

**Flock Pigeon (*Columba dilopha*)**

The stronghold of this fine bird is the mountainous districts of New South Wales. There it feeds in vast flocks on the fruit of the cabbage-tree palms and on the various species of figs. In Queensland, about Brisbane, it is found in large numbers and may be seen feeding in company with the Green Pigeon which it always attacks. It likewise feeds on almost every kind of berry which the scrubs produce. The figs are swallowed whole and as these are sometimes as large as a walnut the bird is provided with a throat capable of great distension. The fruit is mostly taken on the wing; the impetus the bird thus acquires enables it to break off the figs which are, even when ripe, firmly fixed. Early morning and an hour or two before sunset are its feeding times; during the remainder of the day they single out some lofty tree and, there gorged, digest their food.

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**Stray Feathers**

**Plumed Egret at Elwood.**—One September morning last year (1943), I was attracted, when near the Head Street Beach at Elwood, by the dazzling white plumage of a bird perched on a post in the sea close to the shore. The bird was a Plumed Egret (*Egretta intermedia*) in non-breeding plumage. The brilliant white plumage, dirty yellow bill, black legs and small size made its identification certain. The Egret, which was assailed by numerous Silver Gulls, as well as being buffeted by a blustering northerly wind, remained only a short while and then resumed its journey along the coast.—ROY WHEELER, Elwood, Vic., 28/2/44.

**City Kestrels.**—Melbourne's Nankeen Kestrels that inhabit, in particular, the area above the corner of Collins and Queen Streets, are becoming well known, although it is surprising how long they were about before the public and the press were generally aware. My office is at that corner, and over a number of years I have watched them hovering or flying swiftly past, have had them alight on the parapet outside my windows, sometimes with a mouse, and have heard them calling shrilly, particularly as the breeding season approaches.

On August 17, 1943, I heard the birds calling loudly about 4.30 p.m. and saw that a male was treading a hen on the top of a flagpole in Queen Street. That was more than four months ago and there may have been an earlier brood, but yesterday (November 25) a friend telephoned me to say that the 'sparrow-hawks,' having again nested in his ventilator, had the young out of the nest and ensconced on his window ledges.

I went to his office and found a fully-grown young Kestrel on each of two window ledges. The windows were closed but the birds could be observed from a distance of a few

inches. They were exceedingly alert and they watched our every movement, 'jumping' apprehensively at any sudden motion. Occasionally they ran swiftly along the very edge of the sills and peered upwards, evidently 'following' the calls of a parent. They exercised their wings considerably by raising and flapping them.

Two years before, I was told, the birds chose the ventilator, which was broken from the outside, thus affording access, for a nest site. A young bird having died, with consequent inconvenience to the tenants, the ventilator was blocked up from the inside, but left unrepaired outside. Last year the birds reared a brood in the same place, led the fully-developed young to the same window ledges and finally buffeted them off into space, so that the youngsters suddenly found themselves flying.

This year the adults were less in evidence, and finally one young bird fell from the ledge without 'assistance.' It flew into an adjoining wall, recovered its equilibrium and flew off in another direction, struck another wall, again recovered, and finally flew out over the street. One of the parents flew around it and appeared to be endeavouring to guide it.

No food was brought to the youngsters while they were crouched on the ledge. One made an effort to catch a blow-fly that settled in the sun beside it. Evidently the birds consume great numbers of mice, which they most likely capture along the wharves. Insect food and lizards would be readily obtainable from the open waste-lands of Coode Island and Fishermen's Bend, a few miles away.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 26/11/43.

**Partial albinism in Yellow Robin.**—In June, 1943, I had a note from a friend, Captain J. D. McComish, to the effect that he had seen in the Sydney botanic gardens a partial albino Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*). The feathers of the head, nape and throat were white, though the rest of the plumage appeared to be normal. The same bird, or one very much like it, was seen again on October 8, 1943. The notes made by Captain McComish on that occasion read: "I was watching an ordinary Yellow Robin when, suddenly, another bird flew at it. The first bird flew away and the second one settled where it had been perched. I then saw that the head of this bird was white, also the shoulders of the wings. The bird seen in June had a well-defined regular edge to the feathers but, in the bird seen in October, the edges were irregular. Its breast was dull yellow. On December 14, 1943, one of the gardeners told me that a few days previously he had found the remains of this bird under a shrub in that part of the gardens it used to frequent. He took me to the spot and I gathered up the 'remains.'

