

On re-visiting the lagoons already commented upon, I found only the breeding birds in attendance, the others apparently having moved to the main colony.

From these observations I am led to believe that this is perhaps the largest single breeding area of this species in Tasmania, Grimes Lagoon being the centre, with odd pairs of birds breeding on smaller adjacent lagoons.

Stray Feathers

White Phase in Tree-creepers.—About four years ago my attention was drawn to a pure white tree-creeper in company with a number of Brown Tree-creepers (*Climacteris picumnus*). Anticipating that it would be an albino I was surprised to find that its eyes were of a normal colour, and its behaviour in all respects identical with that of the other birds. In spring of 1953 it found a mate and the pair (brown and white) kept within the bounds of a territory of about two acres of mallee timber, being the eastern end of an area of mallee covering about ten acres. The area is bounded on three sides by open country and the mallee on the western side is occupied by other Brown Tree-creepers. The pair would not encroach on their neighbour's territory nor would they go quite to the margin of the open country.

I was unable to visit the locality for a time and did not locate the nest. On my next visit there were three white tree-creepers and a Brown together, which indicated that the pair produced two white young in the 1953 nesting season. The four remained together until the spring of 1954, when two of the white birds disappeared. The others, probably the original pair, have remained together and are still in the same territory, but neither in the 1954 nor 1955 breeding season have any more white birds appeared. However, in September of this year (1955) a white tree-creeper was found in a spot about two miles away and it is natural to suppose that this is one of the 1953 family. The third white bird has not yet been located and it is most likely that it has fallen a victim to some predator.

I have been told by local residents that there was a white tree-creeper in the same area about thirteen years ago and that it remained for several years. The break of five or six years before the reappearance of a white bird and the fact that there are at least two in the locality at present does seem to indicate that there may be a white phase in *Climacteris picumnus* similar to that which is found in the Reef-Heron.

An attempt will be made to keep these birds under closer observation, particularly during the next breeding season, and I hope to be in a position to supply more detailed information about them at a later date.—REV. K. SHRADER, Birchip, Vic., 12/12/55.

Bird Behaviour.—On December 4, 1955, when returning up the Wainui-O-Mata Valley, the car was stopped while we looked at a pair of Pukekos very close to the road. However, the quick flight of a native Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*) hawking for sand-flies above a weed-filled pool of stagnant water caught my eye as it did not rest for a few minutes. Soon it flew to the top of a fence-post close to the car.

The Pipit faced us, showing an almost pure white underside with only a few brownish markings on its chest. The white band around its head also stood out prominently, in marked contrast to the dull-coloured heads of the Skylarks (*Alda arvensis*) seen only a few minutes earlier near the Wainui River lagoon.

After flitting its tail for a while, the Pipit glided from the post to the road in front of the car and was seen to pick up some very small stones. The bird eyed the car in silence for a moment, then ran alongside and flitted up to a post where it again faced the car and slowly flitted its tail in silence. The Pipit appeared to be listening intently, and, reassured, it flew on to a piece of dead gorse just a few feet from the car, at the top of a bank on the side of the road, and disappeared into a hole in the grass. About every ten seconds it came to the opening, in full view, waited again in a listening attitude, and disappeared for several minutes after five appearances.

During the next half hour, some twelve cars passed. The Pipit could hear the cars a considerable distance away and its appearance always coincided with a car coming around a far bend in the road. It would wait until the car was within about fifty yards, then flit over to the top of a fence-post, on the other side of the road. After the car had passed, it dropped to the road, ran alongside our car and flew to the post above the nest or directly on to the small dead stalk of gorse just by the hole in the grass.

The nest, with its three eggs, was placed in a well-lined cup-shaped depression, at the end of a nine-inch tunnel in the tall Italian rye-grass which formed an almost impenetrable waterproof hood over the nest and entrance. As the opening was located directly above a three-foot clay bank on the east side of the road the chances of a rat or stoat finding the nest would be minimized.

