

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

NOTES ON THE YELLOW-FACED MYNA

Rand and Gilliard (1967, Handbook of New Guinea Birds) say that the nest of the Yellow-faced Myna *Mino dumonti* is unknown, but that it is probably in a hole in a tree. It is not clear whether this is presumption based on the habits of other species of *Mino* or on observations of behaviour at holes in trees. The following notes show that there is no reasonable doubt that the species builds a nest of twigs and leaves in hollows in trees.

Virtue (Emu 46: 330) recorded a pair on Bougainville inspecting a hole, 'apparently investigating it for a nesting site'. Watson, Wheeler and Whitbourn (Emu 62: 87) noted that at Port Moresby 'one pair had a nesting hollow' in a tree.

My notes are on three presumed nests. On 28 April 1970 at Jivevenang Village (altitude 500 m) near Finschhafen two Mynas flew overhead, one carrying a leafy forked branchlet. They flew straight to a hole in the trunk of an ancient mango tree. My companions assured me that one bird entered.

On 28 May 1971 at Busu River, Lae, one bird was seen for 15 minutes looking out of a hole, 13 m high, in the trunk of a large tree; a second bird was perched one metre away, calling continuously.

At Igam Barracks, Lae, on 20 March 1971 three birds flew to a huge Bird's-nest Fern *Asplenium* sp, 30 m high, on a horizontal branch of a dead tree standing at the edge of the jungle. The fern had a girdle of dead leaves, 2 m long, round its base, which was 2 m in diameter. The birds continually flew to and from the fern, but their activity could not be closely followed. I had then to be away, but a colleague, Capt. J. Waters, undertook to observe the nest, which was near his house. After watching for a week, he said that the birds carried sticks and leaves, and entered the girdle of dead foliage at the

base of the fern. Three birds flew together, but it was not certain if all three carried material. From 28 March until 10 April I visited the place daily and saw two or three birds flying to the fern, one disappearing into the dead foliage. Regrettably the tree was too dangerous to climb, but presumably the Mynas had built a nest in the dead foliage and may have excavated a hole for it in the basal fibres.

Flocking by this species has been seldom mentioned in the literature. Throughout the year the birds are everywhere in pairs or small groups of three to six. Larger parties gather in fruiting trees and have been reported by most expeditions to New Guinea. Such flocks contain as many as 50 birds, often in company with the Golden-breasted Myna *M. anais*. I have observed that the species, presumably when not breeding, forms roosting flocks. At Lae these have been noted from September to June, which is the drier period of the year. Flocks of 40–50 gather, arriving in pairs or small groups from about 17:30 to 18:30. Considerable movement and incessant calling takes place in the roosting trees. Sometimes at night the flock will call for a few minutes, possibly when alarmed by an intruder. The roosting trees are always tall, usually densely crowned and isolated outside the jungle. The birds may change from one tree to another 100–200 m distant, perhaps because of disturbance by goshawks *Accipiter* spp, which are unusually common along the edge of the forest.

An unusually large roosting flock was observed from 14 May to 9 June 1971, when I left the area, and had probably been in existence before this period. The roosting tree was a very large *Ficus*, 50 m tall, standing alone in the centre of the barracks. On one occasion I counted 185 birds arriving, but many more had arrived before I started to count.

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11 August 1971.

SNARES CRESTED PENGUIN: TWO AUSTRALIAN RECORDS

We recently examined a number of skins of the penguin genus *Eudyptes* Vieillot 1816, from the collections of several museums in Australia, and found two specimens of a subspecies of *Eudyptes* new to Australia.

