

The New South Wales Species of the Genus *Zosterops*

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In the last issue of *The Emu*, Vol. XXXI, Part 4, I was glad to see an article by Mr. George Mack, R.A.O.U., entitled "Notes on Australian Forms of the Genus *Zosterops*." I quite agree with him that there is great confusion in specific names of *Zosterops* on the east coast of Australia. Especially is that so in New South Wales. I always have held that in New South Wales there is only one species which has gone in the past by the names of *Z. caerulescens* and *Z. dorsalis* and now by the name of *Z. lateralis* (the grey-mantled bird, and called originally "Grey-backed Silvereye"), and that *Z. halmaturina* does not exist as a separate species in New South Wales. I have known and studied this bird for 50 years, and as a boy, and since, I have handled hundreds and have kept scores alive in captivity.

The distinguishing feature is the grey back; the yellow throat, especially in its shades, varies considerably, as also does the yellow vent. The feature that gave it its name of *lateralis* is the rufous colour of the flanks, which becomes very dark in the autumn and remains so throughout the winter until the following spring, but this is nothing more or less than a seasonal colour phase and appears to be more marked in the males. The shade of colour varies greatly in different individuals. Some years ago in *The Emu* (Vol. XXV, Part 3, p. 220), in discussing this subject, I mentioned that in my experience, occasionally a bird will be found with no vestige of yellow colour on the throat, and I instanced a bird I had alive for fifteen months, which had no trace of yellow on the throat, and which never underwent any seasonal colour change. For all that it was undoubtedly *Z. lateralis*.

Unfortunately confusion is not limited to the scientific name, but also the vernacular so that the bird that I know as *Z. lateralis* and called the grey-backed bird is now called the grey-breasted bird, and a species (*Z. halmaturina*) is called the grey-backed bird. This is, in my opinion, one of the few serious mistakes in *The Official Check List* (2nd Edition), 1926, and it has caused great confusion. The sooner we recognise only one species for New South Wales, namely, *Z. lateralis* (formerly called *Z. caerulescens* and *Z. dorsalis*), the Grey-backed Silvereye, the sooner we shall appreciate the true position. I speak as a field naturalist, being very familiar with this bird in its type locality, and

elsewhere for many years, and having travelled extensively from north to south of the state, and having known the bird from many localities. The only differences are in colour phases, which are partly variation and partly seasonal. Otherwise, in size, shape, and structure, nest building, colour of eggs, and general habits, the two so-called species for New South Wales are identical.

A Stormy Petrel Nocturne

By A. G. CAMPBELL, R.A.O.U., Kilsyth, Vic.

Opposite Port Phillip Heads, the water gate of a great metropolis, lies Mud Island. The eddying tide swirled about the sandbanks and marshy shores of the inner lagoon, the crisp sea air stirred the saltbush and the samphire, an easterly wind banked up unusual clouds, and the sun sank in unforgettable splendour of silver and rose. Sky and sea dominated the narrow strip of land on which we awaited the homecoming of the little White-faced Storm-Petrels (*Pelagodroma marina*).

To the naturalist there are times not meant for chatter but for contemplation, when the voices of the crowd are hushed and other deeper senses have full play. Long forgotten faculties shake themselves free and a receptive mind is the key-note. There is a pleasure simple and unalloyed in reading a chapter of nature we can understand. This scene is one to stir a chord of harmony in the naturalist that lies deep in all of us.

The first birds to arrive from the ocean waste came about 9.15 p.m., more than an hour after sunset. They came in small coveys, beating up channel from the Heads and making slow progress against the wind. Silently they passed our vantage point, each bird to find its own particular burrow wherein a brooding mate awaited its evening meal. This went on for several hours, but at no time were the birds in great numbers at any one spot. They probably distributed over the islet without delay, after the long journey from the sea. While the name Stormy Petrel has come to suggest erratic and violent ways, the bird itself is of the quietest disposition possible. Only eight inches in length, of delicate build, it may feebly peck at an intruding hand, or gently protest when removed from its egg. The wonder is that so tiny a sprite should be called to a life on the ocean billow, coming ashore only to rear its offspring and performing this duty only under the protective mantle of dark-