The main points in behaviour were—

- (a) complete absence of fear and no notice taken of a stationary car, although it almost obscured the nest;
- (b) acute hearing;
- (c) strategic placing of the nest above water, near food supply, and relatively safe from predators.

—R. V. ROBERTS, Highland Park, Wellington, N.Z., 7/12/55.

White-fronted Tern.—We have one record of this species (*Sterna striata*) from Portland (*Emu*, vol. 54, p. 119), and now Miss E. Blythe has added another. This latest find was picked up by Miss Blythe on the Lighthouse cliff, Portland, on September 10, 1955, and sent to the National Museum. Mr. Allan McEvey has supplied me with the following particulars about the bird.

Partly feathered, dried, beach-washed. Measurements: Culmen, 37.5 mm.; tarsi, 19.5 mm.; depth of bill through region of nares, 8 mm.; bill black, finely tipped light upper and lower mandible; forehead and crown partly feathered, small light-coloured patch above base of bill and for short distance on the sides, remainder of forehead and crown feathers black, base of the small feathers white.

The crown feathers suggest that the full head plumage would have approximated that of adult breeding plumage as figured by Cayley, lower figure, plate 19, *Emu*, vol. 45.

Another Museum specimen B.2573, New Zealand, shows the breeding plumage and coloration of wing and tail is almost identical with that in the present specimen, reg. no. B.6237.—NOEL LEARMONTH, Portland, Vic., 15/2/56.

The Mangrove Warbler—Extension in Range.—The southern limit in the range of the Mangrove Warbler (*Gerygone cantator*) has been recorded as Macksville, New South Wales, some 250 miles north of Sydney. The occurrence and nesting of the species in that district was discussed in detail in 1946 (*Emu*, vol. 45, Apl. 1946, pp. 311-14, pl. 31), the basic field observations being by M. T. Goddard.

The known southern range limit of the Mangrove Warbler can now be stated as Harrington, eighty miles south of Macksville. Another district where it has also been observed in recent years is Port Macquarie, which place lies between Macksville and Harrington.

Port Macquarie localities are—head of bay near mouth of Limeburner's Creek, old nest found October, 1952 (E. L. Hyem); Settlement Point, nesting, 1954 (E. L. Hyem); several birds seen mid-May, 1955 (E. O. Edwards); two pairs observed, November, 1955 (C. P. Humphries and K. A. Hindwood); between Fernbank Creek school and village and the punt crossing, mid-May, 1955 (E. O. Edwards).

The presence of the species in May (winter) as noted by Edwards is of interest, indicating, as it does, that some birds at least are more or less stationary. Goddard was of the opinion that most of the birds left the Macksville district during March and April, though he thought that a few might remain throughout the autumn and winter months.

Having in mind the above records, one of us (McGill) decided to investigate the mangroves near the mouth of the Manning River at Harrington when camping in that locality in late December 1955. A mangrove-fringed island, about a

mile long and a few hundred yards wide, lies at the mouth of the river. It is connected to the northern shore by a break-water. The mangroves are on that side of the island opposite the main river channel and in places are more than a hundred yards in width. Elsewhere the lower course of the river is fringed by scattered mangroves. The island was explored on December 29, 1955, and three Mangrove Warblers were noted; all were in good song.

Harrington, which is the known southern limit of distribution, is about 170 miles north of Sydney. Between those two places there are extensive areas of mangroves, especially at Port Stephens and near the mouth of the Hunter River at Newcastle. It is possible that the Mangrove Warbler is extending its range and that it will eventually be found in suitable habitats south of Harrington. It is a small and unobtrusive bird in the mangroves, and its call, which has the same 'quality' as the more widely-distributed White-throated Warbler (*G. olivacea*) could easily pass unnoticed. Close investigation, by experienced observers, of mangrove forests south of Harrington is desirable in view of the above 'new' locality records.—K. A. HINDWOOD and A. R. MCGILL, Sydney, N.S.W., 15/1/56.

