

Stray Feathers

A Second Australian Specimen of the Wandering Tattler.

—Since Mathews and Iredale in their latest work on Australian birds (*"A Manual of the Birds of Australia,"* I., 1921, pp. 142 and 143) cite but one instance of the occurrence of the Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus*, Gmelin), in Australia, it may be of interest to note here the existence of a hitherto unrecorded specimen of this species in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.

The bird in question (M.C.Z. 56,067) was taken February 11, 1897, by Mr. Milton J. Flood, of Maldon, Mass., U.S.A., in the course of an extensive visit to Australia and the Pacific Islands. The original label fails to give the sex of the specimen, and the locality (except the word Australia) is omitted, its place being taken by a journal number. Owing to Mr. Flood's untimely death at the hands of natives in New Guinea his journals were lost, and it is therefore impossible to learn any more concerning this, or many other specimens in the large collection that he made.

I have examined a considerable number of species collected in Australia by Flood, and all appear to have come from Queensland, so it may be safely assumed that this specimen of the Wandering Tattler was likewise taken there.—JAMES L. PETERS, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.

* * *

The Spotted Ground-bird.—A pair of Ground-birds (*Cinclosoma punctatum*) claim a slope of the hillside here as their own. Last year, when spending a few weeks of the Christmas vacation in the locality, I noticed this pair. They were accompanied by three well-grown young, which, except for their slightly smaller size and their babyish call, were not easy to distinguish from their parents. From my bed on the verandah of the cottage, which my sisters and I rented, I could watch this family in the early hours of the morning. While all was quiet, they would search close to the house, and appeared to be picking up crumbs. They even ran across the end of the verandah. Once, when we came suddenly upon them, they flew, two of the birds settling on the lower branches of a small gum tree. One of these was a parent bird, which from its perch uttered its warning, whispering sort of whistle. Our home is now in the area searched over by the same pair, and in the early morning they often frequent the yard. A little over a week ago the female was sitting. When she came off for her daily exercise, she made a call similar to that of a young one, whereupon her dutiful spouse would at once set to work to hunt up some fragment for his lady. It was pretty to watch both within a few steps of the back

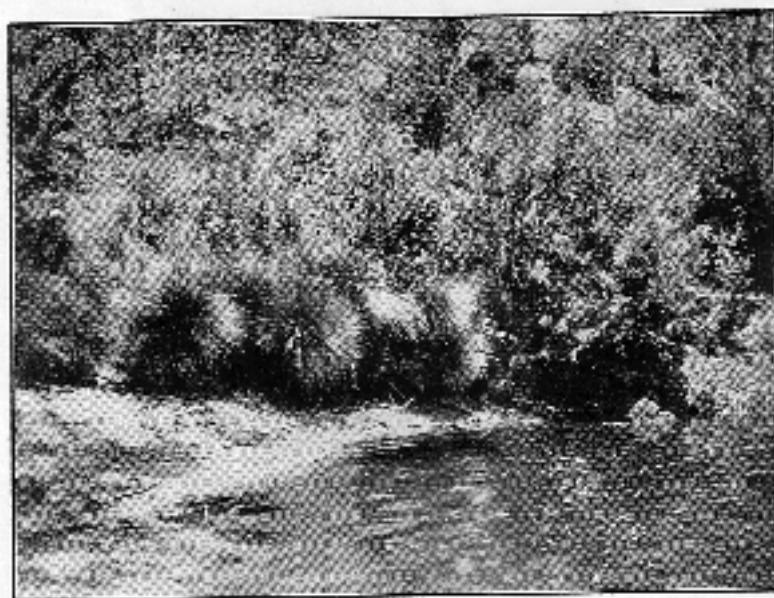
door, hunting through the vegetables, where they picked up a few crumbs as well as other small items I could not classify. One morning they found some of the fowls' bran and pollard mixture which had been dropped. It was a great find, evidently, by the way they both enjoyed their meal. Thereafter some of the mixture was always "accidentally" dropped for the free fowls of the hillside. For a week their visits have ceased. Soon I hope to hear them again, bringing their toddlers with them, as soon as the little legs can safely manage the many mazes amidst the tangle of heath, ferns, and fallen litter. Only once have I found a clutch of four eggs in the nest of these Ground-birds, and that was at Cleveland, in the Midlands, where I came on a nest beneath some large stones. Some day, perhaps, when the sense of security between the present pair and the human partners of their domain is more developed, I may succeed in obtaining a picture of them. It would be interesting, especially if it showed them enjoying the fowls' breakfast.—MISS J. A. FLETCHER, R.A.O.U., "Lyeltya," Eaglehawk Neck, S. Tasmania.

