

Recent Records of the Hoary-headed Grebe for Sydney.— Previous to 1954 I identified the Hoary-headed Grebe (*Podiceps poliocephalus*) with certainty in the Sydney district on one occasion only—one bird on a lower stretch of Cook's River on October 2, 1943. It was in apparent breeding plumage as the head markings were very noticeable. On various other occasions I have observed pale-coloured birds that could refer to *P. poliocephalus* in eclipse plumage but more likely to be immature Little Grebes (*P. ruficollis*), a common Sydney species.

In view of the apparent rareness of the Hoary-headed Grebe near Sydney the occurrence of many small parties on the Hunter River swamps (*Emu*, vol. 51, p. 146), where they nested, was interesting. In 1953, S. G. Lane reported a few birds in the Hawkesbury district, and on April 19, 1954, Messrs. K. A. Hindwood, E. Hoskin and Lane saw a bird in adult plumage, associated with numerous Little Grebes, at Pitt Town Lagoon.

Since that date I have found the species present at three Sydney suburban localities, as follows—

Iron Cove, a backwater of Sydney Harbour, May 9. A compact flock of ten birds, all in excellent plumage, observed from the car on the marine scenic drive that skirts the Cove closely.

Eastlakes, a few miles south of Sydney, July 4. Two, associated with about thirty-five Little Grebes. One in semi-eclipse plumage and the other very pale, but associated closely with the other bird.

Millpond, a little south of Eastlakes, July 11. Two. One in good plumage, and the other in semi-eclipse.

In semi-eclipse plumage the head pattern was much duller but the lines across the head were still noticeable and the dark band on the back of head and nape prominent. In eclipse, no head-lines were seen, but the line from eye to bill, evident with immature Little Grebes, was absent.

Whether such a concentration of observations means that the species has been overlooked previously, or that an influx has occurred, I cannot say, but the latter possibility seems more likely.—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 18/7/54.

Annual Meeting, 1955

The Tasmanian Branch Secretary, Mr. Michael Sharland, advises that a programme is being arranged for the Annual Meeting to be held in Tasmania in October. It has been found impossible to hold the field outing at St. Helen's, as planned, so that will be arranged, now, for Port Arthur, Tasman Peninsula, from which centre excursions will take place. Dates for the tentative programme are:

Friday, October 14: Members arrive in Hobart. Accom-

modation at city hotels. Reception at 4 p.m. Evening at home of Branch Secretary, 141 Hampden Road.

Saturday, 15: Excursion to Mt. Wellington, calling at the home of Mr. and Mrs. H. Boss-Walker ('St. Chad'). Evening at home of Miss H. Mosey, Lindisfarne.

Sunday, 16: Excursion, to be arranged.

Monday, 17: Leave by coach for Port Arthur. Accommodation at 'Roseview' Guest House (semi-rustic accommodation, good meals, rooms to be shared, special tariff £5/5/- week). During stay at Port Arthur, day and half-day outings will be arranged to such places as Saltwater River, Eaglehawk Neck, Fortesque Bay, and possibly by fishing boat to The Isle of the Dead and the eastern coast of Port Arthur.

Saturday, 22: Return to Hobart (meeting ends).

Business sessions will be held in the evenings at Port Arthur, if necessary.

Hobart hotel reservations for the weekend October 14 to 16 and other dates can be arranged by writing to Mr. Leonard Wall, c/o A.M.P. Society, 27 Elizabeth Street, Hobart. Early application is essential, and must be accompanied by a deposit of £2/2/- for each person. It must be emphasized that accommodation at Port Arthur has to be shared, though tents may be available to provide for an overflow. There is a hotel at Port Arthur, where the tariff is considerably higher. Shop and post office and telephone office and other amenities available.

Air fares Melbourne to Hobart, approximately £8 single (Ansett Airways slightly less expensive). Flight time about 2½ hours, compared with 17 hours by boat and train.

The Hon. General Secretary should also be advised of intention to attend the function.

Reviews

Birds' 'Use of Tools'.—In pursuance of what appears to be a desire to keep British ornithologists posted in various aspects of Australian bird-life—that is, 'international' aspects—A. H. Chisholm has written in the *Ibis* (96, 380-3, 1954) an informative paper entitled "The Use by Birds of 'Tools' or 'Instruments'". Four sections discuss briefly (1) the occasional reports of certain birds having been seen to carry flowers in their beaks during courtship activities, (2) the practice of certain finches and tree-creepers of placing charcoal in their nests, together with a report that *Merops* sometimes uses pieces of bone and shell as 'natural lamps' in its burrow, (3) the 'stick game' favoured by certain birds of prey (the dropping of a stick or dried rabbit-skin from high in the air and catching it before it reaches the ground), also reports that a Spotted Bower-bird may at times fly up and drop a bone for another Bower-bird to catch, and (4) the Pacific Gull's habit of breaking shells by dropping them on to rocks.

More definite 'tools', of course, are the bark-wads used by certain bower-birds, either as 'brushes' or 'corks', when painting their bowers, and the stones which the Black-breasted Buzzard employs to break the eggs of Emus. These examples of the use of primary tools are

given most attention in the paper. In addition, reference is made to a report that a Rainbow-bird (*Merops ornatus*) engaged in digging a nest-burrow was seen to hold a small stick in its beak and use it in the fashion of a mining tool, but it is suggested that this statement should not be accepted without verification.—K.A.H.

Western Australian Ornithology.—In the *Western Australian Naturalist*, vol. 4, no. 6, September 1954, G. M. Storr ('South-western Bird Notes', pp. 142-144) deals with certain species in the country between Capes Naturaliste and Leeuwin, mentioning that the Mallee-Fowl appears to be still plentiful near the latter place. Several brief notes on birds appear, including a record of the Crested Bellbird near Williams (Brian V. Teague), observations on the behaviour of Bee-eaters (John Warham) and a record of the flight speed of the Common Bronzewing (B. V. Teague).

An outstanding paper analysing nesting seasons in Western Australia is contributed by I. C. Carnaby in the issue of December 1954 (vol. 4, no. 7, pp. 149-156). This is based on detailed field notes kept since 1926 and the method should commend itself to the notice of egg collectors and others possessing similar data for the more precise delimitation of nesting seasons than is available in the current literature. The brief notes include another inland record of the Great-winged Petrel (at Wyalkatchem by W. H. Butler), the identity of the type locality 'Clifton Downs' (I. C. Carnaby), early nesting of the Little Wattle-bird (J. R. and W. C. Ford), occurrence of the Reef Heron in Fremantle Harbour (G. Cattermole), and a large concentration of the Elegant Parrot (100 birds near Narrogin, by B. V. Teague).—D.L.S.

Correspondence

To the Editor.

Sir,

I have received a request from Dr. Brina Kessel, University of Alaska, College, Alaska, for information on the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in Australia and New Zealand. Dr. Kessel is concerned with the geographic distribution of the Starling and requires up-to-date information along the following lines—(1) date and localities of introduction into Australia and New Zealand; (2) present distribution of the Starling in Australia and New Zealand, especially in relation to major climatic and vegetational areas; (3) references to any Australian literature on this bird, apart from Kinghorn (1930).

I would be grateful to anyone who could assist me in meeting this request. Any such data may be sent either to me at the address below, or direct to Dr. Kessel.

Yours etc.,

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Christchurch, New Zealand.

E. W. DAWSON

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