

## Stray Feathers

**Predation by the Grey Butcherbird in an orchard area.**—Kenthurst is a rural area (mainly citrus-growing) about 25 miles north-west of Sydney. Geologically, shale and sandstone predominate and cultivation is largely restricted to the shale. The whole area drains into the Cattai Creek, a tributary of the Nepean River. The vegetation on my own property (where the following observations were made) has been described in a previous paper (Jasper, *Emu* 62: 177).

The preferred habitat of the Grey Butcherbird, *Cracticus torquatus*, appears to be the open forests of the shale, rather than the sandstone gullies or heathlands, and it often takes up territories on the margins of cultivated land. From these vantage points it inflicts heavy losses on the small passerines that nest in the citrus trees, e.g., Jacky Winter, *Microeca leucophaea*; Silvereye, *Zosterops lateralis*; Yellow-tailed Thornbill, *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*; Red-browed Finch, *Aegintha temporalis*; Superb Blue Wren, *Malurus cyaneus*; and the introduced Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*, and Greenfinch, *Chloris chloris*. It is probable that cultivation has augmented, rather than diminished, the natural food supply of the first four species.

Birds nesting in a citrus orchard are particularly vulnerable to predators because these trees, though generally of good shape and foliage, are neither large nor closely planted. Although the native species have taken advantage of the citrus trees as nesting sites, it is noticeable that the young birds are encouraged to make for the nearest forest on leaving the nest.

During the first five years of our residence at Kenthurst small birds were abundant and nested freely in the garden and orchard, and there were very few predators. In February 1962, a pair of Grey Butcherbirds established their territory in a group of eucalypts and angophoras that fringed the western boundary of the cultivated land, and began to attack everything that flew. With the exception of four pairs of Red-browed Finches, whose nests (with young) were situated right beneath the eucalypts and angophoras, the Butcherbirds soon had the area to themselves. Eventually, only one brood of Finches was reared to the stage of leaving the nest, which was particularly well hidden.

At the present time (July 1962) this pair of Butcherbirds is still in the area but they have extended their range considerably; instead of holding a rather 'tight' territory (which has always seemed typical to me) they now hunt more widely. Consequently their grip on our orchard has relaxed and other species have re-appeared in force; but it is noticeable that all species smaller

than the House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*, approach the orchard warily.

My tentative conclusions are that the Grey Butcherbird, having lost a large portion of its original habitat (i.e., shale forest) in Kenthurst and adjoining citrus areas, has restored the balance by increasing its predation on small passerines and their young; and, further, that alteration of habitat has to some extent modified the bird's territorial behaviour.—TOM JASPER, Annangrove Road, Kenthurst, N.S.W.

**Colonization of Cape York Peninsula by the Noisy Miner.**—The distribution of the Noisy Miner, *Myzantha melanocephala*, as given in the R.A.O.U. Checklist, includes Cairns (*M. m. crassirostris* Mathews). This can, however, be interpreted to mean the tablelands west of Cairns: the birds are found roughly from about Herberton to the hills above Cooktown. G. M. Storr, in his article: 'The Birds of Cooktown and Laura' (*Emu* 53: 244), states that the Noisy Miner was recorded only from Fairview, 13 miles north-west of Laura, and the surrounding woodlands. On a visit to Laura in 1958 I found the birds in the same area but nowhere else, although there were suitable habitats in and about Laura itself.

This year (1963) I was able to travel north from Laura by car and was able to make a reasonable survey of the birdlife along the track. No Noisy Miners were seen until we reached Dead Horse Creek, about 60 miles from Laura, although there appeared to be several quite suitable habitats en route. About five miles farther on, just across the Morehead River, another party of Noisy Miners was encountered. No more birds were seen between Morehead River and Musgrave, which is about 100 miles from Laura.

I was in Coen — another 70 miles north of Musgrave — in 1958, 1961 and 1962 but did not record any Noisy Miners, although there were suitable habitats for them.

In view of the above it would seem reasonable to conclude that the Fairview colony, reported by Storr, has extended its range to at least 65 miles north of Laura. Apart from mine, I know of no other records north of Fairview.

It will be interesting to see whether, over the years, the Noisy Miner reaches, say, Aurukun or Weipa, where it should be at home. The eastern side of the Peninsula would certainly not suit this bird north of about Iron Range, where rain-forest conditions become almost general.—H. R. OFFICER, Monbulk Road, Olinda, Vic.