Breeding of the House Sparrow away from Man in New Zealand.—Hobbs (1955) reported the nesting of the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in open grazing country ten miles, and probably more, from human settlement, in southern New South Wales. This occurrence was claimed as the first definite record of this species breeding away from human habitation.

The diversity of habitats occupied by the Sparrow in New Zealand and its wide distribution strike an ornithologist coming from the European range of this species. Also New Zealand provides several records of the Sparrow's establishment on uninhabited outlying islands, and these have been known for some time and have been listed by Williams (1953) and Oliver (1955, pp. 630-31). Turbott and Bull (1954) confirmed that the Sparrow is still present on Great Island, Three Kings.

An interesting new record of recent self-introduction and permanent establishment of the House Sparrow on an outlying island was provided by the 1947 and 1949 expeditions of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research to White Island in the Bay of Plenty. This island, an active volcano, is thirty-two miles distant from the mainland. There was a workers' camp for the maintenance of sulphur works from the end of last century until a catastrophic eruption in 1914. The island was practically unmodified by human occupation, and has remained uninhabited since the eruption. The Sparrow is not included in bird lists compiled by Oliver (1913) in 1912 and Bernard Sladden (*in litt.*) between 1925

and 1930. In January 1947 and November 1949 nests of this species were found on cliffs, and small flocks were noted both on the rocky coast and along a track in the Pohutukawa (*Metrosideros tomentosa*) forest which covers the northern and north-western slopes of the island. It would appear that the self-introduction of the Sparrow to White Island occurred recently, after the abandonment of the camp.

The successful establishment of the Sparrow on White Island is of some interest because of the prevailing ecological conditions. The plant cover is notable for the paucity of constituent species and its recent establishment. There are about twelve vascular plant species on the island; only one (*Metrosideros tomentosa*) is common and forms most of the forest and scrub which is thought to be not more than one hundred years old. The land birds proper comprise in addition to the Sparrow twelve species of which six are native, all being hardy, pioneering species.—KAZIMIERZ WODZICKI, Animal Ecology Section, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Wellington, N.Z., 11/2/56.

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Wrens in South-western New South Wales.—Austin (*The Emu*, vol. 56, p. 80) has drawn attention to the presence of the Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) on the Murray in extreme north-west Victoria and has commented that Cayley did not extend the range of the Blue Wren to this area in his book, *Fairy Wrens of Australia*. No doubt the distribution maps in this book were intended as a rough guide only, but, nevertheless, as it is the standard work on the genus *Malurus*, it is well to publicize any major discrepancy or variation.

The range of the Blue Wren is given as a strip following the south-east Australian coastline, some 250 miles wide throughout New South Wales, narrowing in Victoria and eventually petering out in South Australia. The western limit on the Murray is shown to pass approximately through Tocumwal. In fact the Blue Wren ranges much more to the west and north than that.

I have seen it on the Murray beyond Barham and it occurs at Mystic Park, Victoria ('World Bird Day Counts, 1954'). It is common in places along the Edwards River and adjacent creeks to at least as far as Moulamein and is particularly common in the country between that town and Barham. On the Billabong Creek it occurs, to my knowledge, at Wanganella and Budyulumbulah. On the Murrumbidgee, although

I did not find it at Maude, it is fairly common at Balranald, and in the near vicinity of that town four species of *Malurus* may be seen in close proximity.

It is noticeable that the Blue Wren does not occur at any great distance from the river frontages and even there selects only those spots where reeds, lignum or blue-bush (*Chenopodium*) give thick cover under a canopy of trees, usually red gum. In view of Austin's record at Ned's Corner, it is reasonable to assume that this species extends right along the Murray frontage at suitable spots and for considerable distances up the various tributaries. It would be of interest to know how far along the Murrumbidgee it extends and whether it is on the Lachlan.

