

The Red-tailed Tropic-bird in Western Australia

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Recorded breeding places of this species—*Phaëthon rubricaudus*—in the Indian Ocean are Mauritius, Christmas Island, and Rat Island (Houtman's Abrolhos). A pair of birds and one egg, all of which are now in the Western Australian Museum, Perth, were obtained by Lipfert on Rat Island, Houtman's Abrolhos, in November, 1894, and Mathews based his *Phaëthon rubricauda westralis* on the male of this pair of specimens.* A. J. Campbell, in his "Nests and Eggs" (1901), records hearsay evidence of the breeding of the species on Pelsart Island, Houtman's Abrolhos. The late Tom Carter obtained a specimen at Point Cloates. That the species occasionally occurs further south is evidenced by the capture of a specimen (now in the Perth Museum) at Gingin, the bird having apparently been blown inland by a storm, and Glauert has recorded the species as having been seen several times in the vicinity of Rottnest Island.

We have now to record the interesting fact that, in 1939, at least one pair bred on the mainland coast a little south of Busselton. On November 1, 1939, an unfamiliar bird was seen flying over Busselton Show Grounds, on which annual school sports were then being held. It was described by those who saw it as "a large white gull with a red beak and a piece of string tied to its legs." Later in the day a local resident, while riding along the beach on horseback, came upon a Tropic-bird brooding an egg. The nesting locality was situated about three-quarters of a mile west of the town jetty. The egg was placed beneath the shelter of a dead tree, which had either been thrown up on the beach by some storm or washed back on to the beach by an extra high tide. The accompanying photograph shows the tree. It was about twenty yards inland from normal high-water mark. A railway-line runs parallel to the beach and about thirty yards inland. The locality is regularly frequented by bathers, so the brooding bird could not have escaped discovery for long. As the bird refused to leave its position beneath the log, the rider dismounted to investigate, and, with the aid of a saddle-cloth, he captured it and conveyed

*In the type-description the type-locality was given as "West Australia," and on page 304 of his *Birds of Australia* (1915), Mathews gave the type-locality as "Rottnest Island," and on the following page as "Houtman's Abrolhos." In their "Manual" (1921), Mathews and Iredale give Houtman's Abrolhos as the correct type-locality.

it into the town, where it was kept for some days. It was then forwarded to Perth, and, after being taken to the Museum, was deposited in the Zoological Gardens, South Perth.

When captured originally one of the red tail-feathers was missing. While at the Zoo, it was very tame and adopted a most motherly attitude towards a Fairy Tern, with which it shared the same compartment. As was only to be expected, the bird did not survive its captivity, and, unfortunately, the skin was not preserved nor was it sexed. However, it was noticed by one of us (Whittell) that, since capture, the remaining streamer feather had been moulted, and that two short new feathers, which did not extend as far as the tips of the other tail-feathers, were apparent when the latter were separated.

The egg has been deposited in the Perth Museum; when blown the contents appeared to be quite normal, and the egg was apparently fresh when taken.

The Tropic-birds—there appears to have been a small party—had been seen by several residents of Busselton, none of whom had previously noticed birds of that type. On the evening of February 1, 1940, one flew over a house at Quindalup, which is eleven miles south of Busselton.

How these birds managed to range so far south is a matter for conjecture—for certainly the weather during the previous few weeks had not been stormy. We believe that not only is this a southern breeding record, but that it is the first record of the bird's having nested on the mainland of Australia, or, as a matter of fact, on the mainland of any other part of the world. As Mathews and Iredale state,* the normal breeding places are on isolated islets.

*"Manual," 1921, p. 81.

Obituary

RONALD RICHARD MINCHIN

Mr. R. R. Minchin, the Director of the Adelaide Zoological Gardens, recently died at the age of 35 years. He became a member of the Union and of the South Australian Ornithological Association in 1938. The deceased was keenly interested in Australian parrots, in particular, and had great success in breeding most forms at the Gardens. Members who visited Adelaide in connection with the 1936 Congress will remember the splendid show of parrots and the enthusiasm of Mr. Minchin with regard to their activities.

Both Mr. Minchin's father and grandfather were Directors of the Zoological Gardens. He is survived by his widow and a young son.—C.E.B.

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