

SHORT NOTES

Sight-record of the Pied Harrier in northern New Guinea

The Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* breeds in north-eastern Asia from the Amur area and Transbaikalia to Manchuria. It is a migrant, leaving its breeding grounds in September and October and wintering in south-eastern Asia, returning north in April. Its winter range is recorded as eastern India (into West Pakistan), across Indochina to Malaya, the Philippines, Borneo and the Sula Islands (Brown and Amadon 1968, Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World; Dement'ev *et al.* 1966, Birds of the Soviet Union, 1).

We found this bird common on the Middle Sepik River near Pagwi during a visit from 2 to 30 March 1973. On ten occasions up to three or four adult males at a time were seen hawking over kunai and swamp land. They were readily identified by the characteristic adult male plumage: back, head all round, breast and primaries solid black; rest of underparts and rump white, and a grey patch on the upper wing surfaces. Confusion with any other harrier is impossible. The only other black-and-white harrier in New Guinea is *C. spilonotus* ($=C. aeruginosa$ *spilothorax* of Brown and Amadon). Rand and Gilliard (1968, Handbook of New Guinea Birds) describe adult male *C. spilonotus* as follows: 'Forehead white; top and sides of head and neck black with white edges of feathers on nape showing through; back and scapulars black, the latter with white tips . . . breast white boldly streaked black; rest of underparts plain white . . .' Specimens examined in the collection of the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research conform to this description, but the streaks on the breast are brownish black rather than black. *C. melanoleucos* is thus readily distinguishable from *C. spilonotus* by its solid-black rather than streaked breast.

Their behaviour was that of typical harriers, the flight being slow and leisurely and, compared with the Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*, appearing more direct, the wings being held in perhaps a shallower V when circling.

These sightings represent an extension of wintering range for *C. melanoleucos* and the first records for New Guinea. Gilliard collecting from December 1962 to March 1963 did not record it for the Middle Sepik (Gilliard and Lecroy 1966, Bull. Am. Mus. nat. Hist. 132: 247-275), nor was it observed by W. B. Hitchcock and K. Keith in their visits to the

Sepik in November 1962 and October to November 1964 (K. Keith, pers. comm. and unpubl.). However, occasionally individuals were seen over the grasslands of the Wabag and Laiagam valleys between June and September 1960 by R. Schodde (pers. comm.).

Whether *C. melanoleucos* is a regular or an occasional winter visitor to northern New Guinea is a moot point. It is difficult to believe that the above competent collectors could have overlooked this conspicuous bird. Our records probably represent a very recent range extension or perhaps just the result of temporary irruptions.

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Common Tern in the Northern Territory

Hitherto there have been no substantiated records of the Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* from northern Australia. Hitchcock (1965, Emu 64: 162-3) cites Robert Hall's early observation that the species 'migrates to northern Australia' but this theoretically well-based supposition has been too vague to be taken seriously. In the first week of February 1973, we observed the Common Tern frequently along the estuarine waters of the East Alligator River in western Arnhem Land. Usually up to five or six loosely grouped individuals would be seen beating up and down and feeding along a 15-km stretch of river about half way between Cannon Hill and the river mouth. The broad flowing waters there, lined and crossed by banks of deep muddy sand, appear to be typical of the habitat favoured by this species (Johansen 1960, J. Orn., Lpz., 101: 320-322; Serventy *et al.* 1971, Handbook of Australian Sea-birds: 212).

Three specimens were taken to verify identification; all had the extensively dark inner webs to the outer primaries, the almost entirely grey tail and long tarsi (19-21 mm) characteristic of this species. On account of their entirely black bills, they are provisionally referred to *S. h. longipennis*, already known to winter in Australia along the eastern coast and about New Guinea. The only verifiable records from Western Australia appear to be of the nominate race, although Hitchcock (1965, Emu 64: 163) sur-

mised that *S. h. longipennis* reaches north-western and northern Australia through the Indonesian archipelago. Our specimens were one male with small testes, one adult female (oviduct convoluted) with granular oocytes, and one sub-adult female (oviduct straight) with granular oocytes. In eclipse plumage with extensive white foreheads, all are obviously wintering birds. The adult female, the first adult recorded in Australian waters (Hitchcock 1965), like the male and sub-adult female, has a grey tail in moult, and dark 'shoulders' (lesser upper wing-coverts). This throws doubt on these features as sub-adult or 'first winter' characters in *S. h. longipennis* (Hitchcock 1965; cf. Witherby *et al.*, Handbook of British Birds 5: 35). Measurements (mm) of the specimens are: ♂ CSIRO Reg. No. 16055, wing 230, tarsus 19, exposed culmen 33, weight 86 g; adult ♀ CSIRO Reg. No. 16042, wing 253, tarsus 20, exposed culmen 33, weight 97 g; subadult ♀ CSIRO Reg. No. 16041, wing 257, tarsus 21, exposed culmen 34, weight 105 g. Length of tail was not measured because of excessive moult. These measurements should be compared with those of Stegmann (1936, Orn. Mber. 44: 106) rather than with Hitchcock (1965), because exposed culmen appears to be a much more reliable measurement than total culmen, it being difficult to determine accurately the position of the cranio-facial hinge. Length of wing is rather shorter than is usual in *S. h. longipennis* but may be accounted for by wear. It would not be surprising, however, if the specimens are from west of the breeding range of typical *longipennis*. Eckert (1969, S. Aust. Orn. 25: 87-89) has drawn attention to difficulties in determining the races of the Common Tern.

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Variation in the song of the Western Wedgebill

In their paper separating the two forms of Wedgebill, Ford and Parker (1973, Emu 73: 113-118) describe the song of the western bird (*Psophodes occidentalis* of their revision) as consisting of four, five or six notes in a descending scale or chime, with the final note stressed. When camping at Bush Bay, south of Carnarvon, WA, in 1966 we heard the four-note 'did you get drunk?' phrase, described as typical by Serventy and Whittell (1967, Birds of Western Australia 4th ed.: 366); but more frequently heard a

version that we called 'stickybeak', consisting of only three notes and sounding to my ears like the first three notes of the more usual phrase. This would appear to be a variant version of the song, possibly peculiar to some individuals, and may have given rise to the supposition that the female supplies the final note, a hypothesis mentioned by Ford and Parker, for which they could offer no support.

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25 August 1973.

King Penguin: a Victorian and two Tasmanian records

Victoria: Messrs C. Lenghour and T. O'Connor and Miss V. Plechan of the Regional Veterinary Laboratory, Department of Agriculture, Hamilton, saw a King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonica* at East Beach, Port Fairy, at 11:15 on 27 February 1973. It could be approached closely enough to be touched and was photographed. The auricular patch was 'cream to dull orange'; so the bird was probably immature and more than one year old. It was plump, apparently in perfect health; after about thirty minutes it entered the sea and swam away. This is probably the first substantiated Victorian (and Australian mainland) record.

Tasmania: Miss L. Lennox of Castlegar, British Columbia, while on holiday in Tasmania, photographed a King Penguin that she found at Surprise Bay Beach, Tasmania, on 26 March 1972. The photographs show a bird in worn brownish plumage, apparently about to moult. The auricular patch is white; so, the bird was probably at the end of its first year after fledging. This record is additional to those summarized by Wall (1973, Tasm. Nat. 33: 1-4), who also overlooked a well-substantiated record of a King Penguin that came ashore to moult at Eaglehawk Neck, east of Hobart, at Easter 1970. It was kept in a private zoo while it moulted. Mr G. Pizzey published the record and a photograph in *The Herald*, Melbourne, on 4 April 1970. There are now at least eight records of King Penguins in Tasmania.

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