

## Stray Feathers

**Superb Parrot in Southern New South Wales.**—Frith and Calaby have stated that, with one exception, there are no records of the Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*) in New South Wales south of the Murrumbidgee valley (*The Emu*, vol. 53, p. 326). However, there is a colony of this species a few miles south of Deniliquin. I located the group shortly after my arrival in the district in July, 1954. In November I counted up to 100 birds, including a high proportion of young birds only just in the flying stage. They nest in a very limited area in plains country interspersed with clumps of black box. A local resident told me that they have only been in the district a few years. Arnold McGill has informed me that he saw a few birds in the Deniliquin area in 1941. I have also seen odd parties in the area west of Mathoura but have no proof of nesting.—JOHN HOBBS, Deniliquin, N.S.W., 20/4/55.

**Victorian Records of the Dominican Gull.**—On March 24, 1955, at 3.30 p.m. at Queenscliff, in, on and around the fishermen's jetty, about twenty-five to thirty Pacific Gulls (*Gabianus pacificus*) were present. There was a range of all ages from birds of the year to fully-fledged adults and all stages between. One bird that flew within twenty feet of the car was noted to have the pure white tail of *Larus dominicanus*. It lacked the rounded plumpness of *pacificus*, and the strawberry flush at the point of the upper and lower mandibles was more extensive and deeper in colour than in that species. During the best part of an hour I saw, at close-up range, this bird at least five times.

This makes the third visual record of this species from southern Victoria. The first was in March two years ago, at Bird Rock, near Avalon jetty, Corio Bay, and the same bird presumably was seen at Point Henry the day before.

Last November when on a voyage in the M.V. Duntroon, near Wilson's Promontory, I saw a Dominican Gull flying past the ship within thirty feet. It had all the characteristics assisting in identification. These three sightings in Victoria, coupled with those off the coast of New South Wales, leads to the view that the Dominican Gull is in process of extending its range across the Tasman.—P. J. WOOD, Geelong, Vic., 26/3/55.

**Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike Caught in Flocks of Starlings.**—On April 12, 1954, at 1700 hours, I observed flocks of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) assembling in the Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

One large flock made a number of circuits, during one of which two Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes (*Coracina novaehollandiæ*) became involved in the flight. The Cuckoo-

Shrikes separated, but both were followed by sections of the flock. Time and time again the Cuckoo-Shrikes evaded the Starlings, only to be overtaken and surrounded once more. There was no sign of aggression on either side. The Cuckoo-Shrikes did not appear to relish the company of the Starlings, but, on the other hand, the Starlings showed a strong tendency to follow the Cuckoo-Shrikes, and having overtaken one, to engulf it in the flock.

I could not keep the flocks in view continuously, so cannot say how often the Cuckoo-Shrikes were recaptured, but I witnessed several overtakings. Nor did I time the behaviour, not anticipating the great persistence of the Starlings, but I should say that I watched for at least three minutes. By that time, one of the Cuckoo-Shrikes appeared to have escaped and was circling alone, perhaps seeking its companion.

A number of records of birds' becoming caught in flocks of other species appear in *British Birds*, vol. XLIII, p. 332. and vol. XLIV, p. 197. Two of these, both involving Wood-Pigeons and Starlings, appear closely parallel to the incident described above.—ERIC H. SEDGWICK, Williams, W.A., 22/9/54.

**Brolga Breeding in the Geelong District.**—I have every reason to believe that a pair of Brolgas bred in the Geelong district—within twelve miles of the Geelong Post Office—during the 1953 season.

For the last three years or more three birds have been present all the year in the locality, two adults, and one apparently the young of these two. It was always with them and only about three-quarters their size. Last year the smaller one disappeared and only the two adult birds remained. On December 28, 1953, Mr. Melville Williams reported seeing the two birds at a waterhole near his property with a young chick about the size of a White-faced Heron.

A hawk—from the description given a Swamp-Harrier (*Circus approximans*)—repeatedly attempted to take the chick, which kept close to the legs of one adult whilst the other made desperate but successful efforts to frustrate the hawk, which then desisted.

