

## SHORT NOTES

### Possible Anting by the Black-backed Butcherbird

On 27 November 1965 at Taurama Barracks, Port Moresby, I noticed a Black-backed Butcherbird *Cracticus mentalis* on bare earth, 4 m from a busy thoroughfare, taking no notice of the traffic. It was lying almost prone with its neck outstretched and wings extended on the ground. The feathers were ruffled, and the bird lay motionless. After about three minutes it was disturbed and flew away. On the spot left by the bird there were two or three meat ants, but no signs of an ants' nest. One presumes that the bird was anting because it would probably not have chosen such a frequented place merely for sun-bathing. Possibly the bird had acquired the ants at a nest and flew to another place for anting.

MAJOR H. L. BELL, 21 Jagara St., Aranda, ACT  
2164.

6 February 1969.

### The Rufous Owl in New Guinea

The Rufous Owl *Ninox rufa* is rare in New Guinea and has not often been found, though probably widespread in lowland rain-forest, judging from the few known specimens. There are no field notes and no breeding record.

On 14 November 1967, while collecting on the Goldie River near Port Moresby, I was attracted by the noise from many birds which I found were mobbing one of these owls. The owl was collected, but being only superficially wounded it recovered from its wound and lived for several months in captivity. It died in the end from unknown causes and was found to be a female. The skin is in the Papua-New Guinea Museum at Port Moresby, No. B377.

During the first night of captivity the bird uttered several times a quiet 'hoo-hoo', but thereafter never called. When kept in a box or in a small cage during the first few days, it collapsed and fell to the ground, as though feigning death, on several occasions when it was approached; but never did this after it had been released into an aviary. When handled it only used its claws for defence. It would also rattle its beak, puff out its feathers, and slightly lift the wings, perhaps as an aggressive display.

When collected it was being mobbed by a remarkable assembly of birds which had not been seen in the area previously in any numbers, and some which are rarely seen except in pairs. The mobbing party consisted of nine Drongos *Dicrurus hottentotus*, one Green Manucode *Manucodia chalybatus*,

nine Black Manucodes *M. ater*, four Black-headed Butcherbirds *Cracticus cassicus*, six or eight Black Butcherbirds *C. quoyi*, four Rusty Pitohuis *Pitohui ferrugineus*, eight Raggiana Birds-of-Paradise *Paradisaea raggiana* and at least two Helmeted Friarbirds *Philemon novaeguineae*. Manucodes and Pitohuis were not at all aggressive towards the owl, nor were the Birds-of-Paradise and the Helmeted Friarbirds. The Black Butcherbirds, which had a nest nearby with young, perched about 2.5 m from the owl, and called continually, but the Black-headed Butcherbirds perched even closer, flapped their wings and called. The Drongos darted at the owl, calling as they flew past. Normally the area seemed to be sparsely populated with birds.

MAJOR H. L. BELL, 21 Jagara St., Aranda, ACT  
2164.

6 February 1969.

### Extension of altitudinal range of the Black-and-red Honeyeater

The Black-and-red Honeyeater *Myzomela rosenbergii* ranges over New Guinea and Goodenough Island at altitudes from 1,200 to 3,500 m, where it is common and conspicuous, particularly in secondary growth. Rand (1942, Bull. Am. Mus. nat. His. 79) recorded it at 4,000 m, above the timber line, on the Snow Mts in West Irian. On 7 November 1967 at Moroka in the Owen Stanley foothills I collected one of several adult males in a large party of honeyeaters and lorikeets feeding in a flowering tree at 600 m in primary oak-forest. It measured (mm): wing 62, tail 38, culmen 19, slightly smaller than average specimens. The skin is in the Papua-New Guinea Museum.

MAJOR H. L. BELL, 21 Jagara St., Aranda, ACT  
2164.

