

Further Records of the White-winged Black Tern at Raby Bay, Queensland

By L. AMIET, Cleveland, Qld.

On December 5, 1955, a pair of White-winged Black Terns (*Chlidonias leucoptera*) was observed in the company of about 150 Little Terns (*Sterna albifrons*) on the tidal flats at Raby Bay. Although otherwise in full eclipse plumage, enough black was beneath the wings of both birds to enable them to be identified—this characteristic, when present, being diagnostic. Judging by the character of the rest of the plumage, they were first-year birds: the grey ground colour with brownish mottlings on the crown and wings agreed with W. B. Alexander's description (*Emu*, 17, 95-105, 1917) of the birds of immature plumage, except for the dusky feathers beneath the wings along the line of the bone structure.

No further birds were seen, although the locality was visited on eight occasions, until February 11, 1956. On that date six birds were in evidence, again in company with Little Terns. Again on February 18, when I was accompanied by Messrs. J. Robertson and F. Hamilton, local members of the R.A.O.U., twenty-six were counted at one time, all being inter-mixed with the Little Terns. All birds were now showing some characteristic changes in plumage. The greyish white of the under-wing and the brown or grey and white of the head were to some degree mottled with black in all cases, and a few birds showed some black towards the tip of the wings. On each occasion when the birds were close enough for such identification, the bills were noted to be black and the legs of a dark colour. An interesting characteristic was the manner in which the birds perched. When at rest the crown was level with the back and the head and neck appeared to be drawn in towards the body and the folded wings were raised until the upper silhouette was almost horizontal. Twelve birds were again seen on my last visit on March 8, and as usual were in company with *S. albifrons*. In most cases the black mottling beneath the wings was now more pronounced and the black of the nape was extending further forward on the head. On all occasions that the birds were observed enough black remained beneath the wings for easy identification.

Messrs. Robertson and Hamilton, who saw the species for the first time on February 18, made a number of other visits to Raby Bay. Mr. Robertson very kindly handed to me notes on observations covering plumage variations in more detail than dealt with in my more general outline, for inclusion in this article. Although I have outlined the birds seen on February 18, his notes are also included for comparison.

February 18, 1956. Twenty-six birds were counted. When comparing *C. leucoptera* with *S. albifrons* the former is both taller and larger, but with a short, hunched neck stance, and the wings are also longer and less slender. Generally the under-wing and back show black mottling on an all white ground. One bird showed a black nape extending down the hind neck. In most cases the black nape extended below the eye—past the ear in some. A number showed much black mottling under the wing. The tail was fanned rather than forked. The bill was black and seemed noticeably shorter than that of an adjacent Little Tern. The legs were black and viewed from a position so close that their colour could be compared with the rusty nails protruding from the old pier on which they were resting.

February 25, 1956. Nine birds present and in company with a number of Little Terns on the old pier. They were clearly larger than the latter species and showed black areas when perched. Some showed black from the nape down the hind neck and below the ears; some showed black patches covering a quarter of the under-wing.

March 10, 1956. About 50 White-winged Black Terns on the old pier. At times several squatted on the salt-pans among waders. A third of the under-wing of many was black; the rest showed a mottled black and white under-wing pattern.

March 24, 1956. Ten birds present; two showed the forward third of the under-wing totally black, with the body mottled black. The birds fed by skimming over and reaching down to the sea with the bill tip, in the manner of the Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*).

April 8, 1956. At least 21 birds observed. Six were in the following plumage—head, neck and body all jet black; forward half of under-wing, black; tail, white; upper-wing, forward half, white and rear part, grey. The other birds in varying stages of plumage. The legs seemed dark red. Later 34 birds were seen and it was definitely ascertained that the legs were red, and the bill either black or dull red.

April 22, 1956. Three birds present; two with fully-black bodies except for a few white feathers on the side of the neck. The body of the other bird was almost two-thirds black. In flight the black under-wing now formed a triangle with the base at the body, from the front edge and over one-third of the width of the wing; the apex at the carpus joint.

The foregoing was the last occasion, during autumn 1956, that the species was seen.

In response to my request, Mr. George Mack, Director of the Queensland Museum, kindly supplied measurements of all specimens of the two species of terns taken at Raby Bay last April, during the visitation of the White-winged Black Tern. It would appear from these measurements, which are in millimetres and included below, that their difference in size is negligible and the apparent difference in the field can be attributed to the different stances of the two species and in some cases to the longer wing of *C. leucoptera*.

Sterna albifrons

Sex	Wing	Tail	Culmen	Tarsus
♂	181	90	29	17
♂	183	77	28	18
♂	177	90	29	17
♀	186	83	30	17
♀	180	80	25	18
♀	185	88	24	18

<i>Chlidonias leucoptera</i>				
Sex	Wing	Tail	Culmen	Tarsus
♂	210	72	24	18
♀	183	70	23	18

In conclusion, it would appear from these observations, and from previous reports in *The Emu*, that this species is not an unusual visitor to Cleveland, Moreton Bay. It may in fact be a regular summer resident and either have been overlooked or the localities frequented by it may not have been visited, between reports, by observers. On the other hand some birds of the apparent irruption reported by me (*Emu*, 56, 1956, 95-99) on the Queensland coast, in 1955, may have found the waters of Moreton Bay to their liking and may return yearly until there is a year of unfavourable conditions, causing them to desert the locality until another irruption from northern haunts takes place. As J. Gentili refers (*W.A. Nat.*, 5, 1956, 84-85) to another visitation to Western Australia in March 1956, and as some thirteen birds had returned to Raby Bay on October 25, 1956, either of the above theories could equally apply.

A Victorian Record of *Pachyptila* *crassirostris*

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Of the six species of *Pachyptila* (prions) listed in Alexander's *Birds of the Ocean*, and diagnosed so fully by Fleming (*Emu*, vol. 38, p. 396, and vol. 41, p. 134), and Falla (*Emu*, vol. 40, p. 218), five have been found on the Australian coast. The sixth has at long last turned up—a storm-washed dead specimen near Portland, Victoria. *Pachyptila* records kept by me show that *P. turtur* (Fairy Prion) is a common bird from Portland, whereas *P. salvini* (Medium-billed Prion), *P. belcheri* (Thin-billed Prion) and *P. desolata* (Dove Prion) were, until the winter of 1956, rare birds. During that year many specimens of all three were found. *P. vittata* (Broad-billed Prion) has not yet been recorded locally. This article deals with the finding of *P. crassirostris* (Fulmar Prion).

Where Portland Bay curves north and then east towards Port Fairy, is a wide shelving beach, and here on November 1, 1954, I picked up a number of dead sea birds. A few were retained as suitable to send to the National Museum, among which was a prion of uncertain species. The birds were in early stages of decomposition, and thus put aside until fit to send away. In the meantime, the position of Ornithologist at the Museum became vacant, and no one was appointed for many months. In June 1955, I sent a parcel of bird remains to Dr. D. L. Serventy in Perth. Week after week went by with no reply and the matter was almost forgotten. Then on August 8, 1956, while in the National Museum, I inspected