

Stray Feathers

Range of the Regent Bower-bird.—The R.A.O.U. *Checklist* (1926) restricts the distribution of the Regent Bower-bird (*Sericulus chrysocephalus*) to south-eastern Queensland in the north and north-eastern N.S.W. in the south. This is erroneous on both counts.

As to the northern extension, S. W. Jackson in 1908 gained evidence of the presence of the species in the highlands west of Mackay (see *The Emu*, vol. 58, p. 104), although he did not record the fact at the time; and in 1915 A. J. Campbell wrote in *The Emu* (vol. 14, p. 173) a paragraph entitled "Extension of Localities", in which he reported receipt from E. M. Cornwall of a skin of a male Regent-bird "taken above the line of Capricorn, in the mountain range behind Mackay". (Obviously, Campbell's note was overlooked by the compilers of the *Checklist*; but, even so, they should not have restricted the species to the south-east of Queensland, for it had previously been recorded in the valleys of the Mackenzie and Isaac Rivers, east and north-east of Rockhampton). The beautiful bird still exists in the ranges of the Mackay area; it was seen there in 1960 by Mr. Tom Jasper, of Kenthurst, N.S.W. Whether it occurs any farther north is doubtful. And, of course, there remains a big geographical gap between it and its nearest relatives, the lovely birds of New Guinea that were previously placed in the genus *Xanthomelus*.

Southward, the Regent-bird is fairly common in the heavy forests of the Gosford district, 50 miles north of Sydney, but below that, as pointed out by Hindwood and McGill in their *Birds of Sydney* (1958), it is known only as a rare straggler. Rather surprisingly, however, a small batch of Regents was recently (June 1961) noted near Cattai Creek, a southern tributary of the Hawkesbury, about 40 miles north-west of Sydney.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, 12/7/61.

Koel Display and Courtship. — Two male Koels (*Eudynamys orientalis*) flew into a tree in my garden when I lived at Beecroft. They settled on different branches, one branch being about three or four feet higher than the other; the birds were about eight feet apart.

Facing each other, both took part in an aggressive display. One bird suddenly flicked its wings and tail and gave a quick downward thrust of the neck and head in the direction of its rival, which promptly responded with identical movements. This reciprocal flicking and thrusting display continued for several minutes. Then the male on the lower branch moved to the higher one about four feet from the other male, uttered three loud, single calls and began the flicking and thrusting movements again, the

first thrust being followed this time by a scolding note. A mutual exchange of "threats" continued for a minute or two and ended when the male which had moved up flew to a branch about 15 feet behind, but level with the other Koel. This bird turned quickly, and the same hostile behaviour pattern was repeated. A female Koel in a nearby eucalypt then flew across to another tree, and the appearance of a third male was the signal for a pandemonium of loud piercing calls and aerial chasings by all three males, the noisy climax ceasing when the female took flight. It would seem that these threat postures of the Koel have assumed a stereotyped pattern in which pugnacious attitudes apparently have the effect of relieving tense emotion without involving actual combat.

On another occasion, a female Koel flew into a tall silky oak in the garden. A male which followed her made a rapid descent from branch to branch with hopping movements and then, with flicking tail and extended wings, moved up towards her, obviously in a state of tense excitement. The female, however, did not choose to accept his advances and both birds flew away. — N. L. ROBERTS, Killara, N.S.W., 20/1/61.

Anting by Grey Thrush.—At 6 a.m. on April 2, 1961, I saw a Grey Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) behaving in an odd fashion on my garden path. It was flicking one wing after the other and thrusting its head beneath them. As it appeared to be picking something off the path I looked more closely, and presently realised that it was anting. The bird's method was to seize an ant and then raise a wing and push the beak down the flank towards the vent. It stood erect during the whole process, which occupied some 18 minutes.

When the thrush departed I went to the spot and found that it had been using sugar ants (*Camponotus consobrinus*), 11 of which were lying dead on the concrete path. The head and abdomen of each ant were bent downward.

On consulting Chisholm's "The History of Anting", (*Emu*, vol. 59, pp. 101-30), I find that in 1936 an observer in Victoria recorded having seen a Grey Thrush indulging in passive anting (lying with wings outspread on a stream of ants), and that there is also one record of the species practising active anting: by J. R. Skemp in Tasmania, in 1952. In Skemp's case, the thrush appears to have eaten the ants after wiping them on its body, whereas in my case most, if not all, of the insects attacked by the bird were left dead on the path.

As these are the only known records of anting by the Grey Thrush, it would appear that the practice is not consistently followed by this familiar bird.—HORACE A. SALMON, Beccroft, N.S.W., 7/4/61.

A Record of the Freckled Duck from North Queensland.

