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Stray Feathers

Waders Swimming.—On February 21, 1957, when I was on a nocturnal excursion to the Wellington Dam, near Collie, a juvenile Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*) was 'trapped' in the beam of our pressure lamp and permitted us to approach to a distance of three feet. The bird then took to the water and commenced swimming rapidly away, much as a young duckling might have done. At this stage a member of the party, thinking that I might wish to examine the bird more closely, scooped it up with a dip-net. We made a brief examination of the bird before releasing it. The bird was a juvenile, almost fully-grown but with the black plumage of the breast only just apparent.

My only other records relating to waders swimming are:

Curlew Sandpiper (*Erolia ferruginea*).

Jan. 4, 1955 (Busselton). One bird waded through a pool deeper than its legs and may have swum, but I think not.

Sep. 23, 1956 (Wagin). Two birds by an arm of Lake Gundaring waded deeply, sometimes plunged their heads under water, and were twice observed to swim.

Banded Stilt (*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*).

Mar. 31, 1941 (Rockingham). While observing a party of 38 Stilt feeding in White Lake, I noted that a few swam.

Jan. 4, 1950 (Esperance). Mr. McKenzie of Esperance reported that shortly before our arrival, Banded Stilt appeared on the Esperance beach in large numbers. Some were seen to alight on the sea at some distance from shore.

Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*).

Sep. 13, 1948 (Pelican Point, Perth). W. R. Wheeler, H. Jarman and I encountered two birds feeding in shallow water. As we watched,

they waded into deeper water and almost certainly swam for a few seconds. Later, when they flew, Jarman observed that they dipped to the water as though to settle, but circled and returned to the Point.

There are doubtless many scattered records of waders swimming and the following recent references in *British Birds* are by no means exhaustive.:

Oyster-catcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*).

(vol. XXXVIII, p. 155)—a distressed individual, at sea.

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*).

(vol. XLIV, p. 30, and vol. XLIII, p. 30).

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*).

(vol. XLVI, p. 260, and vol. XLIV, pp. 285 and 414).

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*).

(vol. XXXIX, p. 158).

Redshank (*T. totanus*).

(vol. XXXIX, p. 319).

Spotted Redshank (*T. erythropus*).

vol. XXXIX, p. 319).

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*).

(vol. XLII, p. 250).

Common Snipe (*Capella gallinago*).

(vol. XLI, p. 276, vol. XLII, p. 368, and vol. XLIII, p. 413).

It seems that swimming is often associated with feeding, sometimes with escape from predators, and occasionally, perhaps, with bathing.

The complete Dipper-like submergence of the Common Sandpiper does not appear to have been adequately explained.—ERIC H. SEDGWICK, Collie, W.A., 25/11/57.

Notes on the Brush Turkey.—Following on information received by Mr. K. A. Hindwood and passed on to me. I visited Mr. T. A. Fraser, of Buttai, N.S.W., on November 30, 1957, who had reported that in previous years Brush Turkeys (*Alectura lathamii*) nested in a gully adjacent to his property. Buttai is situate some fifteen miles south of Maitland and about 100 miles by road north of Sydney. The area is mainly open forest with a few pockets of brush in some gullies. The gully adjacent to Fraser's place has, besides the natural brush, large tracts of lantana scrub, which provides excellent cover and protection for the birds.

With Mr. Fraser I inspected three old mounds, the most recent of which had not been used for at least two years. Near the bottom of the gully we discovered a new mound which had been in use this season. It was situated on a gentle slope about twenty feet from the small creek which flows through the gully. The mound was fifteen feet in circumference and 18 to 24 inches deep and consisted of dirt, leaves, large sticks and small stones, all of which had been scraped from the area surrounding the mound. When first discovered a 'goanna' was disturbed from the top of the mound where he had been digging. Also on top were pieces of egg shell only a few days old, so it would appear that the 'goanna' had already fed on some of the eggs.

This is the most southerly nesting record of a definite nature for Scrub Turkeys for some years. On a few occasions during the past year, I have observed the birds in the Wyong state forest, and this is apparently their present-day southern range limit as there are believed to be none now in the Illawarra scrubs, south of Sydney. I have not been able to locate any nest-mounds in the Wyong state forest although forestry employees have told me that they do nest there.—M. KAVENEY, Morisset, N.S.W., 12/12/57.

Suppression of the Specific Name *Nectris munda* Kuhl, 1820.—In *Opinion* 497, published on December 17, 1957, the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature has ruled that the specific name *munda* Kuhl, 1820, as published in the combinations *Proc. [ellaria] munda*, and *Nectris munda*, are suppressed under the Plenary Powers for purposes of the Law of Priority but not for those of the Law of Homonymy, and has placed these names on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology*.

