

Eggs of the Banded Stilt

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The removal during the year 1930 of two species from the list of Australian birds which appeared under the heading "Nest and eggs undescribed," was a splendid record, and those who participated in the removal are to be congratulated on their respective achievements. Without in any way detracting from the success of Mr. Norman J. Favalloro, R.A.O.U., in finding a nest of the White-eared Flycatcher (*Carterornis leucotis*) in the course of construction, and subsequently securing and describing the clutch of eggs—*vide The Emu*, Vol. XXX, pages 164-8—a greater interest appears to attach to Mrs. B. E. Cannon's triumph in discovering a large colony of Banded Stilts (*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*) in July, 1930, on a sandy tongue of land running into Lake Grace, in Western Australia, and collecting eggs and sending upwards of a score of them to the Western Australian Museum with photographs and descriptions of the birds for identification.

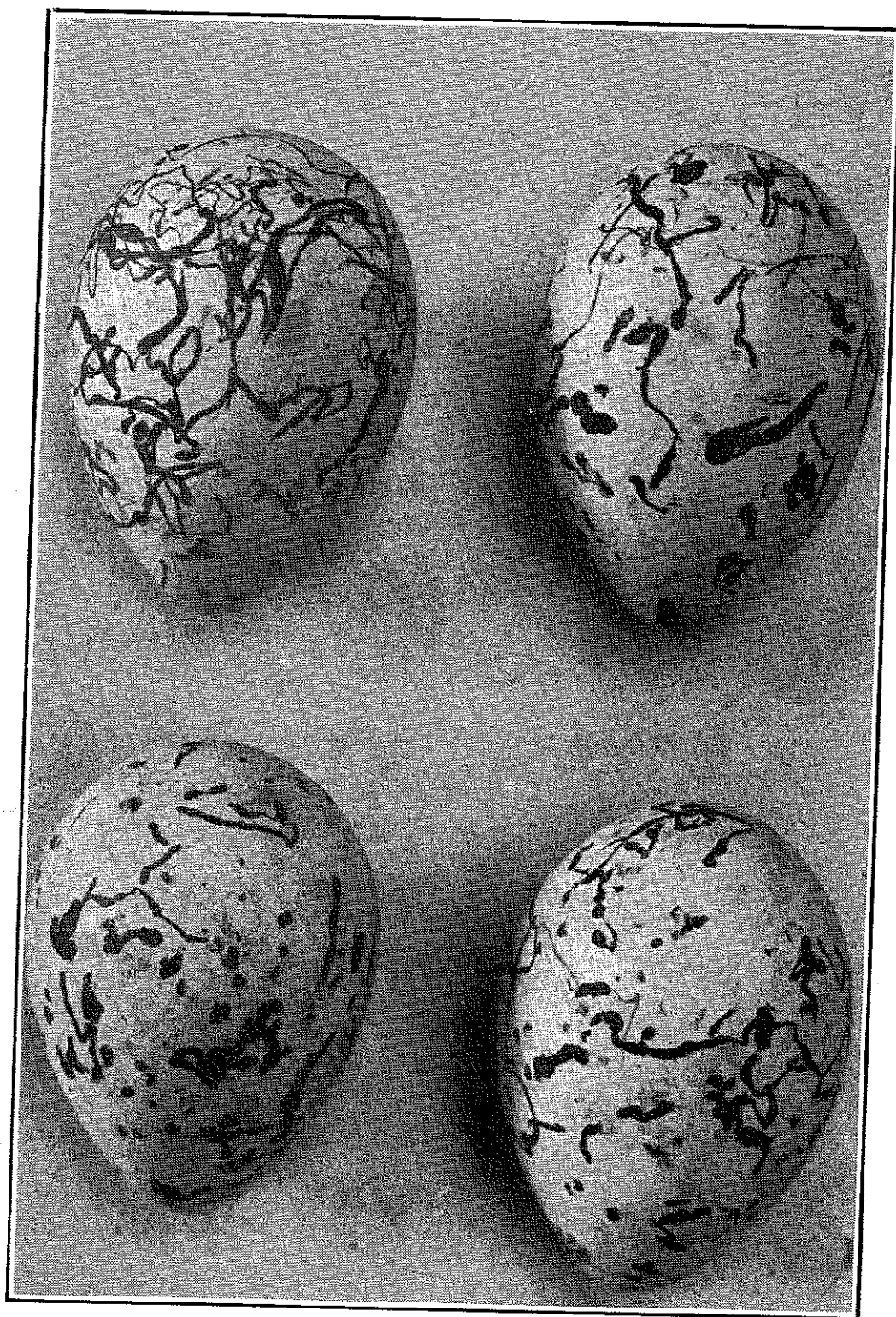
Another memorable event was the subsequent finding by Mr. Rex McKay of a second colony of Banded Stilts breeding on an island in Lake Callabonna in South Australia, and his informing Mr. J. Neil McGilp, R.A.O.U., by telegram of the fact, so that Mr. McGilp and Dr. Morgan, R.A.O.U., were able to visit the colony before the eggs had hatched. Many photographs and clutches of eggs were taken at Lake Callabonna. As a short article, with reproductions of three photographs, based on Mrs. Cannon's discovery, and written by Messrs. L. Glauert and C. F. H. Jenkins, had been published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia*, Vol. XVII, and Mr. McGilp and Dr. Morgan, had given a comprehensive account of their observations at Lake Callabonna, with nine reproductions of photographs, in *The South Australian Ornithologist*, Vol. XI, Mr. McGilp kindly gave us permission to make such use as we thought fit of the two clutches, each of four eggs, which he had given to us. Hence the two accompanying plates depicting the eggs. The clutch shown on plate 16 is in the collection of J. A. Ross, and that on plate 17 in the collection of F. E. Howe.

