

Stray Feathers

An Australian Sight Record of the Black Tern.—At 11 a.m. on September 18, 1958, a very small black tern was observed on a sand-spit at The Entrance, some 50 miles north of Sydney. The bird was in company of, but apparently not associating with, a mixed flock of eight Caspian Terns (*Hydroprogne caspia*), 50 White-fronted Terns (*Sterna striata*) and 40 Crested Terns (*Sterna bergii*). The bird was observed for 30 minutes. During that time it remained stationary except for four very brief flights over the sand-spit area—once skimming at the surface of the water in the manner of the Whiskered (*Chlidonias hybrida*) and White-winged Black (*C. leucoptera*) species. It finally took off, flew out to sea, and turned south along the coast.

On close observation the coloration was noted as bill black, bird completely black with the wings off-black. No white coloration was visible while the bird was stationary. In flight the additional details noted were white leading edges to the wings, the underwing greyish-white, and the under-side (only) of the tail white. The foregoing details were noted at 70 yards' range in good sunlight with a pair of 8 x 30 binoculars. This description was telephoned without delay to A. R. McGill for an independent opinion.

From the writer's previous knowledge, whilst resident in Brisbane, of the White-winged Black Tern, the bird was not considered to be of that species. Subsequent reference to literature and to members of the Sydney branch has supported this. The main diagnostic characteristics noted were—

- (a) the absence of white on the wing when the bird was stationary,
- (b) the black bill,
- (c) the white on the under-side only of the tail,
- (d) the greyish-white under-wing,
- (e) the lack of the black under-wing patch of the White-winged Black Tern, the more likely species in this country.

It will be noted that there are certain omissions in the sight record. The colour of the feet is not noted because, candidly, I could not determine it, the legs being in shadow. The colour of the upper surface of the tail was not noted, but I am certain that the under-side, only, was white. In fact, when the bird was stationary (and I viewed it from all angles) no white at all could be seen.

I believe the bird to have been a Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*), the species breeding on the lakes and swamps of North America and Europe—migrating south to South America, Africa, the Persian Gulf and India. As the nominate race has not been recorded any nearer to Australia than

India it is a possibility that the bird observed was of the American race (*surinamensis*) which is recorded as migrating to Chile. In view of the species of north/south American migrants which have strayed into the south-west pacific—Bartram's Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*) and the Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa limosa haemastica*) for example—this seems not unreasonable.

It is of interest to note that this bird was fully coloured at a time (late September) when the White-winged Black Terns of Moreton Bay in 1957 had lost almost all their black colouring except on the underparts.

The above sight record, uncorroborated as it is, can hardly justify the species' inclusion in an official 'List'. However, it may serve to interest more observers in the field characteristics of the two black terns and also to give closer examination to all small terns seen in the southern summer.—H. L. BELL, Greenwich, N.S.W., 29/9/58.

Cormorants and Mussels.—Early in the present century Dr. Erhard Eylmann made some observations near Waikerie, S.A., which suggest that cormorants feed on fresh-water mussels. In a paper on 'Die Vogelwelt des südöstlichen Teiles vom Staate Südastralien' (*Journal für Ornithologie*, 62, 1, 244-247, April, 1914), he reports the finding of numbers of large mussel (*Unio*) shells lying close together with a stone in the centre of the group. These shells were usually broken, whilst those which were widely and sparsely distributed were intact, as a rule.

There were similar collections of mussel shells around tree stumps and with light brown pellets of unidentifiable matter. Little Black Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*) and Little Pied Cormorants (*P. melanoleucus*) are numerous in the locality at times, and Eylmann concluded that these birds had broken the shells to obtain the animal inside for food.—E. F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 9/2/1959.

Blue Wren at Kulkyne Forest, Vic.—During October and November 1958, a group of bird observers camped for a fortnight in the Kulkyne Forest near Hattah. A notable distributional record was that of a male Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) seen in the mallee/spinifex area. In the same area, within fifty yards of each other, were several parties of Black-backed Wrens. The Blue-and-white Wren and the Purple-backed Wren have also been recorded from this district, making four species of *Malurus* found within a five-mile radius. The Blue Wren may have strayed from one of the 'inland' colonies noted by several observers—see C. N. Austin (*Emu*, vol. 56, p. 80), J. N. Hobbs (*Emu*, vol. 56, pp. 147-148), B. Glover (*Emu*, vol. 56, pp. 228-229) and L. Harvey (*Bird Observer*, June 1957, no. 307).—JOHN L. MCKEAN, Hampton, Vic., 23/12/58.

Fork-tailed Swift at Macquarie Island.—The recording of a Fork-tailed Swift (*Apus pacificus*) at Macquarie Island in December 1958, not only adds a new bird to the island's list, but extends considerably the range of the species in the southern hemisphere. The occasion was during the annual 'change-over' of A.N.A.R.E. personnel.

