

The Group is very appreciative of the assistance of members of the R.A.O.U. and Bird Observers Club who gave of their time to assist in this work.

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Stray Feathers

Ground Thrush inland at Deniliquin, N.S.W.—From the beginning of July, when I first arrived in the district, until August 15, 1954, two Ground Thrushes (*Oreocincla lunulata*) were to be seen in a locality near Deniliquin, N.S.W. Their habitat was a previously-cleared paddock, naturally regenerated with red gums of about ten years' growth. Some indiscriminate cutting had taken place and the lop had been left as thick ground covering. The paddock adjoined a creek running from the nearby Edwards River.

The birds were very tame and allowed close examination, precluding any possibility of mis-identification of the English Song Thrush (*Turdus ericetorum*), with which I am familiar and the only bird with which confusion could be considered. Both birds were silent apart from a thin 'tseep' contact note, and spent most of the time on the ground, turning over leaves in search of food. Their subsequent disappearance suggests they were merely visitors, but, even so, their presence so far from their customary habitat is unusual, possibly unique, and information of previous occurrences locally or in other inland localities would be welcome.—JOHN N. HOBBS, Deniliquin, N.S.W., 31/8/54.

Flame Robin's 'Foot Pattering' Feeding Habit.—In the past I have become familiar with the habit of some English waders of rapidly pattering an extended foot upon soft

mud, presumably with the intention of bringing food to the surface. This habit has been noted in English bird literature and by myself in the Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*), Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) and others. It was no surprise, therefore, to find the Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*) using the same feeding habit here in Australia. However, whilst watching a party of Flame Robins (*Petroica phoenicea*) feeding near Deniliquin, N.S.W., recently, I was most surprised to see them using an identical movement.

They were feeding in short grass in a closely-grazed paddock. It was possible to see that one leg was almost continuously held forward whilst the foot was pattered rapidly on the ground. The bird, meanwhile, would have a watchful look with head slightly on one side, and usually after each patter would rush forward and seize some insect. The movement was in every respect identical with that of a wader.

Some gulls and ducks have a habit of stirring the bottom with their feet, and thrushes, including the Ground Thrush (*Oreocincla lunulata*) often give an impatient sort of stamp at the end of a run, but this is the first time I have seen any bird, other than waders, deliberately extend a foot, vibrate it, and wait for results. I would be interested to hear of similar observations.—JOHN N. HOBBS, Deniliquin, N.S.W., 31/8/54.

Dust-bathing or Anting?—A peculiar method of dust-bathing employed by a White-winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) was observed near Yass, N.S.W., on September 10, 1954. A party of the birds were feeding in a paddock adjoining the tree-lined Hume Highway, when one commenced picking up beak-fuls of dust and placing it amongst its feathers. Those of the breast, belly, back and scapulars were treated in turn, as well as under the wings. At this stage the flock was disturbed and flew into the trees, uttering their harsh grating cries. The 'dust-bather' ruffled up all its feathers, from which a cloud of fine dust fell, and, after a few minutes, returned to the same spot and continued as before. A short time after this it rejoined the foraging flock.

The actions of this Chough suggested that it was 'anting', so I examined the spot where it took place. I found no insects of any kind, only a patch of extremely fine, pale-brown dust of the consistency of talcum. The paddock contained some low ant-hills but none near this particular spot. Two chemical tests for formic acid (the mercuric-chloride and the alcohol-sulphuric acid tests) were carried out on a sample of the dust, both with negative results.

Here is an instance of behaviour apparently midway between dust-bathing and 'anting'. The accepted definition of 'anting' presumably covers the *application* to the feathers by any method of any substance. Perhaps this is a little too broad; the bird as observed was having a normal dust bath in a rather abnormal way. In any case this appears to be real evidence of a close affinity between the two.

Chisholm (*Bird Wonders of Australia*, 3rd edn., 1948), in his review of the subject of 'anting', refers to an early American bird note by Audubon stating that young Wild Turkeys dust-bathe in deserted ant-beds "to clear the feathers of the loose scales and to prevent ticks and other vermin from attacking them, these insects being unable to bear the odour of the earth in which the ants have been."—J. DOUGLAS GIBSON, Thirroul, N.S.W., 15/9/54.