15 February 1969.

### Habitat of the Yellow-billed Kingfisher

Cayley (1959, What Bird is That?) includes the Yellow-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon torotoro* in the mangrove-frequenting species, and says that the New Guinea form is a mangrove-dweller, while the Cape York form usually inhabits scrub and open forest. In New Guinea it is widespread in the lowlands and on many islands up to 500 m and occasionally higher. It remains still when approached, is difficult to locate, and is rarely seen, but is often

heard. It inhabits the lower-storey of the rain-forest and perhaps prefers dense secondary growth where it remains inside the canopy. It is usually caught when mist-netting, always from 1.25 to 2 m from the ground in dense undergrowth. Retraps show that the birds stay in the same places for a long time. Habitat data for specimens collected during various expeditions of the American Museum of Natural History confirm that it never occurs in savanna or mangroves. Rand and Gilliard (1967, Handbook of New Guinea birds) recognize its correct habitat.

MAJOR H. L. BELL, 21 Jagara St., Aranda, ACT  
2164.

15 February 1969.

#### Distribution of the Blue-faced Parrot-Finch

The Blue-faced Parrot Finch *Erythura trichroa* ranges from Celebes to New Guinea, Micronesia, the Bismarck Archipelago, the Solomon Islands, New Hebrides, the Loyalty Islands and even to north-eastern Queensland, where Marshall (1947, Emu 48: 305) thought it to be a vestigial survivor, but Hindwood (1948, Emu 48: 53) considered it a recent colonist. On islands it is found down to sea-level, but on New Guinea it was believed to occur only between 800 and 3,000 m, where it is abundant in the lower-storey of the forest and particularly in secondary growth. In lowlands it was unknown till found on Mt Lawes, near Port Moresby, at 450 m, where the habitat is chiefly savanna with patches of rain-forest (New Guinea Bird Soc. Newsletter, 18 April 1967). On 27 July 1967 an individual was caught in a mistnet at Brown River, 45 km from Port Moresby, inside dense rain-forest along Iomari Creek and inside a tangle of bamboo and lawyer vine. It was dull-plumaged, may have been a female, and showed obvious signs of moult. It measured (mm): wing 61, tail 41, culmen 12.5, somewhat smaller than normal for the race *sigillifera* of New Guinea. It seems most unlikely that the species is resident in the lowlands because otherwise it should have been collected there more often, but it cannot be said whether the bird was vagrant from higher altitudes or from an island.

MAJOR H. L. BELL, 21 Jagara St., Aranda, ACT  
2164.

15 February 1969.

#### White-capped Noddy, a specimen from New South Wales

On 8 February 1969 a noddy, identified by Mr D. Sawyer as the White-capped *Anous minutus*, was observed dipping into foaming water near the outer rocks at Long Reef, 20 km north of Sydney. Without any specimens from the coastal waters of New South Wales the record was held in suspense. On 15 March

1969 when Mr J. Goddard was fishing about 10 km off Terrigal, 40 km north of Long Reef, a strange bird perched on his boat and then rested on his shoulder. Later in the day it was brought to Palm Beach where it died during the night. Next day I collected the bird which was a White-capped Noddy. Mr J. Disney, of the Australian Museum, where the skin now is (Reg. No. 0.43123), found it was a female approaching adult plumage and that its stomach was empty. Its weight, 63 gm, was only slightly more than half that of normal birds, which average about 120 gm (Ashmole 1962, Ibis 103b: 246).

The nearest breeding station of the White-capped Noddy to New South Wales is Norfolk Island about 1,450 km north-east of Terrigal. Stragglers have been recorded from Lord Howe Island, 725 km north-east of Sydney.

K. A. HINDWOOD, 105 Middle Harbour Rd, Lindfield,  
NSW 2070.

28 April 1969.

#### White-winged Triller breeding in north-western Tasmania

The White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii* is rarely observed in Tasmania. A male was shot at Kelso in mid-November 1912 (Littler, Emu 12: 278) and a single bird was seen, presumably at Devonport, on 11 November 1916 (Dove 1917, Emu 17: 46), since when Sharland (1958, Tasmanian Birds) states 'there appear to be no Tasmanian records'.