* * *

On the Notes of the New Zealand Boobook Owl.—In several back numbers of *The Emu*, I have noticed considerable discussion as to the author of the "morepork" notes heard at night. Several observers are quite emphatic in their opinion that they are uttered by a *Podargus*; others are equally confident that an Owl (*Ninox nova-seelandia*) is responsible. Such being the case I have thought it advisable to give the notes of the New Zealand *Ninox* (now considered to be the same species as the Australian bird), and as no *Podargus* occurs in New Zealand, confusion between the notes of the two birds is impossible. This Owl is universally called the "Morepork" in all parts of New Zealand, and most certainly its notes are identical with its local name. The quality of the notes varies greatly, however. Some are quite clear, and uttered with a slight drawl; others are much quicker. I have heard one bird near Masterton give them in a basso-profundo tone, which gives the impression that the bird is husky. One writer in *The Emu* stated that *Ninox* never uttered the "morepork" notes in rapid succession, but that the bird responsible for that performance was a *Podargus*. On 19th April, 1923, when in the Tauherenikau Valley, in the Tararua Mountains, I heard a Morepork utter this note ten times in very rapid succession, without pause. Other notes I have heard this bird use are a sharp-sounding "ow" and a scream-like "airck." Mr. and Mrs. H. F. Chaffey, at their hill residence near the head waters of the Takaka River, Nelson, N.Z., record in Mr. James Drummond's "Nature Notes" column their experience of a male Morepork, on the 14th November last. It sat on a post in front of the cottage window, and began with a guttural "por, por, por, por," repeated quickly from fifteen to twenty times, as if the Owl



Nest of Pheasant Quail (*Centropus phasianinus*) containing
an unhatched egg.
Photo by Rev. U. O. Edwards.



Nesting site of the White-eared Honeyeater (*Malurus lewinii*) in
grass tussock in centre of picture, Thredbo River, N.S.W.
Photo by A. S. Le Souef, R.A.O.C.

were trying to break a record. It finished with a "moreporik," drawn out and well pronounced. Apparently out of breath with the effort, it took a spell for a few minutes, and then repeated the performance, uttering the "por" notes more quickly, if possible. Mr. Chaffey believed the female was sitting at the time. — ROBT. H. D. STIDOLPH, R.A.O.C., Masterton, N.Z.

* * *

A Nest of the Mallee Emu-Wren. — Just recently I received rather a remarkable nest of this little semi-desert form of the Emu-wren. It is remarkable in so far as a quantity of cast snakeskin was used in the construction and decoration of the nest. The cast snakeskin was broken into small pieces, and the nest, when viewed in bright sunlight, had a shining appearance. It would be interesting to know if any of your readers have records of snakeskin being used by this bird, or any other of the genus (*Stipiturus*).

The nest was taken in the Mallee, in the north-west of Victoria. It is almost globular in form, measuring 3 inches in height and width by $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches from front to back. The entrance, which measures $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches, has a slight hood, and is similar to the entrance to the nest of a *Malurus*. The main wall is made up of dark-coloured grasses, pieces of dark fibre, picked up from under the porcupine grass, and quite a quantity of the needle-like spines from porcupine grass (*Triodia*) well worked in together. In the bottom of the nest itself, a thick bed of thistledown, snakeskin, and cocoons was laid, and finally a snug lining of soft feathers, amongst which are noticed several green feathers of the Varied Parrot (*Psephotus varius*). Externally, the nest is beautifully decorated with cobweb, cocoons, feathers, thistledown and a quantity of cast snakeskin. The nest was placed 18 inches from the ground, and well down amidst the spines of the porcupine bush. It contained three fresh eggs, which are smaller and more rounded than typical eggs of the Emu-wrens from more favoured places near the coast-line. The eggs, moreover, are more freckled all over, especially near the large end, though the usual zone of freckles, as in Emu-wrens' eggs, is barely defined in the set under notice. — J. NED. MCGILP, R.A.O.C., King's Park, Adelaide.