—The Freckled Duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*) is not a common species, there is little detailed information on its habits, and its distribution is still uncertain. It was recorded from the Flinders River, Queensland, in 1896 (Campbell, A. J., 1901, *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*, p. 1049).

During waterfowl research in Queensland over the past few years, some reliable reports were received on the presence of this species at Lake Powlathanga, 12 miles west, and at Gainsford, some 30 miles north of Charters Towers. In June 1960 a specimen, now in the collection of the Queensland Museum, was taken in swampy grassland, where the water was about two feet deep, 10 miles north of Lake Buchanan, i.e., about 150 miles south-west of Charters Towers, and 200 miles inland from the eastern coast. From the peculiar call, a few small groups were present in the locality.

Particulars of the specimen are as follow: Male, with a sheathed penis and no Bursa of Fabricius. Upper mandible black, tinged light-brown at base; lower mandible dark-grey; iris dark-brown; tarsus medium grey; with webbing and tops of metatarsi black; claws black. Measurements (mm)—length of head and body 534; culmen 56; wing, from base, 368; tail 69; tarsus 38; tarsus diameter 6.2; middle toe and claw 173.

A few seeds of an aquatic plant were present in the gizzard. No obvious external or internal parasites were found.—H. J. LAVERY, Department of Agriculture and Stock, Qld.

Colombo Crows in Victoria.—In *The Emu*, vol. 49, p. 83, A. R. McGill discussed the several occurrences of the Colombo Crow in Australia which had been recorded up to that time, and commented on the implications of accidental records of birds assisted by ships across natural oceanic barriers. Six instances, involving at least eight birds, were mentioned and in each case the bird(s) left the ship on arrival at Fremantle from Colombo.

The following note, quoted in full, appeared in *The Sea Swallow*, vol. 13, p. 21, 1960, the journal of the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society. The assisted migrant is again, apparently, *Corvus splendens*, but in this case the point of disembarkation (also the first port of call) was Geelong, Victoria.

“How Frequently Do Birds Obtain ‘Assisted Passages’ From Continent to Continent?”

Perhaps the most unique assisted passage yet recorded occurs in the meteorological log of M.V. *Tavince*, Hain Steamship Co.—Captain F. G. Bolton.

Captain Bolton writes:—‘At 06.30 on 10th May, 1959, as the ship left Colombo, it was accompanied by dozens of Indian Crows.

By evening, four crows were seen roosting on the after end of the boat deck, near the galley. Six days later one of them had disap-

peared. Later, on 21st May, it was found dead in number two bilge, having flown or been blown down a ventilator. These crows are very inquisitive by nature.

By this time the remaining three were frequently taking flights all round the ship. They remained mute until 20th May when they were heard croaking for the first time, and in a very short time were in full song.

From 22nd May, by which time the ship was accompanied by a considerable number of albatrosses, the crows remained very close to the ship, perhaps nervous of such large companions.

No attempt was made by them to leave the ship either off Cape Leeuwin, Western Australia, or when five miles from Cape Otway, Victoria. The three crows were still flying around the ship inside Port Phillip Bay and disappeared only when the ship reached Geelong, Victoria, on 29th May."

—J. D. GIBSON, Thirroul, N.S.W., 23 61.

Masked Plover in New South Wales.—During a visit to Lake Cawndilla in September 1958, Gordon Campbell, a member of the Barrier Field Naturalists' Club of Broken Hill, photographed two plovers, separately, on the western shore of the Lake. The plumage of the closer bird was different from the Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*), which was plentiful in the area. The other bird photographed was too far away to pick up much detail. Both photographs were taken with a powerful telephoto lens.

It was also noted that neither of the two birds associated with the flocks of Spur-winged Plovers—at least while under observation.

The photographs were forwarded to Perth and to Sydney for comment, and in each case the birds were identified as the Masked Plover (*Lobibyx miles*).

While in Broken Hill in 1959, I visited Lake Cawndilla with the Barrier Field Naturalists and, on October 3, I had no difficulty in locating a single Masked Plover in the same area where the two birds were photographed a year earlier.

The wattle was distinctive, as in North Queensland birds; the nuchal collar and entire under parts were white, and lacking any black chest markings. No second bird was seen in the area, although a search was made.

Lake Cawndilla is about 65 miles south-east of Broken Hill, and almost due south of Lake Menindee.

Mr. Arnold McGill, of Sydney, who has studied the photographs, states that as far as he knows, this is the first record of *Lobibyx miles* for New South Wales, and extends its range considerably in eastern Australia: see distribution map of *Lobibyx* (Ford, *Emu*, 60: 57).—J. R. WHEELER, Belmont, Vic., 15/6/60.