On 8 October 1968 we saw a female in mixed eucalypt and wattle at Pardoe near Devonport; on 15 October two males were in the same area. These birds were seen on several subsequent occasions and on 16 December a nest, with two eggs, was found in the fork of a horizontal branch of a gum tree about 6 m above the ground. One male returned and incubated but there was no sign of the second male. The last observations were made on 17 January 1969 when the two young were found to be almost ready to leave the nest. Photographs were taken by Mr A. Rettke. This is the first recorded breeding of the species in Tasmania.

Following a request in the local press, we have been told of probable trillers at Wynyard, Sisters Creek, Devonport and Ansons Bay. A male and a female were seen on King Island during October and November 1968 (R. H. Green pers. comm.).

D. PINNER, 151 George St., Devonport, Tas. 7310.  
L. A. BIRD, 28 The Esplanade, Devonport, Tas. 7310.  
11 May 1969.

#### Chinstrap Penguin in Tasmania

Early in January 1969 I heard that in the far south of the State Messrs T. Terry and A. Cross of the Hobart Walking Club had seen and photographed

PLATE 2

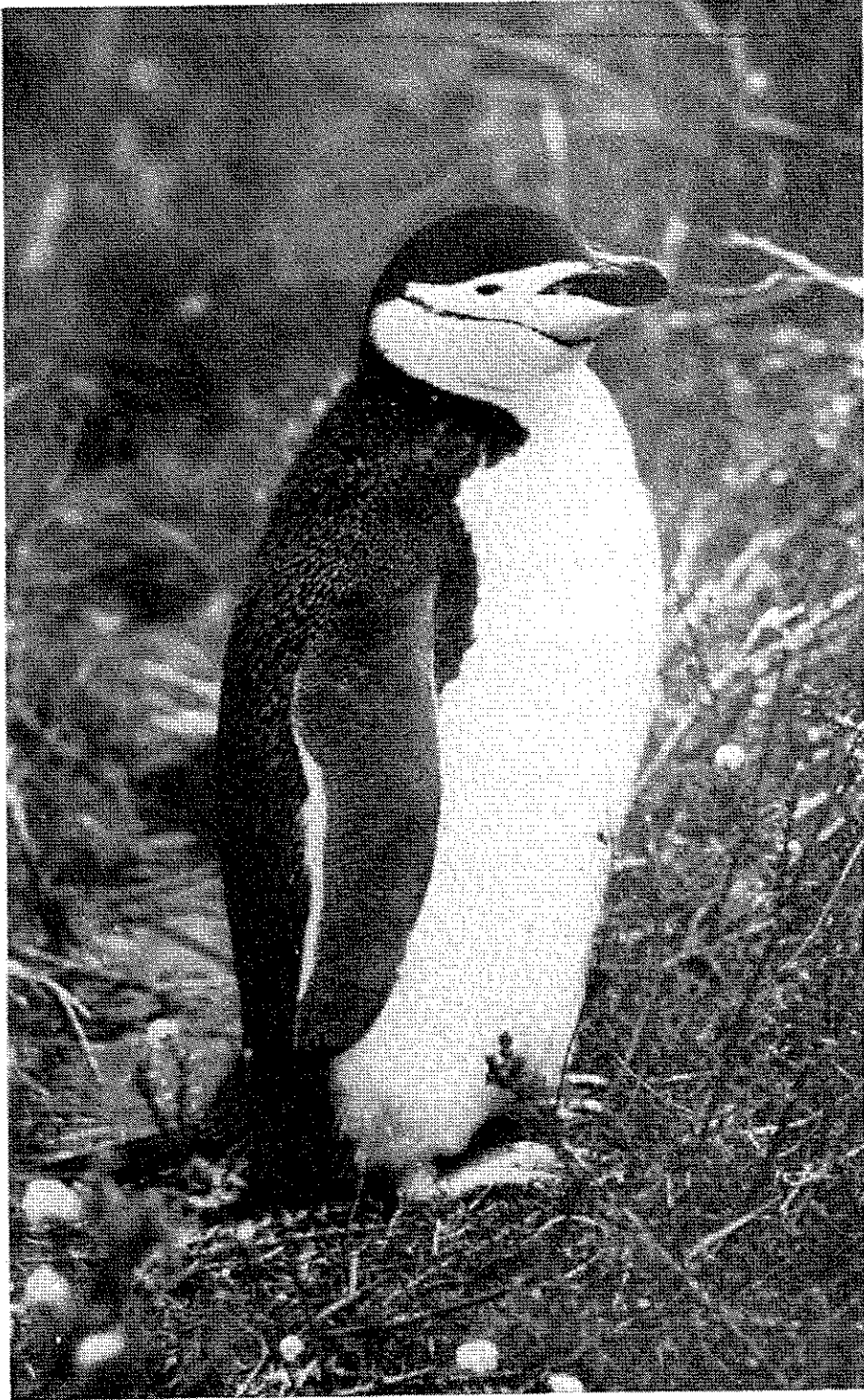


PLATE 2

Chinstrap Penguin, near South Cape, Tasmania.

Photo by A. Cross

a strange penguin, which had been identified by Mr D. Field, as a Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarctica*. Mr Cross gave me three colour transparencies from one of which Plate 2 has been made and the following description of the finding of this bird.

'The penguin was first sighted on the afternoon of 22nd November [1968] at the eastern end of the beach adjacent to South Cape Rivulet. It was standing on a sloping earth bank about five feet above the foreshore. We had not seen it when passing this spot about three hours earlier and it seems likely that it came ashore during this period. The weather at the time was heavily overcast with a rather gusty NW wind. The sea was rough with a heavy swell coming in from the SW. When approached, the bird moved its head to glance at us and shifted position slightly but showed no particular fear or concern at our presence.

'Next day we again sighted the penguin about one hundred yards from the first location. A track goes across a small headland here and the penguin had apparently followed this up a twenty-foot bank from the foreshore through a short section of bush and onto a button grass area. It was last seen standing on the track in this button grass section.

'We were in this area again three weeks later and found the bird's remains lying at approximately the same spot where we had last seen it. Most of the flesh had been devoured leaving the skull and bone and skin fragments.'