On December 11, 1958, D. S. Farner noticed a swift flying over the Royal Penguin rookeries at the Nuggets but no field marks could be discerned at the time. The following day Farner and I had excellent views of a large, white-rumped swift with deeply-forked tail, as it sailed in the windy up-currents around North Head—undoubtedly *Apus pacificus*. Twelve months previous to this, an unidentified swift was seen at Macquarie Island by G. M. Dunnet.

The Fork-tailed Swift is an accidental visitor to Tasmania and there is only one reported occurrence from New Zealand (*Checklist of N.Z. Birds*, 1953). Of the two Asiatic swifts which winter in the Australasian Region, the Fork-tail predominates in the west, and the Spine-tail (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) in the east, so geographically the latter would appear better situated for an extension of range to Macquarie Island. Meteorologically, however, odd Fork-tailed Swifts from Western Australia are the more likely migrants by means of accidental transportation on the powerful westerly air streams south of the continent.—J. D. GIBSON, Thirroul, N.S.W., 15/2/59.

Death of Mrs. Helen Edelsten.—The death occurred on October 18, 1958, at Sherborne in Dorset, England, of Mrs. Helen Edelsten, grand-daughter of the famous English-Australian ornithologist John Gould. She was aged 81 years.

Mrs. Edelsten was the daughter of Gould's oldest daughter, Eliza. Although Gould and his wife had six children (three sons and three daughters), Eliza was the only one who married, and, although she was married twice, she had only the one child. The father of the child was John Muskett; he died soon after his daughter was born.

As a young woman Helen Muskett married Dr. E. A. Edelsten, by whom she had three sons and a daughter. The father and one of the sons have died, but the daughter and the other sons, both of whom are medical practitioners, are still living, and all three have children. If, therefore, the name of Gould is not perpetuated, the line is being carried on.

Mrs. Helen Edelsten, a cultured and gracious woman, was the basic means of causing a great deal of valuable Gouldiana to be recovered in 1938 and presented to the Mitchell Library, Sydney. The material was then in possession of her sons, Drs. Geoffrey and Alan Edelsten, who kindly co-operated in making it available. Subsequently, she presented enlarged photographs of John and Elizabeth Gould to the Gould League of Bird Lovers of Victoria. Her last act in

relation to her grand-father was attendance at the 'christening' of the T.A.A. airliner *John Gould*, in 1951, before it left England for service in Australia. She had been hoping in recent years to visit this country, but failing health caused the intention to remain unfulfilled.

For earlier references in *The Emu* to the Edelsten family see 'Mrs. John Gould and her Relatives' (vol. 40, pp. 337-54, 1941), and 'Birdmen and Aircraft' (vol. 52, p. 213, 1952), and for a list of papers arising from the Gouldiana recovered in 1938 see 'John Gould's Australian Prospectus' (vol. 42, pp. 74-84, 1942). Other details are given in *The Story of Elizabeth Gould* (1944).—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, N.S.W., 27/11/58.

Channel-billed Cuckoo on the New England Tablelands.—A Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novæ-hollandiæ*) was found with a damaged leg, unable to fly, within the city of Armidale on October 8, 1958. As the species is not usually seen on the New England Tableland of New South Wales, this report is submitted.

The damage to the leg made it impossible for the bird to stand, and as a result it could not take off. It was kept for six weeks, being fed fruit (tomato, apple, papaw) and meat, and it became very tame. After a time the leg improved enough for the animal to hop a little. It made some local flights but never flew more than a few hundred yards. While free in the garden, apparently in good health, it suddenly became ill and died in a few minutes.

Its arrival in Armidale was preceded by four days of westerly winds. Drought conditions existed at the time, and had done so for the preceding twelve months.—CLIVE WALLER and JOHN LE GAY BRERETON, Armidale, N.S.W., 25/12/58.

Reviews

Birds of Sydney.—Whatever cavillings may be made concerning local lists, prepared, at times, by enthusiasts visiting a particular district on a two-weeks' holiday, a comprehensive tally of a relatively-large, diversified in habitat types, well-populated area serves a most useful purpose. Accordingly we recommend *The Birds of Sydney (County of Cumberland, New South Wales)*, by K. A. Hindwood and A. R. McGill, 128 pp., 19 pls., Royal Zool. Soc. of N.S.W., 1958, price 12/6.

The Introduction indicates that more than half of Australia's total bird species occur in the County, a corollary of the variety of country and of climatic conditions applicable. The completeness of records during recent decades is commented upon, and this reviewer takes this opportunity of pointing out that the two authors have contributed largely in this respect.

Six general habitats are recognized—rain-forest, forest country, heathlands, open country, swamps, and seashore. A map showing geological formations is included.

The General List (377 species), is followed by Introduced Species (15), Provisional List (19), Species Wrongly Recorded (10). A Select Bibliography and Index of 12 pages concludes the letterpress. Accounts