

think, be sheer casuistry to argue, in view of the whole circumstances, that thereby the difficulties regarding the acceptance of the name *volitans* for the Black-and-white Fantail are automatically eliminated. To do so would be tantamount to reducing nomenclature to the status of a parlour game.

I note with interest that Mr. Mathews is disinclined to follow further the hare he started, that Gray had identified the name *volitans* with the Black-and-white Fantail.

Yours, etc.,

Sydney,
July 16, 1942.

D. L. SERVENTY.

Reviews

New Zealand Ornithology.—Interesting notes appear in the *Bulletin of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand*, 1942, no. II, amongst which is "Notes on Cuckoos," by B. J. Marples. A Pallid Cuckoo is recorded (in September, 1941), from near Beaumont, apparently the first specimen. There are two other sight records. In the same class is a Channel-bill, there being a specimen in the Otago Museum, though the locality is not published. (Incidentally, the reference to a Hudsonian Curlew, in the July review item, should have read 'Hudsonian Godwit').

Other contributions are on *Larus bulleri* and on waders in the Firth of Thames (R. B. Sibson), birds of Stewart Island (E. Stead), white herons (R. A. Falla), and birds of the Taupo district (K. A. Wodzicki), whilst there is a 'boost' for the *Emu* and the Union.—C.E.B.

South Australian Ornithology.—In the *South Australian Ornithologist*, vol. XVI, pt. 2, May, 1942, are lists of birds of Port MacDonnell (H. T. Condon), mid-Yorke Peninsula (T. G. Souter), Kangaroo Island (Joan Cleland) and south-western Australia (L. S. Francis).

J. Neil McGilp contributes "Notes on Pelicans and Musk Ducks." He records the side-splashing of water by the male and the sound associated therewith as new to him, which indicates how the most assiduous of observers sometimes miss the almost commonplace, and stresses the importance of detailed records.

E. F. Boehm deals with "Dwarfism in the Australian Raven." Some measurements are given showing that, in the field, small birds might easily be confused, by the novice, with the Little Crow.—C.E.B.

The Oil Menace.—Dillon Ripley, in "Oil on the Sea" (*Audubon Mag.*, vol. XLIV, no. 2, March-April, 1942, p. 86, describes affected ducks and the effects of salt water in coagulating the oil and the destruction of the waterproofing quality with consequent ills and starvation. Once oiled most birds are doomed and there is no treatment, although transportation to fresh-water and proper feeding might save a small percentage. Steps to tackle the problem at its source have been nullified by the war, ships have gone down, oil has spread over the sea, and "wherever sea birds concentrate on their winter feeding grounds, the toll has been enormous."—C.E.B.

Birds of Laysan.—Younger ornithologists who do not know of the ruthless destruction of bird-life, by the Japanese, at Laysan and neighbouring islands, about 30 years ago, will not be persuaded to respect the 'yellow Aryans' after reading Alfred M. Bailey's account in "The Portulaca Flats of Laysan," *Audubon Mag.*, vol. XLIV, no. 3, May-June, 1942, p. 150. In addition to the well-known revolting practices of chopping off the wings of thousands of brooding alba-

trosses and other Japanese pleasantries—a seven-months 'blood-bath' responsible for the death of over 300,000 birds—the five species peculiar to Laysan were considerably reduced. Two are now extinct, and if the Laysan Teal still exists it must be the rarest duck on earth. The unfortunate introduction of the rabbit, following the apprehending of the human vermin, effected even more drastic destruction by vegetation denudation and consequent collapse of sand burrows.

Albatrosses, terns, tropic-birds, petrels and frigate-birds are pictured and described, and an interesting account given of a three months' sojourn at Laysan shortly after the poachers had ravaged it.—C.E.B.

New Australian Birds.—In the *Journal of the Royal Society of W.A.*, vol. xxvii, p. 77, G. M. Mathews describes some "New Forms of Australian Birds," the result of an examination of the Perth Museum collections. One feels that Mr. Mathews, having seen the specimens, and having a distinct advantage over those who have not, does not impart much of the detail upon which the differences are established. And the comparisons do not always appear to be between the representatives that geographical distribution suggests.

Meliphaga virescens murchisoni is revived as the result of the examination of over fifty skins, and *M. v. glauerti*, *M. v. lipfertii* and *M. v. lewisi* are created. There are two new subspecies of *Sericornis maculata*, one each of *Aegintha temporalis* and *Colluricincla brunea*, and a new species, *Cervinipitta kimbleyensis*, which, though considered a possible subspecies of *C. moluccensis*, is nevertheless stated to differ, as shown, from *Pitta megarhyncha*—which, to say the least, is indecisive.—C.E.B.

Some Facts about *Procellaria gavia* Forster.—Under this title, in *The Ibis*, April, 1942, pp. 269-271, Gregory M. Mathews and A. F. Basset Hull give a version of this apparently interminable controversy which is remarkable less for the presentation of any new facts than for the forensic tactics employed. In particular there is a strange manoeuvre to immobilize Mr. Hull's early observations on the colour change of the Fluttering Shearwater. The writers state: "Now we come to the Australian form of the Flutterer. Some skins were collected by Hull and described as *Cinathisma cyaneoleuca*, on account of the slaty-blue bloom on the back. This bird agrees in no way with Forster's description of the upper surface of *P. gavia*. This bloom is usual on many birds and would soon wear off." (The italics in this and the following excerpts are the reviewer's). Those words should be compared with Mr. Hull's original description (1916): "Whole upper surface and flanks dark slaty blue," and later: "The blue colour was very marked, and accompanied by a rich bloom, like that of a ripe plum. The bloom has now disappeared entirely and the blue has become dull and lifeless; the whole appearance of the bird has changed. I have noticed the same loss of colour in the skins of the White-winged Petrel, and of the rich gloss or bloom of the Wedge-tailed and Short-tailed Petrels, but in no former instance was the change so marked." Still later (1922) he admitted: "The bright colour, however, faded somewhat, and intermediate shades from blue to brown having been recorded, my new name sinks into a synonym." It is clear, from the evidence provided by Hull himself, that the blue colour, the presence or absence of which is the essence of the argument, is no mere ordinary bloom, which these authors would now beguile us into believing. And surely there must be few authors who have compelled a collaborator to eat his words in so wholesale a fashion as this case affords. In the face of Hull's original evidence, to continue to deny that Forster's "blue-black" agrees in no way with the conditions observed in the Fluttering Shearwater must be as surprising to the critical student as was Mathews' insistence, until he abandoned the notion in 1941, that Forster's description applied to *Puffinus assimilis*. This was the fourth time he had changed his mind concerning its identity.—D.L.S.