

Stray Feathers

When Birds Wander.—Although the Blue-faced Honey-eater (*Entomyzon cyanotis*) is somewhat common in forest areas of Queensland it diminishes in numbers in the north of New South Wales, and I have never seen it in the south of the latter State. In Victoria it appears to be very rare. It has been seen on a few occasions immediately south of the Murray River, and A. J. Campbell has recorded a pair nesting near Bendigo in 1881. My surprise was considerable, therefore, when I met one of these pretty birds near Maryborough (about fifty miles south-west of Bendigo) in September of 1934. A commotion among some eucalypts occasioned the stopping of our car, and a solitary Blue-faced Honeyeater, obviously very ill at ease, was seen to be in conflict with a group of Babblers and Noisy Miners. (Is it the "guilty" appearance of a bird that has strayed into a new locality that causes other birds to attack it?)

A kindred surprise was experienced in the same area, about two miles west of Maryborough, in August of 1935. Meeting an irruption of small birds—one of those mixed parties that frequently develops in winter—I followed casually, and soon was struck by the flash of a red rump among some Yellow-tailed Thornbills. A hard chase followed, and eventually a pair of Chestnut-tailed Thornbills (*Acanthiza uropygialis*) detached themselves from the others and were seen as well as their active movements would permit. Apparently these pretty birds had wandered down from the Mallee, and thus considerably extended the normal distribution of their species.

My third note on southerly extensions concerns the Pied Butcher-bird (*Craicticus nigrogularis*). Its range in eastern Australia tallies broadly with that of the Blue-faced Honey-eater—common in Queensland and becoming rarer to the south. It was a pleasure to see several of these fine birds during last autumn (May, 1935), in the vicinity of Hay, New South Wales. The R.A.O.U. *Checklist* extends the species to the north of Victoria, but there is no specimen in the National Museum from that State, and I knew of no appearance of the bird south of the Murray until 1934, when a resident of Tungamah told me that a pair of Pied Butcher-birds frequented his district, retiring in spring to nest in pines on the northern side of the Murray.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Melbourne, 16/8/1935.

Australian Ground-Thrush.—In *The Emu*, Vol. xxviii, p. 155, there appears, amongst the contributions to Stray Feathers, a note from me recording the appearance of the Australian Ground-Thrush (*Oreocincla lunulata*) at my home in Tasmania. The following winter one of those birds was again observed frequenting the house grounds.

Whether or not it was the same one is, of course, problematical. On each occasion the birds disappeared about the end of July.

One morning in June of this year (1935), my wife drew my attention to a Ground-Thrush which was creeping about under the same laurel tree in which I saw the bird mentioned in my record in 1928. We were in a room directly opposite to the laurel and distant therefrom about forty feet, and had a fine opportunity of observing the bird standing quietly beneath the outer branches of the tree. I mentioned the occurrence to my shepherd, who told me that he had noticed a pair of the birds nearly every morning in a paddock at no great distance from the house, and surrounded by trees and hedges, with the Break-O'Day River running past one side. A lad later told me that he had seen the birds frequenting the raspberry canes on several occasions. I made a quiet search and found the two birds lurking about in one of the hawthorn hedges bounding a small paddock close to where sheep are running. They exhibited no fear when I approached to within fifteen feet of them, as they crept about through the stems of the bare hedge. A few days subsequently I saw no fewer than three of them running over a bed of leaves quite close to the back drive approaching the homestead, amongst some deciduous trees. Motors, horsemen and carts are frequently moving to and fro along the road. Towards the end of July I began to hope that a pair of the birds might stay and breed here as I observed them on more than one occasion frequenting the ground beneath a large wide-spreading horizontal cypress standing in a secluded corner of the grounds, close to the river. When disturbed by my approach they would fly into the tree and assume their characteristic motionless attitude affording me an excellent view through the glasses. For about a week they seemed to disappear, until, one day, on revisiting the locality and scanning the branches of the tree, I saw what looked very like a nest in course of construction, placed on one of the long-reaching branches of the cypress about fifteen feet above the ground and at a point where the foliage of a superimposed bough crossed that whereon the material was placed. There was no definite shape about the material. I could not find the birds in the immediate vicinity.

