

Stray Feathers

Hooded Dotterel near Sydney.—A. J. North's comments on the occurrence of the Hooded Dotterel (*Charadrius cucullatus*) near Sydney probably need little amendment in the light of subsequent observations. In 1898 he remarked: "Not common, usually met with on Sydney beaches at Port Hacking and the southern parts of the coast" (*Handbook of Sydney, Austr. Assoc. Adv. Sc.*, 1898, p. 110). Later he stated: "I have never seen or heard of a specimen that was obtained in any locality north of Sydney, and it is even an extremely rare species in the southern neighbourhood of the metropolis" (*Nests and Eggs*, vol. iv, 1913, p. 283). Apart from North's observations there are apparently no published records of the species having been seen near Sydney and Mr. K. A. Hindwood tells me he knows of no local observations. It is rather interesting to record, therefore, that on May 1, 1942, I saw a pair of Hooded Dotterels, in adult plumage, at Bate Bay, Cronulla. The birds were running actively along the ocean beach, working northwards, and pacing me for a considerable distance as I walked to Boat Harbour. The species is well distributed along the beaches of southern Australia and Tasmania and it occurs on the salt lakes inland in southern Western Australia. North stated that he was unaware of any records for the species north of Sydney. However the British Museum lists two specimens from Queensland (Salvin-Godman Coll.) (*Cat. Birds*, vol. xxiv, 1896, p. 303). Mr. Iredale considers that there is a distinct possibility of that locality's being wrong. The species has been recorded at Port Stephens, about 100 miles north of Sydney (*The Emu*, vol. xxviii, 1929, p. 247; *ibid*, vol. xxxi, 1931, p. 24). The accompanying photograph of the nest and eggs of the Hooded Dotterel was taken by Mr. Hindwood on an ocean beach near Bawley Point, south coast of New South Wales, on February 3, 1938.—D. L. SERVENTY, Cronulla, N.S.W., 15/2/43.

Birds of the Kulkyne National Forest.—For five days early in March, 1943, Mr. Jack Jones and I visited the Kulkyne National Forest area. Although in the 'off' season, we listed 103 species, five of which were breeding. In the mallee scrub near the Hattah Railway Station we flushed a Bronze-winged Pigeon from a nest which contained two well-grown young. On Lake Konardin a large cormorant rookery was visited, the breeding birds being chiefly Black Cormorants with a sprinkling of Little Blacks. There were also some Darters. Little Pied Cormorants were nesting on Lake Yelwell. At the 'Peppers,' near Lake Mournpoul, seven or eight Spotted Bower-birds were noted and a bower was seen in course of construction. These birds, together with



Nest and eggs of Hooded Dotterel.

Photo. by K. A. Hindwood.

the Striped and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, seem to relish the pepper-corns. Whistling and Wedge-tailed Eagles were most plentiful and several White-breasted Sea-Eagles were also seen. A small party of Grey Jumpers was noted near our camp on the Chalka Creek. Pelicans and Ducks (mostly Grey Teal and Shovellers) were plentiful on the lakes, which, with the exception of Bitterang and Cramen, were well filled. White-rumped Wood-Swallows are usually seen along the banks of swamps, rivers or creeks, but a small party of these birds was seen by us in the sandhills about a mile south of Lake Mournpoul. Emus were plentiful. One bird with eleven well-grown young was the largest group of the many family parties seen. This park is one huge aviary and any bird-lover would find a visit to the area a unique experience.—ROY WHEELER, Elwood, Vic., 10/4/43.

An Abnormal Tasmanian Shearwater.—On May 8, 1942, I found a dead petrel on the surf beach at Marrawah, north-western Tasmania, which exhibited most unusual coloration. It was damaged but I managed to preserve the mummified skin and the skull. At first sight the species seemed novel, but several ornithologists (Cayley, Iredale, Kinghorn, Mathews, Scott and Serventy) who have seen the specimen, agree that it is an aberrant specimen of the common Bass Strait Mutton-bird or Short-tailed Shearwater, *Puffinus tenuirostris brevicaudus* Gould, several normal examples of which were found at the same time and place. The freak bird was apparently a somewhat undersized partial albino, possibly a weakling. The wing measurement was 253 mm., tarsus 45, and tail 83.