Sir Charles Belcher does not include the Brolga in his book as occurring within say a thirty-mile radius of Geelong. I saw Brolgas—possibly the three birds first mentioned, at any rate two large birds and one smaller—in the vicinity of Lake Connemawarre about four years ago.

The nearest record known to me other than the 1953 record by Mr. Williams was on the Geelong to Cressy road about thirty-five miles from Geelong.—PERCY J. WOOD, Geelong, Vic., 14/3/54.

**The Brown Gannet: a New South Wales Record.**—The Brown Gannet (*Sula leucogaster*) has a wide distribution throughout the tropical oceans of the world. In eastern Australia it breeds as far south as the Bunker Group of islands, close to the Tropic of Capricorn, in south-eastern Queensland. Some birds are known to range south to Moreton Bay, about 250 miles from the Bunker Group and 50 miles from the New South Wales border.

No published records are available of the occurrence of the species in New South Wales, though it is reasonable to assume that stragglers sometimes wander into the coastal waters of the north-eastern portion of that State.

I am now able to record, through the courtesy of Athel F. D'Ombraïn, the presence of an immature Brown Gannet near Port Stephens, central coastal New South Wales. The area where the bird was seen is approximately 100 miles north of Sydney, and some 700 miles from the nearest known breeding station, which is the Bunker Group. Mr. D'Ombraïn has sent the following notes (*in litt.*, 6/5/54)—

I saw a Brown Gannet on Sunday, May 2, 1954, sitting on a floating log a couple of miles off Port Stephens. I ran the boat up alongside and took two colour transparencies at fifteen feet. The beak of the bird was a pale fleshy colour and there was a fleshy area extending back from it. The neck was speckled with brown markings and the body was light brown all over. I feel sure it was a young bird. It was loath to leave the log and could only just flutter for fifty yards or so, but then it rose and flew well out to sea.

The presence of the species so far south of its normal range is exceptional. However, there are three records, much farther to the south, for New Zealand waters (one July 1888, another about 1910, and the third in March 1952). There is also a record for the Kermadec Islands to the north of New Zealand.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 6/11/54.

**Bar-tailed Godwit in Full Breeding Plumage.**—On May 9, 1955, on a sandbank at the entrance to Mallacoota estuary, a group of five Bar-tailed Godwits was seen. One of the birds was in full breeding plumage, the whole of the breast and underparts being a bright orange rufous, and the markings on the back heavier and more distinct. It presented a magnificent sight in the late afternoon sunlight, and the colour could be seen at a distance.

One of the other birds in the group had a little colour about the neck and upper breast, but the remainder were in the usual eclipse plumage. No other migratory waders were seen.—INA WATSON, Jolimont, Vic., 14/5/55.

**Playgrounds of the Chestnut-crowned Babbler.**—The playful habits of the Chestnut-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficeps*) have long been known. L. G. Chandler (*Emu*, 38, 414, 1939) has observed that the birds spend

much time in play, becoming very excited, and making much noise and chasing each other in a follow-my-leader game. However, it seems that the fact that the species has definite playgrounds has not hitherto been recorded.

Such playgrounds do in fact exist, although they are not common, and their development is due to the above-mentioned follow-my-leader activities having taken place around a favourite bush over a long period of time.

A typical one is situated on my property in the Bower district, S.A., in black oak (*Casuarina cristata*) scrub. It consists of a circular runway, or trench, surrounding the base of a pale, greyish-green shrub (*Rhagodia spinescens*) which is growing close to a large fallen bush of *Eremophila oppositifolia*. The shrub overhangs the playground, and is 23 inches high and 48 inches in width. The runway has an average depth of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches and an average width of  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Its outer diameter is 30 inches.—ERHARD F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 21/1/55.

