

survey there, and Sonnerat, nephew to Poivre, became his assistant. Poivre, with the assistance of his nephew, ultimately broke the Dutch spice monopoly by collecting and successfully transplanting the necessary plants from islands north of New Guinea and then retired to France. He was a man of great ability and greatly loved and respected. Commerson, who died in Mauritius after the departure of Poivre, was a very brilliant naturalist and an indefatigable worker. Jossigny was his draughtsman. Sonnerat was not nearly so able a person and one imagines that he was driven by ambition and jealousy to take Commerson's material after his death and publish it as his own. Commerson and he were apparently working together at preparing some drawings for publication as, in addition to those by Jossigny still in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, there are others by Sonnerat with notes by Commerson on the back. That he had used his master's material was known to Cuvier who wrote in his *Histoire des Sciences naturelles*, 5, pp. 93-7, 1845—"Les deux ouvrages de Sonnerat renferment beaucoup de dessins provenant des papiers laissés par Commerson." But it seems likely that his zeal as a collector and the part he played in breaking the Dutch spice monopoly persuaded his contemporaries to take a more lenient view of his behaviour than they would otherwise have done.

I should like to express my thanks to Dr. D. L. Serventy for drawing my attention to Mr. W. B. Alexander's paper on Sonnerat's birds; I was enabled to work at the Commerson material in Paris through the kindness of Professor Berlioz, and with the very practical aid of a grant from the Cultural Section of the French Embassy in London.

Stray Feathers

Interesting South Queensland Sea Bird Derelicts.—Mr. David Fleay, of the West Burleigh Fauna Reserve, in one of his recent articles in the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, stated that the rescue and reporting of sick sea birds at any time along South Coast beaches would be of great assistance in providing fresh data. In addition to a number of shearwaters, other interesting birds have been brought to him. Some of those that have failed to recover under treatment have been handed over to the Queensland Museum, where the Director, Mr. George Mack, has had them made into skins. I am indebted to these two gentlemen not only for the opportunity of examining and measuring these birds and skins from time to time, but also for assisting me to obtain the following particulars for recording here:

White-winged Petrel (*Pterodroma leucoptera*). Picked up alive in grass beside the swimming pool on the ocean beach at Burleigh Heads on April 30, 1955. Three days'

efforts to restore its strength failed and it became a skin in the Queensland Museum, no. 0.5446. The record shows male; I understand the gonads were small. My measurements soon after death were—length 308 mm., bill 27 mm., wing 225 mm., tail 99 mm., tarsus 30 mm. There was a half inch diameter warty appendage above the feathers on the right side of the breast, which was calloused and must have been a serious obstacle to stream-lining. Several Wedge-tailed and a Short-tailed Shearwater came ashore also in the heavy weather of this May day week-end.

Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*). Found alive at Kirra Beach on July 1, 1955. It ate well for a day or two then went downhill and died about July 8. It is now a Museum skin. It proved to be a male and the gonads were small. This bird is very dark coloured but in good plumage. Bill 95 mm., tarsus 86 mm., wing 533 mm., tail 223 mm.

Dove Prion (*Pachyptila desolata*). Delivered by Mr. Fleay to the Museum on May 30, 1955, from Burleigh Heads and now skin no. 0.5439. For my own interest I applied the tabular key of p. 105, *Birds of Western Australia* (Serventy and Whittell) second edition, to this skin and found—tail band 25 mm., dertrum, in side elevation 8 mm., with space to nasal tubes 10 mm., thus classed as 'appreciable space', beak lamellae not exposed, beak margins counted straight, beak width 13 mm., culmen length 26 mm. (beak ratios thus 2.0), wing 180 mm., tail 78 mm. and tarsus 32 mm. Thus concluded the specimen to be *P. desolata* and I found, on reference to Mr. Mack, that he identified it as such, by other means.—J. S. ROBERTSON, East Brisbane, Qld., 26/8/55.

Scavenger Moths in Nests.—When reading over my records contained in 'The Birds of the Murphy's Creek District', *Emu*, vol. 56, at p. 112, I find that it is necessary that I should correct my statements regarding the Forest Kingfisher as they are no doubt confusing to readers and do not convey my correct meaning.

My notes read as follows: "Young are often infested with the larvae of some scavenger moth"—I should have said that the nest is infested.

My reference to a moth is the result of having frequently found the cocoons, paper-like affairs suspended by web to the under side of termite clusters that had been used by nesting Kingfishers.

Though the live insect had not been observed in the nest, it was very evident that the larvae had acted as scavengers during the occupation of the nest by the young Kingfishers, and that they had left after the Kingfishers had vacated and had pupated on the outer parts of the termite cluster.

A scavenger fly is often found in the nests of both the Forest and Sacred Kingfishers; the pupae of these in their

brown cellular cases are found among the refuse in the floor of the nest after the birds have left.

