

Stray Feathers

Rufous Bristle-bird in Eastern Victoria.—On our way home from a Christmas and New Year trip to Mallacoota we camped for the night of January 3, 1947, at Marlo, at the mouth of the Snowy River. Next morning Mr. H. Tarr, a member of the party, called me from the bus, where I had been sleeping, and asked me to listen to a strange bird-call. I immediately identified the notes as those of the Rufous Bristle-bird (*Dasyornis broadbenti*), which has not previously been recorded east of Port Phillip Bay.

Further search led to the discovery of the large dome-shaped nest of the species, placed on top of a clump of sword-grass growing at the foot of a *Melaleuca* tree. The nest contained two young birds with gapes of creamy yellow. The inside of the mouth was yellow. The eyes were not yet open. There was dark, almost black, down on the head and back, and the skin above the eye was pink.—FRANK E. HOWE, Mitcham, Vic., 4/2/47.

The Pied Honeyeater Breeding in Victoria.—The habitat of the Pied Honeyeater (*Certhionyx variegatus*) as quoted by the *Checklist* of the R.A.O.U., 1926, is given as 'Interior A(ustralia), N.S.W.-W.A., N.W.A.', with no definite reference to Victoria, but I now record it as nesting in that State.

On September 15, 1946, my wife and I journeyed to Manya in the north-west of Victoria where we were very comfortably housed by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Hitchcock, whose home is situate in the parish of Manya, and it was from that point that we visited the surrounding scrubs for a radius of about fifteen miles in a northerly and easterly direction. These scrubs have been well described by Messrs. Howe and Ross in volume 32 of *The Emu* and any further remarks by me would be superfluous.

I was in the scrubs each day for a month and was surprised at the number of dainty little Black Honeyeaters (*Myzomela nigra*) that were breeding on every hand. On September 29, near the Manya bore, I wandered through the scrub northwards—see plan of Milton's block in vol. 32, page 136—where a pair of birds of which I had not any previous knowledge attracted my attention by their extraordinary flight and unique call note. Both birds were seen to mount into the air together and literally 'loop the loop'. Many of their actions in the air were similar to those of the Black Honeyeater. It was the Pied Honeyeater. (See pages 529-530, vol. 1, of Gould's *Handbook* for an accurate description of its habits). Many hours were spent watching the birds which were very timid, and on October 2 a nest was found in course of construction. Merely half a dozen twigs had been placed in position.

The site chosen was three feet from the ground in a large bushy round wattle (? sp.) that abounds in the neighbourhood. It was placed on a horizontal branch on the northern side of the bush about eight inches from the edge of the foliage and could only be detected with difficulty from underneath and from the opposite side of the shrub. Both male and female, which shared the task of incubation, could only reach and leave the nest by entering from the southern side of the bush.

The nest was completed and two eggs laid by October 5, which was three days later. I was amazed at the celerity of the whole proceeding. A faithful description of the nest is given by C. G. Gibson on page 90 of volume 2 of A. J. North's *Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia*. When last visited (October 7) the nest still contained the two eggs, from which the male was flushed. Amongst the birds listed, the Meliphagidae predominated and I was also agreeably surprised to find the Regent Honeyeater (*Zanthomiza phrygia*), some four individuals being seen.—WILL BURGESS, Mitcham, Vic., 2/12/46.

Migration Queries.—In *The Emu*, vol. 46, p. 74, Charles H. Blake, of U.S.A., has given observation details of the Fork-tailed Swift (*Micropus pacificus*) and Rainbow-bird (*Merops ornatus*) in northern Queensland during late July, 1944. The record of the former bird is definitely unusual. I cannot obtain, from published records and enquiries, any winter occurrences of the Fork-tailed Swift in eastern Australia. It has always been regarded as a regular and strict migrant, with October and November as the recognized months of its arrival in Australia, November 14 (1943) being my earliest observance date in New South Wales. Of course stragglers may remain, though it would be unlikely with such gregarious and powerful flying birds as swifts. Whilst Mr. Blake can be assured that such a record is possibly without precedence, field-notes for northern Queensland over an extended time are seldom published. Could it be possible that he mis-identified the smaller and resident Grey Swiftlet (*Collocalia francica*)? Otherwise, the logical deduction is that some non-breeding birds occasionally arrive earlier than the main migration flocks and remain in the tropics until suitable climatic conditions allow their departure for the temperate regions of southern Australia and Tasmania. This species is not recorded by Kendall Broadbent (*Emu*, vol. 10, pt. 3), A. J. Campbell (*Emu*, vol. 17, pt. 1), H. G. Barnard (*Emu*, vol. 26, pt. 1), or D. F. Thomson (*Birds of Cape York Peninsula*)—to select but a few of some fairly comprehensive 'lists' from that area, to serve as illustrations. On the other hand, Dr. W. D. MacGillivray (*Emu*, vol. 17, pt. 4) and F. L. Berney (*Emu*, vol. 6, pt. 2) are amongst those who record it but give no indication of winter records,

mentioning late September-November and December, respectively, as arrival dates. The Spine-tailed Swift (*Hirundapus caudacutus*), which often associates with the Fork-tailed, agrees closely with it in habits and arrival, though it is the more frequently recorded bird, being referred to in all the above-mentioned 'lists'.

