

melanocephalus), found in Western North America from Alaska to Monterey in California. We are aware that certain American ornithologists separate the common Turnstone of the Old World from that found in North and South America, giving them different sub-specific names; but the difference relied upon appears to be nothing more than individual variation, and anyone who is familiar with the appearance of the Turnstone at all seasons of the year will be aware that the plumage of the old and young both in summer and winter shows considerable variation. Mr. Mathews would have done well to point out that the larger of the two figures on his plate is an immature bird. The same remark applies to his plate of *Charadrius geoffroyi*. The well-known Grey Plover, Australian specimens of which were properly recognized by Gould, Sharpe, Ramsay, and others, as *Squatarola helvetica*, is renamed by Mr. Mathews, although, like so many others of the wading birds (*Limicolæ*), it is found nearly all over the world, and the variations of plumage to which it is subject may be safely attributed to the age of the bird, and the time of the year at which it may happen to be obtained. As in the breeding season it has the whole of the under parts jet black, and in the winter pure white, naturally the intermediate stages show great variation.

"Some very beautiful Sand-Plovers are figured in part 2 of vol. iii., including the Red-capped Dottrel, the Hooded Dottrel, and the Black-fronted Dottrel. Amongst the larger Sandpipers two very striking species are the Banded Stilt—with pure white head and neck, a chestnut pectoral band, back and wings black, and flanks white—and the Red-necked Avocet, which has the whole of the head and neck chestnut, the wings black with a white bar, the back, tail, and under parts pure white. The last-named is widely distributed in Australia, being found in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania. Why it should receive a new name in Western Australia, as proposed by Mr. Mathews, will puzzle those of his readers who happen to be acquainted with the species.

"The smaller Sandpipers may be conveniently grouped in two genera, *Totanus* and *Tringa*—the former characterized by having a hard bill, semipalmated toes, and a barred tail; the latter a soft, sensitive bill, toes cleft to the base, and the tail not barred. Familiar examples of *Totanus* are the Greenshank, Redshank, and Green and Wood Sandpipers; amongst those of the genus *Tringa* are the Knot, Purple Sandpiper, Dunling, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, and many others. These are ready marks of distinction, yet we note that Mr. Mathews, contrary to the general practice, places the Green Sandpiper (with a barred tail) in the genus *Tringa*, thus upsetting one's preconceived notions respecting the classification of these birds.

"It seems very ungracious to find fault with an author who has bestowed so much labour in the preparation of a very beautiful work (so far as the plates are concerned), but he so often deliberately runs counter to the accepted opinions of naturalists more experienced than himself, and creates so much confusion by changing names that have been in use for many generations, that it is not possible to give unqualified praise to the result of his undertaking."

Stray Feathers.

Charcoal in Finches' Nests.—Mr. H. G. Barnard, who is collecting for me on the west of the Gulf of Carpentaria, has lately forwarded several clutches of eggs of *Poephila personata*, and he mentions the curious fact, which I have not previously seen recorded, that in every case the birds place pieces of charcoal in the nest along with the eggs. The charcoal is in small lumps,

about the size of the eggs, which become quite dark-coloured from contact with it. Other Finches—notably *P. becki* and *P. gouldiae*—breeding in the same locality do not adopt the curious habit.—H. L. WHITE. Belltrees (N.S.W.), 7/9/13.

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Regent Bower-Bird (*Sericulus chrysocephalus*), Lewin. — In *The Emu*, page 44, vol. x. (1910-11), I remarked that probably the female alone built the nest. I have since confirmed that deduction by actual observation. At Ourimbah (12/11/11) I watched a female Regent-Bird commencing her nest, and observed that she returned with material every three minutes. I spent some considerable time watching her movements, and am convinced that she alone constructs the nest. On 26/11/11 the nest contained one fresh egg; the female glided off as I approached. — P. A. GILBERT. Redfern (N.S.W.), 16/2/13.

