

Albert S. Meek's collecting-locality on the Cape York Peninsula, 1898

By S. A. PARKER

In 1898 the English naturalist-collector Albert S. Meek obtained some three hundred bird skins from the Cape York Peninsula. The majority passed with the Rothschild Collection to the American Museum of Natural History, New York, but forty-five came to the British Museum (Natural History). The skins are labelled "Cape York", and those which I have seen or located in literature bear dates from June 14 to August 7, 1898. When Hartert published his notes on that part of the collection in Rothschild's possession (1899 *a, b, c*) he described the following forms:

Pachycephala peninsulae [= *P. simplex peninsulae*], 1899a : 33;
Artamus leucorhynchus parvirostris [= *A.l. leucopygialis* Gould], 1899c : 424;

Zosterops westernensis vegeta [= *Z. lateralis ramsayi* Masters], 1899C : 425;

Poephila nigrotecta [= *P. cincta nigrotecta*], 1899b : 59, and
Bathilda ruficauda clarescens, 1899C : 427.

More recently Mayr described from the same collection *Sericornis beccarii dubius* (1937:9). Whereas Hartert described his new forms as from "Cape York", Mayr suggested that the type-locality of the new *Sericornis* was near Princess Charlotte Bay, south-east Cape York.

It is possible to localize Meek's specimens more precisely for there is information on his movements in correspondence between Meek and Rothschild, Hartert and Jordan at the Zoological Museum, Tring [now part of the British Museum (Natural History)]. The relevant extracts from Meek's letters follow:

Letter to Jordan dated 6 June 1898, from Cooktown: "Tomorrow morning I start for Rocky River about 200 miles north of here . . . I return in about 10 days or a fortnight for my wife (who will in future accompany me) after leaving a couple of men on some good site to clear as camp and to erect tents. I intend sending these collections direct to Janson and Gerrard respectively."

Letter to Hartert dated 1 July 1898, from Cooktown: "I have now two men collecting birds up at the Chester River, 200 miles north of here. I shall be taking up the cutter for them in about six weeks."

Letter to Jordan dated 8 July 1898, from Cooktown: "I am going for a six weeks' trip up Thursday Island and Somerset way. I start in about a fortnight."

Letter to Hartert dated 2 Sept. 1898, from Cooktown: "Have

just returned from Chester River after very bad passage down, being anchored eight [days] at the Howick Is., (nothing but mangroves) on account of excessive bad weather. My men did very badly, nothing but 300 small bird skins and few small rats, mice, etc. There is one of the white owl you wished for and of which I got a previous specimen in Cedar Bay."

Although Meek intended to pitch camp on the Rocky River it seems that an on-the-spot change of plan occurred; the Rocky River is about six miles south of the Chester. It is clear therefore that the type-locality of the six names listed above is the Chester River (13°42'S, 143°33'E), Cape York Peninsula. Meek mentioned in a letter to Hartert dated March 10, 1899, that he had sent him (Hartert) a specimen of mountain thrush (presumably *Zoothera dauma*) from the Chester River, a fact he also mentioned in his book (1913:100). He recorded also (*loc. cit.*:30) that he had met a scrub-turkey at Cape York with a red head and white wattles [*Alectura lathamii purpureicollis* (Le Souëf)] and that it bred on the tops of mountains, making a very shallow nest. From these two facts it seems apparent that some collecting was also done at the head of the Chester River, in the McIlwraith Ranges.

REFERENCES

- Hartert, E., 1899a. *Bull. Br. Orn. Cl.*, 8, no. 60: 33-4.
 ——— b. *ibid.*, 8, no. 64: 59.
 ——— c. On some birds from Cape York, North Queensland. *Novit. Zool.*, 6: 423-428.
 Mayr, E., 1937. Notes on the genus *Sericornis* Gould. *Amer. Mus. Novit.*, 904.
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Eastern Barn Swallow in North Queensland—January 12, 1966—An Eastern Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica gutturalis*, was seen on the electric light wires, in the street outside the Innisfail (N.Q.) aerodrome.

The bird was at once seen to differ from the common Welcome Swallow because of the black band across the chest, separating, a rufous coloured throat from the white breast. The upper colouring was a dark shining colour and the tail was deeply forked and long. The bird had rufous underwing colouring. Another bird was seen in the same area on March 9, 1966.

The Barn Swallow was first recorded from Australia on the basis of a specimen collected on October 18, 1860, on the "North coast of Australia".

Numbers of these birds were seen near Derby, north-west Australia (1960-1961) to which area they may well be regular seasonal migrants from more northern parts.—H. B. GILL, Mail Service 216, Innisfail, North Queensland.