

FOOD OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

DEAR SIRs,—Many details of a fragmentary nature have been published on the food of Australian birds, but at the present time a systematic examination of the contents of as many stomachs as possible is being made by Mr. A. M. Lea, F.E.S., the Adelaide Museum Entomologist, who has already listed the contents of about a thousand stomachs. He would be glad to receive bird stomachs from all parts of Australia. They could be sent to the Adelaide Museum in spirits, or in tins with rags saturated in spirits (so as to arrive in Adelaide in a damp condition). When sending the stomachs the following particulars are desired:—Name of bird (technical, if possible), month when obtained, locality, and collector's name. If the birds have been poisoned, it is also desirable to mention that fact. In particular, he would be glad to receive stomachs of large birds, but especially desires to state that he does not wish any birds to be specially killed for the purpose of this investigation.

Due credit will be given to all those who send stomachs when the results are published, and will be acknowledged as received.—
Yours, &c., S. A. WHITE.

Wetunga, S.A., 14/5/17.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

DEAR SIRs,—On page 175, vol. xvi., when referring to *Milligania robustirostris*, I gave Mr. Milligan credit for discovering this bird. Mr. Milligan described the bird, and gave credit to Mr. F. Lawson Whitlock for unearthing it.

In a recent letter Mr. Whitlock says:—"Possibly you did not know that the *Acanthiza* are quite absent from the Pilbarra Goldfields. I did not see a single example of any species on the Coongan, Nullagine, or De Grey Rivers. The same at Port Hedland and Condon on the coast." A little farther on Mr. Whitlock adds:—"Acanthiza tenuirostris is a bit of a puzzle in its distribution. In this State it seems to be confined to the interior, and only to haunt the samphire flats at the big salt lakes."—
Yours, &c., F. E. HOWE.

Canterbury, 14/4/17.

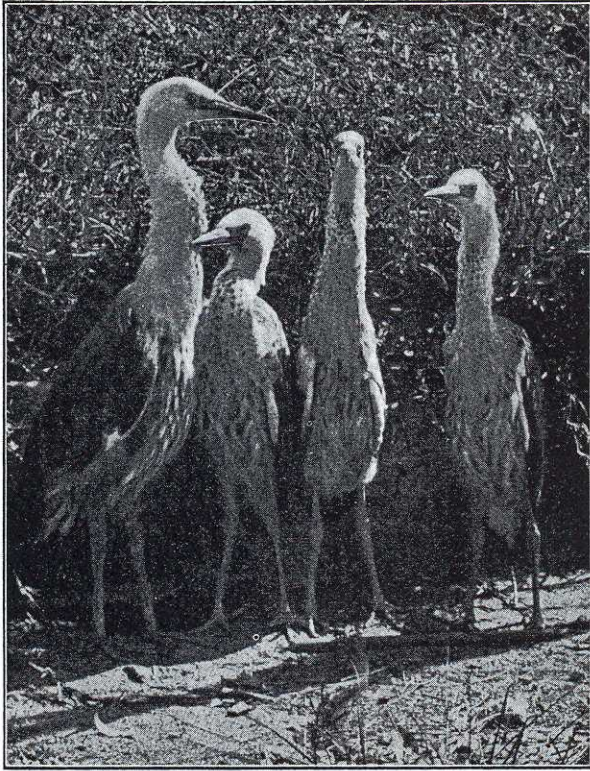
Stray Feathers.

Taronga Park Notes.—A white Emu received seven years ago has very gradually been turning brown, and has never developed the dark grey colour of the ordinary bird. One eye is white and the other is brown.

White Eagle-Hawk.—This bird, which was received about six months ago, had two or three brown feathers on it, but since then

a fair number of brown feathers have appeared on the wings and back. The irides are light colour.

It is very interesting to note how soon birds become used to blasting. During the erection of Taronga Park a good deal of blasting has been done, but the wild birds soon learnt that it did not do them any harm, and the Shrike-Thrush, Blue Wrens,



Adult and three young of Pacific Heron (*Notophoxyx pacifica*),
captured at Narrandera, N.S.W.

PHOTO BY D. LE SOUEF, O.M.Z.S., R.A.O.U., TAKEN AT
TARONGA ZOOLOGICAL PARK, SYDNEY.

"Jackie Winters," Flycatchers, Shrike-Robins, Shrike-Tits, Honey-eaters, and several other species have nested in the grounds, often very close to where the men are working.

It was also very interesting to note the other day a "Willie Wagtail" picking flies off a lion's back. The lion was lying very contentedly, and paid no attention whatever to the bird.—A. S. LE SOUEF. Zoological Gardens, Sydney, 15/1/17.