**Storm-blown shearwaters.**—During the last week-end in April 1963, a severe cyclonic disturbance, with very heavy rain, swept down the north coast of New South Wales and extensive flooding occurred in many towns. On April 30, Father Peters, from the

Catholic Presbytery at Gresford, telephoned to say he had a strange bird that apparently had been forced down by the heavy rain and wind. His suggestion that it might be a species of muttonbird proved correct — it was a Wedge-tailed Shearwater, *Puffinus pacificus*. The bird was in good condition and seemed little the worse for its 'forced landing'. The bird had been found on the doorstep and was placed in some casual water in long grass near the front gate. Unwilling to fly, it dug in under the long couch grass and remained there all day. That night it was again found at the front door — perhaps due to the attraction of a bright light.



Wedge-tailed Shearwater, found near Maitland, N.S.W., and released at Newcastle, May 4, 1963; banded 160-11922.

Photo by Athel D' Ombrain

After filming the bird for a TV station and taking some stills I took it home to Maitland and was able to force half a sardine down its throat; it ate the other half itself during the night. I banded it with C.S.I.R.O. number 160-11921 and released it on Nobby's Beach, Newcastle. The bird eventually flew north along Stockton Beach and when last seen was heading well up towards

Port Stephens. I feel sure this bird was blown in from the Broughton Island area where the species nests.

A second shearwater, again *P. pacificus*, was picked up on the road at Telarah, a suburb of Maitland. Whereas the first bird had been a very healthy adult, this one was a fledgling with the down still showing on its head and neck. It had been in captivity for a few days and had been eating, of all things, worms. Mr. Pat Bourke and I released this bird (banded C.S.I.R.O. 160-11922) at night from the end of the breakwater. It fluttered about 50 yards to the water and, after staying there with its wings raised for a few seconds, took off into the night. This bird is shown in the accompanying photograph.

On May 9, a third shearwater was picked up — again during stormy weather — at Branxton. This bird had been fed on worms and bread, which it ate. It made no attempt to leave, but followed its captor about like a pet. It was a strong adult and was banded (160-11923) and released at Merewether Beach, near Newcastle Beach. As it took off it was unexpectedly attacked by a Nankeen Kestrel, *Falco cenchroides*, but it flew low and strongly out over the breakers and was soon lost to sight.

Several things about these birds struck me as being odd. In the first place, none of them seemed capable of flight in the bush, even when tossed into the air — and in some cases there seemed to be sufficient wind for them to become airborne. They take off easily from the ground when near the sea, but a land environment (trees and mountains) could affect any orientation mechanism; fear might also be a factor.

Secondly, none of the birds made any attempt to bite. This is quite the reverse of their behaviour when nesting. These birds behaved like pets and seemed to have no fear of humans or of being handled.

Thirdly, the eating of worms and bread is quite astounding: a bird at sea will not even glance at a piece of bread or meat thrown to it in the water.

The actual distance the birds were blown inland is hard to estimate. If they came from the Broughton Island area it would be about 50 miles to Maitland, possibly 70 to Branxton, and 60 to Gresford. Knowing the ability of shearwaters to fly thousands of miles, it does not seem possible that a mere 50 or 60 miles would be sufficient to tire them, and I do not consider the cyclonic weather severe enough to have forced them very far. However, the torrential rain may have helped to force them down.—A. F. D'OMBRAIN, 17 Nillo Street, Maitland, N.S.W.

**Shearwater blown inland.**—A live Wedge-tailed Shearwater was found at Gunnedah, N.S.W., on May 7, 1963. Gunnedah is situated on the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range and

is approximately 150 miles from the coast. Immediately prior to finding the bird, cyclonic disturbances, accompanied by strong easterly winds, had been experienced on the northern coast of New South Wales.

The bird was brought to Sydney by the finder, duly banded with a C.S.I.R.O. band (160-11741), and released at Maroubra, a Sydney beach.—S. G. LANE, 65 Wood Street, Lane Cove, N.S.W.

**Quail-Thrushes as songsters.**—In his recent review of the genus *Cinclosoma*, H. T. Condon (*Rec. S.Aust. Mus.* 14: 337-70, 1962) makes the statement: "Quail-Thrushes are not songsters . . ." (p. 342). Condon's assertion is not merely incorrect but is an 'injustice' to this interesting group of passerine birds.