Towards the end of January 1969 Messrs D. Field and F. Steinhausen visited the area and gathered the skull and some bones, which have been deposited in the Tasmanian Museum.

This record appears to be the first known occurrence of the species in continental Australia, although there are several records from the Australian sector of Antarctica and adjacent islands (Ingham 1962, *Emu* 62: 126-127). W. B. Alexander (1955, *Birds of the Ocean*, 2nd ed.) indicates that the species belongs normally to the southern Atlantic Ocean, though the other records referred to above suggest that a considerable extension of range is in progress.

L. E. WALL, 63 Elphinstone Rd, N. Hobart, Tas.  
7000.

22 May 1969.

#### Courtship display of the Diamond Firetail

On 6 April 1969 near Glenmaggie Weir, south-eastern Gippsland, the writer and Mr F. Fehrer saw a courtship display by a pair of Diamond Firetails *Emblema guttata* which differed from the general display described by Immelmann (1965, *Australian Finches*: 33-34), and seems worth recording. No other observations on the display of this species in the wild could be found in the literature.

Two birds were first noted flying about at the end of a shallow inlet of the Glenmaggie reservoir, calling. After some time the bird which during the display took the role of the female landed on a dead branch about 15 m above the water. The second bird, which had been out of sight, then joined the first on the branch, carrying a stalk of seeding grass about 250 mm long in its bill. The stalk was held about 20 mm from the broken end, with the seed-head hanging straight down and reaching well below the perch on which the birds were sitting. The birds faced one another throughout the following display. The bird offering the token then started to bob up and down by alternately bending and straightening its legs, almost touching the perch with its bill, for at least a minute, still grasping the grass firmly. The other bird remained apparently indifferent to this display, and definitely avoided copulation afterwards when the male made three or four attempts to mount her. The presumed male dropped the grass before the first attempt, then turned so as to be perched alongside the female, and attempted to mount. The female hopped along the branch away from the male every time that he tried to alight on her back, and finally flew off with the male in pursuit. The male bird was very vocal throughout the display and during the final pursuit flight, while the female remained quiet during the entire display.