Counts of the Silver Gull in Eastern Cook Strait, New Zealand.—Delete '26/19/50' under the sub-heading 'Lambton Harbour, Port Nicholson', published in *Emu*, vol. 54, p. 73, and substitute '26/10/50'.

These counts were continued in 1954 at Lambton Harbour and Lyall Bay, Wellington. There were about three hundred Silver Gulls, on 15/4/54, in the roadstead a mile north of Point Jerningham on the outskirts of Lambton Harbour, but the birds appeared to disappear for the next few months. They increased in Lambton Harbour proper at the end of the winter as before. It is of interest that they were seen only in small numbers from a ferry steamer in eastern Cook Strait on 12/10/53 and 17/5/54.

The 1954 observations are as follows—

Lambton Harbour.—18/3/54 (under 5), 25/3/54 (under 10), 6/4/54 (several only), 15/4/54 (12), 11/5/54 (under 5), 27/5/54 (under 10), 22/6/54 and 28/6/54 (about a dozen both days), 7/7/54 (about 20), 12/7/54 (30), 20/7/54 (20), 27/7/54 (15), 29/7/54 (20), 3/8/54 (30), 16/8/54 (50), 25/8/54 (about 55), 27/8/54 (50).

Lyall Bay.—9/1/54 (50), 30/1/54 (15), 13/2/54 (90), 14/3/54 (160), 24/4/54 (12), 29/5/54 (30), 31/7/54 (75).
—H. L. SECKER, Wellington, N.Z., 28/8/54.

Scarlet-chested Parrot in Western Australia.—The Scarlet-chested Parrot (*Neophema splendida*) was described by John Gould, in 1841, from a specimen which came from Swan River, the name by which the settlement in Western Australia was then known. Several more specimens were sent to Gould by Johnson Drummond, who had collected them near the Moore River in 1845. Subsequently there are no West Australian records for nearly a hundred years. Serventy and Whittell in *The Birds of Western Australia*, second edition, p. 243, state—"It was not reported in the

State (again) until 1948 when Mr. L. R. M. Hunter observed a small party near Lake Cowan 100 miles south of Kalgoorlie. In 1949 Mr. D. Marchant observed a small party near Kweda (between Pingelly and Corrigin)."

In the years that I spent wandering through Western Australia, I saw the Bourke Parrot several times, and saw the Scarlet-chested Parrot once, but following the practice of the West Australian ornithologists at that time, I did not publish these records because of the assistance that publication can give to trappers. However, no good would be served by withholding any longer the record of the Scarlet-chested Parrot in Western Australia.

It was near the main road, four miles west of Bullabulling late one afternoon in December 1941, that I saw an adult male. The beauty of one of these birds seen in the field is remembered long afterwards. I saw only one bird, but there may have been others in the thick scrub. I returned at the week-end and spent some time searching without seeing the bird again.

In 1939 there was an irruption of the species in South Australia (near Wynbring on the Trans-continental Railway), and large numbers were trapped, as reported by Alan London in the *Avicultural Magazine*, 1940, p. 295. It is likely that some entered Western Australia about that time, after being absent for nearly a century, and that they remained until 1949, and probably still remain in the State. Whether this small population survives and increases will depend partly on what protection it receives in Western Australia from trapping.—H. M. WILSON, Canterbury, Vic., 7/6/54.

News and Notes

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN FAUNA PROTECTION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Governor in Executive Council has appointed Mr. J. B. Higham, of Narrogin, as a member of the Committee for the unexpired term of the late Major H. M. Whittell. Mr. Higham has been a member of the R.A.O.U. for many years. He accompanied the late Tom Carter on his last collecting trip through the south-west.

CORRECTION

In *Emu*, vol. 54, pt. 3, p. 192, for line 19 substitute—"ornithology. Established schemes like the Royal Austral-"

This erratum occurred after the return of corrected proofs to the printer and was not then subject to editorial correction.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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