

Correspondence.

THE CAPE BARREN GOOSE.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

SIRS,—Surely Mr. Armstrong is rather hasty in his remark (*Emu*, 1st April, p. 182):—"I entirely disagree with the opinion expressed by your correspondent, Mr. J. D. MacLaine, who, writing from Clarke Island in 1906, stated that the Cape Barren Goose was holding its own. He quoted someone as having seen a flock of 200 on Chalky. I don't think there are 200 Geese in the whole group."

To begin with, an ounce of positive evidence is worth a ton of the negative sort. Mr. MacLaine is an old resident of the islands, and his evidence is entitled to the greatest respect. Mr. Armstrong only spent 10 days altogether on the islands, which is utterly insufficient for such a sweeping generalization. He says that he expected to see lots of Geese "as it was the breeding season." And his visit took place in the middle of November! Surely Mr. Armstrong knows that this Goose commences to breed in July, and that August and September are its closing months for breeding? The Geese are, in November, scattering for their summer migration to the mainland.

There is another bit of decisive evidence to show that Mr. MacLaine is correct. I think I am correct in assuming that all of the Geese which visit the western plains of Victoria come from the islands that Mr. Armstrong visited. Well, only last summer two flocks of these Geese were counted while feeding—within a day's ride of Mr. Armstrong's residence—and there were 136 in one flock and 98 in the other. In addition, there were hundreds of Geese in smaller flocks in the same neighbourhood. I know of about twenty haunts of the Geese on our plains, where there are at least 1,000 Geese every year. This summer they were as abundant as ever, so that they can fairly be described as "holding their own."

At the same time I am at one with Mr. Armstrong in his desire to see them properly protected, as they are one of our finest and most interesting birds.—Yours, &c.,

Noorat, 13/4/08.

FRANK S. SMITH.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

DEAR SIRS,—When in Launceston recently I saw a copy of *The Emu*,* in which there was an account of the visit of Messrs. Armstrong and Atkinson to the islands in Bass Strait. In their account they seem to be greatly disappointed at the rarity of the Cape Barren Geese, and question very much my statement

* Vol. vii., p. 182.

to the effect that these birds are more than holding their own. They say that "they never saw more than two in one flock, and that the idea of 200 in one flock was out of all reason." You must recollect that I only quoted this from hearsay, and must say that my informant might have multiplied the number by two. However, to proceed: The islands which they visited (they were here during the nesting season), such as Chalky, Green, and Kangaroo Islands, and some others, are ones where the birds do not lay to any extent, and so one cannot wonder at their not seeing many there at the time of their visit, as the majority were away laying at the principal islands they nest on, such as Forsyth and Passage Islands, which they never visited at all. It is a pity that they did not go there, instead of stopping and searching some rocky islets at the north-east end of Clarke Island, as they were within 5 miles of Forsyth Island, where there is a harbour for small craft in all weathers; if they had done so, they would have been less inclined to ridicule my statements. I have been over these two islands, and found as many as 50 nests, with an average of four to each nest. The birds lay about three clutches on Rum Island, approximate to Preservation Island, which I believe Messrs. Armstrong and Atkinson visited. I have been over Preservation Island at certain times of the year, and have not seen a dozen birds on it, and at another time I have seen over 50.

My opinion is this—the birds seem to be just as numerous as, let us say, six years ago. Then one will naturally ask—"How is it, with the number of eggs that you have seen, that the bird is not increasing rapidly?" For answer, I was reading an account of the Geese, which arrive in certain parts of Victoria in large flocks, and feed about the fields and swamps; my theory is this—that many of the young birds, in company with the old ones, migrate there, and I presume that many are shot, as the bird is well known to be excellent eating, and this would account for their not increasing very rapidly. But I must emphatically say that I do not consider that the bird is getting rarer. Comparatively few are shot locally, and to give an instance in favour of the above, I was at Forsyth Island on 20th February, 1908, with a friend. We bagged three Geese, and in traversing the island we came to a beach about half a mile long, on which I counted 75 Geese. We calculated between Forsyth and Passage Island, which are within half a mile of each other, that there would be 200 or more Geese. I have nothing to gain by making misleading statements as to the number of the birds. I may be wrong in my calculations, but only do the best of my ability. In any case, one who is a resident has more opportunity of judging than one who makes a flying visit, and neglects to visit the principal breeding islands.

