Stray Feathers

Recovery of a ringed Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in Siberia.—On January 5, 1961, I ringed a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *(Erolia acuminata)* at the C.S.I.R.O. Wildlife Survey Section's wader traps at Pelican Point, on the Swan River estuary, Nedlands, Western Australia (lat. 32°S., long. 115° 50′ E.). On May 28, 1961, this individual (bearing C.S.I.R.O. band no. 040-13531) was killed in Siberia just north of the Arctic Circle at a point about 12 km. north of Batagaj (Jacutian ASSR), in lat. 67° 40′ N., long. 135° 20′ E. This is the first long-distance recovery of any of the 2,000-odd waders marked at Pelican Point, the seasonal figures for the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper being: summer of 1958-59, 25 birds ringed and released; 1959-60, 160; 1960-61, 122. This makes a total of 307 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers ringed and released.

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers begin to disappear from the Pelican Point area from the end of February. Normally none are seen after the end of March and our latest observation of a bird was on April 11.

Though the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is one of the commonest of the northern-breeding waders in Australia its nest and eggs have not yet been discovered. Gladkov (in Dementiev and Gladkov, *The Birds of the Soviet Union*, 1951, vol. 3, p. 153) states that the nesting area is not known, but cites observational data to indicate where it might be, outlining an area on his map (Fig. 30, p. 154) between the lower Kolyma River in the east to the Indigirka River in the west. He states that in the late summer there are records as far west at the Yenisei River. Bird no. 040-13531 was taken in the general area of the Yana River, somewhat west of the breeding limits suggested by Gladkov.

It may be mentioned that Gladkov's indication of the contra-nuptial range in Australia (in his Fig. 30) is considerably astray. He outlines an area in northern Australia only, from the Kimberley Division in Western Australia to about Southern Queensland in the south-east. The species occurs, however, in marine marshes and freshwater swamps to southern Australia and Tasmania.—C. A. NICHOLLS, Nedlands, W.A., 13/11/61.

The Green-winged Pigeon in Victoria.—On January 4, 1961, while en route to Mallacoota, Vic., I saw a Green-winged Pigeon *(Chalcophaps chrysochlora)* in the centre of the Mallacoota road only 200 yards from Genoa township. The bird made no attempt to fly when approached and, as I slowed down, it began to walk in front of the moving car. When the car was almost on top of it, the pigeon flew up to a branch of a "black" wattle on the roadside and, quite unconcerned, observed the car and its occupants. All

features of the bird — its rusty brown head and underparts, grey back and green wings with their bright patch, were all clearly visible. The area was quite open, with alluvial flats on the left and a hillside covered with sparse wattle growth on the right. How long the bird was there can only be a matter of conjecture as the road was extremely busy at the time. As wattle seeds were strewn along the road I presumed that it was feeding on them.

As quoted by N. A. Wakefield *(Emu,* 58: 274), there are several old records of this bird in Victoria given by A. J. Campbell, one as far west as the Dandenongs. However, apart from these, no other evidence seems to exist of the species' occurrence south of the Illawarra area of N.S.W. As Victorian observers have, over the years, worked the north-east border area the lack of sightings of the species may at first seem puzzling. However, in the Sydney district, where the bird is known to exist, experienced observers may visit likely areas for decades and never see it. That the Green-winged Pigeon is always present around Sydney (though in small numbers) can hardly be disputed. It has been found breeding in the outer suburb of Normanhurst. It was recently taken by H. Battam while banding at Weeney Bay on July 2, 1960, in an area of mangroves and casuarinas; and sight records come in sparsely but regularly.

I consider that the reasons for the lack of observations of the Green-winged Pigeon are:

(a) Its utter fearlessness combined with its coloration. Most ground-feeding pigeons are located by their loud wing beats when flushed, but the Green-wing doesn't flush; it merely moves aside and observes the observer. This, and the excellent camouflage of its plumage, probably results in observers walking past the bird without seeing it.