We have identified a specimen from the South Australian Museum (Reg. No. B1071) as a Snares Crested Penguin. This form is treated as a subspecies,

Eudyptes pachyrhynchus atratus Finsch, 1875, by Fleming (1935) and Kinsky (1970). It was named as a species, *E. robustus*, by Oliver (1953), and this is accepted by Stonehouse (1971). Falla, *et al.* (1966) and Slater (1970) treat it as a species, *E. atratus*. The nomenclature adopted by Kinsky (1970) is accepted in this note. The specimen, a male about to moult, was collected at Cape Banks, south-eastern

South Australia, on 8 January 1914 by Mr J. W. Hilton, Head Keeper of Cape Banks Lighthouse. No other information was provided. The specimen is referred to by Condon (1969) under the name *Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*. He states '[The] subspecies has not been determined, but it may be the nominate form'. We found that this is not so.

We have identified as the same subspecies a second specimen, unsexed, from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (Reg. No. B2637/10,002), previously labelled simply 'crested penguin'. This was collected by Mrs J. M. Wilson at Seven Mile Beach on the south-eastern Tasmanian coast near Hobart on 27 August 1951. No other details are provided on the label or in the Museum's register. There is no sign of moult and the plumage is in perfect condition. Mrs Wilson has informed us (*in litt.* 9 December 1970) that the penguin was found alive. Attempts to feed it failed and it died within a few days. Her daughter, Mrs A. Moody, (*in litt.* 5 February 1971) forwarded two snapshots of the living penguin to us, but regrettably they were not suitable for publication.

The structural characters and plumage of both specimens agree with those of a specimen of the same subspecies in the National Museum of Victoria (Reg. No. B7312) collected at Macquarie Island in 1958, and with those of two adult skins in the Dominion Museum, Wellington, NZ (Reg. Nos 1271 and 1272) collected at the Snares Islands and loaned for examination. A juvenile/immature skin from DM (Reg. No. 1270) was also examined.

They are also similar to photographs of *E. p. atratus* in: (i) Oliver (1955) (Plate p. 73); (ii) in Stonehouse (1968) (Plates pp. 66 and 68); (iii) in Sparks and Soper (1968) (Plates 17 and 18); (iv) in Guthrie Smith (1936) (pfl. facing p. 192).

Points confirming identity and probable age of the penguins as adults are: (i) glossy black head, particularly on the crown; (ii) plain chocolate-black cheeks; (iii) basal half of these cheek feathers white, without white striations visible (at the surface) as in the nominate race; (iv) prominently bi-convex culminicorn; (v) bare white skin edging proximal margin of lower mandible below gape; (vi) anterior tip of the superciliary stripe or crest rising in the central base of the nasal sulcus but separated from it by a narrow line of entirely black feathers; (vii) this same point starting in front of a line drawn between the angle of the gape and the central proximal base of the culminicorn; (viii) the narrowness

of the superciliary stripe or crest above the eye; (ix) the broadening of the stripe to form a prominent drooping plume (crest) on each side of the nape; (x) the silky rather than fibrous texture of the plumes—a feature which immediately eliminates the Rockhopper Penguins *E. crestatus*/*E. c. mosleyi* and the Macaroni-Royal complex *E. c. chrysolophus*/*E. c. schlegeli* from further consideration; (xi) the bases of the feathers of the most posterior region of the coloured plumes not extending part of the way round the back of the crown as they do in the nominate race, (but see also statement by Stonehouse (1971: 2) apparently to the contrary); (xii) the dorsum glossy black, very little blue being visible at the feather tips; (xiii) the pattern on the underside of the flippers which is very similar to those of the three skins in the DM and the specimen from Macquarie Island.

The Snares Islands are in the Sub-Antarctic zone, about 225 kilometres south-east of Invercargill, NZ, and are the only known breeding stations for this subspecies.

We thank the Directors of the South Australian Museum, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and Dominion Museum, Wellington, for the loan of specimens and to the Curators of Birds, Mr H. T. Condon, Mr P. A. Andrews and Mr F. C. Kinsky, for information and assistance. KINGS expresses gratitude for a grant from The Science and Industries Endowment Fund towards costs of travel.

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 27 October 1971.

