

of that form if it were not for the dates. Six of the thirteen above-listed specimens were collected during the Australian summer. Further field work, both in Australia and the islands of the Banda Sea, is needed to clear up the following questions:

- (1) Is there any evidence for migratory movements in *C. m. minutillus*?
- (2) What is the breeding season of this form?

The identification of these specimens as *minutillus* removes the doubt that Junge has recently expressed (*Zool. Med.*, xx (1938), p. 238) on the conspecificity of *crassirostris* and *rufomerus* with *malayanus*. I have been able to re-examine the specimens which he records, with reservation, under the name *malayanus* subsp. (*op. cit.*, p. 239). On the basis of our much better material, I come to the conclusion that two birds belong to *crassirostris* (Ternate, Goram), three are *minutillus* (see above), one is *rufomerus* (Wetter), and one remains doubtful (Amboina). *Chalcites crassirostris* is clearly a geographical representative of *malayanus* and can be considered as a subspecies of it.

Recent Records of the Western Whipbird

By MAJOR H. M. WHITTELL, O.B.E.,
Bridgetown, Western Australia

About 1934 Mr. Edward Watts, of Gnowangerup, found a nest containing two black-spotted blue eggs which he thought were those of the Wedgebill, which bird, however, has not been recorded in Western Australia as far south as Gnowangerup. The eggs were seen by Mr. Roland Benn, who believed them to be of the "missing" Western Whipbird (*Psophodes nigrogularis*), and his opinion was concurred in by some ornithologists to whom they were sent for examination.

Several further nests, with eggs, were found by Mr. Watts in subsequent years, but, as the bird was not identified, the writer decided that the doubt would have to be cleared up, and he accordingly got into touch with Mr. Watts, who arranged to send him a telegram as soon as another nest with eggs was found. A telegram arrived on July 27, 1939, and the writer left the next day for Gnowangerup.

About 7 a.m. on July 30 Mr. Watts, his son Ted, and the writer left for the locality of the nest, after arranging that a specimen of the bird would be collected at the first opportunity offering. To Ted Watts was entrusted the

important work of obtaining the necessary specimen, which we anticipated being able to do at this particular nest as the bird had previously been sitting on the nest and had left only when the bush in which the nest was built had been parted. Going forward to the nest Ted Watts, with a .22 and a dust-shot cartridge, secured the first specimen of *Psophodes nigrogularis nigrogularis* which has been obtained since the late A. W. Milligan collected two specimens at the Margaret River in 1901.

During the three or four hours we were in the locality frequented by the Whipbirds, two other nests, each containing two eggs, were found, also about twenty other nests, without eggs. The latter may have been nests of previous years. The nature of the components used in the manufacture of the nests—very fine twigs, strips of bark, and a few dry grass-stems—tends to prevent the nest disintegrating from year to year.

The only lining is dry grass-stems of a finer quality than is used in the body of the nest. The egg-cavity measures about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches and is about two inches deep.

The nests are usually built in the centre of a *Banksia Cayleyi* R. Brown, the leaves of which are prickly, and are usually within two feet of the ground. I saw a nest in a species of *Daviesia* and Mr. Watts tells me that he has found one nest with eggs in that type of bush but that all others he has seen have been in the *Banksia*.

When driving along a track in the sand-plain country frequented by this bird one got up off the side of the track and flew in front of the car, at a height of about two feet from the ground, for a distance of about three chains, and then dived into the scrub. Another flashed past me in the scrub on another occasion. I heard no call and Mr. Watts has never heard any call other than a "chitter-chitter" like that of a Southern Scrub-Robin when disturbed at its nest.

Psophodes nigrogularis nigrogularis is an early breeder, eggs usually being found in nests from mid-July to the end of August. An interesting feature of this find is that the bird collected whilst incubating was a male. The tail feathers are abraded and the total length in the flesh was $9\frac{5}{16}$ inches. Iris red; legs and feet dark slate with a silvery sheen; upper mandible black, light on the lower edge; lower mandible pale horn colour, dark at base; inside of mouth pink.

Western Australian data and the recent discoveries in Victoria and in South Australia show that *Psophodes nigrogularis* is essentially a bird of the Mallee areas of southern Australia. The highest development of mallee thicket in Western Australia occurs between Israelite Bay and Gnowangerup in a zone running parallel to the south coast and at a distance of from 20 to 50 miles from the coast.

Mr. H. Collins found a nest with two eggs, together with the tail feathers of a mutilated bird, at Ongerup, 50 miles east of Gnowangerup. Geo. Masters, in 1868, collected several specimens which are labelled King George's Sound, but it is known that he worked inland from that place as far as the Salt or Pallinup River, which would bring him into the area of greatest development of mallee thicket, and I suspect that his specimens were obtained not so very far from where I obtained my specimen. In any case a strip of mallee vegetation runs along the south coast westward to the vicinity of Cape Naturaliste in which the Mallee-fowl is still to be found breeding. The presence of this vegetation would account for the presence of the Whipbird at King George's Sound, at the Margaret River where it was collected by Milligan, and in the neighbourhood of Bunbury where North has recorded the taking of a nest and eggs. Gilbert heard the bird in the Wongan Hills which is also within the mallee area of Western Australia.

Writing to me on September 20, 1934, an Australian ornithologist said: "I strongly suggest that you banish all thought of any known Australian bird being extinct. In my opinion that idea is simply a reflection of our want of knowledge, through lack of field work, of even common species, let alone elusive Bristle-birds, Night Parrots, etc. If you can spare the time to search I have no doubt that you would ultimately find the Bristle-bird and the Scrub-bird over in your corner. The Whipbird, another of the 'extinct' species, is not only reasonably plentiful in S.W.A., but is almost certainly distributed in patches across the continent into the Mallee of Victoria." Doubtless he will recognize his own words and doctrine, with which I am in complete agreement. My correspondent must have some further information regarding the Whipbird in Western Australia which has not as yet been published. The late Tom Carter resided some 30 miles west of Gnowangerup and it is difficult to understand how he came to miss the presence of this bird which undoubtedly is not a very scarce resident of the district. Some years ago, when writing in this journal, I gave it as my opinion, as the result of my travels in Western Australia, that the missing Whipbird, Bristle-bird, and Scrub-bird would again be found. The presence of the Whipbird is now established and I again prophesy that the Bristle-bird and Noisy Scrub-bird will be "re-discovered," and in the Mallee areas.

I have to express my thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Watts for their kind hospitality, and to Mr. C. A. Gardner, the Government Botanist, for his help regarding identification of flora.