The body was too damaged to be preserved. However,

the white feathers of the head and neck were more or less intact; there was a grey wash about the forehead, lores and eyes. The lesser wing coverts were largely white, with a few normal feathers showing. The 'remains' were exhibited at a meeting of the Ornithological Section of the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales on December 17, 1943.

Later, when discussing the matter with Mr. Neville W. Cayley, he told me that he had seen in the botanic gardens some four years ago a bird similar to the one found dead, and, also, at the same time, another bird that had the nape only white. Both these Robins used to take food, crumbs and cheese, thrown to them regularly by a couple of bird lovers who visited the gardens.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 22/12/43.

**Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo.**—In the Midlands and Northern Tasmania my experience shows that these cockatoos, *Calyptrorhynchus funereus*, choose their nesting holes in November, and the young ones are not on the wing until January or February. In this southern district of Tasman's Peninsula, and also in the adjoining one of Sorell, I have seen the young ones following their parents as early as November. At the rear of the old Forcett State School, situate close to Lewisham, many black wattles grew. They were constantly visited by the Black Cockatoos. I have watched several young ones, perched on a fallen wattle, all screeching loudly as the older birds poked into the decaying limbs for the big grubs. When a parent bird had secured one, a youngster at once sidled along to it, and with gaping bill and fluttering wings demanded the dainty. Like young Ravens on the wing the young cockatoos were terribly noisy, and no one in the schoolroom was sorry when they flew away to fresh trees. There appeared to be several families in the flock which came regularly to the wattles in the school enclosure. Early this year a Black-cheeked Falcon went after several cockatoos flying over the tiny township at Eaglehawk Neck. Two of the young cockatoos dropped to the roof of a cottage and crouched low by the chimney, while other birds, presumably old ones, continued their flight across the Inlet. Some one appeared with a gun, and the Falcon made off.

I have been told that Black Cockatoos nest in the trees of the Flinders district which runs up from the Tasman Highway to the back of Mt. McGregor at Eaglehawk Neck. A lad who lived in the district found a young Black Cockatoo which had fallen from the hole of its nesting tree. He took it home and reared it. After having it for six months he let it loose in the forest. It had grown into a fine bird by then.—J. A. FLETCHER, Eaglehawk Neck, Tas., 25/11/43.

**A 'Story' about the Lyrebird.**—Some years ago I purchased a book titled *Stories about Birds*, the joint authors being M[ary, 1817-1893] and E[lizabeth, 1823-1873] Kirby, and the publishers Messrs. Cassell, Petter & Galpin. The date of publication is not given but, from the format of the volume, it would be about 1850-1860. My copy is the third edition and is embellished with numerous wood-engravings of British birds, together with illustrations of some outstanding birds from other parts of the world. The text is obviously a compilation from previously-published material and, in consequence, contains some curious statements: curious in the light of present-day knowledge but accepted as fact at the time they were written. We should remember, when inclined to deride the ornithological sins of our forefathers, that such may one day be the fate of some of our own observations.

The following remarks about the Lyrebird, in *Stories about Birds*, impressed themselves upon my mind at the time of reading—

There are twelve or sixteen eggs in the nest, of a white colour, with a few light blue spots. The young birds scamper about with the utmost rapidity, and hide themselves amongst the rocks and bushes.

Years later I happened to be browsing through George Bennett's *Wanderings in New South Wales*, which appeared in 1834, and certain observations by Bennett struck a responsive chord—

... the female lays from twelve to sixteen eggs of a white colour, with a few scattered light blue spots; the young are difficult to catch, as they run with rapidity, concealing themselves among the rocks and bushes (vol. 1, p. 279).

Here, then, was the apparent source of the mis-statements in the Kirbys' book which was probably published some twenty years after the appearance of Bennett's work; unless, of course, Bennett himself obtained his notes from an earlier book. Probably he did not, for his is a first-hand account of his wanderings. He must have listened too seriously to some bushman's 'yarn.'

It is easy to smile now when we know that normally only one egg is laid in a season, that it is a purplish or stone colour with darker blotches, and that the young bird remains in the nest for five weeks or more. John Gould in 1841 (*Birds of Australia*, part III, pl. 14) could state nothing definite about the nesting habits of the Lyrebird. He was told that a nest, found by a cedar-cutter, contained one egg, and that 'The natives state that the eggs are two in number, of a light colour, freckled with spots of red.'