It has long been known that the Chestnut Quail-Thrush, *C. castanotum*, does indeed sing. J. A. Ross (*Emu* 25: 181, 1926) reported having observed males of the species perching on dead limbs about 12 feet from the ground and uttering calls that could be heard for a considerable distance. Edwin Ashby (*S.Aust. Orn.* 10: 12, 1929) recorded seeing a male singing soft-toned, tremulous, somewhat ventriloquial notes while it sat in a mallee tree, and Dr. Charles Sullivan (*ibid.* pp. 115-6) noted singing of the species off the ground.

On a number of occasions I have seen and heard male Chestnut Quail-Thrushes singing what appears to be their territorial song in late winter and in spring. The song is distinctive and is not to be confused with the usual calls uttered on the ground.

J. Neil McGilp (*ibid.* p. 116) heard Cinnamon Quail-Thrushes, *C. cinnamomeum*, singing somewhat like the Brown Thornbill, *Acanthiza pusilla*. It is reasonable to suppose that territorial singing also occurs in males of other species of *Cinclosoma*.—ERHARD F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A.

**Great Crested Grebe in southern Tasmania.**—The Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*, is believed to exist in Tasmania in fairly small numbers. Sharland (*Tasmanian Birds*, 1945, p. 11) refers to it as 'sparsely distributed', and points out that it is most common in inland lakes, wintering in bays and estuaries. My observations at Pittwater in the south of the State have shown that there may be an odd bird present during the summer, but that the usual winter population could be about 50 birds. This was higher than I expected; but the years 1959 and 1960 showed that it would be unwise to make generalizations about the population of this Grebe in Tasmania. During 1959 the numbers gradually built up from one or two in April to 150 in July. By November no birds were to be seen. After April a gradual build-up occurred, until in July 1960 the numbers soared to 225, and then as quickly decreased until there was none to be seen in October 1960.—PETER F. BOLGER, Midway Point, Tas.



**Feeding habit of muttonbirds.**—On October 24, 1959, my wife and I were sitting on top of Cape Bernier on the east coast of Tasmania using binoculars to watch many thousands of sea birds feeding in the great stretch of water between the southern tip of Maria Island and the Tasmanian mainland. Most of the birds in sight were muttonbirds but there were also many albatrosses and gannets. I watched the activities of one particular group of muttonbirds for up to half an hour and found several aspects of their feeding habits to be new in my experience.

In the first place the birds fed communally — there were no single muttonbirds unattached to groups. Each group numbered from about 100 to 1,000 individuals, and there were some 50 or more separate groups visible. Each group I could see was going through the same ritual. In detail, the birds would fly up from a group settled on the water and form a line three or four feet deep, and as long as there were enough birds to fill, until the whole group was airborne. This loose skein of birds, sideslipping in their usual manner, but also flapping occasionally (it was a calm day), would continue until the leaders evidently sighted food, when they plunged into the water, feet and head first and with the wings half-closed. The leading birds disappeared completely from sight, but at the same time those following were diving into the water in a similar manner. This continued until all the birds of the group (nearly 100 in the nearest lot) had gone down in an area of water perhaps 30 feet across.

At one time, for about ten seconds, there were no birds visible and the surface ripples had subsided. Then the birds began popping buoyantly to the surface in quick succession to form a dense raft upon the water, until some would rise into the air again and the process was repeated. The process continued during the next three hours as we checked periodically through binoculars while we walked along the top of the Cape. We estimated that the interval between the first bird diving and the first emerging was about half a minute.—PETER F. BOLGER, Midway Point, Tas.

**'Camouflage' by pigeons.**—The note by C. P. Humphries (*Emu* 63: 72, 1963) raises an interesting point. The habit of "reclining on one side with the wing in a raised position" is a familiar one among the smaller pigeons and doves, and my observations so far seem to suggest that rather as an attempt at camouflage, the posture provides an opportunity for the sun to warm (or perhaps disinfect) areas otherwise covered.

I have seen this posture adopted by Peaceful Doves, *Geopelia placida*, Green-winged Pigeons, *Chalcophaps chrysochlora* (both in Australia and in my aviaries in Bangkok), and among wild and captive examples of Spotted-necked Doves, *Streptopelia chinensis*; Crested Pigeons, *Ocyphaps lophotes*; Brush Bronze-

wings, *Phaps elegans*, and Diamond Doves, *Geopelia cuneata*, in Australia. As far as my memory serves me, in all cases the birds were oriented so that the sun's rays struck directly to the axilla, and the position held for from two to ten minutes; the bird then "changed sides" and re-aligned its body axis to ensure the fullest possible "sun-baking" of the underwing area.