Cayley's range of the Blue-and-white Wren (*Malurus leuconotus*) in this part of New South Wales, should also be extended considerably to the south and east. It is abundant right from eastern limit as now defined to well to the east of Jerilderie. It is confined, of course, to the open plains, and thicker timber restricts any great extension to the south. However, it occurs some miles south of Deniliquin where cleared land has become overgrown with lignum and in blue-bush growing around some swamps.—JOHN N. HOBBS, Finley, N.S.W., 13/3/56.

Grey-tailed Tattler at Laverton Saltworks.—At the Laverton Saltworks, on the afternoon of January 30, 1956, a flock of waders was flushed, the identity of which was not immediately apparent. The place of descent was noted, and by crawling along a bank under shelter of the samphire growth, a position was reached only fifteen feet from the birds, which numbered twelve. They were then identified as Grey-tailed Tattlers (*Heteroscelus brevipes*). The birds were resting on the mud, many standing on one leg, and with heads sunk on to their breasts; every few moments one would raise its head and stretch the neck to its fullest extent, with a bobbing motion, apparently the better to observe its surroundings. This is the first record of the Grey-tailed Tattler in the Laverton Saltworks area, and also the largest number yet sighted in Victoria.—A. J. and B. SALTER, Black Rock, Vic., 19/2/56.

Crested Bellbird's Call.—I would like to record the following observation made during a visit to Central Australia a few weeks ago. After the usual difficulty, I flushed a pair of Crested Bellbirds in an area of mulga country about forty miles north-west of Alice Springs. They settled in forty-foot high branches of a dying leafless tree and continued calling. With binoculars I was able clearly to observe the throat movements of the call which I am convinced, on this occasion at least, was a joint effort, the female bird doing the ventriloquial first part of the call with the male completing the final two guttural notes. The opportunity for observation

was, with this species, most unusual and the movement of the bill, etc., in calling, unmistakable.—G. E. HALE, Adelaide, S.A., 15/2/56.

Obituary

JANE ADA FLETCHER

Miss J. A. Fletcher, who joined the Union at its foundation in 1901, died at her home at Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania, on April 15 this year, after an illness lasting more than a year. She was an outstanding observer of birds, and past numbers of *The Emu* contain many of her papers on Tasmanian birds. She had been an honorary member of the Union for some years.

The daughter of Price Fletcher, one time editor of *The Queenslander* and a naturalist, Miss Fletcher was born at Penshurst, Victoria, and went to school in Brisbane. While still a young woman she came with her family to Tasmania and settled at Wilmot, where her father died. She became a school mistress and was in charge of schools at Wilmot, Cleveland, and Springfield, and several of her papers in *The Emu* refer to the bird life of those particular districts. She was fond of the crakes and rails and wrote much about them, but all birds interested her, and her sisters with whom she lived, and she has left some fascinating descriptions of excursions to swamps and marshes in search of uncommon species. She was first to record the *Cisticola* in Tasmania and found it breeding in the Springfield district, and she also recorded at Eaglehawk Neck the only occurrence in Tasmania of *Pygoscelis papua*, the Gentoo Penguin.

As well as being fond of birds, she was also interested in historical matters, having produced a useful guide book to the history of former penal stations on Tasman Peninsula. She also wrote books for children, one of which, *Stories from Nature* (1915), reflected particularly her wide knowledge of Tasmanian natural history. Stories based on the lives of the extinct Tasmanian aborigines came from her pen as well.

Living in retirement at Eaglehawk Neck, she cultivated a garden that became celebrated for the number of birds it attracted. Many were tame enough to feed from the hand. Quails and rails were seen in this garden, which always had ample cover for shy birds and a wealth of nectar-bearing flowers for others.

She was interested in the Youth Hostel Movement and allowed part of her cottage to be used as a hostel.

She will be remembered for her kindness and generosity, one of her last acts being to provide, at a local guesthouse, a formal luncheon for between forty and fifty members of the Union during the annual meeting in October, 1955, although, on account of the first stages of her fatal illness, she herself was unable to attend.—M.S.R.S.