

present state of knowledge, a matter of speculation. It is apparent from the foregoing observations that it is at the very least one hundred miles in extent. No doubt it commences much further south and continues far to the north of the two observation points, Bundanoon and Blackheath. The indications are that the birds may move on a fairly narrow front with a gradual progressive dispersal to suitable coastal feeding grounds. Again there may be several such fly-ways over a broad front. The absence of observers and the consequent lack of a continuous series of records preclude any definite conclusions.

## REFERENCES

1. McGill, A. R. 'Migrating Honeyeaters,' *The Emu*, vol. 47, pt. 1, July 1947, pp. 56-7.
2. Hindwood, K. A. 'Honeyeaters of the Sydney District (County of Cumberland), New South Wales,' *Australian Zoologist*, vol. 10, pt. 3, May 10, 1944, pp. 231-251, pls. 8-14, see particularly p. 234 and p. 240.

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## Stray Feathers

**The Pomarine Skua.**—Although the Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) is nowadays regarded as a reasonably-common migrant to the eastern Australian coast, and sight observations of it are regularly reported each year, it must be remembered that only twenty-two years ago it was omitted from the numerical sequence of *The Official Checklist* (1926) on the grounds of insufficient occurrences. In an interesting article (*The Emu*, vol. 40, 1940, pp. 177-180) Tom Iredale pointed out the doubts that actuated its exclusion at that time. Despite its recognition as being a somewhat-common visitor now, it is probable that Australian-collected specimens are actually few in numbers. Therefore it may be interesting to report that the remains of a Pomarine Skua were found on Cronulla beach, New South Wales, on December 20, 1947. The bird was badly decomposed, but the legs and some wing and tail feathers were taken for identification purposes, and a check with Australian Museum material by J. A. Keast, subsequently confirmed identity.

Mr. K. A. Hindwood has kindly supplied information of two specimens in the Australian Museum, as follows—

- O.10089. Collected by E. P. Ramsay, April 1881, Bondi beach, imm.
- O.35532. Collected by G. P. Whitley, March 1937, Maroubra beach, ♂.

G. M. Mathews (*Austr. Av. Rec.*, vol. 3, pt. 4, July 21, 1917, p. 72) refers—under the subspecific name of *nutcheri*—to a specimen taken at Broken Bay on December 3, 1913. He also deals with a subspecies of *S. parasiticus*, i.e. *visitori*,

from Broken Bay, November 11, 1913. Of *pomarinus*, he states (p. 73)—“This is the first authentic published record of *Coprotheres* in Australian waters.”—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 29/1/48.

**Animate Perches and Hair Gathering.**—Further to Mr. E. F. Boehm's notes (*Emu*, vol. 47, 233) concerning the perching of birds on animals I would like to add the kangaroo to the list of the Willie Wagtail's 'perches.' The kangaroo was sitting upright in its enclosure in Parramatta Park on March 17, 1946, when the Wagtail was observed to sit on its back and head. When the kangaroo lowered its head to graze the Wagtail left its perch and flitted to the ground around the kangaroo's nose, snapping up disturbed insects. When the animal raised its head, back went the Wagtail on to its back. The kangaroo occasionally flicked its ears when the Wagtail perched between them and, no doubt, tickled them with his restless tail, but apart from that he gave no indication of even being aware of the bird.

I have also a record (August 10, 1947) of the Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) unsuccessfully trying to part a fibre of sheep's wool from its rightful place on the sheep's back. It made many spirited wrenches and tugs but could not get the wool, finally flying—probably in 'disgust.' However, this bird must have been like Bruce's spider, for when I located the nest, in a blackthorn, about six feet away from the scene of the foregoing act, I found that the 'cock's nest' at the top was heavily lined with sheep wool.

Incidentally this occurrence would seem to support K. A. Hindwood's statement (*Emu*, vol. 46, 323)—“I suggest that the upper chamber, or 'cock's nest,' is the natural outcome of the nest-building instincts of the male bird which persist after the essential nest, in which the eggs are deposited, has been completed.” I say that it adds weight to Hindwood's suggestion because (a) the nest was only six feet or so from where I had seen a Thornbill trying to gather wool, (b) the 'cock's nest' and the nesting chamber proper were heavily lined with sheep wool, and (c) there were four other nests of this species close handy (radius of approximately 100 yards), but this nest was the only nest lined thus. The others were feather lined, which is more normal for this species.

From the foregoing it seems safe to assume that the bird had an interest in this nest, although I did not actually see the bird add material to it.

If this assumption should be correct then the bird was still gathering material for a nest which contained two well-fledged chicks. I watched this nest carefully for several more days and saw both birds feeding the young.

However, I saw no material gathered or added up to the time when the chicks left (August 16).

