

the opposite ends of the earth—the albatrosses, the Giant Petrel and the Southern Skua from the sub-Antarctic; the Pomarine and Arctic Skuas from high northern latitudes—with an ever-present population of Silver Gulls. Doubtless the Gulls are drawn from breeding grounds in south-eastern Australia, probably as far south as southern Victoria; in fact, banded Silver Gulls from Altona, Victoria, have been recorded from a rubbish-tip within a few miles of Malabar.

My thanks to A. R. McGill and E. S. Hoskin for field notes which have been incorporated in this paper.

Notes on Young Black Bitterns

By A. F. D'OMBRAIN, West Maitland, N.S.W.

On December 11, 1954, I was rowing on the Paterson River opposite Tocal, when I heard a bird call which at first I took to be that of a pigeon. I listened carefully and then realized it was too loud for a pigeon.

Stopping the boat, I let it drift and soon found that the call was coming from a willow tree about a hundred yards upstream. It was a loud, very pronounced 'w-h-o-o-o-o-o'. After a pause of about 15 seconds the call would be heard again, then far in the distance downstream I heard a faint answering call.

I said to a friend with me that I suspected a Bittern, so rowing quietly down to the willow we let the dinghy drift into the willows. As we drew abreast of the tree, the call ceased. Suddenly a Bittern burst out of the foliage a few feet above the water, and on forcing my way in I found the nest of what I took to be the Black or Yellow-necked Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*). There were three eggs in the nest which was composed of sticks, and it was only about five feet above the water.

The next day I returned and made my way quietly down to the nest. Both birds were there, one standing erect and rigid under the tree at the water's edge and the other lying just as stiffly across the nest. They both flew away, and I lost no time in setting up the camera. It was a very hot windy day with clouds obscuring the sun—a most unpleasant and undesirable day to take colour photographs.

After securing the camera to a limb with a cramp and a universal joint fixture, I ran a long thread back to the bank and hid in some long grass. I could just see the nest but did not have a good view of the approaches from the water.

After ten minutes I thought I heard a call of the White-eared Honeyeater, but it was very much quieter and only repeated twice. Then I saw the Bittern creeping very stiff-leggedly along the horizontal limbs to the nest. Giving it time to settle down, I pulled hard on the string but could not hear any click, nor did the bird move. I was sure something was amiss, so got up and made my way quietly to the nest. The bird flew away, and I found that the string had become fouled in the camera and the shutter had not worked.

I re-set it and made my way back to my hide amongst the flies and heat in the grass.

After another ten minutes or so I again heard the strange honeyeater-like call and then a long drawn-out and almost inaudible single whistle. It was almost a long, quiet hiss. Then the Bittern again walked up the limb and this time I was lucky to get what I hope may be a good picture. I made one more exposure, and this time the bird made the same sibilant call, lasting about two seconds.

My son took a snap of the nest and eggs and we left as I did not wish to frighten the birds.

On January 7 I visited the nest on my return from my holidays, hoping to obtain some photographs of the birds feeding the young. What was my surprise when I went to the tree to see the three young birds all standing up stiff, rigid, and blending in extremely well with the foliage of the tree. They were well feathered and two were at the end of the limbs where the nest had been, and the third was very much nearer the shore. There was no sign whatever of the nest and I cannot account for its disappearance. Could the birds have destroyed it or could the wind have blown it away from the two limbs across which the platform of twigs had been laid?

I felt like laughing out loud at the odd-looking trio as they stood there. They were all breast-on to me, but I could see their eyes almost squinting at me and giving the impression that they possessed binocular vision.

With difficulty I made my way out to the first bird, which did not flinch or move in any way. I carefully adjusted the camera and made the last exposure I had in the camera on Ektachrome. Conditions were not good, as it was afternoon sun and cloud was intermittently drifting across the sun. I changed the film and took some more pictures. All this time the bird did not move, but stood, bow-legged, its great knobby knee-joints looking very incongruous, supporting a body that had a 'halo' of feathers protruding from the neck to the head.

I reached out my hand and broke twigs away to within one foot of his face but all the bird did was to squint more violently at me, all the time with beak held stiffly vertical.

My moving about at last disturbed one of the others which turned and very delicately jumped a few feet into the river. It sunk, but came up again and made its way very slowly through the mass of willow leaves and stems in the water. Then I tried to detract the attention of the first bird by holding the camera to one side of its face. This was successful, and it turned its head and then also walked into mid-air to land rather undignifiedly belly-first from about six feet up, into the water. I watched its efforts to swim particularly. Its body was mostly under the water but it kept its head and neck straight out along the surface of the water and by means of a very crude dog paddle, progressed extremely

slowly, but surely, to the mass of willow leaves and stems. Here it struggled through, and instead of hiding, made on out into open water and eventually reached another willow and disappeared amongst the leaves on the water's edge.

The third bird I caught with the camera before it also took the plunge, and slowly dog paddled its way after the other. No sight of either of the parents was had.

The birds must have hatched a day or so after I took the first pictures, for they were very nearly full grown and had advanced feathers, though I doubt if they would be ready to fly. The neck was mottled, and the rest of the plumage was a brownish colour, lacking the dark plumage of the back and back of the head so prominent on the adult birds. At no time did they utter a sound, but depended on their protective coloration and immobility to deceive me.

Straited Field-Wren near Milton, N.S.W.

By C. P. HUMPHRIES, Ulladulla, N.S.W.

In June 1953, I decided to investigate the country lying west of Conjola, some 12 miles north of Milton on the Prince's Highway, south-eastern New South Wales. Here a bush road leads to a forestry look-out tower from which, on a clear day, splendid views may be had of the coast, and of the rugged country north, south and west, up to 30 miles distant. At the top of the range, which is generally about 1,600 feet above sea level, the heavily-timbered slopes and gorges give way to patches of forest and a lighter growth of rather stunted, wind-blown trees, heathlands, and extensive areas of a swampy nature, often referred to as 'button-grass plains'. The road continues through similar mixed country until it reaches the Tomerong-Nerriga road, a total distance of about 13 miles.

My first impressions of the open swampy areas were that here I might find a bird I had long wished to observe, namely the Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*). I did see the bird eventually, but not on that particular trip. I had not walked far from the car, when a small bird flew from the grass to the top of a low shrub. It was 'new' to me and on checking my description—pronounced striations on a base of greenish-yellow—against available literature on my return home I realized that it was a Striated Field-Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*).

Subsequently several visits were made to the locality and also to the country lying to the west, towards the headwaters of the Clyde River. On one occasion some fourteen birds were seen in the space of a couple of hours. On November 7, 1953, when in company with W. Lane of Sydney, we found a well-concealed nest, containing three eggs, in thick grass at the base of a small bush.

Later, on January 1, 1954, a party comprising K. A. Hindwood, W. Lane, Ellis McNamara, Keith Egan, my son Keith,