Whilst the head and most of the body were of the normal blackish colour, the distal ends of the wings and legs were white, the line of demarcation being very pronounced and occurring halfway along the forearm (ulna and radius) and halfway along the tarsus. Distally from those parts, the forewing, including the whole of the primaries, and the distal series of secondaries, with their upper and under coverts, were white, over the whole of each feather (shaft and vane). The extraordinary feature was the disposition of the white (albino) coloration. The primaries and half of the secondaries and coverts were wholly white but the albinism stopped dead half way across the line of the coverts, so that the ranges of wing coverts had the distal feathers pure white and the proximal ones normal, as if the coloration factor refused to act past midway along the radius and ulna. This was curiously endorsed by the tarso-metatarsal coloration which showed the distal half, with the toes, webs and claws, completely albinistic (pinkish white), the proximal portion being normal. There were only two slight blemishes in the total albinism of the wing-feathers, one

upper primary covert showing normality and one small covert in the interior bend of the wing being of the normal dark colour. The breast was mainly blackish except a narrow median longitudinal tract of white feathers, from upper breast to level of vent, whence the white continued for two or three feathers to the right side of the body.

It does not seem to be generally known that the Mutton-bird goes well below the surface of the sea at times. When aboard the *M.V. Warreen*, off the Bay of Fires, north-east Tasmania, on April 5, 1942, I saw a flock of Mutton-birds flying around a small area. Their dark forms converging towards the nucleus of the flock reminded me of iron filings attracted to a magnetic field. As the ship approached them, they rose from the surface with a dry crackling sound and then, as we came even closer, hundreds of birds came up from *deep below* the water-surface and (with hardly an awkward flap or motion to indicate the surprise they must feel at the readjustment) actually rose direct from below the waves to fly into the air. Some of the birds were almost rammed by the ship's stem, but all managed to get clear. Their facility of motion was all the more remarkable when it was remembered how awkward these birds are when on land. The dry crackling noise became a great roar like applause in a theatre as, just above the water, the whirring wings moved so quickly as to dazzle the eye. And certainly they merited applause as, Venus-like, each one was born out of the foam. The *Warreen* passed them and then, again like the iron filings, I thought, the birds were drawn back again to their submarine pursuits. No fish could be seen anywhere in the vicinity, splashes being made by the birds themselves. Perhaps they were feeding on 'krill,' the tiny crustacea upon which so many animals subsist in those waters.—GILBERT P. WHITLEY, Sydney, N.S.W., 12/2/43.

Abel Tasman National Park.—At the official lunch given to the Dutch delegates headed by Dr. Van der Plas, it was announced by the acting Prime Minister that "In honour of the Tercentenary of the discovery of New Zealand by Abel Tasman, the Government has presented a National Park to the nation, to be called The Abel Tasman National Park of which Her Majesty the Queen of Holland has graciously consented to be patron."

The park lies in Nelson Province, facing Tasman Bay, and consists of 38,000 acres of forest and crown lands. Running along the slope of wooded hills in much the same condition as seen by Tasman, Dumont D'Urville, Captain Cook and the early pioneers, it consists of both North and South Island types of vegetation and should prove a most valuable asset to botanists. It is also of interest from the geological standpoint as well as being the home of many well-known species of South Island birds. The scenery

varies from coastal bays and deep gullies rich in plant-life to tableland and mountain heights whence spring four rivers which descend very rapidly by means of innumerable cascades—a feature commented upon by D'Urville—to the coast.

Whilst honouring our Dutch Allies, our own soldiers have been borne in mind in this preserving of some of the best forest in view of their return. To fellow-members of the R.A.O.U. it should prove an additional attraction when they visit New Zealand after the war.—PERRINE MONCRIEFF, Nelson, N.Z., 8/1/43.

Gannets in Hobson's Bay.—Although not uncommon in Port Phillip Bay it is less often that a small party or an odd Gannet visits Hobson's Bay. On the afternoon of April 10, 1942, thirty Gannets were counted fishing in the Bay off Port Melbourne. Among the Gannets was an immature bird in brown plumage. Crested Terns were also present in numbers and a Skua Gull joined in the party, chasing the Terns for its share of the booty. Fish must have been in great numbers for the Gannets were wheeling and diving in their effortless manner all the afternoon.—ROY WHEELER, Elwood, Vic., 10/4/43.

