

Stray Feathers

Correct Name of the Black-and-white Fantail.—About a century ago Gray examined the Lambert drawings "from whence Dr. Latham described most of the Australian species . . ." In the *Mag. Nat. Hist.*, vol. XI, May, 1843, Gray published the result of his deliberations on Latham's names and pointed out, on page 192, that *Turdus volitans* was to be used. He placed it in the genus *Seisura* and said that it was *not* the *Seisura volitans* of Vigors and Horsfield, which was the Restless Flycatcher. We should remember that Latham described this latter bird three times correctly. When he saw the Volatile Thrush he noticed how it differed from the other drawings and said "head and neck black," thus agreeing with the type picture.

Gray had some fifty of the Lambert drawings copied and I published a reproduction of the rough copy of the above-mentioned bird in the *Supplement to the Birds of Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands*, 1936, pl. 74. Examination of this reproduction shows that Latham's description must have been taken from the original, for "shape slender," "tail long and even at the end" apply accurately and only to the original drawing. The only discrepancy noticeable in the rough copy of the original is that the wing does not reach to the middle of the tail. So out of eight of the characters mentioned by Latham all are accurate except this one.

Gray's copy of the original Lambert drawings has written on it 'Lamb. Dr. 1-59. *Turdus volitans*,' thus leaving no doubt that the drawing is Latham's type.

I have discussed this matter thoroughly at the Sydney Museum and Messrs. Tom Iredale and K. A. Hindwood concur with me. We maintain that Gray was right and that the correct name for the Black-and-white Fantail (Willy Wagtail), following the genera of the *Checklist* (2nd edn., 1926) is

Rhipidura (Leucocirca) volitans (Latham).

Turdus volitans Latham, *Index Orn. Suppl.*, p. XLI, 1801 (after May 30), Sydney.

GREGORY MATHEWS, Sydney, N.S.W., 22/2/42.

Problems of Nestlings.—In most cases leaving the nest is a simple procedure for fledglings. Occasionally, however, risks must be taken for various reasons and the odds may be against the adventurers. On a farm in Victoria recently I noticed Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) entering and leaving three different water tanks through the overflow pipe. In each case a nest had been built between the side of the tank and the top, limiting the fledglings' chance of escape to a single egress which had to be reached in semi-darkness.

In the event of failure the fledgling would have to flutter back to the nest and await a second attempt, or meet death by drowning. If it be true that birds which spend most of their time in the air take longer to fledge than others— young swifts may be in the nest for six weeks—I hope this wise provision of Mother Nature has ensured a safe emergence for those Victorian nestlings. Heavy rain, of course, would prove fatal.

On the same farm I found a Starling's nest, with eggs, in a hole in a fence-post. The hole was about three feet deep and the sitting bird, either by means of a spy-hole or some specially acute sense or instinct, always knew of my approach and scrambled up to safety in a noisy, though inelegant, manner. Presumably the fledglings will be able to do so also, although the depth and narrowness of the hole made it look a difficult problem. In a similar situation, young parrots have the advantage of a stout, hooked beak and strong claws.—N. L. ROBERTS, Beecroft, N.S.W., 23/12/41.

Bathing by Nesting Birds.—C. E. Bryant (*Emu*, XLI, p. 55) refers to the occasionally-observed action of the Black-fronted Dotterel in which the bird leaves the eggs and wades into the water. He does not consider that this action is necessarily directly connected with the incubating process, but believes that, in some cases, the reason for bathing may be simply to alleviate the discomfort occasioned to the sitting bird by the heat of the sun.

This reference called to mind some observations by the writer upon a female Cockatiel nesting in captivity. The bird under consideration had been hand reared from the nest, and was kept with a number of small parrots and finches in a large flight aviary. She was two years old when a mate of wild stock was provided for her, and within five weeks had laid a clutch of eggs and commenced to incubate. During the incubation period, the sitting bird (the female carried on the major part of the incubating duties) sometimes showed signs of distress. On these occasions she would leave the nest and fly several times up and down the flight, finally coming to rest in a sheltered corner, where she sat until "cooled off." Immediately before returning to the nest, she would fly down to the drinking pool, take a few "beakfuls" of water and then step into the pool so that her breast and belly feathers were submerged. She would then fly to a perch, shake herself gently and return to the nest.

The regularity of these actions aroused interest, and the bird was closely observed thereafter. It should be explained that the nest was a deal box 14" x 6" x 6", with a hole cut in one side. The outside of the box was camouflaged with

stringybark, and a handful of dry wood chips was placed inside. During the 1935-36 season, the bird successfully reared three nests of young—5, 4, 5—and on many occasions on which she was seen to leave the nest and exhibit signs of distress the nest chamber when examined was found to be hot and dry. Later examination, when the bird had returned to the nest after bathing, revealed that the eggs and nest material, though warm, were noticeably moist. It is evident that the Cockatiel exercised a marked degree of control over the humidity of the nesting chamber, the evidence being greatly strengthened by the fact that the bird "cooled off" before wetting her feathers.—J. A. TUBB, Hobart, 20/8/41.

Reviews

Towards a Stable Nomenclature.—The Law of Priority is the keystone of our system of scientific naming, but it has been responsible for so many exasperating and unsettling changes that it is imperative to devise some means of shackling this nomenclatural Frankenstein. The obvious solution seems to be a wholesale adoption of *nomina conservanda*, or lists of reserved names—"permanently beyond reach of name-shifters," in the words of the late Joseph Grinnell—but nomenclaturists have hitherto been strangely averse to following this commonsense plan. A remarkable ornithological instance of sabotaging what little progress had been attained in this direction is the abandonment by most workers—the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee has been a conspicuous exception—of the name *Gallinago*, which had been placed in the list of reserved names by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature in 1916, in favour of *Capella*, really a prior name, but which had been overlooked till 1920. Now a daring plan for the general implementing of the principle of reserved names has been put forward by Mr. G. P. Whitley, of the Australian Museum, in his presidential address to the Royal Zoological Society of N.S.W. ("The Study of Australian Fishes," *Proc. Roy. Zool. Soc., N.S.W.*, 1941, pp. 7-14). Coming from one who has in the past been most devoted to digging up old names and so ousting familiar ones, the proposal will be doubly welcomed by those who regard a scientific name as a label for practical use, and hence consider stability as its prime characteristic. Mr. Whitley writes (p. 9): "The year 1958 will see the bicentenary of the publication of Linne's *Systema Naturae*, the basis of binomial scientific names and zoological nomenclature. I suggest that a fitting commemoration would be the publication of a new *Systema Naturae* to serve as a key to all the Linnean and later species of the animal kingdom . . . every name in the new *Systema* should be a *nomen conservandum*, and any name dug out from overlooked books or papers published before 1958 would have no more standing in scientific nomenclature than a pre-linnean polynomial has to-day." In lieu of specially prepared lists the reviewer borrows a suggestion made verbally to him by Mr. Whitley that various extant checklists could be chosen as integral parts of the new *Systema*. For birds a convenient one might be the checklist of the birds of the world now being produced by Mr. Peters.—D.L.S.

Variation in the Reef Heron.—Dr. Ernst Mayr and Mr. Dean Amadon, in the Whitney South Sea Expedition series, give an informative review of this puzzling dimorphic species ("Geographical Variation in *Demigretta sacra* (Gmelin)," *Amer. Mus. Nov.*, no. 1144, Oct. 13, 1941; 11 pp., with distribution map). Mainly on the basis of