

Fauna Administration

Hereunder is a detailed list of all birds exported from Western Australia for the period 1/1/57 to 31/12/57 (Departmental names)—

Gouldian Finch 10,611, Masked Finch 1,230, Yellow-rump Finch 108, Chestnut-eared Finch 56, *Emblema picta* 48, Crimson Finch 120, Longtail Finch 4,330, Double-bar Finch 132, Blood Finch 392, Parson Finch 12, Mixed Finches 12, Pictorellas 3,651, Star Finch 2,672, Smoker Parrot 126, Twenty-eight Parrot 168, Galah 4, Budgerygahs 26, Western Rosella 308, King Parrot 61, Major Mitchell Cockatoo 2, Yellow Rosella 8, Eastern Rosella 6, Hooded Rosella 1, Crimson Wing Parrot 2, Stanley Rosella 36, Rainbow Lorikets 24, Tasmanian Rosella 5, Northern Rosella 2, Crimson Rosella 4, Elegant Parrot 10, Blue Bonnet 10, Rock Parrot 6, Barraband Parrot 3, Rufous Tree-creeper 3, Splendid Blue Wren 7, Miners 2, Hooded Robin 2, Kookaburra 2, Mongolian Pheasant 2, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater 4, Canaries 4, Emu 4.

P. J. FULLER

BRANCH SECRETARY

Stray Feathers

Alfred J. North as a 'Taxonomer'.—It is now generally agreed that, as remarked by Mathews, with the death of A. J. North in 1917 Australia "lost her foremost ornithologist". Mathews also says that "North was no species maker nor did he indulge much in the naming of subspecies, but he had a good eye and constantly discriminated the racial forms . . . as a general rule his names have remained valid".

An interesting sidelight on North's taxonomic views is provided by some letters written by him to the late A. H. C. Zietz in the year 1906, when the latter was Assistant Director at the South Australian Museum. The correspondence deals mainly with Kangaroo Island birds and contains some forthright but completely justifiable (and commendable) criticisms of the work of certain ornithologists. He says "Australian ornithology is being overburdened with unnecessary synonyms in addition to those created by quite needless separation". At the present time many of North's 'species' are considered geographical races and it is worth pointing out that he also held the same view. For instance, of '*Platycercus melanoptera*' (the Kangaroo island race of *P. elegans*) which he described in *The Emu*, vol. 6, p. 78, North writes "a variety of subspecies, what you will of *P. elegans* Gmelin, differing from that species by the greater amount of black on the feathers of the back, but principally by the inner half of the upper wing coverts (except the margins of some of the median and greater series) being black, and for which I would suggest the distinguishing name of

melanopterus". Of *Acanthiza zietzi* (listed under *Acanthiza pusilla*, Brown Thornbill, in the *Checklist*) he says—"A constant form . . . the Kangaroo Island birds are far more worthy of full specific recognition, than either *A. apicalis*, or *A. diemenensis*. If we admit these two as species, so we must *A. zietzi*."

His remarks under *Melithreptus brevirostris* are important and explain why many of his races were described as 'species'. North described Kangaroo Island birds as the 'Large-billed Honeyeater, *Melithreptus magnirostris*' in the *Records of the Australian Museum*, vol. 6, part 1, June 1905. The type, a male, is housed in the South Australian Museum (reg. no. B.8610). His comments to Zietz (dated June 11, 1906) are as follows: "The K.I. birds are in my opinion a constant large-billed form of *M. brevirostris*. There is no reason that the latter [*i.e.* mainland form—H.T.C.] should be found on the island also. The title of my paper in the *Records* refers to it as 'insular form', and I subspecifically separated it, but when printed one name was so contradictory to the other that the Curator (who greatly dislikes also subspecific distinctions) with my consent deleted the *sub*."

Undoubtedly North's systematic views were ahead of those of 'superiors' of his time. Mathews (*Austral Avian Record*, vol. 3, p. 131) says—"In many cases he criticised the subspecies and forms of birds, and his observations are regularly found to be reliable. He noted the geographic differences in many species, but continually regarded these as negligible [extracts quoted above do not support this—H.T.C.] though sometimes differentiating a subspecific form."—H. T. CONDON, S.A. Museum, Adelaide, 27/11/58.

