

## STRAY FEATHERS

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Tasmania.**—On October 15, 1967, I deliberately flushed a mixed flock of Golden Plovers, *Pluvialis dominica*, Curlew Sandpipers, *Calidris ferruginea*, and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, *C. acuminata*, that were resting in a samphire flat in Barilla Bay. As I was about to move on, a bird I had previously overlooked because it was in a crouched position stood up, adopting an erect stance. Approximately the same size as a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, it was obviously of a different species. The bill appeared to be too short and slender and the head too small. Without the aid of glasses the entire underparts appeared to be uniform grey. However, on approaching closer and using  $\times 10$  glasses they were seen to be a uniform dull-buff with a few dark spots. The legs were a more distinct yellow than in most *acuminata*.

The bird did not remain for long before taking flight, which was of an erratic nature. At first it remained low until it left the samphire flat, but once over exposed mud flats it started to climb. It did not join the flock of other waders that were circling the area but continued to fly in a northerly direction until lost to sight. In flight the upper surfaces appeared uniformly dark. The under wings were white.

I am satisfied that the bird was a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, *Tryngites subruficollis*, of which this is the first Tasmanian record. The bird has not been seen on several subsequent visits to Barilla Bay.—D. G. THOMAS, 9 Lallaby Road, Moonah, Tas.

**Wood Sandpiper in Tasmania.**—The first Tasmanian record of the Wood Sandpiper, *Tringa glareola*, was obtained on October 21, 1967, when one bird was seen at Clear Lagoon, Sandford. The bird was subsequently seen by L. E. Wall and G. Duggan on the following day and by R. J. Vincent on October 26. It was not present on October 28 and has not been seen since.

All who saw the bird agree that it was a Wood Sandpiper. About the size of a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Calidris acuminata*, it was pale grey above with distinct white spotting on the back and wings. The crown was striped and there was a white superciliary stripe. The breast was pencilled grey and the rest of the underparts white apart from some grey mottling on the flanks. The bill was black, moderately long and straight, and the legs were greenish-yellow. In flight the feet protruded beyond the tail, the rump was white and the tail barred.

The bird was only seen on one part of the lagoon edge, an area of swampy vegetation close to a wooded area.—D. G. THOMAS, 9 Lallaby Road, Moonah, Tas.

**The Noisy Pitta in New Guinea.**—Mayr (1941) lists the Noisy Pitta, *Pitta versicolor*, as "apparently only a winter visitor from Australia". At this time only three specimens had been collected.

Rand (1938) reported one shot in June or July 1936 at Daru Island, on Torres Strait. He also referred to two older specimens collected by D'Albertis on the Katau River in October and November. The Katau is now known as the Binaturi, and joins the sea close to Daru. The specimens were referred to the race *simillima* known to inhabit coastal Northern Queensland.

On August 16, 1966, I had the good fortune to observe the species near Port Moresby. The area was Eriama Creek, a stream lined by dry rain-forest and situated in savanna country 10 miles east of Moresby. At dawn a Pitta was seen to hop on to the road which bisected the small jungle path. The yellow collar and cobalt wing patch were clearly seen. Later that day a Pitta was again seen in this locality, in poor light, and I concluded that in all probability I had mistaken a Blue-breasted Pitta, *P. macklotii*, which is a reasonably common bird in the jungles behind Port Moresby. However, on August 17 the bird was seen again, and in fact was followed for some distance in the rain forest, and this time left no doubt as to its identity as *Pitta versicolor*.

The movements of the Noisy Pitta are as yet little understood. In the southernmost position of its range it is reputed by some to be migratory, but this reputation may well be caused by absence during non-breeding of the distinctive call of the species. It is a well-known phenomenon for local observers to be unaware that such a brightly coloured bird even exists in their district—so secretive are the Pitta's habits. Nevertheless some movement must take place as Jack (1963) records night-flying Pittas striking power-lines in Brisbane's suburbs. McGill and Hindwood (1958) also quote the record of A. J. North, of two specimens collected at Wollongong, but for some reason consider that these may have been aviary escapees. That Pittas fly great distances is well known. Austin and Kuroda (1953) quote the Fairy Pitta, *P. brachyura nympha*, as migratory from South-east Asia to tiny and scattered breeding grounds in North China, Cheju-do (Quelpart Island) and Skikoku, in Japan.

In Northern Queensland, a migratory movement seems indicated by the following:

- (a) Cochrane (1903). "Numerous 14th May. Have seen none since September."
- (b) Barnard (1911). "The first one was noticed (at Cape York) on 10th October, 1910, and a few days later the species was plentiful in the scrubs, and there shortly commenced to build."
- (c) Macgillivray (1914). "This smaller northern form is fairly common in the Cape York scrubs from July until the end of March. They nest in the wet season, from December until March."

- (d) Vidgen (1920). "From personal observation I am sure they are much decreased in numbers after March. These remarks are applicable only as regards the locality Paira, Cape York."
- (e) Mrs. R. G. Gill (in litt.). "Nonsy Pittas are here (Innisfail) on the coastal plain, no doubt at least some of them, for the whole year, but between November and March/April are almost, except for a rare call, silent down here but becoming noisy at about 1500 feet altitude. Then for the rest of the year when noisy on the coast they are silent up higher."

These notes indicate a degree of migratory movement although Macgillivray's and Gill's comments rather complicate the picture. Of course one cannot overlook the possibility of the North Queensland breeding races migrating to New Guinea and being replaced by wintering birds of the nominate race. There are precedents elsewhere of two races of the one species doing just this. There is a possibility that the Blue-breasted Pitta, *Pitta macklotii*, may have confused the issue but, however, Barnard makes the point that *P. versicolor simillima* and *P. macklotii* had identical migratory habits in the area in which he worked. *P. macklotii* is a confirmed breeding migrant to North Queensland with in addition some six resident races in New Guinea.

Whatever the final outcome, it would seem that the Noisy Pitta occurs in New Guinea far more than present records indicate and that later work, particularly on Torres Strait migration routes, will support Mayr's assertion that the bird is a regular wintering migrant. However D'Albertis' specimen taken in November may indicate the presence of a resident New Guinea population.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Mrs. R. G. Gill (Queensland) and K. T. Hindwood (New South Wales) for assistance in the preparation of this paper.—H. L. BELL.

#### REFERENCES

- Austin, Oliver L. and Kuroda, Nagahisa. 1953. The Birds of Japan, their Status and Distribution. *Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., Harvard College* **109**, 4: 494.
- Barnard, H. G. 1911. Field Notes from Cape York. *Emu* **11**: 25.
- Cochrane, P. 1903. *Emu* **3**: 47.
- Hindwood, K. A. and McGill, A. R. 1958. *The Birds of Sydney*. Sydney: 110.
- Jack, N. 1963. *The Birds of Brisbane*. Brisbane: 24.
- Macgillivray, W. 1914. Notes on Some North Queensland Birds. *Emu* **13**: 164.
- Mayr, Ernst. 1941. *List of New Guinea Birds*. A.M.N.H.
- Rand, A. L. 1938. Results of the Archbold Expeditions. No. 20. On some Passerine New Guinea birds. *Amer. Mus. Novit.* **991**: 1.
- Vidgen, H. G. 1921. Birds Visiting Cape York Peninsula and New Guinea. *Emu* **20**: 227.