**Red-tailed Tropic-bird in South-eastern Australia.**—

Recently Mr. A. F. D'Ombraïn sent me a specimen of the Red-tailed Tropic-bird (*Phaethon rubricaudus*) that had been found dead floating in the sea near Broughton Island, 100 miles north of Sydney, N.S.W. Mr. A. Mitchell, who collected the bird on January 12, 1955, was of the opinion that it had only recently been shot, presumably by a crew member of one of the several fishing boats working nearby. A few weeks later he reported seeing three more Red-tailed Tropic-birds close to Broughton Island. During the past six years Mr. D'Ombraïn has also observed the species several times in the same general area while big-game fishing off Port Stephens. It would seem, therefore, that Red-tailed Tropic-birds may occur in coastal south-eastern Australia more frequently than is thought to be the case but have been overlooked, on some occasions at least, in the absence of interested observers.

Lord Howe Island, some 300 miles to the east, is the closest breeding place to south-eastern Australia, so it is likely that birds from that locality are blown across to the Australian coast by cyclonic winds. The recent specimen from near Broughton Island is a male, with rather sparse black speckling on the crown, nape, mantle and wing-coverts. The upper mandible is orange-red, the lower a deep cloudy-red. Only one of the two elongated red tail feathers is present and it extends nine inches beyond the normal tail feathers. A beautiful pale pink suffusion is apparent in most of the silky white plumage though, according to Mr. D'Ombraïn, it has faded somewhat since the bird was collected.

Measurements of the specimen are—wing 330 mm., culmen 65 mm., tarsus 32 mm.; specimen no. 0.39563, ♂,

Australian Museum, Sydney. Collected A. Mitchell, near Broughton Island, N.S.W., January 12, 1955. .

Earlier occurrences of the species in south-eastern Australia and Tasmania are discussed in *The Emu*, vol. 47, 1947, p. 57.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 4/4/55.

**Grey Thrush Eating a Pygmy Glider.**—On March 19, 1955, at Plumpton, near Sydney, a Grey Shrike-Thrush was seen holding a small 'mouse' in its bill and hitting it against a fallen branch on the ground. The bird was disturbed and flew to a nearby tree where it tried, unsuccessfully, to swallow its prey. The partly-engorged animal was regurgitated to receive further treatment, in the course of which it fell to a lower horizontal branch. The Thrush was then purposely frightened and the 'mouse' collected. It proved to be a young pygmy or feather-tailed glider (*Acrobates pygmaeus*) with a body two inches long and a tail the same length. The head was badly crushed. An adult pygmy glider measures about six inches in length.

The Thrush seemed distressed at losing such a substantial, and perhaps tasty, meal, and for several minutes it could be heard in the forest uttering both single and double notes of a mournful quality, quite unlike the usual cheerful and melodious calls of the species.

Grey Thrushes have been known to steal eggs and also small nestlings. There is an instance on record of one of these birds picking up a recently-shot King Quail (*Excalfactoria chinensis*) flying to a tree and there commencing to make a meal off it (*Emu*, vol. 3, 1904, p. 185). Normally they eat insects.

The pygmy glider has a wide range in eastern Australia, but because of its small size and nocturnal habits it is not often observed.—K. A. HINDWOOD and H. A. SALMON, Sydney, N.S.W., 29/3/55.

## Reviews

**The Passenger Pigeon.**—The Passenger Pigeon of North America, with its tragic story, has engaged the attention of more writers than, perhaps, any other individual bird species. The unbelievable migration flocks, blotting out the sun for hours and even days; the unrelenting slaughter first on the pretext of protecting crops, then of feeding pigs, and finally without any pretext whatever; the dramatic disappearance of the flocks; and the death in captivity of the last languishing specimen in 1914—all these aspects have commended the subject to magazine editors of the natural history and the lay press alike.

Always, however, the story has been the same, quoted and re-quoted from the most easily accessible accounts of the several stages of the history of the species.

With the minuteness that is characteristic of so much American scientific work, A. W. Schorger (*The Passenger: its Natural History and Extinction*, by A. W. Schorger, published by the University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 424 + xiii) has obviously set