The measurements of the eggs in millimetres are:—

Plate 16, 55 x 39.4, 55.7 x 38.7, 56 x 38.9, 55 x 39.1.

Plate 17, 56.9 x 38, 56.4 x 38.5, 57.7 x 40.7, 53.2 x 38.5.

The shape of the eggs and the nature of the markings are clearly illustrated in the plates. The ground colour is dull white, with a faint tinge of cream in some of the eggs, giving them a somewhat dirty appearance, and the markings are generally deep black, while a few are very dark



Clutch of Eggs of Banded Stilt.

Photo. by D. J. Dickison, R.A.O.U.

brown, and there are underlying markings of grey. Eggs in other clutches are marked with blotches and large spots instead of being ornamented with a tangle of irregular, twisted and interlacing lines, and others again are almost unmarked.

The island already referred to was visited by Mr. McGilp's brother on December 19, 1930, but the Banded Stilts were not there then. Ten days later Mr. McKay found on the island a large colony of those birds, whose nests, which were shallow scrapes in the ground, occupied an area of more than half an acre, and contained from one to five eggs each, the majority containing three. The nests were placed rather regularly in rows at distances of about eighteen inches from centre to centre, and it was estimated that the nests in the main colony and in a few smaller adjacent groups numbered about 27,000. Mr. McGilp is of opinion that two or three eggs form the usual clutch, and it was noticed that when the number exceeded three it was usual to find varying types suggesting that all the eggs had not been laid by one bird.

On January 21, 1931, Mr. McKay re-visited the island, and ascertained that nearly all the eggs had been hatched, and numerous chicks clothed in white down were seen.