In contrast to Immelmann's account (*op. cit.*) in this display the male used dead, not green, grass of moderate length, although much longer green grass was available nearby. It did not seem to stretch its neck abnormally, and, though it puffed out its feathers, this did not seem to make it significantly more bulky. No begging postures were adopted before attempted copulation nor did the female approach the male as he performed his bobbing movements. Because the display noted here occurred rather late in the breeding season, the female may have been somewhat indifferent, but the attempts at copulation suggest that the male was in breeding condition and that the display was indeed courtship.

H. BESTE, 1 Willurah St, Forest Hill, Vic. 3131.  
26 June 1969.

#### Shearwater taking food on land

Although the Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* feeds on beached carcasses, other species of Procellariidae are not normally recorded taking food on land. In April 1966 I was on Cheyne Beach on the southern coast of Western Australia when shoals of the local 'salmon' were being netted and pulled ashore. Some fish were gutted on the beach, and a small group of Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* were feeding on the entrails. Fleshy-footed Shearwaters *Procellaria carneipes* were gliding low over

the waves well inshore, and I noticed that at times a few were moving closer inshore and flying over part of the beach near the water. As I watched, one glided low up the beach and ran in among the gulls with half-closed wings, running on the webs with the tibiotarsi of the legs well clear of the ground, aided no doubt by the momentum of the previous flight. It quickly snatched up a piece of the fish gut, swallowed it, and was off and out to sea again. During the season such fishing occurs regularly from this place, and I had the impression that the shearwaters expected to find food here.

C. J. O. HARRISON, *British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Rd, London SW7.*

12 June 1969.

#### Early record of the Night Parrot in New South Wales

In my book (1969, Australian Parrots: 293) I claimed that no references to the Night Parrot *Geopsittacus occidentalis* having been seen in western New South Wales can be traced to a particular locality. I have now found a record from that State.

Kershaw (1943, Victorian Nat. 59: 196) describes the finding of a nest among 'a kind of porcupine grass' on a salt-bush plain about 65 km from Oxley in August 1897 by a Mr W. Kelly. One of the parent birds was shot and presumably Kelly examined it. Furthermore, his comments on the parrots' habits leave little doubt that they were Night Parrots.

Wheeler (1967, Handlist of the Birds of Victoria: 77) and other recent authors have rejected early sight records from north-western Victoria. I have pointed out (*loc. cit.*) that there seems to be no justification for this because there were reported sightings from across the border in South Australia at about the same time. This record from south-western New South Wales is further evidence that Night Parrots occurred in the region at the turn of the century.

J. M. FORSHAW, *Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO, P.O. Box 109, Canberra City, ACT 2601.*  
30 June 1969.

#### The Red-backed Parrot in the Brisbane area

A small population of Red-backed Parrots *Psephotus haematonotus* has become established in the Brisbane area. The first sighting, without positive identification, was of four birds on 16 July 1956 by H. Bell (Queensland Branch Minutes, October 1957). It has also been recorded by Jack (1963, List of the Birds of Brisbane). In 1964 Mr G. Bennett and I.F. saw birds several times in the Nudgee area but the extent of the colony was not further investigated. In March 1969 N.J. saw a party of five in the

Nudgee area, daily for about a fortnight. On 29 March 1969 I.F. in company with Mr P. Slater saw thirteen birds at Cribb Island in the same general district as the previous sightings. Recently Mr L. Nielsen (*in litt.*) said that in the Jandowae area the Red-backed Parrot seemed to be increasing its range northward because several have appeared in areas where there was none previously.

Evidently the Red-backed Parrot is now resident in the Nudgee-Cribb Island area, but its status in other parts of Brisbane is unknown. The colony may be the result of an extension from the west or could perhaps have originated from aviary escapes.

N. JACK, *54 Cochrane St., Paddington, Q 4064.*

I. FIEN, *61 Highlands St, Wavell Heights, Q 4012.*  
14 July 1969.

#### First record of the Marsh Sandpiper in Tasmania

On 6 March 1969 at Scott's Lagoon on Flinders Island I saw a single Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* with a small flock of six Greenshanks *T. nebularia*.

The birds were first observed standing together at the water's edge and the Marsh Sandpiper was immediately conspicuous by its smaller size and more slender build than the Greenshanks, with a finer shorter bill, and more white about the face.