FIRST RECORDS OF REDSHANK IN AUSTRALIA

At 07:30 on 19 July 1970 I was making a routine census of waders on a sandbar at the mouth of Buffalo Creek 13 km north-east of Darwin, NT. About 200 waders were resting on the bar, among which were four Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia* and an unfamiliar bird resting together. Conditions of light were good and I could observe the birds to within a distance of 30 m with x12 binoculars. The group was flushed several times, and each time the strange bird accompanied the Greenshanks. The following detailed description was taken in the field.

Resembled a Greenshank, but intermediate in size between that and a Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*; head, back and wings brown; an indistinct stripe above the eye; neck pale-brown merging into off-white on the upper breast; underside off-white; bill slightly shorter than that of Greenshank, dark becoming reddish at base; legs orange-red, distinctly different from greenish grey of Greenshank. In flight a conspicuous white stripe on the following edge of wing along the secondaries; white area of rump extending to the back.

I could see that it called in flight because it opened and shut its bill, but I could not be sure of the call because the other birds were calling at the same time.

When I examined the literature, I concluded that the bird could have been only a Redshank *Tringa totanus* because of the colour of its legs and the characteristic conspicuous pattern in flight.

At 11:30 on 26 July 1970 I saw 17 other Redshanks at high tide with a large flock of waders at Cameron Beach. Again I was not able to distinguish their call among the calls of other waders, but noted the main characters mentioned above.

Smythies (1968, *The Birds of Borneo*: 202) gives several records of Redshanks in Borneo during the northern summer, including one of 50 birds in June. Vaurie (1965, *The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna. Non Passeriformes*: 412) states that the eastern race *eurhinus* winters in '... the Sundas east oc-

asionally to Celebes'. However, Dr D. Wells (pers. comm.) informs me that there are no records for June and July in Malaya and that the extreme dates of records there are 2 August and 31 May. What, then, is remarkable about my records is that there were so many birds very early in the season of migration, or rather so soon after the northern breeding season. Even if the species has been overlooked by previous observers in the Northern Territory, it can hardly be a regular visitor because these were my only records during almost five years in the Darwin area (Crawford 1972, *Emu* in press).

The birds that I saw could perhaps have overwintered in the area, though that is hardly likely because then I would probably have noted them before the middle of July. Presumably they overshot their normal wintering area, perhaps by being caught up in migrating flocks of other species that normally reach Australia. Whatever the explanation, these occurrences emphasize how little is really known about the details of the avifauna in north-western Australia and show that it is an area where a regular watch will probably add several species to the Australian list, no doubt as vagrants or migrants. At the same time there is evidence in the northern hemisphere that climate is becoming cooler and several northern species seem to be colonizing Britain. If long-term changes are really taking place in climate generally, changes in the distribution of birds in the Australian region may result. So far, in Australia evidence to support a theory of changing distribution of waders is non-existent. The addition of such species as Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina* to the Australian list recently means nothing because the number of birds in relation to the population of visiting waders is very small and because there is no knowing whether these species were previously overlooked. If changes are taking place, these could be monitored best perhaps in the north-west.

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7 March 1972.

FIRST AUSTRALIAN RECORD OF THE ASIATIC DOWITCHER

At 13:30 on 16 October 1971 I was making a routine census of waders at Frances Bay, Darwin Harbour, NT. There were over a hundred waders resting on a gravel bank during high tide at the western end of the bay at the mouth of Sandgrove Creek. An unfamiliar bird with the following field characteristics was noted: Resembled a Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, of

which there were several present, but differed in being slightly smaller, with proportionately longer bill and shorter legs; the bill was black along its entire length, not pinkish at base, and straight with a blunt tip; there was a broad off-white eyebrow; upper parts were a richer brown. The bird was collected and a subsequent examination showed it to be an Asiatic

Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, for which there appears to be no previous Australian record. Description of the specimen, CSIRO DL 20001: Imm. ♀ by gonads. Bill long and straight, slightly spatulate at the tip of the upper mandible, pitted and marked with small indentations at the end of both mandibles, and black with a buff area about 10 mm long at the base of both mandibles; crown black-brown lightly flecked with white; white patches at sides of top of bill extending above eye where it becomes freckled with brown; lores brown; sides of face and throat white, speckled light-brown; breast, belly and vent white; flanks and undertail-coverts white, lightly marked with brown scallops; nape and upper back light-brown with some white streaks; mantle and upper sides of wings black-brown, boldly edged with white; rump, upper tail-coverts, tail and underside of tail white, barred brown; underwing white with a little brown mottling on some of the coverts; tips of primaries and secondaries light-brown, the rest dark-brown; legs and feet very dark

grey; semi-palmated toes; iris dark-brown; gape pinkish grey. Measurements (mm): Total length 349; wing-span 592; wing 79; tail 61; exposed culmen 82.4; tarsus 52.1; middle toe 32.1; claw 7. Extensive body-moult, but no moulting of the wings and tail evident.

The breeding range is not well known (Vaurie 1945. The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna. Non Passeriformes: 408) but it apparently breeds in isolated colonies in Siberia, Mongolia and possibly in north-western Manchuria. On migration it has been recorded as far west as Aden and throughout the southern half of Asia including Indonesia; it has not yet been recorded from New Guinea. The species does not seem to be common in any part of its range, though the lack of records may reflect the ease with which it could be mistaken for a small Bar-tailed Godwit (Ali and Ripley 1969, Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, 2: 277).

I acknowledge the assistance of J. L. McKean in compiling the description of the specimen.

D. N. CRAWFORD, c/o CSIRO, Box 738, Darwin, NT 5794.
10 March 1972.

DISTRIBUTION AND TAXONOMIC STATUS OF *PAROTIA LAWESII HELENAE DE VIS*

Dark-crested populations of a black short-tailed flag bird-of-paradise of the genus *Parotia* from south-eastern New Guinea have been usually treated as a race, *helenae* De Vis, of *P. lawesii* (Mayr 1941, List of New Guinea Birds; Mayr in Peters 1962, Checklist of Birds of the World, 15; Gilliard 1969, Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds). Hitherto, the form has been known only from between the Waria and Mamber Rivers on the northern scarp of the western Owen Stanley Range (Gilliard, *op. cit.* map 9.7). Specimens collected during CSIRO faunal surveys, and others in the MacGregor collection in the Queensland Museum, now reveal that it is abundant on both northern and southern scarps of the eastern Owen Stanley Range east of Mt Suckling.

Comparison of this form with topotypical specimens of nominate *P. lawesii* shows, furthermore, that it is a good species, differing markedly from *P. lawesii* in the form of the crest-tufts on the forehead, proportions of bill and nostrils, and colour of eye. The differences are:

P. lawesii: Supra-nasal ridges well developed, from each of which, in adult males, long tufts (6–10 mm) of extensively white-tipped feathers curve inwards and meet over the culmen; exposed culmen (♂♀) (13.5 – 14 – 15.5 (– 18.5) mm; culmen to nostril (♂♀)

(13.5 – 14.5 – 15.5 (– 16.8) mm; nostril (♂♀) 8.5 – 9.5 (– 11.2) mm; iris apparently uniformly bright azure-blue.

P. helenae: Supra-nasal ridges absent; the supra-nasal tufts in adult males 3–4 mm long, short, erect, golden-brown, lining the main black crest of the forehead; exposed culmen (♂♀) (15 – 17 – 19.5 (– 23) mm; culmen to nostril (15 – 17 – 19 (– 19.5) mm); nostril 6.0 – 7.5 (– 9.0) mm; iris with bright azure-blue inner ring and broad yellow-cream outer ring.

The species are otherwise similar in male and female plumages. Differences in calls and behaviour are not known.