Channel-bill Cuckoo in Tasmania.—A female specimen of the Channel-bill Cuckoo (*Scythrops novæ-hollandiæ*) was received at the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston, on February 13, 1943. The donor was Mr. W. R. Morice, who shot the bird at 'Landfall,' East Tamar, about eight miles from Launceston. The stomach contents consisted wholly of mulberries. The Channel-bill is 'accidental' to Tasmania and the previous record of its presence there was as far back as November, 1867. For this information I am indebted to the Officer in charge of the Museum, Lola van Gooch.—M. S. R. SHARLAND, Richmond, N.S.W., 1/6/43.

Australian Faunal Regions.—Mr. A. G. Campbell's interesting article on 'Australian Faunal Regions' in *The Emu*, vol. XLII, page 242, is both timely and helpful. His arrangement of these important areas leaves little for comment, and the map clearly depicts the different districts outlined according to geological and climatical conditions.

I would like, however, to draw some attention to that area marked no. 2 (Cape York). As it is drawn by Mr. Campbell it comprises all territory between points corresponding with the Leichhardt River in the Gulf of Carpentaria and Townsville in north-eastern Queensland. This interesting region bases its importance mainly through its affinities with New Guinea, but it is only the eastern half of the Peninsula that possesses this close relationship. There-

fore, to depict clearly this faunal area through its New Guinea association, it would be necessary to draw its boundaries approximately half its present size, commencing near the western tip of Cape York and continuing midway down the Peninsula, terminating at a point slightly farther north than its present extremity.—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 24/5/43.

Mathews' *Cervinipitta kimbleyensis*.—On September 10, 1940, Mr. G. M. Mathews communicated to the Royal Society of Western Australia a description of a Pitta, new, not only to Western Australia, but to science. This bird he named *Cervinipitta kimbleyensis* (*Journ. Roy. Soc. W.A.*, XXVII, 1942, Feb. 12, p. 78.) In connection with the species the author wrote: "The type is an unsexed adult in the Perth Museum—collected in the Derby District of North-western Australia. Another example of the same locality is a mummy, but in good condition. This bird may be a subspecies of *Cervinipitta moluccensis* Muller, 1776."

In order to assist Australian ornithologists to assess the claim of *kimbleyensis* to a place on the Australian list, I print the following from the *West Australian* newspaper of February 2, 1931. "Some three years ago Mr. Glauert received a gaudily-coloured ant-thrush, or pitta, from Mr. N. E. Spry, of Mandora Station, Wallal, who said that the bird had been captured by some aborigines and brought into the homestead. The bird differed markedly from every other known Australian pitta—the birds are of tropical distribution only—but was identified with a species occurring in parts of India, the Malay Peninsula and Banda Island, known as the large-billed blue-winged pitta. Was the Wallal specimen to be accepted then, as evidence that this beautiful Malayan bird also inhabited Western Australia, or that it was merely an escaped cage-bird?

"Mr. Glauert inclined to the latter view and asked Mr. Spry to obtain further information, but without success. So the discovery was not announced to ornithologists. Recently a second specimen of the same kind of bird was received at the Museum, on this occasion from Derby, the donor being Mr. Ah Chee. The circumstances of this second donation confirmed Mr. Glauert's opinion that the Wallal bird was an escaped cage-bird which had subsequently been re-captured."

Wallal is on the Ninety Mile Beach, 338 miles, by road, south-west of Derby, so Mr. Mathews' remark that the other example came from 'the same locality,' is not quite accurate.

On the information now disclosed it may be assumed that ornithologists will await the collection of further specimens in Australia before considering its admission to the Australian list. Owing to the lack in Western Australia, and

possibly in Australia, of specimens of *moluccensis* with which to compare *kimbleyensis*, decision as to the validity of the latter as a species will have to await more settled days.—H. M. WHITTELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 31/1/43.