* * *

The White-eared Honeyeater (*Meliphaga leucotis*). — This familiar bird is common in the Monaro district, and its delightful notes add life and music to the lonely valleys of the Upper Snowy and Thredbo Rivers. Here it finds a happy home among the overhanging tea-trees which in the summer are covered with flowers and crowded with small beetles. The birds usually nest low in the bushes, but in one instance a cosy cup-shaped nest was placed in a tussock of grass within a foot of the ground. — A. S. LE SOTER, Sydney.

A Nest of the Pheasant Coucal.—The nest of the Pheasant Coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*) shown in the accompanying photograph was found in a stool of cane at one of the sugar-cane farms in Ayr, North Queensland. The nest was built of cane-trash and lined with gum leaves. One of the four eggs was undersized, as is clearly visible in the photograph.—Rev. C. O. EDWARDS, The Rectory, Ayr, N.Q.

* * *

How to Spell "Emu."—Dr. Alfred Newton, in his "Dictionary of Birds," spells the name "Emcu," which seems to me preferable to the rather abrupt form now in use. The Californian writer Bret Harte used the same orthography as Dr. Newton, in the humorous poem about the Naughty Emeu which plucked and swallowed a diamond scarf-pin from a gentleman's cravat, thereby causing an irremediable breach between two fond lovers. It was, however, Rev. Bobby Knopwood, our first Tasmanian chaplain, who got the utmost out of the name by the insertion of no less than three "e's" in a word of six letters! Mr. Knopwood, with Captain Merthon and several others, boated up the Derwent to about 30 miles above Sullivan's Cove, then walked several miles up the west side of the stream. In his diary, under date of 7th March, 1804, he writes: "We walked on the west side of the river; hills very high. When one side of the river was hilly, the other was a valley, and it continued so for more than 40 miles from the camp" (now Hobart) "where there was an extensive plain of very few trees. We see Kangaroos, Emewes, Pigeons, and Parrots." Knopwood's party were the first white men to gaze upon this extensive tract, now well known as the Macquarie Plains.—H. STUART DOVE, W. Devonport, Tasmania.

* * *

White-headed Stilts and Other Water Birds near Melbourne.—Whilst on a ramble near Edithvale on October 4, 1924, I came across a large temporary swamp, left behind by the recent heavy rains, lying across the Dandenong Road for a distance of perhaps three hundred yards, and extending about the same distance on either side. No means of crossing being at hand, and not wishing to make a long trip back, I had no recourse but to remove my footgear and commence to wade through. Just as I entered the water, a bird call unfamiliar to my ears attracted my notice, so my steps were immediately turned to the left side of the road, the direction whence the call originated. Wading a couple of hundred yards from the roadside, the water began to get shallower, and left several small areas of grass-covered mud, drying above the water. Here I flushed two long red-legged, handsome birds, which proved to be White-headed Stilts. They rose into the air uttering a call easily recognised as that of one of the water birds, and were joined by several others. In flight they appeared most remarkable birds, looking

all out of proportion, the long legs trailing out behind, giving one the impression of a very long tail. I walked about the edges of the water for about an hour. At a moderate estimate, I should say there were at least fifty or sixty of these dainty, red-legged visitors, scattered about on my side of the road. There must have been an abundance of food to keep them located here, for another week found them still lingering. Some sportsman (?) had, in the meantime, shot one of the poor creatures into a mass of blood-stained feathers, and left it, wings outstretched, hanging on a nearby fence, a tribute to his wonderful marksmanship! I don't think they were nesting anywhere round, as they would keep flying to a different area if I approached near them. Probably a few more weeks would find them moving to more suitable nesting areas, but it was pleasant to find them so near the city. Another bird in evidence on the swamp, was a small white Tern in small parties, diving, or rather, falling, as it was too shallow to dive, into the water, after dinner no doubt. It was either the Fairy Ternlet or the Whiskered Tern, I think. Passing along, I flushed six Australian Snipe, also several Black-fronted Dotterels, feeding round the edges. On the farther end were a number of White-fronted Herons, also some Cormorants.—C. H. BORCH, R.A.O.U., Newport, Victoria..