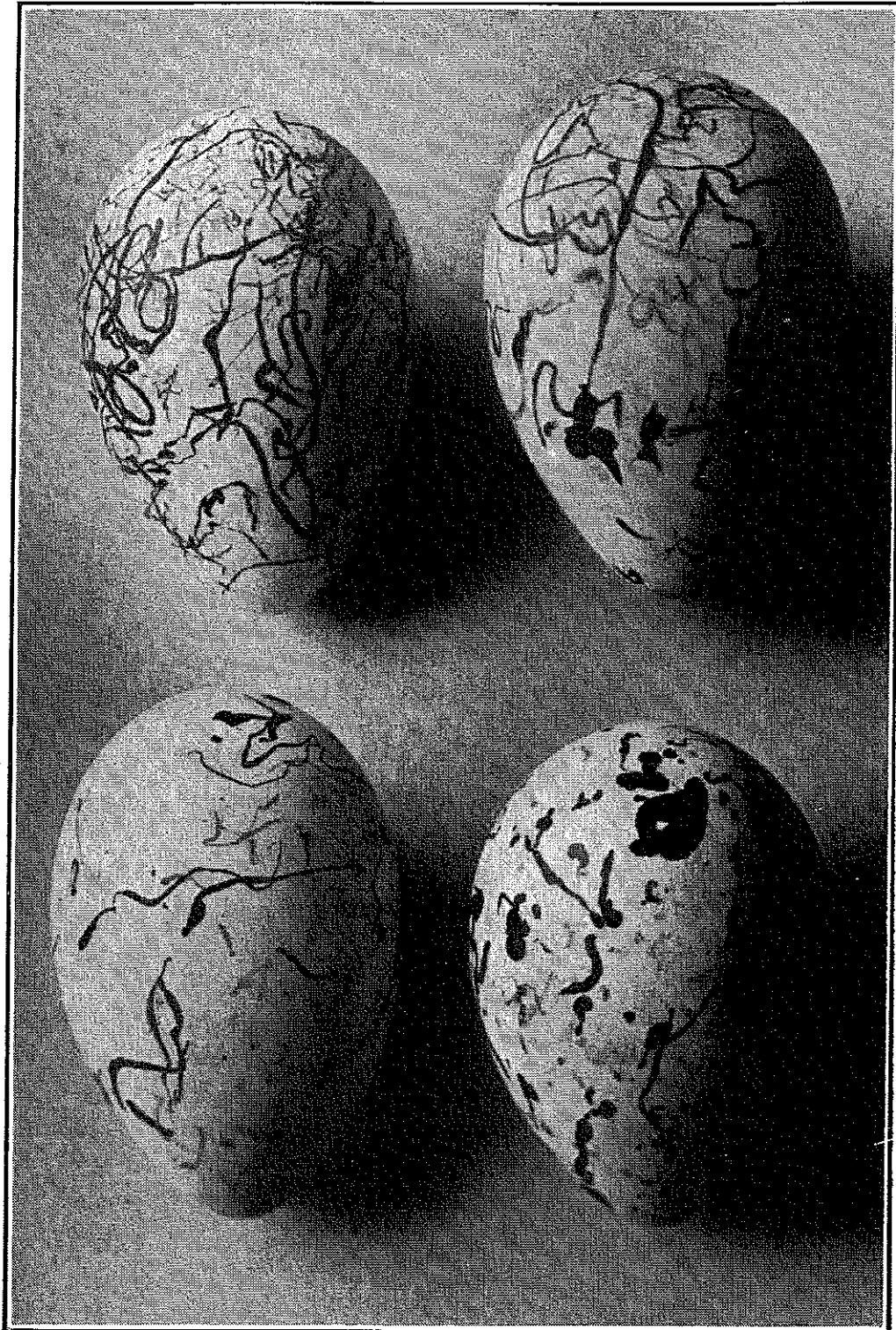
In earlier times there had been several reports of the finding of eggs of the Banded Stilt, and several descriptions of alleged eggs have appeared in print, but all such reports and descriptions proved erroneous. The late A. J. Campbell, in *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*, at page 803 stated:—"But occasionally, especially during wet seasons, the Banded Stilts may be found breeding in Riverina, as in the year when my young friend, Mr. Lindsay Clark, enriched my collection with the eggs of this species, which he procured from near Booligal, on the Lachlan, New South Wales, the memorable wet season of 1879." In *Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania*, by the late A. J. North, the following paragraph appears in Vol. IV, page 293:—"Of the Banded Stilt (*Cladorhynchus pectoralis*) I regret to state I have not seen a properly authenticated set of its eggs, although, doubtless, they resemble in general characters those of the preceding species (White-headed Stilt). The eggs described by Dr. E. P. Ramsay from Mr. H. R. Whittell's collection are those of *Himantopus leucocephalus*. From Mr. L. Clark, of Hawthorn, Victoria, in 1880, I received an egg, purporting to be that of the Banded Stilt, taken by him the previous season near Booligal, on the Lachlan River, New South Wales, but subsequently he wrote and informed me he had incorrectly identified the bird, and the egg belonged to the White-headed Stilt. The late Mr. K. H. Bennett, who knew *Cladorhynchus pectoralis* well, having frequently seen it on the

Gippsland Lakes, Victoria, in former days, and whose station, Yandembah, is next but one to Booligal, informed me that during more than thirty years' collecting in different parts of the Lachlan River district and surrounding country, he had rarely met with the Banded Stilt, and never knew of an instance of its breeding." Evidently Mr. Clark had omitted to inform Mr. Campbell of the incorrect identification.

Everybody had expected that when the nests of the Banded Stilts should be discovered the eggs would be found to resemble those of the White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) and the Red-necked Avocet (*Recurvirostra novæ-hollandiæ*), and that the chicks would be mottled or striped, so that it was a double surprise to find white chicks and eggs with white ground. A further unexpected item was the size of the eggs of the Banded Stilt. Although that bird is approximately the same size as the White-headed Stilt the excess in size of the eggs of the former over that of the latter is very noticeable. Perhaps environment may have something to do with this, for like other creatures which breed in the interior of Australia it may be necessary for the Banded Stilts to make the most of favourable opportunities, such as when there have been heavy falls of rain, and to reproduce their species and rear their broods as rapidly as possible, and this would be aided by the production of large eggs from which would be hatched well-developed chicks. All the food for the adults and young was obtained in the water adjacent to the island.

The rapid sequence of events at Lake Callabonna is worthy of notice. On December 19, 1930, there were no Stilts or their eggs on the island; on December 29 the birds and eggs were there in thousands; on January 4, 1931, clutches of eggs showing well-defined signs of incubation were taken; on January 25 nearly all the eggs had been hatched; and on February 16, when the island was visited by Dr. Ian MacGillivray, only about six Stilts, all of which were adults, were to be seen.

Reference was made on page 251 of Vol. XXX of *The Emu* to the recent appointment of Charles F. Belcher, a member of the R.A.O.U., and at one time co-editor with the late A. J. Campbell, of our magazine, to the position of Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, a promotion which followed not long after his appointment to the office of Chief Justice of Cyprus. His Majesty the King has since graciously conferred upon him the honour of Knight Bachelor and we heartily congratulate Sir Charles upon the honour thus bestowed upon him.



Clutch of Eggs of Banded Stilt.

Photo. by D. J. Dickison, R.A.O.U.