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White Cockatoos.—These birds (*Cacatua galerita*) have always been plentiful in the Upper Hunter district of New South Wales (*vide* North's "Nests and Eggs," vol. iii., page 79), but the numbers noted during the late winter have exceeded all former records. I never previously noticed the birds in such numbers. Luckily, the invasion occurred after the maize crops had been harvested. To the south-west, and about a mile from the Belltrees homestead, a very sharp-pointed, conical hill rises abruptly from the surrounding country to a height of about 1,000 feet; it is clothed on the eastern (or sheep-camping) side with a dense coat of thistles and weeds, which appear to attract the Cockatoos. During several mornings lately the pointed top of the hill has been covered by thousands of Cockatoos, crowded so closely together that from a distance the mass presents the exact appearance of snow—in fact, several people who witnessed the sight for the first time declared that the hill was capped by snow.—H. L. WHITE. Belltrees (N.S.W.), 7/9/13.

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Brush-Turkeys in England.—Mr. D. Le Souëf, Director of the Melbourne Zoological Gardens, has received a letter from the Duchess of Bedford, in which she states:—"The Brush-Turkeys (*Cathartus lathamii*) have done extremely well with us. The first were imported in 1897, and, as far as I can make out, we have imported about 26 in all. It is very difficult to estimate their numbers now, as they are out in the woods; but, when Pheasant shooting in winter, I have counted 40 in the trees at one moment, and we must have well over a hundred. I think that they must have been breeding before your visit to Woburn, as we have had young for many years. They seem to hatch out at the end of July and August. We opened a mound last year, in the first week in August, and there was a young bird in it, which appeared to have been hatched for some time, and was almost capable of

flight. There were also several fertile eggs. The birds do not stray at all, and, though they are in a wood which is on the extreme outside of the park, I have never seen a single bird outside, nor have I seen them in any other part of the park, though, as you know, they have their complete liberty. We can only catch them by feeding them into traps. We do not feed the chickens until they come to the ordinary winter feeding for Brush-Turkeys and Pheasants together."

From Magazines, &c.

Montebello Islands.—*The Geographical Journal* (July, 1913) contains a general and interesting article on these islands by P. D. Montague. The islands are off the coast of North-West Australia, and about 40 miles from the nearest mainland. Mr. Montague had in his party the late Mr. L. Burns, whose obituary notice appears in this issue. Mr. Montague remarks that ten small land-birds are found in the group, the majority of which agree with types from the north-west mainland, but two are sub-species not elsewhere recorded—one a very pale form of *Anthus*, named *A. montebelli*,* the other a dark sub-species of *Eremiornis*, called *E. assimilis*.* Of the birds of prey, the Osprey (*Pandion*) was the most abundant. Two pairs of Sea-Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) were also found nesting, and a few pairs of the White-headed Sea-Eagle (*Haliastur leucosternus*). The latter species fed largely on rock-crabs. The mangroves were much frequented by Brown-Honey-eaters (*Stigmatops*) and a species of Ground-Dove (*Geopelia*), which roosted in the thick trees during night and from the heat of the day. The nesting season varies according to the rains, said to be usually January or February; but after a shower in July a small percentage of these birds began breeding.

Correspondence.

THE R.A.O.U. "CHECK-LIST."

To the Editors of "*The Emu*."

SIRS,—I am sorry that Mr. A. W. Milligan should have drawn personalities into his defence of the "Check-list." This should not have been done, because I feel quite sure that all the members of the "Check-list" Committee, except Mr. Milligan, know me well enough not to credit me with any wish to be personal. I contend that, in spite of Mr. Milligan's argument, the Tasmanian session did not represent the ornithologists of Australia. The majority at every session is composed of trippers, or, if you like, call them "bird-lovers." How could anyone, who thought for a moment, adopt the list when they had not the slightest knowledge of what it contained?

* Montague, *Austral Avian Record*, vol. i., p. 181.