Hoary-headed Grebe's Call.—J. N. Hobbs in 'Some Notes on Grebes' (*Emu*, vol. 58, 1958, pp. 129-132) has an interesting reference to the call of the Hoary-headed Grebe (*Podiceps poliocephalus*). Like others, I had long suspected the species of being voiceless, yet could not bring myself positively to accept such a conclusion, for possibly there is no bird incapable of uttering some kind of vocal sound. Nevertheless, I have spent much time in the haunts of these Grebes and watched them constantly, whilst also listening for any call that might give some clue to whether they actually were silent or not. Now, as the result of a recent experience, I can confirm J. N. Hobbs' observation that this species does have a voice.

After L. Wall, Hobart, had reported having heard an unusual call on Windermere Lagoon, Sandford, a popular resort both of the Hoary-headed Grebe and Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*), and stated he believed it was made by a Grebe, I visited the lagoon late in August, 1958, but found the birds too far out from shore to make useful observations. So I returned a few miles to Rushy Lagoon, closer to Sandford,

and pulled the car up on the edge of the road within a few yards of the lagoon on which some 20 or 30 Hoary-headed Grebes were feeding. With them were three Musk Ducks.

Whilst studying one well-coloured Grebe through glasses, about 20 yards off shore, I saw it suddenly rear its head, open its beak, and utter a curiously-soft 'chirring' sort of call. Several times I heard it from the same bird, and I set it down as 'joy-wee-er', the emphasis being on the middle syllable. Occasionally, the final syllable was eliminated and the call was just 'joy-wee', though perhaps this actually was uttered and was soft enough to be outside my range of hearing.

The call seemed to contain a warning, for each time it was uttered another bird a few feet from the car suddenly became alarmed and paddled away, though returning a few moments later. As this bird and the one calling were detached from the main flock, I believed they were paired, in which case the call could have been associated with nuptials.

The note is uttered so softly that normally one would not hear it, except on a perfectly-still day and then only if the caller was in fairly close range. The Musk Ducks were whistling in a loud way, but this Grebe's call was a curious kind of trill.

So far I have not heard or seen the Little Grebe (*P. ruficollis*) in Tasmania. All the hundreds of birds here seem to be the Hoary-headed species. One never could mistake the call of this one for that of the Little Grebe, which is a loud metallic rattle, aptly described by North as "resembling the sound made by rapidly running small cog-wheels".—MICHAEL SHARLAND, Hobart, Tas., 1/9/58.

The Turquoise Parrot.—Earlier this century the Turquoise Parrot (*Neophema pulchella*) was considered on the verge of extinction. Although not now considered the rarity it was thirty years ago, it is interesting to record that I have found the species in numbers in the Inverell district, New South Wales. A few years ago, in an area of some two hundred yards in length and forty yards in width, I counted approximately forty birds. They were mostly in parties of from three to six, young with parent birds frequenting a patch of second-growth timber about ten feet in height. Inquiries from local residents have assured me that these 'little parrots', as they are locally known, have been in the area a number of years. Their close proximity to a thickly-populated town, and also to a busy highway, their breeding potential and their present numbers, and their persistence to a favoured locality over many years with no apparent interference by human agency gives some degree of assurance that *Neophema pulchella* will remain with us in the future and possibly continue to show every evidence of increasing numbers.—ALEX C. HUNT, Inverell, N.S.W., 22/9/58.

Crested Bell-bird Call.—In volume 56, part 2, of *The Emu* of May 1956, Mr. George Hale recorded that he had listened to a joint call by a pair of Crested Bell-birds (*Oreoica gutturalis*) where the female supplied the first part of the call, with the male completing the final guttural notes.

On October 2, 1958, at a point near the road to Port Augusta about ten miles north of Whyalla in South Australia, Mr. Hale and I spent an hour or so walking over a piece of typical saltbush country with some rather sparse mulga scrub. We flushed four pairs of Crested Bell-birds, all of which were calling. We were quite close to two pairs, and were able to watch them for quite a time. In both cases the female which was close to the ground, supplied the whole of the first part of the call, while the male, sitting out on a dry branch about 12 feet from the ground, in clear view, uttered the two or three 'tonk, tonk' notes at the end. The light was good and we were able to study the male's bill and throat movements with binoculars, and we can state with certainty that he supplied only the final guttural notes of all the many calls to which we listened.—A. L. KEEP, Toorak, Vic., 10/11/58.