The above remarks illustrate how errors can be, and are, transmitted. A much more interesting, yet elusive, question is—How do they originate?—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 8/11/43.

**Occurrence of the Dunlin (*Pelidna* (= *Erolia*) *alpina*) in Australia.**—In the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales*, vol. x (pt. 2, July 31, 1885), 1886, pp. 251-8, there was published an interesting article under the title 'Rough Notes on the Natural History of the Claremont Islands,' by Gervase F. Mathew. Mathew was paymaster on *H.M.S. Espiegle*, a ship of six guns and 1,130 tons, of the Australian squadron of that period.

The Claremont Islands lie within the Barrier Reef between Cooktown and Cape York in latitude 13° 42' S., and extend for some forty miles from north to south. Mathew landed on the largest of the islands, no. 5, which he called 'Espiegle,' on April 12 and 13, 1885. A 'multitude' of shore birds was observed feeding upon the reefs at low tide. Brief notes are given on the various birds noted, including the following waders: Pied Oyster-catcher, Grey Plover, Golden Plover, Red-capped Dotterel, Mongolian Dotterel (called the Allied Dotterel, *Ochthodromus inornatus*), Barred-rumped Godwit, Little Stint, Knot, Grey-rumped Sandpiper, Curlew, and Whimbrel.

Towards the conclusion of his observations Mathew remarks:

In addition to the shore birds enumerated above three or four examples were shot of a bird which to me appeared to be identical with European dunlin (*Tringa variabilis*). They were in summer dress. I was surprised to find so many of these birds [shore birds] still in their summer plumage at this time of the year, when I should have imagined that they would have been in their winter dress.

When the above remarks were written naturalists generally were unaware of the extent to which wading birds migrate from their northern breeding grounds, often to localities far south of the equator. At the approach of the southern autumn the northward migration takes place. Many of the birds acquire breeding plumage before, or during, the journey.

In summer, or breeding, plumage the Dunlin is quite a distinctive bird and can scarcely be confused with any other wader. Mathew, an English naturalist, would know the species well as it is a common bird in England. There seems to be no reason why we should not accept his identification as being correct. It appears that the Australian occurrence has been overlooked because of the absence of specimens in museums. One of these days we may learn the whereabouts of the birds shot by Mathew, if such were preserved as specimens.

The Dunlin has an extensive breeding range throughout the northern parts of the Northern hemisphere. The majority of birds appear to winter in temperate and tropical zones north of the equator. However, specimens of the European race (*P. a. alpina*) have been secured on the east coast of Africa as far south as Zanzibar. In America the

Eastern form (*P. a. sakhalina*), which is generally known as the Red-backed Sandpiper, has occurred casually in the West Indies and in Nicaragua.

The Eastern Dunlin winters commonly in Japan and, no doubt, along the coasts of China, and perhaps India. Its normal 'winter' quarters do not extend south of the equator.

Mathew was in the service of the navy for more than forty years. He was particularly interested in butterflies and "seems invariably to have gone ashore with a net." From his remarks on the birds seen on the Claremont Islands he appears also to have been an experienced field ornithologist. Anthony Musgrave, in his *Bibliography of Australian Entomology*, 1932, pp. 219-220, gives a brief outline of Mathew's activities, together with a list of his published papers concerning Australian birds and butterflies, and references to biographies. My thanks to Tom Iredale for drawing attention to the reference to the Dunlin as quoted above.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 8/10/43.

**Early Record of the Sanderling (*Crocethia alba*) in Australia.**—In the *Records of the Australian Museum* for 1892<sup>1</sup> there appears a note by Professor Newton on the occurrence of the Sanderling in Australia. Certain inaccuracies therein need correction. Newton remarks:

Having lately occasion to investigate the range of the Sanderling (*Calidris arenaria*), I came across a memorandum made in the year 1860 of my having then seen in the Derby Museum at Liverpool, two specimens of the larger race of this species, one in Winter dress and the other in incipient Spring plumage, both being marked as females and as having been obtained at Sandy Cove in New South Wales, 20th April, 1844, by the late John MacGillivray. As this wandering species does not seem to have been hitherto recorded from Australia, this fact may be of some interest to the Ornithologists of that country.