My reference to termite mounds should be explained more clearly, so that it will not be assumed that all kinds of termite mounds may be used. My meaning is that the "mounds" are termite clusters commonly found on trees.—E. A. R. LORD, Murphy's Creek, Q'ld., 13/7/56.

Is the Lyrebird Polygamous?—When writing in *The Emu* for February 1953 (vol. 53, p. 88) on the occurrence of polygamy among certain ground-nesting birds, I mentioned that in 1909 A. J. North had quoted a Victorian correspondent as saying that Lyrebirds "do not pair but are polygamous". Recently I have noted that another observation bearing on the point is contained in an article by L. C. Cook of Poo-wong, Gippsland, published in *The Emu* for the same year as North's note (vol. 8, p. 220); it is said there that male Superb Lyrebirds invariably have two or three females as 'consorts', but it is suggested that in such cases only one bird lays, though possibly the others assist in incubation. Further remarks to a similar effect, with a certain amount of evidence added, are made by Cook in another *Emu* article published in 1916 (vol. 16, p. 101).

With those statements in mind, it is interesting to find that a reference to the possible occurrence of polygamy among Lyrebirds was published during last century. The commentator in this case was Augustus A. Leycester, a settler on the Richmond River, N.S.W., who is known to ornithology because of basic and informative notes on the Albert Lyrebird which he sent to London, and which were published by John Gould in his *Handbook to the Birds of Australia* in 1865.

Leycester, a young Englishman, collected the first known example of the Albert Lyrebird in a rain-forest of the Richmond River in 1844, but, being unaware that it differed from *Menura* in the south, he did nothing with the specimen. Fifteen years later he carried out, with aboriginal assistants, an intensive search for an occupied nest of *M. alberti*, and, after a hunt extending over four months, a female was found brooding an egg. Later again Leycester wrote a detailed account of that remarkable expedition of 1859, and this appeared in the *Sydney Mail* of July 10, 1880—it jostled for space with a lengthy account of the operations of the Kelly gang of bushrangers, who had been broken up at Glenrowan a few days previously. In his subsidiary remarks Leycester says that bushmen in his area had gained the impression that the Lyrebird was polygamous, but he adds that he himself had not been able to verify this theory.

The fact is, therefore, that a belief of the kind among bushmen has prevailed at intervals, in respect of both species of Lyrebirds, during almost one hundred years. It is not a

theory to be lightly dismissed, particularly in the case of a genus in which the male birds are domestically slack. Personally, I incline to think that Lyrebirds are in fact polygamous, but only when circumstances make the practice desirable.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, N.S.W., 7/2/56.

The Blue Wren along the Murray River.—In *The Emu*, vol. 56, p. 80, Claude N. Austin records the Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) from Ned's Corner, north-western Victoria. For several years I have been studying the distribution of the genus *Malurus* in South Australia with the aim of eventually publishing a paper on the subject. The following notes summarize the information on hand with regard to the distribution of *M. cyaneus* along the Murray River in South Australia.

The Blue Wren occurs around Lakes Alexandrina and Albert where suitable habitat occurs, its range in this area being continuous with the south-east of South Australia, via the Coorong, and was almost certainly continuous with the Mount Lofty Ranges via the Goolwa and Victor Harbour coastal strip before the coastal scrub was cleared. The few remnants of native vegetation along this strip indicate that the former vegetation was of a mallee-heath type of scrub. The species still occurs in a small tea-tree swamp (*Melaleuca halmaturorum* and *M. pubescens*) between Goolwa and Middleton, indicating a former continuous range.

The range probably is (or was before clearing) continuous between the Mount Lofty Ranges and The Lakes via the Rivers Finniss and Bremer, Currency Creek and possibly other streams.

The species is common in the lignums, etc., bordering the Murray from Wellington, where the river enters Lake Alexandrina, north to at least Wongulla, but apparently disappears between Wongulla and Swan Reach, about nine miles further north direct (considerably more by river), being replaced by the Purple-backed Wren (*M. assimilis*), which also occurs in small numbers at Wongulla, but which is not normally found further south along the river, although present in the bordering mallee.

To my knowledge there are no records of *cyaneus* between Wongulla and Kingston, where the species is again common. From Kingston the range appears to be continuous to at least Renmark, but somewhere between there and Mildura it again disappears. *M. assimilis* also occurs along the Murray in the Moorook area and may possibly occur throughout the upper section of the Blue Wren's range.

In addition to Austin's record from Ned's Corner I can add the following for this general area—

1. Rufus Creek (south-western New South Wales). Captain S. A. White in 'Birds of Lake Victoria and the Murray River for 100 Miles Down Stream' (*The Emu*, vol. 18, pp.

8-25, 1918) stated that along Rufus Creek—"We were surprised to see the little Blue Wrens and their cousins, the Red-shouldered Wrens, moving about in the almost submerged lignum bushes" (p. 13).