It would be of interest to know whether Mr. Humphries' birds were in full or "dappled" sunshine, or in more or less dense shade.

Among the columbids it may be that this habit is associated only, or mainly, with the ground-frequenting forms, as I cannot recall noting the phenomenon among the more arboreal species. It can be observed also among some of the gallinaceous birds, although in the latter cases it seems usually to be associated with "dusting", which the doves omit.—J. A. TUBB, FAO Regional Office, Bangkok, Thailand.

**Plovers in the Atherton district, North Queensland.**—The Masked Plover, *Lobibyx miles*, is our resident species of plover and can be observed in most of the local habitats that are suited to its requirements. The Spurwinged Plover, *L. novaehollandiae*, is an erratic visitor to Atherton (cf. Warham, *Emu* 60: 61-3, 1960).

It is now possible to report the Banded Plover, *Zonifer tricolor*, from Atherton — on October 23, 1962, when a single bird visited an area near my dairy and was closely observed for several hours. Most of the time the plover rested under the shade of an isolated tamarind tree, occasionally catching an insect among the leaves and debris covering the area beneath the tree. Late in the evening the plover moved to an adjoining field and was not seen again.

It was thought that this bird was a stray from more inland areas, the weather at the time being hot and dry, and the inland was more or less drought-stricken at the time. However, another Banded Plover visited my property on June 28, 1963, this time feeding in a newly planted lucerne field. It was observed for a considerable time and when approached closely flew around and landed in another part of the field. The weather at the time was very cold and there had been several severe frosts. It would seem that the Banded Plover may visit local habitats more often than was previously believed.

The Eastern Golden Plover, *Pluvialis dominicus*, occasionally visits the foreshores of Tinaroo Dam, and a few birds in non-breeding plumage were observed there in September, 1961. On September 30, 1962, in company with Mr. Tom Jasper, of Kenthurst, N.S.W., a Golden Plover in full breeding plumage was observed on the foreshore of Foster's property at Tinaroo.—JAMES A. BRAVERY, Atherton, Qld.

**Grey Falcon in the Wimmera of Victoria.**—About 16 miles east of Dimboola, on June 14, 1963, two Grey Falcons, *Falco*

*hypoleucos*, were observed by Andrew Thornley and myself for almost one hour.

The female was busy feeding on a bird and we were able to approach gradually in the car to within ten yards of the fence post on which she was sitting. The male, a noticeably smaller bird, occupied another post about one chain away. Once he came to investigate, flying and gliding gracefully around the car and calling occasionally with plaintive whistles, which the female answered several times. Before alighting again the male showed flashes of the power and speed of a falcon's flight.

The female's prey was a Crested Pigeon, *Ocyphaps lophotes*, and when we eventually flushed her from the post she refused to part with the remnants of her meal, which she carried to a large Black Box about 100 yards away. Here she was joined by the male. The Crested Pigeon, which has a habit of leaving the timber during the day to feed on adjacent grassland, would provide good hunting for the Falcons.

We also found the feathers of an Eastern Rosella, *Platycercus eximius*, about 200 yards from where we first saw the birds and the presence of bird faeces on the ground suggested that the Falcons had probably eaten it.—W. G. D. MIDDLETON, Wimmera Forest Nursery, Dimboola, Vic.

**Notes on *Puffinus pacificus* on Heron Island, Capricorn Group.**—Through the kindness of the Great Barrier Reef Research Committee I was able to spend the week May 20-26, 1961, at their laboratory on Heron Island, Queensland, and to examine a number of both juvenile and adult Wedge-tailed Shearwaters at the time when the last young were leaving the nests. The ordinary noises of the shearwater breeding season were then only occasionally heard and few juveniles remained on the island.

On the six nights, May 20-25, birds were sought between the onset of darkness and midnight and, when captured, were examined, weighed and measured, marked by clipping the end of a primary, and then released. Fifty birds were examined: 46 juveniles and 4 adults. Table 1 shows the weights of these birds.

The juveniles were graded according to the amount of down remaining, on the ground that this would give some idea of relative age. 3+ means almost complete down over the body; 2+ extensive down on chest and abdomen; 1+ a substantial amount of remaining down, usually on the abdomen. In two birds with 3+ down, two with 2+, one with 1+, and one with only a trace, primaries were not yet mature. This indicates that loss of down is not altogether a reliable guide to age.