To come back to the subject of birds and their associations with animals, I recently watched a Brown-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*)\* gathering hair from a calf. I was first attracted by the chirping call of the bird coming from the direction of the calf. Suddenly it bounced from right under the animal up on to its back. Then it disappeared overboard again to the accompaniment of much chirping. I moved around for a better look and found the Honeyeater clinging upside-down to the calf's belly lustily pulling at the hair growing thereon. Then I watched, for ten minutes or so, a most interesting and sagacious performance. Although the Honeyeater flew all round the calf, hovering over and perching on its back, shoulders and rump, it took hair from no other place but the calf's tender abdomen, at all times clinging upside-down to do so. It packed its bill tighter and tighter with hair, till it could not close its mandibles to take another one, then off it flew to a nearby gum tree and, of course, its nest.

P. A. Gilbert also vouches for the Black-chinned Honeyeater (*Melithreptus gularis*) as a hair gatherer (*Emu*, vol. 19, 32)—“I was attracted,” he writes, “by a pair of these birds hovering over, then darting down upon, the back of a calf, and picking and tugging at its hair, then up into the air again, and so on.” He says that these birds did not alight on the calf to gather the hair.

Chaffer and Wolstenholme (*Emu*, vol. 23, 49) record the Fuscous Honeyeater (*Meliphaga fusca*) as a gatherer of cow's hair from the live beast.

There are, too, many references to the White-eared Honeyeater (*Meliphaga leucotis*) as a gatherer of hair, particularly from the human head, and this habit is said to persist even after the bird has finished its season of nesting (e.g. Hindwood, *Emu*, vol. 29, 181, and Chaffer, *Emu*, vol. 32, 270).—R. H. BOUGHTWOOD, South Liverpool, N.S.W., 2/3/48.

\*At Christmas 1926, a bird of this species attempted to remove hair from my head at a spring near Mt. Clear, Victoria. A footnote to Mr. Chaffer's article referred to later in this paper reads—‘A case of this bird [*Melithreptus brevirostris*] has been noted,’ though no details were given. This is the instance referred to.—Ed.

**Mimicry of Black-backed Magpie.**—Some light on the problem of vocal mimicry by various kinds of birds is thrown by the performance of a wild Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) which frequents our farm-yard. Its repertoire does not end with the imitation of calls of other species of birds, such as Yellow-throated Miners (*Myzantha flavigula*), Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*), and Purple-backed Wrens (*Malurus assimilis*). Occasionally it mimics

the bark of our dog or the neigh of a horse so well that members of the family have been misled by the bird.

These calls are not natural to Magpies and are obviously imitations of farm-yard sounds. Moreover, the mimicry is indulged in by the bird only during its 'whisper singing.' It is never used during the periods of loud carolling.—E. F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 7/2/48.

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## Meeting

The next meeting of the Union will be held at the Lecture Hall, Public Library, Melbourne, at 8 p.m. on Friday, July 2. Members and friends welcome. The subject will be a discussion on cuckoos and the parasitic habit in birds and will be led by Mr. E. S. Hanks. Members are requested to introduce questions and comments of interest on the subject.

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## Reviews

**Frederick Strange.**—Perhaps it is because of the circumstance, noted by his latest biographer, that he never had a bird named after him that Frederick Strange is not so well known by name to ornithologists of the present day as are some of his contemporaries. Major H. M. Whittell remarks in a biographical article in the *Australian Zoologist* (1947, vol. 11, part 2) that he was "undoubtedly one of Australia's great pioneer naturalists." He also remarks that "no account worthy of the extent and results of his pioneer work in natural history in Australia and New Zealand has so far been published," but it may be asserted that the biographer has now rectified that omission. His biography is full, concise, and illuminating, and reflects a large amount of laborious and difficult original historical research. The date of Strange's birth remains unknown, but he was a contemporary of John Gould and a companion of John Gilbert and of Macgillivray, journeyed with Sturt, and was murdered by blacks in 1854. Whittell's researches have disclosed, incidentally, a letter from John Gilbert to Strange of later date than Gilbert's 'last letter' hitherto known. The biography is commended to all who are interested in the history of Australian ornithology.—P.C.M.

**A Naturalist's 'Adventures.'**—Willoughby P. Lowe, past vice-president of the British Ornithologists Union and collector for the British Museum (Natural History), has completed the saga that he began in *The Trail that is Always New*. There is an old-world leisure about the writing of Willoughby Lowe that makes it refreshing to read, but sometimes exasperating. He writes with ease and entirely without self-consciousness, as a good correspondent would in writing letters to his home people from abroad, but in doing so he occasionally dismisses in a few words an incident about which one would gladly have read several pages. *The End of the Trail* (edition limited to 400 copies) gives accounts of bird-hunting expeditions in Tunisia, Indo-China, across the Sahara to the Hoggar Mountains, through Tanganyika, and around the Gold Coast. His final brief chapter of moral reflections on a life spent in the service of natural history is really devoted to justifying to his own conscience (and, one gathers, to his own satisfaction) the taking of bird and animal life in the cause of true science. An 'incomplete list' of more than 200 species of mammals, birds, and a few incidentals, all species new to science, which Lowe has collected, forms a valuable appendix. Is there any-