Corrections.—On page 225 (last paragraph) of the April *Emu*, in 'The Noisy Scrub-bird' (Whittell), a reference is made to Campbell's altering 'abides in the thickest undergrowth' to 'lives in the thickest undergrowth.' Reference to Campbell's *Nests and Eggs* shows the correct wording to be 'lives in the thickets of undergrowth.' It is considered that 'on the ground' is more likely correct than 'in the ground' at the end of the foregoing paragraph.

In view of earlier events, it is not possible for the date 'October 18' to be correct on page 215, under Case 7 (Fleming on the Life History of the Silver-eye).

Speckled Warbler.—The Speckled Warbler (*Chthonicola sagittata*) is found all over Eastern Australia. In New South Wales it inhabits the coast at and near sea level over the Great Dividing Range and beyond. I have met with it near Toowoomba (Queensland) at a height of over 2,000 feet above sea level; on the Blue Mountains (N.S.W.) and beyond at Murrangaroo, 70 or 80 miles from the coast at a height of 3,050 feet above sea level; in the Pilliga Scrub on the north-west plains west of the Warrabungle ranges at a height of 990 feet; and south-west at Tumbarumba, 30 miles or so from the upper Murray at a height of 2,275 feet. As can be seen from that it is found in all kinds of country at various levels and climates. It is seldom one sees more than a pair together and it is nowhere common. It is a ground-feeder, being often associated with the ground-feeding Thornbills (*Acanthiza*). It prefers low scrub and is found mostly on the ground or in low bushes.

It is a sprightly little bird and sometimes difficult to approach. The nest is often built at the butt of a small shrub and thus hidden more or less by it. Composed of grass, fibres and like material, dome shaped with a side entrance, it often has a cup-shaped open nest attached in front comparable to the cup-shaped structure built on top of the nest proper of *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* and evidently used as a roosting place for the male when the nest is too crowded with well-grown young or as a lure to entice a cuckoo to lay its egg.

It is an insectivorous soft-billed bird. It appears to be a partial migrant, at least in New South Wales. The writer, although he has known the species for upward of fifty years, has never seen it except in spring and summer (to mid-March). It is rather a silent bird except when one approaches its nest, when it utters some harsh scolding notes.

Its mode of progression on the ground, like that of all the Thornbill family, is by means of hopping.—E. C. CHISHOLM, Bateman's Bay, N.S.W., 20/5/41.

Speckled Warbler Displaying.—At Christmas, 1942, I was photographing at the nest of Speckled Warblers at Toolern Vale. The young were well advanced and were being fed by both adults, the parents returning with food more or less alternately. Despite the size of the nestlings one bird often entered the nest and stayed there for some minutes at a time—the hen, I assumed.

Returning with food on one occasion, the other bird came up to the nest, and, as he neared the entrance, the hen put out her head and then drew back again. Immediately he spread the feathers of his tail in an elaborate fan and quivered his whole body, emitting a series of soft rapid notes. He crouched low and moved forward, still with fanned-out tail, the few inches to the nest. The hen looked out again, whereupon he increased the quivering of his body. The hen did not take the food, if he were proffering it, but in a few seconds left the nest. The male did not feed the young but followed her. What happened to the insect in his bill I could not see as both birds flew out of my vision.

The actions appeared to me to be a recrudescence of courtship display, possibly preliminary to mating for a second (or later) brood, for they seemed inspired by the sight of the hen in the nest and not connected with feeding the young, although without doubt the food had originally been acquired for that purpose. The Speckled Warbler breeds on into January at least and last season was a favourable one in the Melbourne district for late broods.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 7/5/43.

Obituary

A. J. ELLIOTT

From his brother Arthur, also a member of the Union, comes news of the death of Aubrey J. Elliott, in Bellenger hospital, on June 16, 1943. Death followed an operation for internal injuries caused by a fall while he was cutting scrub on his farm at Dorriggo on June 8, on his 33rd birthday.

Aubrey Elliott had been a member of the Union since 1928. He attended the camps at Moree (1933) and Leeton (1939). He was a keen observer, and had gathered a large series of field-notes of which, unfortunately, too few had been published in *The Emu*. He was an excellent photographer and had recently attained one of the rungs of his photographic aspirations in securing first-class pictures of one hundred species of birds. Contributions to *The Emu* indicate the quality of his pictorial work, the chief of which



Speckled Warbler displaying at nest.

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.