TABLE 1  
*Weights in Grams of Juvenile and Adult P. pacificus\**

<i>Amount of down</i>	<i>Max. Wt.</i>	<i>Min. Wt.</i>	<i>Mean Wt.</i>	<i>Total No.</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
3+	362	351	355	4	One under 300 g.
2+	418	329	370	13	Two under 300 g.
1+	426	307	364	18	One under 300 g.
trace, or nil	378	349	363	7	
adults	365	327	347	4	

\* Weak and undersized birds weighing less than 300 g. have been excluded.

There was no evidence of a falling weight with increasing age, although two birds captured on two successive nights showed falls in weight of 10 and 14 g. during the 24 hours. There were no other recaptures. On two occasions during the week adults were found feeding young, and on another occasion a juvenile with 1—down vomited partly digested fish after being captured. All this evidence together shows that, contrary to the usually accepted view (e.g., Oliver, *Birds of New Zealand*, ed. 2, 1955, pp. 134-5), adults of this species do not leave the breeding station completely before the young, and that young are being fed often enough not to show a steady fall in weight with age, even though a fasting juvenile may lose 10-14 g. during 24 hours.

Four weak, undersized, and very light birds were seen. Such birds are found at the end of the season in all shearwater colonies and presumably result from underfeeding due to the death of one parent or due to desertion before full size is reached. I have seen them in colonies of *Puffinus puffinus* and *P. griseus*, as well as *P. pacificus*.

The notable difference between this colony and colonies of *P. puffinus* at the end of the season was the presence of numbers of adults and evidence of feeding. Richdale, in an article, 'Maori and Muttonbird' (Otago Daily Times, Dunedin, p. 96, 1946), states of *P. griseus*: 'I have found food in the stomachs of young birds in May, which is late in the season.' He holds that, if there is any fasting period in that species, it is not more than one week. It appears that in this respect *P. pacificus* and *P. griseus* behave similarly, and are different from the European species.

I have been able to find only one reference to a previous personal May observation of a colony of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. This was the report by W. D. K. MacGillivray (1931, *Emu* 30: 270-6) of a visit to the Capricorn Group. His observations were very similar to those reported here. It is therefore clear that, at least in the population in the Capricorns, the young of *P. pacificus* are fed occasionally, if not regularly, right up to the time when they leave the breeding area.—J. A. R. MILES, University of Otago, Dunedin, N.Z.

**Notes on the status of certain birds in Fiji.**—Between December 10, 1959, and January 7, 1960, while on a visit to the Fiji Islands, I was able to visit a number of centres on Viti Levu, Vanua Levua, and Taveuni, and to make some observations on birds. My observations of the status of certain species differ from statements in the literature and therefore the following are recorded.

**Whistling Tree-Duck, *Dendrocygna arcuata*.**—The subspecies reported from Fiji is *pygmaeus* and it is said to be extinct in the Fiji group, having been destroyed by the introduced mongoose (Delacour 1954, *Waterfowl of the World*, vol. 1, p. 41). At 6.45 a.m. on December 19, in the grounds of the government rest house near Waiyevo on the island of Taveuni, a Whistling Tree-Duck was observed feeding on the edge of open ground for several minutes. The description noted in my diary was: "Long legged duck — dark brown upper parts, striped flanks, brown or chestnut underparts. Crown and back of neck dark — whistling tree duck." Until I read, in Delacour's book, that this species was supposed to be extinct in Fiji, I had not regarded the observation as of special interest.

**Barn Owl, *Tyto alba*.**—This species is reputed to be rare in the Fiji group. In three days on Taveuni one was seen. My notes on two night journeys by car on Viti Levu record 10 Barn Owls seen over a distance of 42 miles in the Tavua district on the north of the island, and seven seen in 50 miles travelling to Suva from the north-east. These trips were made on January 4 and 5, 1960. I do not remember having seen so many Barn Owls in a single night's journey in any other country I have visited.