Diversionsary Activity of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.—One assumes that in its breeding locale, the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Erolia acuminata*) indulges in 'broken-wing' action to divert attention from its eggs or young, much in the manner of the majority of the wader species. However, as this bird has not yet been discovered breeding, although presumed to do so somewhere in Siberia, a note on such activity in the non-breeding season is worthy of comment.

In the 1953-54 summer the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was present in large numbers on the Tuggerah Lakes area of New South Wales, as the lake was then open to the sea, and subject to a strong tidal influence with consequent provision of suitable feeding grounds at low tides. On January 5, 1954, I observed two birds of this species in the marram grass on the coast side of the Lake near Budgewoi.

On being approached, neither of these two birds attempted to fly, and one appeared to have an injured wing. I attempted to run this bird down, when, instantly, the other carried out simulated broken wing activity, stumbling over the sand, and leading me away from the injured bird. Moving in this manner for 80 yards, the bird only desisted when I turned away to the injured bird.

This bird was easily caught and was found to have a badly-broken left wing. The uninjured bird, meanwhile, approached, performing an almost frenzied 'broken wing' simulation, coming so close that it, too, was easily caught. Examined closely, the two birds were almost identical in appearance except that the injured bird was noticeably smaller. Unfortunately, I had no means of identifying the

sex of the birds. Neither bird uttered any call throughout the whole proceedings. When released the two birds scuttled into the shelter of some nearby reeds, the uninjured bird flying for some ten yards and then settling down with the other.

The main interest in this note lies in the possibility that these birds were a mated pair—which opens the question of whether these birds remain mated during their non-breeding seasonal migration to the southern hemisphere. This of course will only be cleared up by extensive banding in the breeding area—a not likely event in the immediate future.—H. L. BELL, Greenwich, N.S.W., 15/1/59.

Reviews

Australian Cuckoo-Shrikes and Trillers.—The family Campephagidae is well represented in Australia, nine species placed under four genera being recognized in the *Checklist* (1926). In a recent review of Australian forms ('Variation and Speciation in the Australian Campephagidae (Passeres)', *Australian Journal of Zoology*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 248-267, 1958), Dr. A. Keast reduces the genera to three and acceptable species to eight. *Eodolisma* is regarded as a subgenus of *Coracina*, and *C. hypoleuca* is made a race of *C. papuensis*, an arrangement with which most will agree.

It is of interest that there is such noticeable polytypic disagreement with the two species most widely spread (*C. novaehollandiae* and *Lalage sueurii*) and which "undertake equally extensive seasonal movements"—the former depicting marked clinal variation and the latter showing no geographic change. Four races of *novaehollandiae* are accepted, the south-western isolate for the present being included with *melanops*, whilst the mid-western pallid race (*subpallida*) is regarded as 'very distinct'. The Tasmanian nominate form is characterized by short bill and short wing, and the northern *didima* by short wing and long bill. *C. robusta* is undivided, but three races (in Australia) of *C. papuensis* are recognized, the Cape York form being indistinguishable from the southern New Guinea bird (*oriomo*). *C. lineata* is undivided in Australia, but three subspecies are distinguishable in *C. (Eodolisma) tenuirostris*. The Ground Cuckoo-Shrike has a wide distribution in the interior (with some coastal occurrences) but "geographic variation is virtually lacking". Treatment of *Lalage leucomela* follows that given by Mayr (1940) with two eastern races and a further one isolated in the north-west. It is regarded as sedentary (the only species so stated besides *C. papuensis*) throughout its range. The Bellingen River is given as the distributional southern limit is eastern Australia, but there are two published notes in *The Emu* extending its range over 100 miles south of that point.—A.R.M.

A Systematic Review of the Weebill.—Although generally accepted as the smallest bird occurring in Australia, the Weebill has spread throughout most of the continent. It feeds exclusively in the outer foliage of trees, so forest country, ranging from tall coastal sclerophyll types to semi-desert stunted eucalypts, controls its dispersal. In an interesting ecological and taxonomic review ('Geographic Variation in the Weebill, *Smicrornis brevirostris* (Gould) (Passeres: Muscicapidae, Malurinae), a Sedentary Species with a Continuous Range', *Australian Journal of Zoology*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 152-161, 1958), Dr. A. Keast remarks that "its interest lies in the degree of colour variation displayed, the way in which this can be explained, and the difficulty associated with fitting the variation into the trinomial system of nomenclature". The two species currently recognized in the *Checklist* (1926) are