This decision, made in response to an application lodged in 1952 by W. B. Alexander, R. A. Falla, C.A. Fleming, R. C. Murphy and D. L. Serventy, removes from consideration in nomenclature a name first given by Banks on Cook's first voyage to a small southern petrel. Kuhl's description was considered indeterminable by most reviewers, but Fleming and Serventy (*Emu*, 43, 122-3; *Emu* 52, 17-23) maintained that it applied to a race of the Allied Shearwater, generally known as *Puffinus assimilis* Gould, 1838.—C. A. FLEMING, Wellington, N.Z., 24/2/58.

Occurrence of the Little Whimbrel in Sydney.—The recent appearance of nine Little Whimbrels in Timbrell Park, Five Dock, a suburb of Sydney, aroused much interest among Sydney enthusiasts. According to K. A. Hindwood, it is almost 50 years since this bird was last positively recorded from the Sydney area. In December 1908 two specimens were collected at Campbelltown, 25 miles south-west of Sydney.

Timbrell Park is an open grassed area reclaimed from tidal mud-flats at the head of Iron Cove, an arm of the Parramatta River. The birds were found feeding there on Monday, January 13, 1958, and they have been noted in the same place practically every day up to and including January 24. They appeared to be feeding on insect life consisting of small black beetles and possibly caterpillars and grasshoppers. When feeding they are active and alert and their movements and behaviour suggest those of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. They have been observed to thrust their bills to their full extent into the ground and withdraw them holding the small black beetles commonly found among the grass roots.

The appearance of the bird in the field corresponds with the published description with the exception that the legs

were observed to be a beautiful blue-grey. The published description gives the colour of the legs as brown (presumably because of reference to an old skin) and this caused some initial doubt as to whether the bird was the Little Whimbrel. Messrs. Hindwood and A. R. McGill both viewed the subject-birds later and identity was established.

They were observed in company with Golden Plover; they appear slightly larger than such species. The crown of the head is striped after the fashion of the Snipe, there being a whitish stripe through the centre and over each eye, the remainder of the crown being dark brown; the throat and front of the neck are whitish with very fine brown striping. The bill is distinctly decurved, most of the curvature occurring in the terminal third, and appears, in the field, to be black, with the exception that the basal portion of the lower mandible is flesh pink. The upper parts are of mottled brown and the underparts whitish. The rump is dark and similar to the rest of the upper parts. This contrasts with the rump of the Whimbrel which is described as 'whitish (barred grey)'. On some individuals this observer noticed some very fine barring at the side of the breast just below the shoulder. In one case this barring was absent, being replaced by a faint rufous wash. This latter bird appeared to be loose in feather on the back and wings. Perhaps the rufous colour observed was the early commencement of nuptial plumage.—C. B. CAMPION, Abbotsford, N.S.W., 26/1/58.

Communal Display of House Sparrow in Central New Zealand.—Summers-Smith (1954, *Ibis*, 116-128) discusses the communal display of the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) which involves cock birds and a hen. His account gives data for the display's monthly occurrence in England (Hampshire) and Holland. As a matter of interest, the display is rendered most frequently in England, as described by Summers-Smith, in April, the month succeeding the spring equinox, the equivalent of which is October in the Antipodes. Whilst the position as regards Holland is not clear to me, observations establish that this physiological state of the House Sparrow occurs earlier in the south-west North Island, central New Zealand (Wellington city and Upper Hutt), judging from monthly counts, than it does in England. The following counts in confirmation were made in 1957 commencing July when the communal display first became noticeable—July (16), August (44), September (56), October (55), November (17), December (under 10).—H. L. SECKER, Wellington, N.Z., 3/1/58.

Oyster-catchers in South-eastern Queensland.—John Uniacke, one of the party that on November 1, 1823, made the first landing on Cook Island, just south of the Queensland/New South Wales border, later wrote a narrative containing

details of that event. Uniacke called the island Turtle Island and his account of the landing appeared in Barron Field's *Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales* (1825). Recently (1957) George Mackaness has included Uniacke's notes in his historical monograph *The Discovery and Exploration of Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River, 1799-1823*. The portion of Uniacke's narrative describing the birds encountered, contains the passage—

In ascending to the top of the island, we sank nearly knee deep at every step in the bird holes that undermine the surface. The inhabitants of these subterranean dwellings were sooty petrels, mutton-birds and red-bills, the last very good eating. We shot many of them, as the young ones were fully fledged and got up in numbers around us, when disturbed by our falling into their holes.