Three days later I again visited the spot and found that the material had assumed a definite nest-like form, the well-known rounded shape being well in evidence. The site is as usual, rather dark, and, using 8-power prism glasses, I failed to detect the customary outer lining of moss which *Oreocincla* always uses in its forest homes. There was plenty of moss along the river bank hard by, although not of the same variety as that which grows on the rotting logs and musk-tree boughs in the gullies. On August 14 I paid

another visit to the site, and was delighted to see the tail, of the female presumably, projecting above the nest. The next day a further visit revealed the motionless form of one bird sitting on a small platform of the bulky nesting material alongside the nest proper. It was probably the male. I am in hopes of the pair succeeding in bringing out a clutch of young ones. They will not be altogether free from attack by natural enemies in their strange home, for we have the Grey Butcher-bird (*Cracticus torquatus*) here, also the Spotted Owl (*Ninox nova-seelandiæ*), a recently-arrived colony of Blackbirds, and also the Grey Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*), which last is by no means above suspicion. With the exception of the Blackbirds they would, of course, run the same risks of depredations by the birds mentioned in their mountain homes. Seeing how far Cullenswood is situated from the natural habitat of these beautiful birds, it may be considered a remarkable instance of nomadism for the Ground-Thrush to nest so far from its proper environment, especially as the last two years in this district have been the wettest on record for at least forty years.—ROBT. W. LEGGE, Cullenswood, Tas., 16. 8. 35.

White-backed Swallows and Red-backed Kingfishers near Brisbane.—Some years back Mr. W. B. Alexander (at that time a resident of Graceville, a suburb of Brisbane), recorded in *The Emu* the presence of White-backed Swallows (*Cheramæca leucosterna*) and also (I think) Red-backed Kingfishers (*Halcyon pyrrhopygius*) about the river near Graceville. Mr. Alexander at the time wondered whether those birds were extending their range as he felt sure they nested somewhere in the vicinity. On three occasions lately I have spent some time bird observing in the Graceville district and have found both White-backed Swallows and Red-backed Kingfishers there. The distance by road to Graceville is about ten miles from the city of Brisbane.—L. M. MAYO, Sth. Brisbane, Qld., 24. 6. 35.

Satin Bower-bird.—On Tuesday, July 30, we were greatly interested to find a Satin Bower-bird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) making a bower in plain sight from the sitting-room windows—scarcely twelve feet away from them. A blue cineraria, blue hyacinths and a blue poultry ring provided the materials for decoration to the “floor”—half-a-dozen of the flowers being strewn about. The sticks used were twigs of a Japanese maple—a dwarf tree that we have had for thirty years.

We have known the particular bird for several years. He has been a solitary bird for some time. In 1924 there were two birds here—and they were very impudent in their foraging around the garden. They used to spend much

time in a sword-grass swamp when not in the garden. Then the blue one disappeared and the green bird came for years alone. I would say it was the same bird as I cannot remember there ever being more than one since the 1924 pair. Last year we noted several dark feathers in its plumage and now he has the full blue livery. On August 12 he brought a mate to the garden. Both birds are very shy at present.

In 1876-77 Satin Bower-birds were, I believe, here in hundreds. They used to eat growing carrots right down into the ground. The numbers gradually diminished. The present bower is only the third we have found—one in 1908 and the second in 1932.—C. C. CURRIE, Lardner, Vic., 14/8/35.

Bush-Larks around Brisbane.—Whilst observing birds in some grassy paddocks up the Brisbane River I disturbed a pair of Horsfield Bush-Larks (*Mirafra javanica*) and several Fantail Warblers (*Cisticola exilis*). The Bush-Larks must be rare with us round Brisbane and are seldom seen.—L. M. MAYO, Sth. Brisbane, Qld., 23.6.35.

