

***Puffinus assimilis* in Eastern Australia — A Definite Record**

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The Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*) has had a chequered history in respect of its claim to be regarded as an eastern Australian bird. Following Gould, most writers such as Ramsay, Campbell, Hall and Leach, accepted it without question as an inhabitant of Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian waters. The work of North and Hull introduced the first doubts about its status, and North wrote, in 1914, in his *Nests and Eggs of Birds found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania*: "With over a quarter of a century's residence near the eastern shores of New South Wales, I have never observed it in any part of the eastern Australian seas, nor have I seen a specimen in any collection obtained in Queensland or New South Wales."

The earlier authors had, indeed, nothing better to go on than a mere supposition of Gould's that a species which bred on Norfolk Island (and later, as it proved, on Lord Howe) should as a matter of course range into eastern Australian seas. When Gregory Mathews came to review the petrels for his work on the birds of Australia he arrived at the same conclusions as North and found that every mainland specimen labelled as *assimilis* was really a misidentified *Puffinus gavia*, the common Fluttering Shearwater of our coast. This threw suspicion on the alleged sight observations of *P. assimilis* that had been published from time to time, none of which can be accepted unreservedly in the absence of specimens.

All things considered, Mathews had no alternative but to remove *P. assimilis* from the local list, stating (*Emu*, vol. XVIII, 1918, p. 83) that "... no mainland record was available from the east coast. I therefore await such before admitting this form."

I am now in a position, after 24 years, to produce such evidence.

On April 10, this year, I found a partially-decomposed specimen of *Puffinus assimilis* on Cronulla beach, not far south of Boat Harbour. It was in fresh plumage, and slight white tipping to the wing coverts suggested it might not be fully adult. Unfortunately a study skin could not be made of it, but the specimen was preserved. I had the pleasure of showing it to Messrs. Mathews and Iredale a few days later.

It seems remarkable that a bird which breeds so near the mainland should so rarely approach our inshore waters. The species, however, is not only one of the non-migratory petrels, but seems from all accounts to be an unusually

sedentary one, little given to wandering. Its appearance in New South Wales inshore waters may be related to the unusual hydrographic conditions ruling during the summer and autumn, high temperatures all along the coast indicating an exceptionally strong influence of the warm eastern Australian Current in the inshore zone.

It may be that the sight records of Dr. P. Jespersen, of the Danish 'Dana' Expedition (*Vidensk. Medd. fra Dansk naturh. Foren.*, vol. 94, 1933, p. 197), reporting the bird along the New South Wales coast, between January and March, 1929, in the off-shore waters, do really refer, at least in part, to this species. But as he does not mention *P. gavia* at all in his list of birds seen, the possibilities of erroneous identification cannot be excluded.

In south-western Australia the species is represented by a number of breeding colonies from the Archipelago of the Recherche to the Abrolhos.

Stray Feathers

Elegant Parrot in the Bridgetown District, S.W.A.—Up to 1938 this species, *Neophema elegans*, was unknown in this heavily-timbered district, in fact it was unknown 20 miles further inland, where the timber is much lighter. In 1937 the Elegant Parrot appeared in the Boyup Brook district, 18 miles east of Bridgetown, and from that year the bird has steadily increased in numbers and range until it is now quite numerous around Bridgetown. To give an idea of its numbers, I may say that this morning, when walking over one of my paddocks (40 acres), within a mile of Bridgetown township, Elegant Parrots were in dozens feeding on the ground, and quite indifferent to my presence. They would not move until I was within a few yards of them, and then, as I approached closer, only flew a dozen or so yards away and settled again and searched for food. Similarly it is also numerous on another of my paddocks (100 acres) six miles east of Bridgetown.

"Elegant" is a good name for the bird, as it is neat in figure and its feathers fit closely to the slender body, giving it a trim appearance. The two shades of green, dark on the back, and with a yellow tinge on the under-surface, plus the blue distal half of the wing, are very distinctive. Judging from the numbers of immature birds, it has bred freely this year.

As with the Bronzewing, the spread of subterranean clover and other pasture grasses, combined with the clearing away of timber and the formation of open spaces, is undoubtedly responsible for the spread of the species to the south-west. Although clearing results in the decrease