Mr. Keith Hindwood, when forwarding to me a copy of Uniacke's notes and the references to their publication, invited comment based on my local knowledge. The descriptive phrases "... red bills, ... very good eating. We shot many of them ..." concern, I think, Pied Oyster-catchers (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*), though the notes are ambiguous. The only other likely species is the Silver Gull which is not known to nest, or have nested, on the island. In addition Oyster-catchers seem generally rated as good table birds, whilst Gulls are not considered so.

Of course neither the Pied Oyster-catcher nor the Silver Gull nests in 'subterranean dwellings'.

In any case it is of interest to know that Pied Oyster-catchers are to be found in the locality generally. About 1907, and 20 miles up the coast from Cook Island, a local shooter showed me my first Pied Oyster-catchers, called by him 'Red-bills or Ugari birds' flying as a party of four over the edge of the surf. Red-bill appears to be a name that readily suggests itself for Pied Oyster-catchers and is used by many early navigators and explorers, for example, Flinders. 'Ugari' is the aboriginal name used locally for the once common bivalve of the sandy ocean beaches, *Plebidonax deltoides*—known in New South Wales as 'Pipi'—and said to be eaten by the Pied Oyster-catchers.

Since 1907 I have seen many Pied Oyster-catchers along the sandy ocean beaches of the outer islands of Moreton Bay and similar adjacent mainland shores. The birds appear to be resident and are occasionally seen in parties of up to half a dozen, but generally as pairs scattered at mile intervals along the dunes of the more lonely ocean beaches. Often by patient watching the eggs have been found. The birds attack like Spur-winged Plovers. Like Mr. L. Amiet (*Emu*, 1957, p. 243), I have no record of these birds on the inner or estuarine parts of Moreton Bay.

On June 24, 1957, when travelling south in the Bay, by launch from Amity Point, where Moreton Bay and the ocean meet at the north end of Stradbroke Island, we passed an

exposed sand-bank on which were flocks of resting sea-birds. Among them was a party of 65 Pied Oyster-catchers. The Pelicans, cormorants, Gulls and Bar-tailed Godwits stood and watched the launch go by, but the Pied Oyster-catchers took off in a flock ahead of us, circled around beyond the bank, and landed on it again behind the launch. At short range with binoculars and good light, they were clearly seen. This observation lends force to the inference of Uniacke's notes of the occasional occurrence locally of 'many Red-bills'.

My records show only one Sooty Oyster-catcher (*Hæmatopus unicolor*)—a single bird resting on Currumbin Rock on May 7, 1955. Considerable pains were taken to make certain of this bird's identity.—J. S. ROBERTSON, East Brisbane, Qld., 26/9/57.

Pied Butcher-bird Robs Ants.—From a low window I was watching one of the four friendly Pied Butcher-birds (*Cracticus nigrogularis*) which come to the garden to be fed. The bird was on the ground and was intently watching ants. Two meat ants were carrying an object about the size of a pea. The bird seized the item, to which the ants clung. Shaking its head vigorously, the bird dislodged the ants, which showed signs of injury as they squirmed on the ground. Having swallowed the morsel, the Butcher-bird then turned its attention to the smaller green-head ants, several of which were carrying very small white objects, which were not apparently larvae, but may have been bread-crumbs. One after another the bird swallowed the morsels, again leaving the disabled ants squirming. Due to the serious drought conditions prevailing in the area, food has been very scarce, and many birds have deserted the district.—(MRS.) DOROTHY MAKIN, Columboola, Qld., 2/3/58.

Reviews

The Feeding Habits of Cormorants in Victoria.—John McNally's paper of this title is Fauna Contribution no. 6 of the Fisheries and Game Department, Victoria, published May 1957 and now belatedly reviewed. The oft-publicized (daily press) allegations that all cormorants are voracious eaters of quality fish demand constant denial: unfortunately most readers of items such as that under view fall into two classes—those that do not need convincing and those who will not be convinced.

McNally's investigation extended over five years from 1949 to 1955, and covered 2,043 stomachs. Principal habitats studied were (a) large inland, (b) estuarine, and (c) marine, waters. Mountain streams were not included. The spread of the 2,043 stomachs covered *Phalacrocorax carbo* (1,224), *P. sulcirostris* (357), *P. varius* (57), *P. melanoleucus* (342), and *P. fuscescens* (20). Concentration on the first, the alleged chief offender, will be noted. It appears that cormorants spend a small part only of the day fishing, particularly if food is plentiful in which case they rapidly become satiated and retire to digest their catch.

Of 613 stomachs of *P. carbo* from large inland waters, 376 contained English perch: the next highest is yabbies (70). The occurrence of