

## Stray Feathers

**Rosellas as insect eaters.**—In the course of field observations at Green's Beach on the north coast of Tasmania on 27/9/64 we took the opportunity to observe the feeding habits of the Green Rosella, *Platycercus caledonicus*, and Eastern Rosella, *Platycercus eximius*.

A small mixed flock was noticed busily climbing about in the extremities of the leafy foliage of the Black Peppermint, *Eucalyptus amygdalina*. Upon closer observation they were noticed to be removing galls from the gum leaves, cracking them open, apparently in search of food, and dropping the split galls to the ground.

The rapidity with which the birds worked was such that the patter of galls falling on the leaf-covered ground was almost continuous and resembled falling rain drops. A sample of the foliage showed it to be heavily affected with leaf galls containing psyllids in their larval or immature stage.

Two Green Rosellas were collected and their crops found to be filled solely with psyllids similar to those we found in the galls. Examples were forwarded to the Department of Agriculture and found to belong to the genus *Schedotrioza*. Eastern Rosellas were not collected but were watched feeding in an identical manner. A microscopic examination of the stomach contents revealed that these tiny soft bodied insects had been extracted from the hard woody galls without the slightest damage. This demonstrates a high degree of versatility and efficiency in the Rosella's powerful beak and tongue.

Both species are commonly considered to be fruit and seed feeders but, like their relatives the cockatoos, apparently consume quantities of insects under certain specialized conditions.

F. M. Littler in his *Handbook of the birds of Tasmania* 1910, makes reference to the Green Rosella feeding on insects and larva, and Mathews makes a near similar reference in *The Birds of Australia* 1921-1922, but neither author gives details.—R. M. GREEN, J. W. SWIFT, Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston.

**The Whistling Eagle in Tasmania.**—Miss J. A. Fletcher reported a breeding pair of this species at Eaglehawk Neck (*Emu* 32: 119), and inferred that they had nested there for several years. It would appear, however, that this record should refer to the White-breasted Sea Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, a bird which breeds commonly along the south-east coast of Tasmania.

The report referred to "a pair of Whistling Eagles, *Haliaeetus sphenerus*". The name *Haliaeetus sphenerus* was given by Gould to an immature specimen of the White-breasted Sea Eagle, an error which he acknowledged in his *Handbook* (vol. 1, p. 15).

I came to know Miss Fletcher well during her later years at Eaglehawk Neck and often discussed her finds with her, but this

record was never mentioned by her and I was unaware of it during her lifetime, having only discovered the reference in recent years. In this connection it is worth noting that at the R.A.O.U. Congress and Field Outing at Port Arthur in 1955 a paper under the title "Birds of My Garden", written by Miss Fletcher, was read on her behalf (at that time she was suffering from an illness which proved fatal soon afterwards). In this she referred to, I think, all the unusual observations she made in that locality, but did not make any reference to the Whistling Eagle. This paper was subsequently published, together with her "Tasmania's Own Birds", through the good offices of the Director of Education, Tasmania.

The *Field Guide to the Hawks of Australia*, by H. T. Condon, published by the Bird Observers Club of Victoria, 1949, shows the distribution of the Whistling Eagle as "Australia, (?) Tasmania", but Tasmania has been omitted from the 1957 edition. Mr Condon has informed me (*in litt.*) that his authority for including Tasmania originally was Whittell and Serventy's *List of the Birds of Western Australia*, 1948. I have discussed this with Dr Serventy who is unable to indicate the reason for its inclusion there, but agrees that it may have emanated from Miss Fletcher's report mentioned above.

In the *South Australian Ornithologist*, vol. 21, part 5 (April 1955) R. F. Brown recorded sighting nineteen birds over Bass Strait, just north of King Island, fifteen of them flying steadily northward towards Cape Otway, Victoria. This was referred to the Editor, Mr H. T. Condon, because the species was not known in Tasmania, and he replied "... the observation made by R. F. Brown I regard as completely reliable as I have known him for many years".

The species has not been included in Sharland's *Tasmanian Birds*, 1958.

A sight record of the Whistling Eagle was made by a party, including W. R. Wheeler and the writer, near Falmouth, on the east coast of Tasmania on November 10, 1964, while returning by car from the R.A.O.U. Congress and Field Outing at Bicheno. As we passed the junction of Falmouth Road with the Tasman Highway, a few miles north of St. Mary's, a large bird of prey was seen circling slowly at a considerable height and drifting north-east. We followed it a short distance along the highway and stopped at Steele's Lagoon where the bird continued circling for several minutes before moving away to the coast. The underwing pattern could not be determined, chiefly because of poor light conditions, but the upper surface was seen to be cinnamon brown with blackish wing primaries. The prominent dark "fingers" of the wings and the long tail were clearly seen, and the slow circling flight and absence of a light-coloured rump clearly distinguished it from a Swamp Harrier, a common bird in that area.

This would seem to confirm that the species should be included in the Tasmanian list.—L. E. WALL, 63 Elphinstone Rd., North Hobart, Tas.

**First record of a Grey Plover at Macquarie Island.**—Accompanied by Mr T. Gadd (Technical Officer Biology) and Dr N. Abbott (Medical Officer), I flushed a wader from the beach of Buckles Bay, below Gadgets Gulley, on the north-east coast of Macquarie Island (Lat.  $54^{\circ} 30'S$ , Long.  $159^{\circ} 00'E$ ), at 1630 hours, February 24, 1964. The day was overcast and foggy, with misty rain and a light westerly wind.