The birds were under observation for three minutes and the sighting was made through 8 x 30 binoculars. I managed to approach to about 30 m, and as I moved closer, the birds flushed and flew straight overhead giving an excellent view. Again the size difference between the Marsh Sandpiper and Greenshank was noted, and the legs of the former trailed conspicuously beyond the tail.

A detailed description of the bird and its sighting taken from my field note-book is as follows—

'11.45 at Scott's Lagoon, day fine and sunny, light north-west wind. Focusing on a group of waders in south-east corner of Lagoon noted all appeared to be Greenshanks but one smaller than others. It stood shorter than Greenshanks, head smaller, neck slim, bill finer and shorter, body and legs a little shorter. Bill dark, head and neck white, back of crown and hind neck finely speckled grey. Breast and abdomen white, mantle and secondaries grey flecked darker with some larger fawn markings, tail white tipped grey. Birds flushed on approach, smaller bird had white underwings and white rump extended well up back as with Greenshanks, dark legs projected beyond tail—quite noticeable. Birds flew overhead in line-abreast, smaller bird stood out well.'

Scott's Lagoon, 3 km east of Lady Barron, is fresh-water and a favourite haunt of waterbirds such as grebes, ducks and herons, but normally waders other than Spur-winged Plovers *Lobibyx novae-*

*hollandiae* do not occur. Greenshanks are usually found about the brackish lagoons of the eastern coast such as Logan's, South Chain, North Chain and Burnett's. However the birds at Scott's Lagoon had probably been disturbed from one of these other lagoons by duck shooters, the season having recently started and shooters being rather active. I failed to find the Marsh Sandpiper again on visits to Scott's Lagoon later in the month, and I could not find it in any other nearby wader haunt; so presumably it had moved on.

D. MILLEDGE, 60 Derwentwater Ave, Sandy Bay, Tas. 7005.  
26 July 1969.

#### Red-necked Avocet recorded at Westport, NZ

At 15:00 on 6 March 1968 I saw a Red-necked Avocet *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae* with four stilts on a mud flat opposite the Dulux Motel at Westport. This bird was observed for 15 minutes with 7 x 50 binoculars as a gentle rain apparently stimulated the avocet to dive, wash and preen. It then flew across a dike leading to the city dump and landed to feed in a muddy marsh. My wife, daughter and I drove to the dike road and watched this bird feed in a typical avocet-manner, accompanied by stilts, Bar-tailed Godwits, Grey Ducks and Oystercatchers. Rain fell during the night, and on the morning of 7 March as we left for Christchurch the avocet was seen again feeding in the muddy marsh. Cayley (1967, *What Bird Is That?*) mentions that this species is accidental in New Zealand. New Zealand

game biologists stated that avocets from Australia had not been reported for several years.

PROFESSOR C. F. YOCOM, *Humboldt State College, Arcata, California 95521, USA.*  
31 July 1969.

#### Second record of the Green Pygmy Goose in New South Wales

In October 1967, while observing waterfowl on Ball's Lagoon, Leeville, northern NSW, with Messrs E. McCulloch and H. Pope, I noticed a strange waterfowl. The following description is taken from my field note-book: 'The bird was cruising very slowly amongst waterlilies and had a dark-green head, back of neck, back and tail; white face, cheeks, throat and flanks; underparts mottled grey and brown. The bird was very difficult to flush, but when it did (it flew very low and only for 50 m) white patches at the base of the wing were very noticeable, while the rest of the plumage was dark-green. Being small with a distinctive goose-bill and 'horizontal' tail, it resembled a Pygmy Goose.' Being uncertain as to which species, I sent a detailed description of the bird to Dr H. J. Frith, CSIRO, Canberra. In his reply Dr Frith said that it was certainly a female Green Pygmy Goose *Nettapus pulchellus*, only the second record for New South Wales. The other was a bird shot about 12 years ago near Tucki, also northern NSW.

MISS M. SPINAZE, 115 Wyrallah Rd, Lismore, NSW 2480.  
31 October 1969.