The actual locality where the Sanderlings were collected was Sandy Cape (not 'Sandy Cove') at the northern end of Fraser Island, south-eastern Queensland (not 'New South Wales'). Reference to the *Voyage of H.M.S. Fly*, on which ship Macgillivray was travelling as Lord Derby's naturalist, reveals that *H.M.S. Fly* was at Sandy Cape in April, 1844.<sup>2</sup> Newton, when examining the labels on the specimens, has obviously mis-read 'Cape' for 'Cove.' The New South Wales part of the locality can be explained by the fact that prior to 1859, when Queensland became a separate State, most of the east coast of Australia was known as New South Wales. Macgillivray collected the Sanderlings in 1844 and, no doubt, wrote New South Wales on the labels.

Confirmation of the correct locality is obtained from the

1. 1892. Newton, Alfred. 'Note on the Occurrence of the Sanderling (*Calidris arenaria*) in New South Wales,' *Rec. Austr. Mus.*, vol. II, no. 1, April, p. 22.

2. 1847. Jukes, J. B. *Narrative of the Surveying Voyage of H.M.S. Fly, 1842-1846*, 2 vols., 8vo. London. (See vol. 2, p. 272.)

*Bulletin of the Liverpool Museums*, wherein it is given as 'Eastern Australia (Sandy Cape, April).'<sup>3</sup> In a footnote it is stated that the specimens were collected during the voyage of *H.M.S. Rattlesnake*, an obvious error, as the *Rattlesnake* was not commissioned until 1846, two years after the birds were taken by Macgillivray. *Fly* was the ship. Macgillivray was on both surveying vessels and wrote a narrative of the voyage of the *Rattlesnake*.<sup>4</sup> These circumstances may account for the confusion.

Newton was also under the impression that the Sanderling had not previously been recorded from Australia. However, in June, 1841, Captain (afterwards Rear-Admiral) Stokes, of *H.M.S. Beagle*, landed at Halifax Bay, near Townsville, north-eastern Queensland, and later remarked: "Our game-bag was thinly lined with small curlews, oystercatchers, and Sanderlings."<sup>5</sup>—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 15/10/43.

3. 1899. Forbes, Henry O., and Robinson, Herbert C. 'Catalogue of the Charadriomorphie Birds (Charadriiformes) . . . in the Derby Museum,' *Bulletin of the Liverpool Museums*, vol. 2, no. 2, September, p. 72.

4. 1852. Macgillivray, John. *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Rattlesnake*, 2 vols., 8vo. London.

5. 1846. Stokes, J. Lort. *Discoveries in Australia . . . during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle, 1837-1843*, 2 vols., 8vo. London. (See vol. 2, p. 254.)

**Black-shouldered Kite in Western Australia.**—Up to within the last few months *Elanus axillaris* has been by no means a common bird in Western Australia, judging by published records of its occurrence in the State, and by specimens received at the Western Australian Museum, Perth. The late Tom Carter has placed on record (*Emu*, vol. III, 1903, pp. 33-34) that the Black-shouldered Kite was a very uncertain visitor to Point Cloates during his residence there, several years passing without his observing any. During the drought of 1891 the birds were plentiful, and again in the good wet season of 1900 they were 'fairly common' and a pair nested and reared their young. The only other occasion on which Carter appears to have observed the species was on September 1, 1916, when he saw a couple near the Minilya River (*Ibis*, 1920, p. 708).<sup>\*</sup> But Mr. McLeod, of Minilya Station informed him that the birds had been very numerous there a few weeks before that date.

Similarly I am informed by Mr. C. E. Orton that he has found the species uncommon at Moora. Up to 1935 Mr. Orton had seen the bird on only two occasions, but on December 24, 1935, he found a pair breeding and observed two other single birds. L. H. C. Jenkins has recorded (*Emu*, vol. XXXVI, 1936, p. 3) seeing a single bird at

\* Carter called the bird *Elanus notatus parryi*.

Northam in July, 1934, and a pair in that district from March, 1935, which successfully reared three young ones. Apart from the above, the only other records for Western Australia are the initial record for the State by Gould, who mentioned in his *Handbook*, (vol I, 1865, p. 53) its being found at Swan River, and that of W. B. Alexander (*Emu*, vol. XX, 1921, p. 161) who recorded a specimen in the Western Australian Museum, Perth, shot at Burswood on March 30, 1909.

Mr. Glauert has supplied me with a full list of specimens of the species received at the Western Australian Museum, so I am enabled to place on record all known occurrences of the bird to date in Western Australia. Records for the State south of the Tropics only are given.