The bird was recognized as a Grey Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*, as soon as it flew, the black axillary patches being immediately obvious. It flew strongly several times, showing a marked preference for the inland side of the predominantly stony beach whenever it landed. A fairly close approach was possible, and it was collected half an hour later. The specimen was returned to the National Museum of Victoria, where the identification was confirmed by Mr A. R. McEvey, and it is now in the Museum's collection.

Only four species of waders have been previously recorded on Macquarie Island. Of these, a specimen of the Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica novae-zealandiae*, was collected by Ainsworth, October 20, 1912 (Falla 1937), and another on December 20, 1951 (Lindholm 1952). The Lesser Knot, *Calidris c. canutus*, was collected by Hamilton on November 7, 1913 (Falla 1937). Both of these species are common summer migrants to New Zealand, and both have also been recorded at Campbell Island, situated some four hundred miles north-east of Macquarie Island (Bailey and Sorenson 1962). During 1962, a specimen of the Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*, was collected on Macquarie Island by Mr D. Nicholls (A.N.A.R.E. Biologist, 1961-62) (unpublished A.N.A.R.E. record) and is now in the National Museum's collection (W6480). In addition, there is a sight record of an unidentified snipe (probably *Gallinago* sp.) (Gwynn 1953).

A summary of the distribution of the Grey Plover in Australasia is given by Condon and McGill (1960). The bird was included on the New Zealand list (Fleming 1952) on the basis of two sight records by Sibson (1949).

Three recent records for New Zealand were published during 1961 (i.e. Brathwaite; Bell, McKenzie and Sibson; Sibson and Urquhart). Mr F. C. Kinskey (Dominion Museum, Wellington) informs me (*in litt.* 1964) that there are probably at least two more sightings not yet published.

The Grey Plover is not particularly common in Tasmania during the summer months, and this straggler is an unexpected and very interesting addition to the list of Macquarie Island birds.—K. G. SIMPSON, CSIRO, Division of Wildlife Research, Canberra.

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**A note on Whistlers.**—The purpose of this par is to bring to notice the fact that in all three editions of Cayley's *What Bird Is That?* a bird figured has been wrongly identified. On plate XVIII, figs. 1 and 1A are supposed to represent a male and female Buff-breasted Whistler, *Pachycephala rufogularis*, and fig 2 a male Gilbert Whistler, *P. inornata*. While both of the males are correctly depicted, the supposed female Buff-breasted Whistler is actually a female Gilbert Whistler. The bird figured has a plain grey throat and breast, and since Cayley's book was first published in 1931, Parsons and McGilp, 1935, made the notable discovery that female Buff-breasted Whistlers actually do have a buff throat and breast, similar to the male. Cayley would have become aware of this by 1935, as he was responsible for plates 7 and 8 in Parsons and McGilp's paper already referred to, which beautifully illustrates a pair of Gilbert Whistlers and a pair of Buff-breasted Whistlers respectively. However, Cayley did not live to supervise another edition of this book. Chisholm, 1947, wrote a popular article which mentioned the difference in colouring, so was of course aware of these characteristics, but unfortunately failed to notice the error when editing (in conjunction with Hindwood and McGill) the two revised editions of *What Bird Is That?* I informed Chisholm of the error on 6/11/60, and he replied (*in litt.* 30/10/61) that he would rectify the matter in the next edition. Until then, those bird observers who, like myself, rely on this book for confirmation of sightings in the field in "new" country, should note the error, and correct their copies in accordance.—JOHN COURTNEY, "Ashgrove", Swan Vale, via Glen Innes, N.S.W.

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**Parental feeding of a fledgling Dollar-bird.**—At 9.30 a.m. January 15, 1965, two adults and a fledgling Dollar-bird, *Eurystomus orientalis*, were seen perched on some dead branches in the top of a tall Port Orford Cedar, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, in the grounds of the CSIRO, Division of Wildlife Research, Gungahlin, at Canberra, A.C.T. It was a warm, almost windless morning, with not a cloud in the sky.

The adults left their perch from time to time to catch some of the large beetles, probably Christmas Beetles, *Anaplognathus* sp., that were flying about. The beetles were carried singly in the bill and were vigorously crushed several times before they were given to the fledgling. Both adults fed the fledgling, which appeared to beg with a rapid lowering and raising of the lower mandible and an upright posture. The bill was not opened more than about 20 degrees. See figure 1A.

After feeding the fledgling for about 15 minutes the parents flew away and did not return before it also disappeared, half an hour later. Several times after the departure of its parents the fledgling assumed an almost horizontal posture with the bill wide open. This may also be a begging posture. See figure 1B.

The fledgling differed from the adults by having a yellow instead of a red bill. The figures have been redrawn from field sketches which were made while observing the birds with a 15x to 60x telescope.—GERARD F. VAN TETS, CSIRO, Canberra, A.C.T.

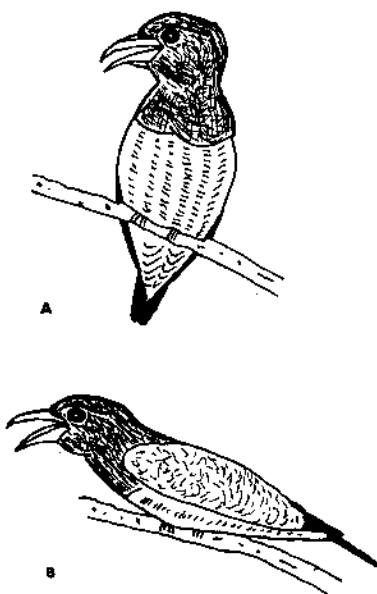


Figure 1. Food-begging postures of a fledgling Dollar-bird.