My brothers and I lease Passage Island for grazing, and lose a lot of valuable feed through the Geese being there; we could

soon lessen them by smashing all the eggs on both islands, without the slightest fear of being found out, which would certainly be the death-knell of this fine bird, but we have not the slightest intention of doing so, as we all admire them as a somewhat unique bird, and I understand these are the only places in Bass Strait where they breed.—Yours, &c.,

Clarke Island, 23/5/08.

J. D. MACLAINE.

South Australian Ornithological Association.

THE eighth annual meeting of the South Australian Ornithological Association was held at the residence of Mr. A. H. C. Zietz on Thursday evening, 5th March. Mr. Zietz presided. The hon. secretary reported good progress during the year, several new members having joined. Interest in the study of native birds had not abated, but much had been done individually and collectively in the protection of useful birds, notably the little Kestrel (*Cerchneis cenchroides*), a species of the Hawk family, which had been totally protected, with other birds. The association had also used its influence in recommending the national reserve on Kangaroo Island. The financial report showed a good credit balance, and was adopted. The chairman read interesting notes by the late Mr. F. W. Andrews on bird life in the earlier days in the Mounts Compass and Jagged districts, and a pamphlet upon the meat-eating Kea Parrot (*Nestor notabilis*) of New Zealand, by G. R. Marriner, F.R.M.S. Mr. F. R. Zietz showed plates of Petrels and other illustrations of bird life. Mr. M. Symonds Clarke read a letter from Mr. W. C. Skipper, advocating the introduction of native birds into Botanic Park. A number of interesting exhibits were shown, including a series of Nightjars by Mr. A. H. C. Zietz, F.L.S.; the White-throated Nightjar (*Eurostopodus albogularis*), Spotted (*E. argus*), and the Large-tailed (*Caprimulgus macrurus*), also specimens of the Flame-breasted Robin (*Petræa phænicea*), and the Scarlet-breasted (*P. leggii*), and an interesting zoological collection. Mr. E. Ashby showed several birds from Port Keats, Northern Territory, notably a new Pigeon—the Lilac-mantled, which has just been described by Mr. A. J. North, of the Sydney Museum, as *Chalcophaps occidentalis*. Mr. Ashby also exhibited a Nightjar from New South Wales. Captain White showed nest and eggs of Rufous-breasted Shrike-Thrush from Tweed River. The following officers were elected:—President, Mr. A. H. C. Zietz; vice-president, Mr. M. Symonds Clarke; hon. secretary and treasurer, Mr. J. W. Mellor.

The next meeting of the Association was held at the office of Messrs. Saunders and Ashby, Adelaide, on the evening of 7th May, Mr. A. H. C. Zietz presiding. The hon. secretary read a letter from the Commissioner of Crown Lands relative to the total protection of Black Swans and the Kestrel. Several members bore testimony to the extreme usefulness of the latter bird in killing mice and small vermin. Mr. Ashby reported that the Government had refused to set aside an area at the western end of Kangaroo Island as a National Reserve and Park, and were only willing to consider the Cape Borda lighthouse reserve. The subject for discussion was "The Malurus Family," commonly known as "Wrens," and noted for the beautiful plumage of the males of all the species. The family is purely insectivorous, and therefore extremely useful in keeping down blight and small insect pests. The chairman showed 14 species of the male birds in illustration of some interesting remarks made, which were supplemented by 10 species exhibited by Mr. Ashby for comparison. Mr. Ashby also showed the Rainbow Pitta (*Pitta iris*), from the Northern Territory, the Western Australian Grass-Bird (*Megalurus striatus*), and the Western Field-Wren (*Calamanthus*).