(b) The presumption by most observers that a search for it should be made in rain-forest. Like that other ground feeder, the Wonga *(Leucosarcia melanoleuca),* the Green-winged Pigeon will seek its food in wet-sclerophyll forest often far removed from "jungle". I feel that *Lantana* thickets and wattle groves in secluded gullies may well prove to be just as normal a habitat for this bird as rain-forest. I have spent a considerable period tramping through the McPherson Range jungles and have never seen the species there. Yet, on Mt. Glorious near Brisbane, I was usually able to locate it in *Lantana* and second growth rain-forest on many visits.

(c) Most southern observers, having little opportunity to gain familiarity with the species, fail to identify its call note. While a specimen is needed to confirm the

Green-winged Pigeon's existence in Victoria, one thing seems likely: the person who secures it will do so by chance, and not by deliberately seeking out the bird.—H. L. BELL, Holsworthy, N.S.W., 10/5/61.

Nesting of Flame Robins near Inglewood, Vic.—On August 21, 1960, I found a nest of the Flame Robin *(Petroica phoenicea)* being built in a well-protected cavity, just below the fork of a fairly large gum tree, about four feet from the ground. This area is about five miles south-west of Inglewood — the area referred to in my previous note *(Emu* 59: 222-223).

On this occasion the female made several visits to the nest with building material; the fully-plumaged male usually followed along and perched nearby, calling at frequent intervals.

On September 10, accompanied by P. Allan and J. McKean of Melbourne, and on September 17 by J. Ipsen, J. Kellam and friend of Bendigo, we found the female brooding closely on the nest, which now contained three eggs. Another female robin some distance away was observed carrying nesting material on September 10, but the nest was not discovered.

On September 29 I found the nest deserted and the eggs broken; there was very bad weather the previous week-end. During the day I found another nest about half-way down the southern slope, almost below the first nest. It was completely concealed in a hollow portion of a gum tree about five feet from the ground. I made no close inspection of the nest on that occasion, but it contained three young on October 16 and they were being fed by both parents. Also, a young Flame Robin was observed being fed in a clump of mistletoe some distance away.

I made my last visit to the area on November 10, a day of very strong north winds, when no Flame Robins were observed.

At least four pairs of Flame Robins were observed along the Ranges during August-October; they were also seen in roadside paddocks during August, but all had departed by September 4, except for one female. Yellow, Red-capped, and Hooded Robins also nest in the Ranges, but no Scarlet Robins were observed during the spring months. It may be significant that the rainfall for 1960 was above average.

I re-visited the area on April 2, 1961, when no Flame Robins were observed; but two pairs of Scarlet Robins were seen near the original Flame Robin's nest which, incidentally, had remained in an excellent state of preservation.

I visited the Bald Hills, an area some three or four miles south-west of the Ranges, on September 27 and found a nest of the Flame Robin there; there were three young in the nest, which was concealed in a hollow in the trunk of

a gum tree, about ten feet from the ground. No other Flame Robins were seen on that date.—F. A. WATTS, Heathmont, Vic., 17/6/61.

Random notes on Tasmanian robins.—The interesting article by Mr. A. H. Chisholm on robins *(Emu,* 60: 221-236) has led me to write a few notes on the experiences of my sister, the late J. A. Fletcher, and myself in connection with the four species of robins found in Tasmania.

The Dusky Robin *(Petroica vittata)*, often called the "sad robin" from its peculiar call, is a friendly bird, easily tamed. During the years, we had many that came to the hand for food — suet or grubs being preferred to bread-crumbs or cheese. These robins were excellent "snake sentinels"; the instant we heard a Dusky Robin give a "snake alarm" call we knew that one was in the vicinity. Once, I heard several robins giving the call but could not find the snake on the ground or in a shrub, but suddenly saw it stretched along the top rail of the fence.