2. Lake Cullulera (north-western Victoria). One male seen in September or October 1955 (Jim Watson, *in litt.*, November 4, 1956).

It appears probable that the range of *Malurus cyaneus* along the Murray River in South Australia was once continuous, but that it was split by the advent of some arid period, and replaced by the Purple-backed Wren.—BRIAN GLOVER, Blackwood South, S.A., 27/3/56.

Delay in Egg-laying by the Brown Thornbill after Completion of Nest.—The time taken by the Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*) from the commencement of building until the young leave the nest is, in normal circumstances, about five weeks. Accordingly, the following details of three nests of this species found near Sydney and studied during July, August and September, 1955, should be of interest. The estimated period for these three nests is some nine (A), ten (B) and seven (C) weeks.

Nest A—Kuring-gai Chase

July 23 Building, nest half constructed.
July 31 Completed, ready for eggs.
August 6 No change.
September 10 Three eggs well incubated.
September 11 Two eggs and one young.
September 24 Three young ready to leave.

Nest B—Royal National Park

July 24 Building, nest three-quarters constructed.
September 4 Three fresh eggs.

Nest C—Becroft

July 30 Nest just commenced.
August 1 Nest completed.
August 12 First egg laid.
August 14 Second egg laid.
August 16 Third egg laid.
August 18 Commenced brooding day and night.
Bird on nest at night after first egg was laid but not during day until August 18. No further observation until September 2, when nest was found destroyed.

Observations were made on nests A and B only on the dates shown, but nest C was under observation by Mr. H. Salmon twice daily from July 30 to August 18. In this last case the nest-building occupied three to four days, but nest A was

probably completed in seven days or even fewer. In addition, the times between the completion of the nest and egg-laying were:

Nest A—Between 27 and 34 days.

Nest B—Approximately 35 days.

Nest C—10 days.

No abnormal weather conditions existed prior to or during the period of observation.

Similar information to the foregoing data, especially that relating to delay in egg-laying after the completion of the nest, would be very useful for comparison.—S. G. LANE, Lane Cove, N.S.W., 24/4/56.

Reviews

Western Australian Ornithology.—A detailed account of the nesting habits of the Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*) is given by John Warham in the *Western Australian Naturalist*, vol. 5, no. 2, October 1955, p. 31, based on observations at Eclipse Island. Striking photographs illustrating the feeding operation are included as well as a nocturnal flight study over the rookery. In the first part of an account of the bird life at Wooroloo E. H. Sedgwick (p. 39) describes the habitat preferences of the local birds. Short notes in the same issue deal with the unusually early arrival of Rainbow-birds in the spring of 1954 (Rica Erickson), tortoises as predators of Coot (J. R. Ford), several records of the Red-eared Firetail in the Darling Range, occurrence of the White Ibis at Bunbury; breeding frequency records in the wheatbelt (E. H. Sedgwick), and an account of an unusually large clutch in the Grey Butcher-bird (A. H. Robinson).

An annotated list of the birds of Wooroloo by E. H. Sedgwick appears in the March 1956 number (vol. 5, no. 3, p. 63). An important record of the occurrence of the Arctic Tern on the Swan River is reported by G. M. Storr (p. 70).

In the May 1956 issue (vol. 5, no. 4) commences a series of papers by J. Gentili on tropical cyclones as bioclimatic activators (p. 82): reference is made to the meteorological backgrounds of notable bird irruptions in the State, including those of the White-winged Black Tern. A remarkable recovery of a ringed European Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) is reported by G. M. Dunnet; the bird was marked in Sweden on July 9, 1955 as a nestling and was found dead south of Fremantle six months later, on January 7, 1956, after presumably flying around the Cape of Good Hope. This is the first occurrence of the Common Tern in Western Australia, but the east Asiatic subspecies is known to migrate to the eastern States.

In vol. 5, no. 5, July 1956, E. Lindgren describes a visit to Lion Island in the Recherche Archipelago (p. 97), and V. Serventy an excursion to Queen Victoria Spring (p. 102). He describes a remarkable concentration of Budgerygahs which even landed on the canopy of the motor vehicle under the impression that the sheen of the enamel was water. L. Glauert reports the finding of a Gannet (*Sula serrator*), on the sea beach near Northampton, which had been ringed in New Zealand; this is the first occasion on which marked members of the New Zealand breeding population have been taken in the State.—D.L.S.

Australian Orioles and Figbirds.—In keeping with present-day views of many taxonomists, the orioles and figbirds are treated as a family unit by Allen Keast in his recent review of Australian forms ('Variation in the Australian Oriolidæ', *Proc. Roy Zool. Soc. N.S.W.*, for 1954-55, pp. 19-25, April 10, 1956). Specimens housed in the American Museum of Natural History, New York, and the Australian Museum,