Parrots Recovering.—It is pleasing to learn that two of Australia's finest Parrots, the ranks of which had been sadly reduced by trappers, have made a partial recovery. The Regent Parrot (*Polytelis anthopeplus*), which in Victoria is restricted to Mallee areas, had been so decimated that the authorities afforded it strict protection. As a result the species is now moderately abundant in such areas as the Wyperfeld National Park, in north-western Victoria. When visiting that reservation in October of 1934 I frequently saw small flocks with the sun glowing on their beautiful plumage, and as we left the area a company of some sixteen birds flew directly towards the car before rising higher and disappearing. It is said that there is still surreptitious traffic in the "Smokers," but if the protection continues to be enforced the birds should hold their own.

A second member of the regal *Polytelis* group, the Superb Parrot (*P. swainsoni*), also appears to have increased in numbers of late. When visiting Riverina in May of 1935 I was pleasantly surprised to see small flocks of the "Green Leeks" on several occasions at various points along the Murrumbidgee, and to be assured by residents that they were not at all rare. The first pair was revealed near Narrandera. It was a coincidence that the beautiful birds were being attacked by Noisy Miners—a coincidence because when I was watching a pair of the very rare Paradise Parrots in Queensland in 1922, our relations were disturbed by the "butting-in" of Noisy Miners. The Murrumbidgee country appears to be the headquarters of the Superb Parrot. Occasionally, however, small flocks visit the north-east of Victoria.

Another bird that remains faithful to the Murrumbidgee-Murray area is the Yellow Rosella (*Platycercus flaveolus*). Along the border the bird is known as the "Murray Smoker" (not to be confused with the "Mallee Smoker"), but a little farther north it becomes the "Murrumbidgee Lowry." The species is common at almost all points along the 'Bidgee. It is frequently seen in the company of "Green Leeks."—A. H. CHISHOLM, Melbourne, 16/8/35.

Lotus-birds Swimming.—A week or so ago we visited the Kholo River bridge on the Brisbane watershed. The river is fairly wide—deep in places, with plenty of weed showing beneath in the deep pools. A red scum (or weed) covers the water near the river banks. A pair of Lotus-birds were picking about on shore making their way quite cleverly amongst some rocks lying there. One bird on being disturbed flew directly into the river and rested on the open water, swimming a few yards before rising again and flying back to the red weed, on which it seemed to walk easily. There were no lily leaves or hyacinth anywhere in sight on the river, but the birds seemed quite at home there. Whatever others' observations of this matter have been, it was my first experience of Lotus-birds swimming on open water.—L. M. MAYO, Sth. Brisbane, Qld., 24/6/35.

Migrants and Others (1935).—When at Redpa, Western Tasmania, last summer, I noticed on February 26 a male *Malurus* which was so far advanced in moult that only three slight patches of blue on the head were visible—the rest of the plumage was grey. On March 17, the Wood-Swallows (*Artamus cyanopterus*) had begun to come from inland districts and to gather at Devonport previous to migration—they usually sit about on wires and fences near the beach until the end of the month. On the same date two young Fan-tailed Cuckoos (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) were noted in the town. On March 18, a party of Spine-tailed Swifts (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) was seen over Devonport, the individuals flying at various heights, and apparently feeding as they flew. When I was in the Stanley district, about eighty miles west of Devonport, on April 8, some Wood-Swallows, also Pipits (*Anthus australis*) were noted—migrants seem to stay later in the western districts, where there is more bush and more rain, ensuring more insect-food. On April 9 a pair of "Summer Birds" (*Coracina novæ-hollandiæ*) was observed in eucalypts on a hillside at Forth, six miles west of Devonport. At Black River, about seventy miles west of the Mersey, on April 20, both Fan-tailed and Pallid Cuckoos (*Cuculus pallidus*) were noted in the bush there. Some Wood-Swallows were also seen.

The male *Malurus* in my garden at Devonport was in full blue again on April 28, after his moult. On June 23, after a severe spell of snow on the mountains to the south of us, and frost in the Mersey district, numbers of Flame Robins (*Petroica phoenicea*) suddenly appeared on the fences and in the paddocks at Devonport, driven down from the higher lands by the hard weather. On June 24 a Fan-tailed Cuckoo was calling with the plaintive double whistle from a silver wattle just at the back of my cottage, while another, about sixty yards away, was uttering the trill call. Although several of these Cuckoos always stay with us through the winter, it is unusual to hear them calling at this season. The morning was bright and sunny after a white frost.—H. STUART DOVE, Devonport, Tas., 17. 7. 35.