Scarlet Robins *(Petroica multicolor)* were very easily tamed, and during the years we spent at Eaglehawk Neck we had them as "tame-wild" pets on many occasions. At the call "Robbie" they would fly from the hillside behind our house and come to the outstretched hand for food. They preferred a white grub that lived at the base of twitch grass, to suet or cheese. When the young were hatched the male was most "insistent" that we help to provide the food, and would come to the back door and give the quaint call. The last robin was with us for three years, and Mr. M. S. R. Sharland photographed him on my sister's hand just before her last illness. Years ago, when my sister had charge of Wilmot school in north-west Tasmania, a pair of Scarlet Robins began a nest on a board in the corner of the verandah. Unfortunately, the wind blew it down and the birds departed to the bush. The next year a pair, possibly the same ones, built a nest in a corner of the back verandah near the school door, but this was pulled to pieces by the swallows on their return from migration, and the one egg that had been laid was smashed on the verandah.

Flame Robins *(Petroica phoenicea)* were much shyer, and we never tamed one, although they frequented the front garden at the Neck, and we often saw many on the beach. Plate 15 in Mr. Chisholm's article shows the low position of the nest of a Flame Robin, but at The Steppes, near Great Lake, Tasmania, my sister found and photographed one on the ground under a log. The young were safely reared, although one wonders how they escaped destruction from snakes — numerous at The Steppes — and other predators. Another Flame Robin's nest was found by a scholar of mine in a small tin nailed to the rear of an old hut. The tin had been used to hold soap, and a nearby nail

made a convenient landing post for the robins. The young were reared, and this nest made a delightful photo.

In the deep forests of the Springfield district, near Scottsdale, Tasmania, were many Pink Robins *(Petroica rodinogaster)*; the nests of these birds were frequently destroyed by the Grey Shrike-Thrush. In one forest, one of these thrushes was disturbed piercing the eggs of the Pink Robin, and we called this particular forest, "Destruction Forest" from the nests found robbed.—S. E. FLETCHER, Upper Burnie, Tas.

Range of Rufous-throated Honeyeater.—Driving with Mr. F. M. Hamilton on the Pacific Highway south of Gladstone, Qld., on October 10, 1959, we noticed several small honeyeaters around a group of red-flowered *Callistemon* trees. Inspection showed that there were numbers of both male and female Scarlet Honeyeaters, Dusky Honeyeaters, Brown Honeyeaters, and a fourth species similar to the Brown but shorter in both bill and tail. Closer examination showed these birds to have a dark curved bill, a brown forehead, crown, hindneck, back and rump; dark brown upper-tail and primaries — the latter with a yellow edge; underside generally grey-white; flanks with a faint rusty wash; a distinctive red-rufous patch covering the chin, throat and upper foreneck. My field notes also state that on some birds the rufous-red throat patch continued as a red-yellow or red-orange mark up the sides of the head toward the eye, and also that the gape was yellow. They called generally two sharp "zit zit" notes but sometimes three. These birds were very active and fed in typical honeyeater fashion, often upside down. They were identified as Rufous-throated Honeyeaters *(Conopophila rufogularis)*.

These birds were seen at various places along the road to as far south as Gin Gin on the Burnett River. The next day, at Walla Station, the birds were found to be plentiful in the red bottle-brush flowers of the *Callistemon* trees lining the water's edge of the Burnett River. Our host, Mr. Hugh Innes, told us they were often there.

Later reference to museum specimens confirmed their identity but made it clear that the rufous throat patch does not extend beyond the under surface of this or any similar honeyeater. My field observation of a red-yellow area below the eye must therefore be attributed to a temporary colouring from some outside source. Just such a colour appears occasionally on the heads of Brown Honeyeaters visiting my home bird-bath when the nearby Black Beantree *(Castanospermum australe)* is in flower. The sloping banks of the Burnett River and nearby streams are heavily timbered with Black Beantrees; possibly the pollen from their yellowish-red pea-shaped flowers was the colour source. A similar difficulty sometimes arises with Little Pied Cor-

morants which show quite clearly a rufous colour on the white underparts. Serventy and Whittell in *Birds of Western Australia* (1951, p. 121) state that this is "due to iron compounds (ferric oxide) in some waters".