The Rainbow-bird breeds in Australia and migrates regularly to the tropics according to present-known knowledge, so it would be feasible to expect some to remain in the Cairns-Townsville area during portion of the Australian winter, though the migration urge would have taken most of them much farther north. Their movement southwards, also, may be slow in tropical Queensland, but in New South Wales (Brisbane is close to that State's border) arrival is complete and regular (*cf.* P. A. Gilbert, *Emu*, vol. 35, p. 22). The other migrants seen at Brisbane, as detailed, from mid-September to early October, agree with their recognized arrival times.

The scientific title given the Black-faced Flycatcher is incorrect, as *canescens* is the north Queensland bird. If trinomials are used, *melanopsis* is the older name, and the bird breeding in south-eastern Australia is *Monarcha melanopsis melanopsis*.—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 10/9/46.

Tasmanian Notes.—Three Dove Prions (*Pachyptila desolata*) were washed ashore ten days ago. There had been no rough weather along our coast. They were all recently dead, in good plumage and plump, and bore no external marks of injury. The specimen brought to me had its throat stained by blood, which had oozed from the mouth. I was at a loss to suggest the cause of their deaths.

Mr. Sharland, in his book, *Tasmanian Birds*, lists the Vieillot Storm-Petrel (*Cymodroma grallaria*) amongst the 'Probable Visitors'. Towards the close of 1928 I picked up a dead bird of this species. It was lying on the beach at the head of the inner bay at Eaglehawk Neck. It appeared to have been killed by striking a telephone post nearby, for its feathers were not wet, and its flesh was still quite firm.

Two flocks of the Brown Quail (*Synoicus australis*), each numbering eight, patrolled the garden and orchard all last winter and into the late spring. Each lot kept to its own range. At the end of September they disappeared, except for one pair, which remained in their old haunt. They nested further up the slopes of Mt. Cash. I often heard the hen calling for her mate when she returned from laying. In early February they brought a family of seven back to the garden. From the window I watched them to-day as they hunted for grass seeds. I placed wheat for them in one of the corners they like, and they came

back and ate it. Owing to a most severe drought, coupled with a plague of night-feeding caterpillars, seeds are very scarce. The Quail family enters the fowl yard and eats the remnants of mash left in the trays.

On Saturday morning last, a Ground or Button-grass Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*) was in the fowl-yard eating grains of wheat that had been left over from the evening meal. When detected, it took a short flight into the star ferns nearby, then another similar flight, which took it higher up the hill, where it dropped into scrub and ferny growth close to a gum tree. It is a long time since I have seen this species here, although when I first came to live at Eaglehawk Neck I occasionally flushed single birds from the scrub close to the beach. The bird noted had evidently been driven from its usual haunts by the fearful bush fires that raged over Mt. Cash early last week, and which came very near to burning out 'Lyeltya', which was only saved by the arrival of the fire-fighting squad. There is a small button-grass plain running up to the western slopes of Mt. Cash range, where a few of these birds still appear to hold their own, and I think this bird had come from there.

Owing to the effects of an accident some years ago I am unable to do field work and follow up many interesting points. Fellow ornithologists will understand what a hardship this has been.—J. A. FLETCHER, Eaglehawk Neck, Tas., 18/2/46.

Reviews

Central Pacific Birds.—A handy, informative work on the sea-birds of the central Pacific Ocean has long been a desideratum. Thomas M. Blackman's book (*Birds of the Central Pacific Ocean*, 1944, pp. 1-70, 18 pls., Tongg Publishing Company, Honolulu, Hawaii) fills this want admirably. Some 42 species of sea-birds are treated: notes are given of plumage phases, habits, and distribution, including known breeding places of those species that nest within the area. A short section towards the end of the volume deals with the shore-birds (waders) that regularly occur as migrants from the Arctic regions.

The illustrations are from photographs and drawings by the author. The coloured figures are life-like and should be of considerable assistance to the field worker. In most instances they have been drawn direct from photographs of living birds, careful attention having been given to the colours of the soft parts.

It is noted that the terns are listed under the Order Charadriiformes: a new departure in classification, or an error. Which? The Gould Petrel (*Pterodroma leucoptera leucoptera*) is recorded as breeding in the Fiji Islands and on islands near the Australian coastline. The form usually listed from Fiji is *brevipes*, as noted by Blackman. The nominate race, *leucoptera*, has, to the reviewer's knowledge, been found breeding only on Cabbage Tree Island off the entrance to Port Stephens, N.S.W. The Red-billed Tropic-bird (*Phaethon aethereus*) is listed. Details of occurrences are not given. Normally the species occurs, in the Pacific, considerably to the east of the area covered by this book.