Extended Distribution of *Phaëthon rubricauda*.—A specimen of the Red-tailed Tropic-Bird was found dead upon the South Arm beach of the estuary of the Derwent River, Tasmania, on 25th February, 1917, the specimen being passed on to me by Mr. Geo. Griffiths while still in a fresh condition. Apparently it is a new record for Tasmania, and its most southerly recorded range to date. It was an adult female, in perfect plumage, but in poor fleshy condition, there being no fat between the skin and the trunk. I should say it was a prey to the easterly gale blowing about the time of its death. Buller has reported that specimens have been washed ashore on the North Cape of New Zealand as the result of easterly gales. It is only an occasional visitant to the North Island of New Zealand, while southern Tasmania is in a much higher latitude, and quite beyond the range of the normal habitat of the species.—ROBERT HALL.

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***Myzantha garrula*.**—The writer has been but one month in this glorious north-west of New South Wales. Bird-life is remarkably plentiful, and, whether from the abnormally prolific season or not the writer does not claim to know, many young broods are still to be found. On the 18th inst. he witnessed a stirring example of the strong parental love of the Noisy Miner (*Myzantha garrula*) for its young. One of the parent birds had just fed the young brood when a fine specimen of the Brown Hawk (*Hieracidea orientalis*) swooped down, and, seizing a young one, flew off with the plump young bird. The unfortunate parents vigorously attacked, daring to even light on the back of the rapidly-flying Hawk, from whose suspended legs hung the intended victim. As the trio disappeared through the timber the shrieking parent was on the back of the Hawk, fiercely but unavailingly pecking the feathers of the bird of prey, who was hotly pursued by scores of other noisy birds, but chiefly Miners and Grallinas.—S. A. HANSCOMBE. "Gleness," Warialda Railway Station, 19/2/17.

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The Allied Harrier.—While on a driving trip along the north-west of Tasmania in December, 1916, and January of the present year, in company with Mr. W. G. Buck, we were greatly struck with the large number of Harriers (*Circus gouldi*, Bp.) which were visible during our journey. Almost every large paddock appeared to have its individual or pair of these fine Hawks hunting over it for prey. This increase in numbers we attribute to two reasons—(1) owing to the heavy rainfall of spring and early summer, there was a great growth of green feed and a heavy yield of grain, and a proportionate increase in the rabbits and rats which form the chief prey of the Harrier; some of the stacks we saw had the sides and thatch riddled with holes made by the bush rats. (2) A great many of the farmers' sons, who carry guns and have a

bang at the Hawks as a matter of course, not knowing they are destroying good friends, are away from the Commonwealth just now, so that the Raptores have a chance to increase. The Harrier, on clear, warm afternoons in summer, has a habit of mounting high in the air and circling in a leisurely fashion at this altitude, as if for pure enjoyment.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U. W. Devonport, Tasmania, 10/2/17.

From Magazines, &c.

The Value of Sub-species.—In *The Ibis*, January, 1917, p. 120, Mr. Gregory M. Mathews has contributed a most important letter. It speaks for itself, and terminates thus:—"I have concluded that the value of sub-species is almost negligible in Australian ornithology. In the Palæarctic Region they may be useful, but even here I think that they have been much over-rated; while if large series are examined from Australia, very many sub-specific forms can be differentiated, but larger series always link most extreme cases up very quickly. Consequently, in my 'Birds of Australia' I have depreciated sub-species. . . . This course was adopted nearly two years ago."

Mr. Mathews is to be congratulated on the frankness of this admission. Many of his best friends in Australia were getting bewildered in the mazes of his sub-species and consequent nomenclature, while he will win many who were flatly opposed to his system. But, in fairness to both supporters and opponents, Mr. Mathews, likewise in justice to himself, not to mention *the science*, should have made known the purport of his letter, considering that he changed his attitude regarding sub-species "nearly two years ago." No people are more interested than Australians in Mr. Mathews's work.—A. J. C.

Obituary Notice.

NORTH.—On the 6th May, 1917, at his residence, "Hillcrest," Darling-street, Chatswood, Sydney, Alfred John, the beloved husband of Clara R. North, and second son of the late Henry and Mary T. North, Moonee Ponds, Victoria, Ornithologist to the Australian Museum, Sydney, aged 61 years.

THE friends of the late Mr. A. J. North, C.M.B.O.U., will greatly regret his demise, which occurred somewhat suddenly from heart failure on Sunday, 6th May. His remains were buried at the Gore Hill Cemetery, Sydney.

The late ornithologist was born 11th June, 1855, at North Melbourne, and was educated at the Public School, and subsequently at the Grammar School, South Melbourne. He was apprenticed to the jeweller's trade, and worked assiduously at his