In view of these observations, it is suggested that the stated range of the Rufous-throated Honeyeater be extended south by 350 miles to Bundaberg instead of Mackay.—J. S. ROBERTSON, East Brisbane. Qld.

Specimens of extinct Tasmanian Emu.—It is necessary to correct a statement about specimens of the extinct Tasmanian Emu published in vol.60, p.19.

Mr. R. H. Green used information supplied by me in a letter to him dated January 30, 1959. At that time the two skin specimens referred to in the "British Museum Catalogue of Birds", vol.27, were not on the museum premises at South Kensington. It was therefore assumed that they had been mounted and exhibited in the public gallery and that they had been lost in the "blitz", along with so many other specimens.

Happily, these Emu specimens were not mounted and had been removed for safety, along with a lot of other valuable ratite material, to the museum premises at Tring, Hertfordshire. It is only recently that this material has been brought back to South Kensington and the specimens checked.

The two Tasmanian Emu skins have the register numbers 1838:1:15:203/204. They are complete skins and are said to be male and female, respectively.—J. D. MACDONALD, British Museum (Nat. Hist.), London, 5/4/61.

Plumage succession in Adelaide Rosella.—In my paper on "Parrots and Cockatoos of the Mount Mary Plains, South Australia" (*Emu*, May 1959), I stated that the adult plumage of the Adelaide Rosella (*Platycercus adelaidae*) does not appear to be attained until at least the third year, and possibly only in the fourth year of life. Dr. A. H. Lendon (*ibid*, August 1959) has since questioned my opinion, and has repeated his earlier claim that the adult plumage is acquired at the age of fifteen months.

My conclusions are based on field observations and the examination of a number of skins which I personally collected. Lendon further claims that his statement is based on carefully-recorded observations of birds in captivity. However, his findings are at variance with those of Samuel White, a pioneer ornithologist and collaborator of John Gould. White, quoted by his son, Capt. S. A. White (*S. A. Orn.*, IV(1), 30, 1919) wrote: "I have observed that the common 'Rosehill' parrot (*P. adelaidensis*) when kept in confinement will improve in depth and brightness of plumage for 7 or 8 years".

It will be seen that there are good reasons for my supposition that Dr. Lendon does not appreciate the sequence of plumages when he insists that the adult plumage is acquired at fifteen months.—ERHARD F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 9/8/1960.

Obituary

MR. E. A. R. LORD

The death occurred on October 28, 1961, of E. A. R. Lord of Murphy's Creek, Queensland, at the age of 72 years.

Ernie Lord belonged to a school of naturalists who have capably carried on a tradition established by Gilbert White of Selborne. For over 50 years he studied the natural history of Murphy's Creek, a small settlement at the foot of the Dividing Range, below Toowoomba.

First and foremost a "birdman," he also had a good working knowledge of botany, geology, and other branches of natural history. He contributed many articles to *The Emu*, his greatest achievement being "The Birds of Murphy's Creek," published in May 1956. He also contributed to *The Darling Downs Naturalist* from its inception in 1952, and for over 12 years he regularly sent notes to the Queensland Branch of the R.A.O.U.; his final letter was read at our meeting on the day of his death, and his last article appeared in the October issue of *The Darling Downs Naturalist*.

For many years he carried on the heartbreaking business of a dairy farmer in an area which, while excellent bird country, was hardly ideal for dairying purposes.

Details of his early life are very sketchy. He was born on the Dawson River and spent his earlier years there, moving later to Murphy's Creek. He was a likeable character and was noted for his hospitality to visiting ornithologists. He had many friends, both avian and human, and they will all regret his passing.

— N. JACK.