

Stray Feathers

Unusual nesting height for the Yellow-tailed Thornbill.—During the 1961 nesting season Keith Egan (of Ulladulla) and I observed a Yellow-tailed Thornbill, *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, leave the ground with an insect in its bill and fly to the outer foliage of a huge Turpentine tree, *Syncarpia laurifolia*. After reliable calculations were made, the height of the tree was given at 120 feet and the nest site from the ground below at 100 feet. It was situated in a cleared paddock at Conjola, twelve miles north of Milton. Although the tree was on a hillside, it nevertheless appeared to be quite an effort for the small Thornbill to gain such a height.—C. P. HUMPHRIES, Ulladulla, N.S.W., 22/11/62.

Penetration of Central Australia by *Malurus melanocephalus*.—The report by Mrs. Rothwell (*The Emu*, vol. 62, p. 210) of the presence of the Red-backed Wren near Tennant Creek brings to mind my earlier observations of the species in the same area. I was resident at Tennant Creek from July 1946 to January 1947, and again from October 1947 to June 1948. This bird was seen by me on January 26, 1948, on Tennant Creek (seven miles north of the township) approximately two miles east of the Highway. Also noted by me at the same place were Rufous-throated Honeyeaters, *Conopophila rufogularis*. My second record for the Red-backed Wren was at Hayward Creek, a few miles farther north, on March 20, 1948. At Dunmarra, some 200 miles farther north, I observed it again.—C. P. HUMPHRIES, Ulladulla, N.S.W., 22/11/62.

Camouflage by Partridge-Pigeons.—My first observation of the Partridge Pigeon, *Geophaps smithii*, was on August 14, 1948, at a point 18 miles south of Darwin, and I considered that it was a perfect example of avian camouflage. At the time I was standing beneath a huge spreading tree with the ground beneath being covered for a considerable area with large fallen leaves. I was surprised when several pigeons flew from what appeared to be almost beneath my feet. Remaining perfectly still I counted five more birds, after careful scrutiny, at distances from six to ten feet from me. They were reclining on one side with the wing in a raised position. So perfectly did they merge with the fallen leaves that had it not been for the head coloration they would have been practically invisible, even at such a short distance.—C. P. HUMPHRIES, Ulladulla, N.S.W., 22/11/62.

Colour of orbital ring in the Squatter-Pigeon.—All authorities on Australian birds that I have been able to consult describe the colour of the skin around the eye of the Squatter-Pigeon, *Geophaps scripta*, as being leaden, bluish-leaden, or something similar. By contrast, the Partridge-Pigeon, *Geophaps smithii*, has the skin around the eye definitely red.

During more than one visit to Cape York, I was therefore sur-

prised and puzzled to note that all Squatter-Pigeons had *tan* skin around the eye. Further observations of the birds on the Atherton Tableland revealed that they, too, had tan, and not leaden-blue, skin around the eye.

Beginning to doubt the correctness of my identification, I examined the skins in the National Museum, Melbourne, and to my surprise found that every specimen there had the orbital ring tan.

I then began to doubt the correctness of the description of leaden-blue skin, although I had clear memories of birds I identified at Carandotta Station, in the channel country of western Queensland, in August 1955, having the leaden-blue skin. I accordingly asked a friend living near Inverell to let me know what was the colour of the skin round the eye of the birds in New South Wales, and the reply was that they were very definitely leaden-blue.

The conclusion, therefore, can only be that the Squatter-Pigeon of New South Wales and western and southern Queensland has a leaden-blue orbital ring, whereas birds from the Atherton Tableland and northwards to Cape York have tan skin around the eye.

It was suggested to me that possibly immature birds had the tan skin, but that can be safely dismissed because whole coveys of the birds (in North Queensland) have the tan-coloured skin.—H. R. OFFICER, Olinda, Vic., 12/10/62.

Obituaries

MR. BRUCE W. LEAKE

Bruce W. Leake, a foundation member of the R.A.O.U., died at Perth on July 22, 1962. He was born at York, W.A., on June 11, 1880, the son of a pioneer settler at Kellerberrin, in the eastern wheatbelt, who first made his home there in 1868.

In his early years Bruce Leake was an active field naturalist and formed a local egg collection. He was visited on several occasions by Tom Carter, who collected a number of birds in the neighbourhood of Bruce Leake's farm, "Cardonia", Woolundra, near Kellerberrin, and some of these were described as new subspecies by Gregory Mathews (e.g. *Calamanthus montanellus leakei*, *Barnardius zonarius woolundra*, *Nesoptilotis leucotis woolundra* and *Acanthagenys rufogularis woolundra*). On his last visit, a fortnight in March 1922, following a cyclone in the previous month, Carter made important observations on "out-of-season" nesting (*Ibis*, 1923: 218). Other early visitors to "Cardonia" included Dudley Le Souef and A. J. Campbell, in 1920, after the first R.A.O.U. Congress in W.A., when Bruce Leake became State Secretary in succession to W. B. Alexander.

One of his notable activities in ornithology was the breeding of Mallee-Fowl in captivity by the construction of an artificial mound