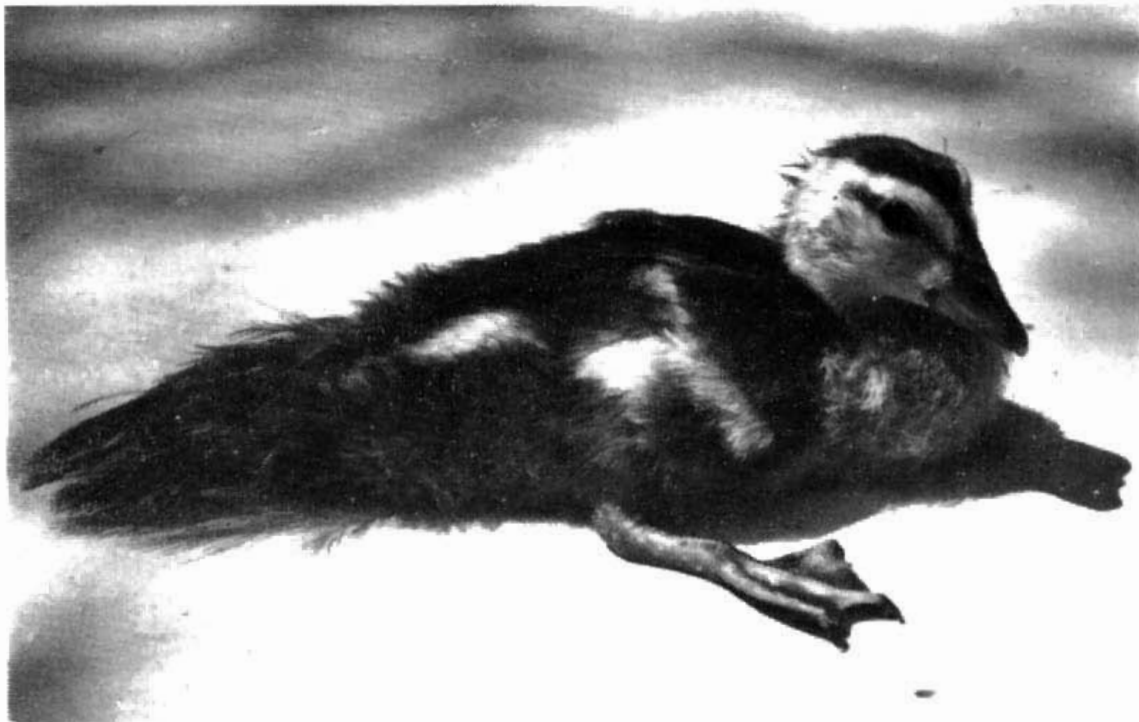
**Goshawk, *Accipiter fasciatus*.**—By contrast, during the whole month I saw only one Goshawk, a species said to be common in Fiji.

**Swamp-Harrier, *Circus approximans*.**—This species is widespread and will be seen on most days on the main islands, but it is by no means so common as in New Zealand where, as in Fiji, it is the dominant diurnal raptor.—J. A. R. MILES, University of Otago, Dunedin, N.Z.

**Downy young of the White-quilled Pigmy-Goose.**—Delacour and Mayr (*Wilson Bull.* 57: 3-55, 1945) have illustrated the significance of the plumage patterns of downy young of the Anatidae in the classification of the family. One of the few Anatids whose young are still to be described is the uncommon Australian race of the White-quilled Pigmy-Goose, *Nettapus coromandelianus albipennis* Gould. A brood of three females, approximately three weeks old, was collected on March 30, 1962, on the dam beside Powlathanga homestead, twelve miles west of Charters Towers, North Queensland. The colour pattern is illustrated in the accompanying plate and the following description

is based on the skins, now in the collection of the Queensland Museum, Brisbane.

General colour above dark brown with a dark brown stripe running mid-dorsally from bill to tail. The brown of the back merges into grey on the sides of the throat. The undersides of the throat and abdomen are light grey, becoming white on lower breast; the underside of the tail is dark grey to black at the tip. The sides of the body become darker away from breast except for a light grey patch to rear of leg, a similar patch hidden by the wing, and another at the top of the leg. These patches are due to lack of colour in the tips of the down.



A downy young of the Pigmy-Goose, *Nettapus coromandelianus albipennis*.  
"Powlathanga", near Charters Towers, Qld., March 1962.

The wing is dark brown above with a distinct white trailing edge. There is some pale grey below wing on front edge of digits and on rear edge of humerus. The legs are dark grey except for yellow along the sides of bones, particularly on the webs.

The head has a dark brown cap and light grey sides and under-side. There is a single dark brown stripe through the eye, but not joining with brown of the head or neck. The general distribution of colour on the head is similar to that of the adult female. The bill is dark grey with a pale grey tip and pale yellow mandible; in shape it is similar to that of the adults.—H. J. LAVERY, Department of Primary Industries, Townsville, Qld.