

## A Further Record of the Pectoral Sandpiper in South-western New South Wales and Some Wader Notes

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On March 23, 1958, a pair of Pectoral Sandpipers (*Erolia melanotos*) was under observation at a small swamp four miles east of Finley, New South Wales. Although a considerable time was spent watching the birds and the identification was unchallengeable, it was considered that as only two specimens of this species had been previously taken in Australia, it would be advisable to obtain one of the birds. The next day one of the pair was obtained and forwarded in the flesh to K. A. Hindwood, who kindly conveyed it to the Australian Museum, where it is now in the reference collection, specimen no. 0.39702. The bird, a female, weighed 2 ounces, and the stomach contained comminuted insect remains, too small to identify but mostly chitinous in nature, presumably from water beetles, etc., also grains of fine sand. The location of this record is about 70 miles south-east of the site of my earlier record at Wanganella (*Emu*, vol. 58, p. 56). The remaining bird of the pair was still at the spot on March 30.

Finley is an area of irrigated pastures devoted to the raising of fat lambs. Paddocks are periodically flooded to a depth of several inches, but the water soon drains away after each irrigation. However, in places, such as slight depressions or against channel banks, the water is liable to remain for a period. It was such a spot that formed the habitat favoured by this pair of Pectoral Sandpipers. Close-cropped grass was covered with water to a maximum depth of two inches. Overseas publications stress this as a typical habitat of the species and it is possible that if such places were regularly watched in Australia, it would be found that this sandpiper is a more common visitor than supposed.

Drawing on my double experience of the species, I would say it is reasonably easy to identify in the field, and I here outline the chief points of identification and the means of distinguishing it from the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Erolia acuminata*). The pair of birds referred to were attaining breeding plumage and differed somewhat from the December bird, so that certain earlier notes require amendment.

The main point is the striated gorget terminating in an abrupt and clear-cut line from the remaining underparts which are pure white. Apparently in breeding plumage a few dark streaks are present on the upper flanks, but I could only see these at close range and they in no way compare with the heavier streaking of *acuminata*: neither does the white of the underparts take on the buffish wash of *acumi-*

*nata*. The pair watched frequently circled the swamp at about 200 feet when disturbed, and, even at that height, the demarcation was easily visible with glasses and the whiteness of the abdomen was easily apparent to the naked eye. Although the upper parts tend to be darker and more contrasted in coloration, even having a striped effect, I do not now consider this a definite identification point. In both of the present pair I noticed the colour and striations of the gorget extended around the neck and on to the lower nape, so that when the birds fed towards me there appeared to be a greyish wedge into the brown of the back. The crown appears black with but the slightest suspicion of russet, and is most distinct from the reddish crown of *acuminata*. The eye-stripe is indistinct and practically indiscernible before the eye. The legs are relatively bright yellow. I noted the colour of the specimen's legs as clay-yellow. There can be no fear of confusion with the slight yellowish tinge sometimes shown by *acuminata*. Each of the present pair had a bill coloured distinctly in the modern trend, that is 'two-tone'. The basal half was yellow, a little brighter than the leg-colour; the remainder was dark brown. It should be noted that on receipt of the bird in Sydney the yellow of the bill had faded to light brown, probably similar to the reddish-brown of the bird seen in December. The yellow is obviously a transitory coloration assumed in breeding plumage only. Owing to the great variation of size in *acuminata*, I do not think size may be used as an identification point. Both of the Finley birds were distinctly smaller than a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper present at the same swamp. However, *melanotos* has a habit of assuming a very stretched appearance when at all wary. It stands and walks fully upright, neck stretched to the full extent. In such posture it appears most slender and totally different from *acuminata*. The call note is a double 'trrit, trrit', more clearly enunciated and harder in tone than that of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. I doubt if anyone with an ear for call-notes could confuse it with the call of that bird.

A negative point of identification is that, on both occasions I have seen *melanotos*, there have been *acuminata* at the same place, yet the two have not associated together; they have not fed together and neither have they joined up in flight after being flushed.

The opportunity is here taken to bring up to date my previous notes on waders seen in the south-west corner of New South Wales.

*Charadrius bicinctus*. Double-banded Dotterel.

Two at Fletcher's Lake, Dareton, on April 7, 1958, and one at the same spot on April 27, presumably one of the original birds. On April 2, 1958, there were five at a salt lake near Beverford, Victoria.

*Tringa nebularia*. Greenshank.

Two birds were seen at various dates between December 17, 1957, and March 17, 1958, at the same spot on the Cocketgedong Creek, Jerilderie. On February 17, 1958, there was a flock of sixteen birds at a swamp on Moorna Station, west of Wentworth (recorded in *Emu*, vol. 58, p. 291) and a flock of sixteen was at the same spot on April 8, 1958. These records could probably indicate that where conditions are suitable, northern waders will summer inland and are not necessarily just passing migratory visitors when seen away from the coast.

*Erolia ferruginea*. Curlew-Sandpiper.

Two birds, one in full breeding plumage, at Yanga Lake, Balranald, on May 6, 1958. There were seven at Lake Boga, Victoria, on April 2, 1958.

*Erolia ruficollis*. Red-necked Stint.

At various dates in April, 1958, and up to May 4, parties of up to 50 birds were at Fletcher's Lake, Dareton. Undoubtedly passage was continuous through this area at the time, as the percentage of birds in breeding plumage varied considerably at each visit. Twelve at Yanga Lake, Balranald, on May 6, 1958.

*Erolia acuminata*. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

On May 4, 1958, there were at least forty still at Fletcher's Lake, Dareton. This is apparently a late date for such large numbers to be found so far south.

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**Note on Australian Egg of the Australian Snipe.**—Recently I interviewed a shooter who was reported to have an egg of a 'Jack Snipe' (*Gallinago hardwickii*) taken near Swan Hill. During the winter of 1956 he shot many snipe and in cleaning birds for the table found in one an egg 'ready for laying'. Since there was often discussion amongst shooters as to whether the Jack Snipe bred in Australia, he kept the egg on a sideboard as proof to visitors. Unfortunately, it was accidentally smashed before my arrival. He described it as about the size of a Starling's egg and in colour much like that of a Plover. He noticed no other eggs of any size in the bird. He was hazy as to the date but suggested it was July or August, though he admitted it may have been later. We have recorded the Snipe near Swan Hill in September.

I was on the point of submitting these notes to the Editor, thinking the occurrence unique, when my attention was drawn to the following. In *The Emu*, vol. XII, part 2, October 1912, page 119, A. C. Stone writes of *Gallinago australis* (= *G. hardwickii*)—"Dr. Mitchell, late of Swan Hill, once found a fully-developed egg in a bird he dissected".—V. T. LOWE, Mystic Park, Vic., 27/7/58.