Realization of the distinctiveness of *P. helenae* and its more extended geographical range has led us to re-examine the relation, distribution and evolution of the species of *Parotia*. The results of this study will be reported in detail later. In summary, all five species of the genus seem to be essentially allopatric. In south-eastern New Guinea, *P. lawesii* and *P. helenae* appear to confront each other in parts of the Wharton and western Owen Stanley Ranges west of the Keveri hills. Along these mountains, *P. lawesii* occupies the southern scarps and *P. helenae* the northern. Both species are confined mainly to primary mixed montane forests between approximately 1,400

and 1,800 mm altitude, and presumably compete.

Our re-evaluation of relation of *Parotia* spp indicates that, among morphological characters, the form of the crests and tufts making up the feathering on the forehead in males is the most fundamental criterion. In feathering of the crest, *P. helenae* appears to be more closely related to *P. wahnesi* than to *P. lawesii*. Gilliard's (*op. cit.*) contention, based mainly on form of the tail, that *P. wahnesi* and *P. sefilata*

are the most primitive flagbirds, seems to be corroborated by the simplicity of the feathering on their foreheads. The crests and tufts in the other three species appear to represent differing combinations of those of *P. wahnesi* and *P. sefilata*, leading us to believe that introgression and the selection of recombinants has played an important role in the evolution of the species of *Parotia*.

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10 April 1972.

FIRST RECORD OF NARETHA PARROT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

During early 1970 the South Australian Department of Fisheries and Fauna Conservation received unconfirmed reports of the occurrence of the Naretha Parrot *Psephotus haematogaster narethae* in an area of South Australia north-west of Ceduna, on the south-eastern edge of the Nullarbor Plain. It was also reported that many of these parrots were being trapped in this area and offered for sale in South Australia and other States. The Department had, in fact, noted that many Naretha Parrots were suddenly being offered for sale in South Australia and found out that these birds, or many of them, were coming from north-west of Ceduna.

It was realized that if *narethae* occurs in this area, so far east of its normally accepted range, which is usually held to be no further eastward than Eucla on the border of Western and South Australia, the range of *narethae* could meet or overlap that of the nominate race. In consequence the Department tried to collect specimens of *P. haematogaster* in the Ceduna area in order that they might establish the ranges of the different races.

In November 1970 myself and another officer of the Department of Fisheries and Fauna Conservation, while surveying kangaroos in the area, tried to get specimens of blue bonnets for identification. Because it rained heavily at the time, none could be collected and none was seen at the watering points. Two specimens of *P. h. haematogaster* were collected at Lake Everard Station about 140 km north-east of Ceduna on 12 November 1971.

P. haematogaster was also seen at Mulgathing (200 km north of Ceduna) and Commonwealth Hill Stations (232 km north of Ceduna) on 14 November 1971.

The occurrence of *narethae* north-west of Ceduna had yet to be proved, and it was essential to collect specimens. The inspector of Fisheries and Fauna Conservation, Mr M. A. Calliss, based at Ceduna, was asked to try to get a specimen during one of his visits to the area. On 8 July 1971 while travelling through the country where *narethae* was suspected, approximately 200 km north-west of Ceduna, he saw a blue bonnet fly across the track and tried to collect it, but it had disappeared. Early next day he returned to the place and after searching for several hours collected one bird, which has since been identified as *P. h. narethae*, an adult male, showing signs of coming into breeding condition.

The country in which the bird was collected was myall and blue-bush savanna interspersed with clumps of mallee. The bird collected was the only individual seen, and although the area was searched thoroughly no others could be found on that occasion. In his report on the collection of the specimen Mr Calliss mentioned that local aborigines told him that these parrots were once quite common, but that they had not noticed many of them for a long time. The suspected decline in the local population of *narethae* is probably because of illegal trapping.

The discovery of *narethae* so far east of its previously recognized and restricted range, entirely within Western Australia, is particularly interesting and probably this subspecies can no longer be considered as isolated from the nominate race, which occurs about 200 km north-east of where the specimen of *narethae* was collected. It may be found even closer, because there are no significant natural barriers between the distributions of these two races of the species, as known at present.

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23 November 1971.