It will be noticed how very prevalent the species has been since April, 1943, and, in drawing my attention to this, Mr. Glauert suggests that, as this Kite is a known enemy of small mammals, numbers may have attended the late record mouse plague of the interior, spreading in all directions when the mouse population declined.

The pair which bred at Bridgetown have now hatched out two young ones, which have left the nest, and it will be interesting to see whether any of the four birds remain on in the district. I have spread the gospel of *laissez faire* as far as possible, and have taken the opportunity of spreading the information that the birds are valuable destroyers of mice, beetles, etc., and are by no means a menace to young poultry. The Kestrel-like hovering habits of the species, to which attention was drawn by Mr. W. B. Alexander in *The Emu* (vol. XXII, 1923, p. 146-147) is much used by the two local parent birds when searching for food, and the habit lays the bird open to falling an easy prey to anyone who has the mistaken impression that the species is a danger to young poultry.

The nest, a bulky affair, was placed in the centre top branches of a red gum (*Eucalyptus calophylla*) at a height of approximately thirty feet from the ground. It was very inconspicuous, being well hidden by the leafy tops of the branches. The tree is close to a farm house, in a paddock with few other trees, and within a mile of the township.

The occurrences of the Black-shouldered Kite in Western Australia, of which there are records, appears to be as follows:—1865 (*ante*), Swan River, Gould. 1891, Point Cloates, plentiful, Tom Carter. 1900, Point Cloates, fairly common, one pair bred, Tom Carter. 1901, January 4, Dongarra, W.A. Museum. 1902, July 21, Yalgoo, W.A. Museum. 1909, March 20, Burswood, Perth, female, W.A. Museum. 1916, Minilya River, very numerous, G. McLeod. September 1, Minilya River, two observed, T. Carter. 1933, October 1, Beacon, male, W. A. Museum. 1934,



July, Northam, single bird seen, L. H. C. Jenkins. September 12, West Brookton, female, W.A. Museum. 1935, March, Northam, pair nested, L. H. C. Jenkins. December 24, Moora, pair nested, C. L. Orton—before 1935 seen only on two occasions. 1938, March 4, Calcarra, Bolgart, W.A. Museum. 1942, August 7, Yanchap, W.A. Museum. 1943, April 13, Kurnalpi, W.A. Museum. June 9, Yarloop, W.A. Museum. June 18, King River, Albany, W.A. Museum. June 23, Pinjarra, W.A. Museum. July 2, Three Springs, W.A. Museum. August 30, Kojonup, W.A. Museum. September, Quairading, observed by L. Glauert on three occasions. October 16, Boyup Brook, W.A. Museum. November, Bridgetown, one pair nested, H. M. Whittell. 1944, January 13, Helena Valley, W.A. Museum. January 18, Busselton, W.A. Museum.

Owing to condition on receipt, all specimens recorded as received at the Museum were not preserved.—H. M. WHITTELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 25/1/44.

**Reed Warblers and Gum Blossom.**—On the Little River, not far from the Little River township, is a small reserve. Last summer, while resting under the trees there and listening to the Reed Warblers calling from a reed-bed along the river, Mr. Jack Jones and I saw what we took to be 'Greenies' feeding in the blossom of a big old gum across the river. When the birds left the blossom and glided down across the water to the reeds, we at once saw that we had been mistaken, for the birds were Reed Warblers. The explanation no doubt was that the blossom attracted certain insects of the Reed Warblers' liking, as well as being an easy source of food for their young. Nests with eggs of the Reed Warbler were seen on the edge of the reeds, so possibly in the further reeds were nests containing young birds.—ROY WHEELER, Elwood, Vic, 17/9/43.

**Moving Plover Eggs.**—Reading Mr. Sharland's article on plover egg clutches brought to mind my having shifted plover eggs to another site to save their destruction. When ploughing a paddock I found the clutch of eggs and moved them about three yards. The bird returned immediately and covered them. A week later I had to shift them again and the birds again accepted the change. The eggs finally hatched safely.

The foregoing refers to the Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*). The Spur-winged Plover is here, also, but the foxes keep them down. Foxes have hunted the Plain Turkey and the Curlew right out of the district. I consider them the worst enemy of our ground-nesting birds. Out 'West' most of the water birds have taken to nesting on islands in creeks or swamps to get away from the foxes.—A. E. CAMERON, Biddeston, Qld., 25/10/43.