familiar and fearless behaviour enabled me to recognise them as the same pair in each case.

The above record further illustrates the all-the-year-round breeding habit of *M. garrula* in Queensland. I have nest records of the species for every month of the year. No doubt this prolificacy partly accounts for the fact that Soldier-Birds here outnumber the birds of all other species (excluding gregarious nomads, such as Honey-Parrots and Wood-Swallows) together.—C. H. H. JERRARD, Blackdown, Gayndah, Queensland.

* * *

Albatross Death-Trap.—In the April *Emu* (xxv., p. 281) there is an editorial query as to a death-trap alleged to exist on the Australian coast, in which Albatrosses get caught and perish. This is situated on Albatross Island, Bass Strait, and an account will be found, with photos, in Le Souef's *Wild Life in Australia*, pp. 196-8. He says:—"In the centre of the island is a depression with almost perpendicular sides and an exit only through a cave. In the depression we found an Albatross and I tried unsuccessfully to make it fly from the ground."

I then took it to the top of one of the big boulders in the depression and drove it off, but it only fluttered to the ground. I noticed later that when an Albatross came sailing over the island against the wind, and took a downward sweep in passing this depression for the purpose of landing on the colony at the other side, if he went a little too low, he suddenly lost all the wind on which he was relying, and consequently went lower than he intended, and before he could recover himself, came against the cliff and fluttered helplessly to the bottom. He then wasted his strength in trying to climb out, and when exhausted by hunger, apparently went into the entrance of the cave to die, but did not seem to pass through the semi-darkness to get out at the other side. Many hundreds must have died at this place, as there was a large heap of their bones which had been sifted from the guano, and the bones were perfect, not broken. We called this depression the Albatross Death-Trap."—H. STUART DOVE, West Devonport, Tasmania.

[Several other correspondents have written in the same strain as Mr. Dove. Mr. Robert W. Legge (Cullenswood House, Cullenswood, Tasmania), gives this additional note :—"There is a sort of cave, too, which runs back from the bottom, but whether it gives out to the sea I cannot remember. Many years ago, a party of enterprising fishermen landed on the island with the idea of collecting the decayed matter, resulting from the bodies of thousands of Albatrosses. They bagged a large quantity of the stuff, but became weather-bound, and they came very near to losing their lives over the attempt."]

* * *

Five Nests in Five Months.—Second broods are by no means so rare as Mr. J. McGilp, of South Australia, appears to believe. I could enumerate dozens of instances where birds have reared a second family in the same season. The following birds I have observed build a new nest for the second family :—Black-backed Magpie, White-backed Magpie, Pied Butcher-Bird, Grey Butcher-Bird, Lewin's Honey-eater, Yellow-plumed Honey-eater, Black-and-White Fantail, Grey Fantail, Blue Wren, Silvereye and Spotted-sided Finch. The Yellow-tailed Thornbill, White-fronted Chat and Blue Wren used the same nest for the second brood. With the late Mrs. Norton, R.A.O.U., I watched a pair of Blue Wrens for about five months, in which time they built no less than five nests. Whilst pruning a rose bush I came upon the first nest with one egg, but had the branch severed before I noticed it. Their second nest was built in honey-suckle in less than two days, but I did not have a look at the eggs. Ten or twelve days later I saw two naked chicks on the ground, dead, and on looking in the nest saw a young Cuckoo, which turned out to be a Narrow-billed Bronze Cuckoo. Both male and female Wrens fed this interloper until it left the nest. The male bird then saw his mistake (?) and gave up the job of feeding the chick, but often brought an insect to his wife. The hen bird continued to feed the foster-chick until it was able to fend for itself; then, after determined efforts on the part of both birds, they drove it away. In the meantime, the male Wren amused himself by building another nest about 20 feet away, which his wife turned down as unfit to live in, after trying it for a whole day. This nest was not as well built as the

others, being shallower and having a larger opening. The hen bird selected a more secluded spot—*i.e.*, eighteen inches above my head where I slept on the verandah, so I had a close view every morning—and built again with very little assistance from her mate, although he sat in the nest a good deal. Three eggs formed the clutch, and when the young were hatched and fully fledged, father Wren again built a new nest; this time Mrs. Wren only helped occasionally. A clutch of eggs appeared in this nest very soon, and the hen did more of the brooding than on previous occasions, her mate being occupied with the earlier brood; but he often found time to give her a tit-bit. In good time the young were hatched, both parents feeding the chicks and sometimes the earlier brood; and when they had left the nest, the earlier family gave a hand with the feeding, for I saw three little gray birds feeding a young one at the same time. These birds were very tame and most of my observing was done at a distance of a couple of feet. I touched the male bird when he was on the nest, and held a young one while the parent fed it.—J. J. DE WARREN, Dungog, N.S.W.

* * *

Food of Sea-Birds.—Although I have had the opportunity of carefully observing Albatrosses on several long sea voyages, I have never seen these birds pick up any natural food from the water. Observation hour after hour, and day after day, has given a negative result. Even when resting on the water they do not appear to feed, though they certainly eat meaty food thrown over from ships. These birds rest on the sea at night, and in the early morning they have been noted floating about. On this evidence it would appear that they feed at night on floating crustacea or fish. It has been shown that deep sea animals come to the higher levels after dark.

The only time I have seen Shearwaters feeding was on the present trip. In Bass Strait great flocks of Short-tailed Shearwaters were seen resting on the sea in the early morning, evidently feeding, as many were ducking under the surface. During the daytime they appear to fly over the sea for hours together without taking anything.