* * *

The Arrival of the Mutton-Birds—A Remarkable Sight.

—The return of the Mutton-Birds to Phillip Island, in Western-port Bay, Victoria, an event that happens just about the same time every November, is described in an interesting report in the Melbourne *Argus*.

"Mutton-Bird" is the popular name for the Short-tailed Petrel or Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*), which nests on the islands of Bass Strait and on the Victorian coast. The birds come in myriads each year, remain through the summer, and then mysteriously disappear. Describing the latest arrival of these migrants, the *Argus* says: "Far on the eastern horizon a black patch could be discerned. It grew in size, until finally it could be distinguished as a flight of fast-moving birds. Outdistancing the rest, a dozen reached the cliff at exactly 8 o'clock. There—wheeling, swooping, circling, and diving—they uttered strange unmusical cries, as though rejoicing to be home again. The return of the Mutton-Birds had begun. For some time they came in singly—here a bird and there a bird. Gradually their numbers increased until the sky was covered with them. Swiftly they hurtled in from the sea, by tens, by twenties, by hundreds, by thousands; but not to land at once. There seemed a spirit of unrest about the birds, as if, having reached their objective after long wandering, they were too overjoyed to be still, but must be darting and poising, rushing and gliding, wheeling and circling, all the time screaming discordantly till the semi-darkness was filled with

their cries. Now distant against the sky, now lost in the darkness of the land, the birds might be thought to have no aim in their manoeuvres, but closer watching showed that each was most nearly touching the earth at one particular breeding burrow. At first the velocity with which the spot was traversed scarcely indicated any desire to land, but after many gradually narrowing loops had been described, there came a time when the speed decreased, and the wings flickered somewhat. On the next circle the bird poised, and then alighted as softly as snow at the very mouth of the burrow—not even then to rest until darkness was complete. Cape Woolamai was as busy as a bargain sale, new arrivals running hither and thither, inspecting, rejecting, visiting, courting, fighting, and singing their deep sea chanty. By half-past 8 it seemed that fully 100 acres of the cape was a mass of excited birds. Angry squawks here and there denoted that fights were in progress in some of the burrows. Now and then a bird could be seen hastily emerging, while his successful rival screamed with harsh triumph. Similar scenes had been enacted simultaneously on a dozen minor rookeries around the island. Altogether they represented a line of breeding burrows six and a half miles long, and the birds must be numbered in millions. The birds, which have come in from the sea to breed, will remain until late in April. During all this time similar stirring fights may be witnessed every night. Silence at last returned; birds which had found no burrows, or had been ejected from those which they considered theirs, were walking awkwardly up and down, muttering in what might be taken to be sullen resentment. At the mouth of one burrow one unmistakably proud householder was sending forth to the skies an unmusical psalm of sheer delight. So another great problem has been solved. For the past week everywhere one has gone on this pleasant island one has been informed that the Mutton-Birds return to the day, to the hour, to the minute, each year; on that, all those who are not hopeless disbelievers in the Mutton-Birds legend have agreed. The only point has been that nearly everyone has named a different day, a different hour, a different minute. Let all doubts be resolved. The Mutton-Birds returned to Phillip Island at 8 o'clock on November 23. Those few who named this date and time are entitled to the respect which they will receive.

Bird Protection

CENTRAL QUEENSLAND NATIVE BIRDS' PROTECTION ASSOCIATION.

The annual meeting of the association was held at Rockhampton on January 29, 1925. In moving the adoption of the annual report and balance sheet, the President, Mr. A. Boldemann,