

SHORT NOTES

Torres Strait Pigeon breeding in Kimberley, WA.

Hitherto the Torres Strait Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoa* has not been recorded breeding in Western Australia. Storr (1966, Spec. Publ. West. Aust. Mus. 4) considers it to be a partial migrant in the Northern Territory and in Queensland he (1973, Spec. Publ. West. Aust. Mus. 5) considers it to be a migrant appearing on Torres Strait islands in July and spreading south in August–October. It has been sighted occasionally along the coast of north-western Kimberley but these sightings have not been published.

On 14 August 1974 I found a nest thirteen metres from the ground in a *Ficus racemosa* at 15° 28' S, 125° 40' E in the Prince Regent River Reserve, north-western Kimberley. The incubating bird was collected; it was a male with well-developed brood-patch, had testes 17 x 8 millimetres and weighed 475 grams. The nest was a flimsy structure of a few thin twigs on a horizontal fork of branches eight centimetres in diameter. The single egg was white, well incubated and measured 42.8 x 30.6 millimetres.

This is the earliest breeding record in Australia: in Northern Territory breeding takes place between September and March (Storr 1966) and in Queensland, between September and January (Storr 1973). My record suggests that the Western Australian population may be resident. The taxonomy of Kimberley birds will be considered by R. E. Johnstone in a study of Kimberley pigeons.

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8 March 1977.

Swamp Quail eating slugs

A Swamp Quail *Coturnix ypsilophora* that had just been killed by a Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* was collected on 9 June 1976, at Stocker's Marsh (42° 08' S, 147° 39' E), in central Tasmania. The crop of the dead bird contained forty-five individuals of *Deroceras reticulatum*, a slug that has been introduced to Tasmania. The remaining food items were four female talitrid amphipods, twenty-five unidentified seeds of two grasses and several pieces of green leaves. In Tasmania, Swamp Quail eat seeds and leaves (Littler 1910, A Handbook of the Birds of Tasmania . . .) as well as insects (Green 1966, Emu 66: 105-110) but there is no record of them eating molluscs. In Victoria McNally (1938, Emu 18: 367-400) found two other species of slugs,

Agriolimax agrestis and *Limax flavus* in five out of a total of 1,096 Stubble Quail *Coturnix pectoralis*.

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19 February 1977.

Helpers at the nest of the Rainbow Bee-eater

Morris (1976, Victorian Nat. 93: 152-154) reported sightings of up to eight adult Rainbow Bee-eaters *Merops ornatus* attending one nest hole. We now wish to confirm by means of banding that more than two birds attend a nest.

As an official project by members of the Victorian Ornithological Research Group, sixteen birds from a scattered colony of Bee-eaters at Taminick Gap in the Warby Ranges near Wangaratta, Vic. (36° 25' S, 146° 12' E), were banded between 27 and 30 December 1976 with metal bands, some with colour-bands. They were trapped using hand-nets placed over the entrance of the burrow after the bird had entered. It was not necessary to use a torch to attract the birds from the burrow into the net (Waterman 1965, Aust. Bird-Bander 3: 49; Waterman and Llewellyn 1968, Aust. Bird-Bander 6: 8-9); and placing nets over the holes before daybreak (Lane 1963, [Aust.] Bird-Bander 1: 59-61) was ineffective because the adults roosted elsewhere.

Of the sixteen birds banded, ten were trapped as single birds or pairs from seven burrows; three birds were trapped at Nest 4 and three at Nest 6 and all six were observed entering the holes with food and all had brood patches. Presumably, all these birds brooded the eggs or fed the young.

Helpers at the nest of the Rainbow Bee-eater have not been reported previously in Australia (Rowley 1976, Proc. XVI Int. orn. Congr. 657-666; Harrison 1969, Emu 69: 30-40; Courtney 1971, Emu 71: 172-174). Grimes (1976, Proc. XVI Int. orn. Congr. 667-673) listed three species of Meropidae in Africa suspected of breeding co-operatively and three that have been confirmed as doing so in Africa. Fry (1972, Ibis 114: 1-14) was the first to report co-operative breeding in the Meropidae, although Comrie-Smith (1930, Emu 30: 64-66) observed three adults feeding one nestling.

Fry established that, for the Red-throated Bee-eater *Merops bullocki* in Nigeria, helpers are males, generally one-year old, and up to three may assist at one nest; apparently males preponderate in the population at a ration of 1.5:1. He suggested that helpers among Meropidae in Africa are confined to

species breeding in savanna; solitary breeders or those breeding in forest have a sex ratio of 1:1 and do not breed co-operatively. The Rainbow Bee-eater conforms to Fry's definition of a savanna-breeding species and it is interesting to note that it also breeds co-operatively. There are more males than females in the Australian Museum, Sydney, among the specimens properly sexed. This is probably not caused by collecting bias, because the sexes are similar in plumage and in size.

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20 May 1977.

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON ZOOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE

The following Opinions have been published recently by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, c/o British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, United Kingdom. (See Bulletin Zoological Nomenclature, Volume 34, part 1.)

1078 (p. 14) *Anas punctata* Burchell, 1822 (Aves) suppressed under the plenary powers.

1081 (p. 25) Addition of Family-Group Names based on *Alca* (Aves) and *Alces* (Mammalia) to the Official List of Family-Group Names in Zoology.

The Commission cannot supply separates of Opinions.