

A Proposed 'Handbook of Australian Birds'

By K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W.

Recently I acquired a four-page 4to. (11 x 8 $\frac{3}{4}$) leaflet advertising a proposed Handbook of Australian Birds, by Alfred J. North, ornithologist at the Australian Museum, Sydney. The leaflet is dated November 28, 1908, at which time North was writing his *Nests and Eggs of Birds found breeding in Australia and Tasmania* (Australian Museum Special Catalogue, no. 1). Volume 1, and parts 1 and 2 of volume 2, had appeared, though the work (in four volumes) was not completed until December 1914.

On page 4 of the leaflet North states—"The manuscript of the proposed work was commenced as far back as 1896, and some little while after the receipt of the following letter from the late Professor Alfred Newton." This letter, dated May 15, 1896, stresses the need for a popular book on the birds of Australia. A letter from R. Bowdler Sharpe, suggesting such a book, is also quoted by North, who concludes with the following remarks—"The work, if carried out, will be nearly in the same style as indicated by the above authorities."

It is obvious that some hitch occurred preventing the publication of the proposed Handbook. North may have been too much occupied with the Special Catalogue, commenced in June 1901, to devote the necessary time to the preparation of a handbook, which was to be of a similar nature, though more popular in appeal. Again, permission may not have been granted by the Trustees of the Museum for North to publish a work resembling in many details the official publication then in progress.

Pages 2 and 3 give examples of the scope of the Handbook; the type faces are the same as used in the Special Catalogue, the printer of which was F. W. White, of Sydney, who also produced the leaflet. Many of the Museum publications of that period were also printed by White. North, in explanation of the project, states—"Owing to the many new discoveries made since the publication of Gould's 'Handbook to the Birds of Australia,' over forty years ago, the want of a work on a similar subject is more keenly felt year by year. At present there are almost nine hundred described species of Australian Birds, of which over two hundred have been added to our avi-fauna since Gould's 'Handbook' was issued in 1865. Now that nature-study, too, is taught in our schools, inquiries for a text book for the use of teachers and others are more numerous than ever.

"The present proposed work will contain descriptions of all species of birds inhabiting Australia and Tasmania, and

HANDBOOK

OF

AUSTRALIAN BIRDS,

CONTAINING

DESCRIPTIONS OF ALL THE SPECIES INHABITING AUSTRALIA
AND TASMANIA, AT PRESENT KNOWN TO THE AUTHOR;

ALSO

SHOWING THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION, AND GIVING A
BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THEIR LIFE HISTORY,

BY

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an appendix including the birds of Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands. Their distribution will be shown, as well as a description of their nests and eggs, where known to the author, and general remarks on the haunts and habits of every species referred to in the work. The principal refer-

ences given will consist of the original description of each species, to a published figure, but chiefly to those in Gould's beautiful folio edition of his 'Birds of Australia'; to a more detailed description in those standard publications, the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum,' and to a fuller account of the life history of the species. Dealing with the subject matter, with due regard to efficiency, yet in the most concise manner, it is estimated that the proposed work will consist of two volumes of about 500 pages each."

It will be noticed that North makes no mention of A. J. Campbell's fine publication, *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*, 1901, a work based on similar lines to his own proposed Handbook. A great fault in North's published writings is his neglect of his contemporaries in Australia, whose work he largely ignored, apparently because of a jaundiced outlook. Here we see, perhaps, the reason why he specifically mentioned in the leaflet that he first contemplated his Handbook in 1896, five years before Campbell's book was published.

W. A. Rainbow, Librarian at the Australian Museum, and a contemporary of A. J. North, tells me that he has no knowledge of North's ever discussing his proposed Handbook. The leaflet is very rare: the copy discussed is the only one I can trace, and it is, I feel, of sufficient interest to warrant the foregoing remarks.

Partial Albinism.—Although albinism in birds is infrequently met with in the field, there are a number of published records. Two additional instances have recently come under my notice close to Sydney, New South Wales. On May 13, 1945, a Coot (*Fulica atra*) was noted amongst a flock on Eastlakes Lagoon, with most of the feathers of the lower back pure white, and standing out vividly amongst its otherwise black plumage. Although only slightly noticeable whilst swimming, the white was clearly discernible each time it dived.

Whilst I was with a party on an organized outing of Royal Zoological Society members to National Park heathlands on September 8, 1946, a Yellow-winged Honeyeater (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*) was observed with a pure white head. Commencing with the breast and back portion of the crown to the tail, the plumage was otherwise typical. It apparently was mated to a normal-plumaged bird as they remained close together and gave the impression they were breeding, but no nest could be located.—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 10/9/46.