

## The Brown-headed Petrel in Australian Waters

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When W. B. Alexander reviewed the Australian species of sea-birds (1920, p. 22) he was able to quote only Gould's record for the Brown-headed Petrel—a specimen taken in Bass Strait in 1839, which Gould named *Procellaria solandri*. However, G. M. Mathews and other writers believed this bird agreed closely with the description of *Procellaria melanopus*, named fifty years previously by Gmelin, and which was said to inhabit 'North America'. It is generally accepted that *Procellaria phillipii* Gray (1862), the 'Bird of Providence' of Norfolk Island (which for so long had been regarded as extinct and of which no specimen from that island is in existence, but which agrees closely in description and has long been considered conspecific with Gould's Bass Strait specimen) is the same species as the winter-breeding petrel of Lord Howe Island, named *Æstrelata montana* by Basset Hull in 1910. Although Gmelin's *Procellaria melanopus* has been in use for some time as the oldest known name of this species, and is that used in the *Official Checklist* (1926), some present-day taxonomists reject it as indeterminable, a fate which has affected the nomenclatural stability of several other sea-birds whose earliest names were based on scanty descriptions.

J. L. Peters (1931, p. 63) used *solandri* for the Brown-headed Petrel, with *montana* as a synonym, but then expressed strange reasoning in accepting *phillipii* as the earliest name for the species usually called *Pterodroma neglecta* (Schlegel), the Kermadec Petrel (which also breeds on Lord Howe Island), and queried whether the prior *melanopus* might not correctly be used for that bird. R. C. Murphy and Jessie M. Pennoyer (1952, p. 15) accepted *solandri* and gave reasons for the rejection of *melanopus*. Furthermore, they state that it is "a subtropical petrel known exclusively from the Tasman Sea and closely adjacent waters. Its only nesting sites are Lord Howe Island and (formerly) Norfolk Island." They therefore refute Peters' statement that it breeds also in the Taumotu and Austral Islands, a belief that was expressed earlier by Alexander (1928, p. 41), and copied in other literature.

In his account of the birds of Lord Howe Island, K. A. Hindwood (1940a, p. 41) gave an interesting summary of the early history of the Brown-headed or Providence Petrel, and included notes of its status as a breeding bird in that area. Considering the relatively close proximity of that island to the eastern Australian coast, it is peculiar that nearly one hundred years elapsed since Gould collected his specimen in Bass Strait until the next undoubted example

was recorded in Australian waters. That specimen was picked up by G. P. Whitley on Maroubra beach, a few miles south of Sydney, on April 9, 1934. Details were given by Hindwood (1940b, p. 14), who also stated that three earlier published records of the species by Tom Iredale (1929a, p. 360; 1929b, p. 291; and 1930, p. 113) in Australian waters, were actually referable to the Great-winged Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera*). Therefore up to 1940 the history of *Pterodroma melanopus*, the Brown-headed Petrel, in Australia, concerned two specimens, collected over a period of ninety-five years.

Two further occurrences are known to me. The first of these is for a beach-washed bird, picked up by A. M. Rapson in Bate Bay on December 17, 1947. This specimen was registered at the Australian Museum in January 1948 (no. 0.37768) but it does not appear to be in that institution now. In the same locality, which is about ten miles south of Sydney, on October 2, 1954, Fred Johnston and I collected the wing and sternum of a bird we could not identify with certainty. It was forwarded to K. A. Hindwood for a check with Australian Museum skins, and he reported as follows—"The wing is that of *Pterodroma melanopus*; not quite the same as normal birds from Lord Howe Island, but this may be due to moult, wear, etc. It does not agree with *P. macroptera* or *Puffinus carneipes*" (in litt., October 7, 1954). The latter two species were those to which we assumed the wing would be most likely to refer. The following week, E. S. Hoskin was in the same locality and fully five hundred yards in from the beach he picked up another wing, which he brought home. Apparently it had been carried in by a fox, and some of the primaries were missing, but the noticeable greyish sheen to the feathers was evident, and it is possible that it was part of the bird collected on October 2. Despite its badly-decomposed state, the body must have been washed up less than a week prior to October 2, as it would have been hardly overlooked during a beach patrol in the same area the previous week.

The Brown-headed or Providence Petrel has now been recorded in Australia on four occasions, three of the occurrences being close to Sydney and within the last twenty years.

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## The Black-winged Currawong

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In conversation with Mr. Norman Favaloro during the 1951 R.A.O.U. Camp-out at Lake Hattah, the status and distribution of the Black-winged Currawong (*Strepera melanoptera*) were discussed. We were in agreement on its specific distinctness and that no published record on the occurrence of the species in New South Wales was known.

During the trip from Sydney to Lake Hattah prior to the Camp, Mr. Jim Palmer and I observed two undoubted Black-winged Currawongs about 15 miles along the Sturt Highway, west of Balranald, on October 10. They were in typical mallee country. Favaloro later informed me (*in litt.*, August 8, 1952) that "the bird is tolerably plentiful in mallee between Euston and Balranald, where it breeds. The first record by me was in September, 1939. Other localities are (a) to the west of Euston in mallee north of the Highway, and (b) occasional birds noted on the Murray flats, opposite to Hattah on the Murray River."

There is little published information on the bird life of south-western New South Wales, and knowledge of the status of mallee-frequenting birds in that area is largely confined to the records of Kenric H. Bennett, who resided at Moolah in the Mossgiel district. His field-notes were freely used by A. J. North (1901-1914) in his well-known work on the nests and eggs of Australian birds, but under *Strepera melanoptera* there are no New South Wales data, nor is that State included in its recorded distribution. There is, however, some interesting information (1901, p. 17) included under the Sooty Crow-Shrike (*S. fuliginosa*), which I have no doubt actually refers to *S. melanoptera*. North states—"Hitherto it [*S. fuliginosa*] has not been regarded as an inhabitant of New South Wales, but during a twenty-five years' residence in the south-western portion of the State, the late Mr. K. H. Bennett met with it on three occasions. The last one he observed was in an unusual situation, in a mallee scrub in the most arid part of the Mossgiel district, and far from any permanent water. I have never heard of any species of the genus being found in similar country."

No indication is given by North as to the type of country in which Bennett made his first two acquaintances with the species, but his third record, far from being in an