During a visit to Montagu Island, when hundreds of Gulls and Terns were nesting, large flocks of Silver Gulls were seen massed on the surface eagerly feeding on small red shrimps. They appeared to be most busy in the late afternoon.

Gannets obviously feed on fish. During a day's stay on Broughton Island several of these birds were seen diving into a shoal of small garfish.

Terns have been seen to pick up such small fish in a shoal that for any reason turn on their sides and show thus up as a silver gleam in the water. On a voyage from Montagu Island we passed close to a vast shoal of fish, an acre or more in extent; these were evidently being taken by predaceous fish, as the surface was being agitated. Hundreds of Terns, Petrels and Gannets were apparently picking up maimed fish or scraps of fish.

Arctic Skuas generally fly high, apparently taking no interest in

the sea ; I have never seen one feeding, and presume that they are night feeders.

20/3/26.—At the present moment there is a Frigate-Bird high in the air, evidently waiting for some work-a-day fisher-bird to rob. We are about 60 miles from Cocos Island.—A. S. LE SOUEF, C.M.Z.S. (Sydney).

* * *

Southern Australian Sea-Birds.—The following notes were made during the homeward voyage of the R.M.S. Otranto, which left Sydney on March 4, 1926. As the first port of call was Hobart a good opportunity was presented to observe a wide stretch of our southern coastal waters.

Storm-Petrel. A few of these dainty little birds were observed in Bass Strait and the Australian Bight. The birds were black with the flanks mottled white, and were provisionally identified as *Fregetta tropica*. The flight of these birds is unlike that of any other sea birds that I have observed. They flit over the surface of the ocean, frequently dipping to pick up something on the surface, and have a habit of swerving at an acute angle to their line of flight.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*). On the first day out from Fremantle hundreds of these birds were flying close to the surface of the water. They were never seen to settle nor could they be seen to pick up anything from the sea. Viewed in the sunlight they had a blackish-brown appearance, with black primaries and darker tail. At night one flew on to the bridge deck ; this was secured identified and skinned, and the specimen will be sent to the Australian Museum.

Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*). Thousands of Shearwaters, identified as this species, were noted between Sydney and Hobart. On the first day out from Hobart tremendous numbers were seen in the early morning, making out to sea from the coast, and great flocks were resting on the water, evidently feeding on floating crustacea.

Black Petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*). One specimen only was noted near Adelaide. The bird had a flapping flight like that of a Silver Gull, and picked up things from the surface of the water without alighting, and often dropped its legs when hovering. In appearance it was intensely black all over.

Prion. Species not identified. Thousands of these dainty little birds were seen flicking over the water in Bass Strait.

Snowy Albatross, (*Diomedea chionoptera*). A few of these noble birds were seen between Hobart and Albany. Careful observation through powerful field glasses did not denote any lines on their white body plumage. One bird, however, was entirely dark brown with the exception of face, bill, throat, and part of the under-surface of the wings.

White-capped Albatross (*Diomedea cauta*). This species appears to have a very restricted habitat : a few were noted in Bass Strait. Their flight is different to that of other species of Albatross noted in that they follow a fairly even course, level with the water, and do not follow the ship.

Black-browed Albatross (*Diomedea melanophrys*). This species was by far the most common of the genus; several birds often followed the ship in Bass Strait. It has a fairly fast flight and often rises high in the air. I estimated its speed at 40 miles an hour.

Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Diomedea chlororhynchus*). This species was seen only in the Australian Bight, its black and yellow bill being a conspicuous feature.

Sooty Albatross (*Phœbetría fusca*). This striking species was scarce, only half a dozen birds being seen in the Bight. The day they were seen there was a strong head wind, and they did not appear to be able to keep up with the ship.

Pacific Gull (*Gabianus pacificus*). A few immature dark-coloured birds were flying about the Hobart harbour.

Skua (*Catharacta lomnbergi*). Odd birds of this species were noted occasionally in Bass Strait. The bird has a slow and rather laboured gull-like flight.

Arctic Skuas (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). Arctic Skuas, both pied and dark forms, were very numerous between Sydney and Hobart. They usually flew high in the air, and did not seem to be searching the ocean surface for food.

Australian Gannet (*Sula serratör*). Rather numerous between Sydney and Hobart. They were frequently seen resting on the water.—A. S. LE SOUEF, C.M.Z.S.

From Magazines.

Comrades in Adversity.—Bearing on recent notes regarding the destruction of fauna in the disastrous bush fires of Victoria, an interesting little story has come to hand from a friend who lives on the edge of the fire-stricken areas. He relates that a resident of Noogee was lying in a creek with a wet blanket over him and felt someone crawl under the screen alongside him. When the worst of the flames had passed the man turned to speak to his companion. Then, to his amazement and pleasure, he found that his guest was a Lyre-Bird, one of the shyest creatures in the Australian Bush.—From the Nature Notes column of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, March 13, 1926.

* * *

Kookaburras' "Humor."—An extraordinary incident, in which two Kookaburras (*Dacelo gigas*) were the chief figures, is reported by the *Sydney Morning Herald* to have occurred at the big Royal Agricultural Show in that city during April. "A delightful bush touch to the Show scenes on Saturday," says the newspaper, "added much to the enjoyment of the thousands massed around the ring. While the voice of the announcer, speaking from the centre of the ring, told in clarion tones the winners of the trotting contest, there suddenly rang out still more stridently a volume of demoniacal laughter. It silenced at once the voice of the announcer standing before his amplifier. Growing ever more frenzied, the laughter rose to a triumphant cres-