

Small-billed Cuckoo-Shrike (*Graucalus parvirostris*), Gould.—I saw a flock of nine on several occasions on and about 5th June. There were both adult and immature birds, the latter being the young of this summer. The flock was perfectly silent, and was passing amongst the orchard trees and adjacent timber.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*, Latham).—I saw it on 1st June, and recognized it by its flight and markings. It has not been calling for months.

The past few weeks have been mild, and on two occasions only have we had a low temperature. The weather to-day appears to indicate the real winter, and those birds which have been induced to stay because of good climate and abundance of food—if Tasmania ever really has it—may now be sorry for themselves.—ROBERT HALL. Hobart, 12/6/17.

Correspondence.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

DEAR SIRS,—The very valuable article on "Birds of the Rockingham Bay District, North Queensland," by Messrs. A. J. Campbell and H. G. Barnard, in *The Emu*, vol. xvii., p. 2, is to my mind somewhat marred by the controversial tone adopted in reference to the work of Mr. G. M. Mathews. Personally, I think that Mr. Mathews' own great work on "The Birds of Australia" is even more spoilt by this fault, and that a text-book is not the right place in which to embody the controversies of the moment. It will be a great pity if the habit is to spread to all contributions to Australian ornithology. Of course, I do not object to the authors expressing their opinions as to whether particular forms are or are not worthy of specific or sub-specific rank. Such opinions from field workers are of supreme importance, and personally I think that these matters cannot be settled solely by examination of skins, but that the nests, eggs, notes, and other habits of the birds must also be taken into consideration.

Without in any way holding a brief for Mr. Mathews, who is quite capable of fighting his own battles (but, being in England, may not be able to reply in time for the next issue), will you allow me to comment on one point in the article in question?

On page 17 the authors write:—"Bee-eaters have been observed passing to and from New Guinea during migration. How can it be possible, then, that there are two races of these birds in Australia, as Mathews infers?" Again, on page 36, when discussing the Spangled Drongo, they say:—"If this bird migrates from New Guinea (one of us has observed it doing so), why does Mathews make two sub-species of the Drongo—one for Queensland and the other for Northern Territory?"

Mr. Mathews may or may not be right in these cases in separating these migratory birds into sub-species, but the mere fact that they are only summer migrants in Australia, and

possibly winter together in New Guinea, does not affect the question, as the authors appear to suppose. It has been known for some years that two sub-species of Wheatear occur regularly in England on migration in spring and autumn. The smaller form remains to breed in the British Isles, while the larger passes on to Scandinavia. A similar phenomenon is met with in the cases of the Willow-Wren and the Chiffchaff. The sub-species *Phylloscopus trochilus trochilus* and *Phylloscopus collybita collybita* remain in England all through the summer, and are two of the best-known British birds, but in spring and autumn some individuals of the northern forms, *P. trochilus eversmanni* and *P. collybita tristis*, pass through England on migration. I have just received a reprint of an article by my brother, H. G. Alexander, from *British Birds* (vol. x., p. 263, April, 1917), in which he records that Miss E. L. Turner and he watched specimens of the Common and the Northern Willow-Wrens in company in the same bushes at Dungeness on 13th September, 1916, and were able to distinguish them both by their slightly different coloration and their decidedly different notes. The European cases quoted seem to me exactly comparable with the Australian cases referred to by Messrs. Campbell and Barnard. In each we have sub-species with different ranges in the summer mingling together on migration, and in neither case are we aware whether the two forms remain mixed during the winter or have distinct winter areas. The fact, however, that they follow the same routes on migration has not prevented European students from regarding the birds mentioned as sub-species.—Yours, &c.,

W. B. ALEXANDER.

Queen's College, University of Melbourne, 17/7/17.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

DEAR SIRs,—I beg to amend the classification at the end of my article in the January, 1917, issue, p. 170. I had overlooked the fact that Mathews, in the same volume (July, 1916, p. 34), had separated *Acanthiza albiventris* from *A. pusilla*, adding *A. venus*, *A. hamiltoni*, *A. consobrina*, *A. whitlocki*, and *A. tanami* as sub-species, and leaving *A. macularia*, *A. archibaldi*, *A. diemenensis*, *A. zietzi*, *A. arno*, *A. apicalis*, and *A. katherina* as sub-species of *A. pusilla*.

Perhaps Mr. Mathews is correct, but the only difference, according to the late Mr. A. J. North, is the white under tail coverts and slightly larger size of *A. albiventris*. If this is sufficient to separate *A. albiventris* specifically from *A. pusilla*, it is strange that the under tail coverts in *A. hamiltoni* are fulvous, as is also the case in *A. pusilla* and all, or nearly all, of its sub-species.—Yours faithfully,

F. E. HOWE.

Canterbury (Vic.), 24/7/17.