Penguins on Bunbury Beach, W.A.—My experience with Penguins has been of the most limited character. These hardy birds seem able to weather the roughest gales, and are rarely thrown up on our beaches. Two years ago, or a little more, however, a specimen was picked up at Bunbury near the Surf Club pavilion, but when I learned of the fact it was too far gone for preservation. I cut off the flipper, however, and took measurements. It was undoubtedly a typical Little Blue Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*).

On July 14 of the present year, after a gale of moderate strength, a larger species was captured alive in an exhausted state. Efforts were vainly made to revive it, but it died after a few hours captivity. It was subsequently sent to me for preservation. I was very doubtful as to its identity, but our member, Major H. M. Whittell, kindly went into the matter thoroughly, and with the aid of Dr. Oliver's *Birds of New Zealand* cleared up the matter beyond doubt. It proved to be a female adult of the Crested or Thickbilled Penguin (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*). In the genus *Eudyptes* the bill has deep grooves; in *Eudyptula* conspicuous grooves are absent. The colour of the bill was dull Indian red, iris pale yellow, feet very pale flesh colour, soles of feet neutral. Above the eye was a well-defined yellowish white stripe. The orbit, after the eye was extracted, measured 27 mm.—F. LAWSON WHITLOCK, Bunbury, W.A.

[Mr. Whitlock has very generously given me the Penguin, of which he made a very beautiful skin. I think there is little doubt that it is *E. pachyrhynchus*, but as the skin is in existence the question may easily be finally settled after I have had it compared with four skins in the Adelaide Museum and two mounted specimens in the Perth Museum.—H. M. WHITTELL.]

Remarks on *Puffinus assimilis*.—In his account of his cruise in the trawler *Bonthorne* off the southern coast of

Western Australia, Dr. Serventy refers to the familiar Petrel—*Puffinus assimilis*. He describes them as having brown upper plumage. That is interesting. A fair number of specimens of the Petrel have passed through my hands during the last ten years, all having been obtained on the south-western coast. In every case the plumage has been a combination of white, grey and black. In fully-adult birds which had died ashore the black had a distinct gloss—almost velvety.

Dr. R. Cushman Murphy, of the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, in *Bulletin No. 276*, Sept. 8, 1927, has gone into the question of the various races of *P. assimilis* and divides the several forms into two main groups, viz.: (i) with the upper surface varying between slate colour and slate black, "without a trace of brown hue in fresh feathers" = *P. assimilis*; and (ii) upper surface varying from blackish brown to sooty black, "but always brownish black rather than slaty" = *P. lherminieri*. Range: tropical seas, extending just north of the Tropic of Cancer. . . . The range of *P. assimilis* is extra-tropical seas, chiefly in the temperate zone beyond 30° South latitude. . . .

It now appears that we have a brown form off our southern coast-line.—F. LAWSON WHITLOCK, Bunbury, W.A.

The cost of the additional colour plate in this issue has partly been covered by a generous donation by Mr. J. Neil McGilp.

Reviews

[*Zur Kenntnis Nordostasiatischer Vögel* : ein Beitrag zur systematik biologie und verbreitung der vögel Kamtschatkas und der Kurilen. By Sten Bergmann. 268 pages. Published by Albert Bonniers, Stockholm.]

Following introductory matter concerning the topography and vegetation of the regions, which indicates that conditions in the northern Kuriles are somewhat similar to those appertaining in Kamtschatka and that the barren nature of those localities changes to well-timbered areas in the southern Kuriles, the volume falls into two parts dealing with the birds of the Kamtschatkan Peninsula and the Kuriles respectively. There are 132 forms recorded from the former and 142 from the volcanic island chain. Eighty-five birds are common to both areas, with less than twenty species showing subspecific differences—these distinctions