

## Correspondence.

CORMORANTS : ARE THEY PESTS OR OTHERWISE ?

*To the Editors of "The Emu."*

SIRS,—An article appearing under the above heading in the October, 1918, number of *The Emu*, by Mr. W. T. Forster, is intended, if I read the author's meaning aright, to suggest that the Cormorant—or Shag, as the bird is better known to me—is a wholesale destroyer of a staple article of human food, and that it should be regarded as a thing of evil. It is only fair, however, to Mr. Forster to mention that at the conclusion of this article he states, in the frankest possible manner, that further evidence is necessary before the question can be finally settled.

Nature, in producing that delicate and beautiful poise which characterizes all her works, has never begrudged her children the reward of their toil. That the Shag is a greedy devourer of fish is indubitably true. It is equally true that in so doing the bird is merely taking its wages for holding in check the many forces inimical to the welfare of fish. Nor is this the only beneficent power it wields. The bird, in eating fish, is still further fulfilling its mission by exercising a wholesome and necessary thinning-out of the unhealthy and of the superfluous members of the finny tribe.

The economic value of the Shag is, in fact, little understood, and the method of learning it through its destruction is—as evidenced by an instance I am about to relate which came under my personal observation—fraught with unpleasant consequences. Many years ago, in a certain locality in New Zealand, the local anglers, on observing that the Shag was eating an imported fish, concluded that the bird was harmful to their interests, and decreed that it should die. So the old birds were shot, while the eggs and the young were pushed with the aid of long sticks from the nests in the branches of the *pohutukawa* trees which grow outwards from the edge of the precipitous cliffs which front the sea. The Shag disappeared. Mark the sequel: the repressive influence which the bird had exerted on the increase of crustaceans and of other natural enemies of young fish and of ova having been removed, the fish likewise disappeared.

In 1878, voyaging from England to Australia, I left the boat at Glenelg and journeyed overland from Adelaide to Melbourne, idling along the Coorong, and lingering by the shores of the lakes. There I feasted abundantly on fish caught by blacks. I have been informed in recent years by Australian ornithologists home on active service that there are fewer Shags in this district at the present time than there were when I was there, forty years ago. Tell me—are there more fish?—Yours, &c.,

JAS. BUCKLAND,  
Corres. Memb. R.A.O.U., London.

[Possibly some South Australian member can say.—Eds.]

To the Editors of "The Emu."

SIRS,—As regards the diet of Cormorants, which most people consider highly destructive to valuable food-fishes, I may mention that the following assorted *menu* was found in the stomach of a Cormorant shot in the Bega (South Coastal) district of New South Wales this summer, viz.:—Several earthworms, a small brown eel, some fish fry (including those of sea-mullet, which inhabit lagoons and ponds adjacent to the coastal rivers), some frogs, and a young lagoon turtle. Both the lagoon turtle and the brown eel are, it is asserted, themselves greedy devourers of the ova of valuable fishes, while the latter also feeds on the fry, and even on the adult fish itself.

Certain lagoons and ponds in this district, once fairly well stocked with mullet and perch (of the fluviatile and an allied species), have become almost entirely depleted of both adult and young fish. Enormous brown eels inhabit these lagoons and ponds, and it is to them that the gradual disappearance of fish is attributed. Very few are taken by hand-line. Thus Cormorants, in some respects, perform a useful office.—Yours, &c.,

H. V. EDWARDS.

Bega, N.S.W.

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SOME OF GOULD'S TYPES.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

SIRS,—When in Philadelphia a few months back I had the opportunity of inspecting some of Gould's types.

(*Gilbertornis*) *Pachycephala rufogularis*, Gould.—The type of this bird is marked "Adelaide"; no further details. Probably Gould would call anywhere within 100 miles "Adelaide." The particular locality for this bird—viz., the Mallee north of the main line to Victoria—was then a huge sheep station. Probably the bird was brought in to the great ornithologist, and, owing to the then sparsely populated condition of the colony, no nearer settlement could be designated.

My specimen of adult male I collected near Karoonda on what is known as the Brown's Well, on Paringa railway line, on 9th April, 1913. It is in all respects, except the tone of the grey back, a duplicate of Gould's type. In that specimen the grey of the upper plumage seems to have faded somewhat, due, no doubt, to the fact that his types were all mounted, and suffered from exposure to light during a considerable number of years. The chestnut abdomen and chestnut lores easily distinguish this bird from its relative, *Pachycephala gilberti*, Gould, the lores in the latter species being black.

*Platycercus adelaidæ*, Gould (Adelaide Rosella).—This was another of our birds of which I was anxious to inspect the type. I found it was a representative of the ordinary form found in

our Blackwood district, and extending from this part of the Adelaide Hills northwards. The back was almost uniformly dull green and black; only an odd feather or so showed any red at all. The breast was the brick to orange-red of our ordinary bird; no suggestion of the high colouring of the sub-species, *P. fleurieuensis*, Ashby.—Yours, &c.,

EDWIN ASHBY.

## Bird Protection.

### BIRD PROTECTION IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

THE new *Birds and Animals Protection Act*, passed by Parliament at the last session, and which came into force on 1st January, 1919, provides for the protection of all birds and animals except those mentioned in the schedule. These are Sparrows, Silver-eyes, Shags, Crows, Pied Crow-Shrikes, Leatherheads, Garrulous Honey-eaters, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Galahs, Pennant's Parrot, Rosella, Blue Mountain Lorikeet, Red-rumped Parrakeet, Wedge-tailed Eagles, Snipe, Gill-Birds, Starlings, all Falcons and Goshawks. It also provides for the absolute protection of all birds except Sparrows, Silver-eyes, Crows, Starlings, and Cormorants in certain districts, including all the county of Cumberland (Sydney and Hawkesbury River), all Government reserves and forests, all inland lakes and islands therein, and also all islands off the coast of the State.

The Act is administered by the Chief Secretary, who is empowered to appoint rangers, who will have all the powers of a police constable for the purpose of enforcing the Act.

Possession of skins, eggs, feathers, &c., of protected birds is prohibited except under licence from the Chief Secretary, and dealing in same and also in live birds is also prohibited except under licence. Sportsmen or dealers for the market are not allowed to kill more than fifty Ducks, or one hundred Quail, or twenty of any other bird, in twenty-four hours. Dealers in live birds must take out a licence each year, at a cost of £5.

The open season for Quail is from the 1st day of February to the 31st of July, but this is varied in specified districts where experience has shown that the birds are earlier or later in nesting. For Ducks the season is from the 1st of February to the 30th of June. The following birds are also allowed to be taken for the same period:—All Pigeons and Doves except the Wonga and Bronzewings, Coots, Moor-Hens, Mallee-Fowls, Pied Geese, Diamond Finches, Zebra Finches, Firetails, and the Red-browed and the Chestnut-breasted Finches.

This Act is a great advance on the previous one. It provides for large sanctuaries throughout the State, greatly reduces the birds that can be killed or caught, brings under licence all dealers, and shortens the open seasons of the game birds. Its effectiveness