

out to sea with the Shearwaters. During the normal run of the summer pilchards, they feed on those fish to a large extent, and also may be seen diving for the common yellow-tail which is abundant around the shallow parts of the islands.

The Silver Gulls appear to work the beaches and breakers more, following the schools of travelling fish such as tailor, mullet and salmon.

At certain times of the year the Gulls appear to desert their normal marine feeding grounds, and it is a common sight to see them as far inland as Maitland and Muswellbrook (to where they have followed the Hunter River from the mouth at Newcastle) some twenty and eight miles inland respectively. In some of the large swampy areas left after the frequent Hunter River floodings, Gulls congregate in great numbers at times.

It is the usual thing for the newspapers to report such happenings as being due to stormy weather at sea, but I have noticed that these inland migrations have occurred when the conditions at sea have been anything but stormy. On the Hexham swamps, which are about ten miles out from Newcastle on the Maitland line, I have seen flocks of Silver Gulls of from twenty to fifty birds scattered all over the area, feeding on the marshy ground. No doubt many of these birds come down from Port Stephens, some twenty-five miles north from Newcastle, and also from places south of that city.

It may be due to a falling off of plankton and other natural marine food, and it may be due to the desire for a change of diet which by some means becomes suddenly known to all the Gulls for miles around.

Recent Observations on Some Birds of the Swan River District

By JULIAN R. FORD, Fremantle, W.A.

Since Dr. D. L. Serventy published his paper on 'The Birds of the Swan River District, Western Australia' (*Emu*, vol. 47, p. 241), the writer has made some observations in this district which might be of general interest and, in particular provide some new facts on the distribution of *Malurus pulcherrimus* and on the breeding range of *Petroica goode-novii*.

Malurus pulcherrimus. Blue-breasted Red-winged Wren.

Serventy does not include this species in the district census but includes the closely-allied species *Malurus elegans*, of which he says—"In 1943, and on several occasions since, L. J. McHugh observed Red-winged Wrens, including

fully-plumaged males, in the thickly-grown gullies on the landward side of the beach dunes at Scarborough, just westward of Herdsman's Lake." In his paper on 'The Evolution of the Chestnut-shouldered Wrens' (*Emu*, vol. 51, p. 113) he says that "one must accept Loaring's view that McHugh's birds were really *Malurus pulcherrimus*. This was established to my satisfaction when I observed this species at Swanbourne in September 1952 and again at Leighton in January 1954. The former observation was made when several birds were encountered in the sand-dunes just north of the Swanbourne beach, and the latter when two adults and two fledgelings were recorded in the sand-dunes just south of Leighton beach.

***Malurus leuconotus*. Blue-and-white Wren.**

About twenty of these birds were observed in a wattle-tree thicket near the Naval Base camp, during December 1948. The thicket concerned is close to the sand-dunes along the coast, and is north of the oil refinery.

***Stipiturus malachurus*. Southern Emu-Wren.**

A single fully-plumaged male bird was observed in the reeds on the eastern side of Thompson's (Jilbup) Lake in January 1950, when it was seen in the presence of several thornbills and silvereyes.

***Artamus persontus*. Masked Wood-Swallow.**

Alexander did not include this bird in his list of Swan River birds (*Emu*, vol. 20, p. 149), and Serventy doubted A. W. Milligan's record in the *Western Australia Year Book* for 1900-01. A single bird was observed by the writer in a banksia tree on the westward side of Bilva Lake, October 1948.

***Petroica goodenovii*. Red-capped Robin.**

This species is known to breed on Rottnest Island and over the Darling Range, and although some individuals wander into the coastal plain from the hills, up to now there is no record of this species breeding on the coastal plain. But, in September 1949, the writer observed two immature Red-capped Robins building a nest in a banksia tree, on the eastern side of North Lake, a large open fresh-water lake just two hundred yards north of Bilva Lake. The birds were similar—the male did not have any pink coloration on the head or breast feathers. How did these two immature birds get there? Did they wander from the Darling Range or are there other resident breeding birds in this district? The colony on Rottnest Island is isolated by twelve miles of sea. The writer concludes that there are a few breeding birds in the district, but up to now they have not attracted attention, due, no doubt, to their scarcity in this district. The

two birds concerned subsequently raised a brood after building two nests, the first having been deserted.

My thanks are due to Dr. D. L. Serventy, who identified the two birds as being immature Red-capped Robins.

Stray Feathers

Gilbert Whistler near Sydney.—Most Australian members of the genus *Pachycephala* have their strongholds in coastal and near-coastal areas. A notable exception is *P. inornata*, the Gilbert Whistler, which is widely spread throughout the interior of all mainland States and which has come to be regarded as typical of dry mallee and similar areas. That being so, I was astonished to hear the voice of a 'Gilbert' in a heathland above Bayview, 20 miles north of Sydney, on August 30, 1953.

The call came from a group of trees growing on a sandstone knoll surrounded by scrub. As soon as I heard it I 'propped', scarcely able to believe the evidence of my ears. Mr. G. R. Gannon then joined me, and, when the bird called again, he, too, was convinced at once that the voice was that of the Gilbert Whistler. Skirting the knoll, I tried by 'squeaking' to persuade the bird to show itself, but the only effect of the advance was to cause the stranger to fly off (thereby revealing itself to be the right size) towards a group of trees a few hundred yards away. We followed it to that spot and there again heard the call, but again we failed to see the bird. Another search in the area a week later was fruitless; we neither heard the airy voice nor saw its author.

Although this is merely a 'sound' record I have no doubt at all regarding the bird's identity. I have known the Gilbert Whistler since youthful days, and am not likely to confuse its voice with that of any other bird, certainly not any bird near Sydney. Moreover, it is to be noted that the visitor to Bayview was alone, manifested the shyness of a stranger, and did not attempt to descend to the thick heathy vegetation. How it found its way to such a spot, within a mile or so of the coast, is a matter for speculation. I should have thought that the Gilbert Whistler would not be seen or heard, in New South Wales, within about two hundred miles of the sea.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, N.S.W., 8/5/54.

Unusual Habitat of the White-headed Stilt.—The margins of lakes and swampland generally are the usual types of country frequented by the White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*). A check through published material in *The Emu* shows no noticeable deviation from such a habitat. At any rate I can find no previously-recorded instance of the species having been seen on exposed coastal reefs, so the