

Branch Report

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Recently the Masked Plover (*Lobibyx miles*) was recorded for the first time in the southern half of Western Australia and further observations on the White Ibis (*Threskiornis molucca*) in the South-west indicate that this species is now permanently established.

The discovery of the White-breasted Robin (*Quoyornis georgianus*) north of Perth, whereas it was previously thought to be restricted to the lower South-west (from Pinjarra to Albany) has created considerable interest and emphasized that the distributions of many Australian bird species are inadequately known. It is also pleasing to note that the Western Whip-bird (*Psophodes nigrogularis*) still survives in the Mallee country between Borden and Ravens-thorpe.

A new bird for the Australian list was recorded during the year. It was the Malay Banded Crane (*Rallina fasciata*), a specimen of which was recorded at Broome in the north of this State. This Malayan species is known to undergo seasonal movements, but details of them are little known. An account has been published by Dr. D. L. Serventy in *The Emu*. The specimen has been lodged with the Western Australian Museum.

Formation of W.A. Bird-banding Group

Following a visit of Mr. W. B. Hitchcock, Secretary of the C.S.I.R.O. Bird-banding Scheme, to this State, in September 1958, when a meeting of local bird-banding enthusiasts was held in the Perth Town Hall, it was considered that the formation of a Western Australian Bird-banding Group would do much to accelerate and co-ordinate bird-banding. The inaugural meeting of this Group was held at the W.A. Museum on October 17, 1958, and has since become a branch of the Western Australian Naturalists Club. An ambitious banding project on the Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*), which has breeding colonies at Moora, Gingin and Coolup, has been launched, and next year it is intended to extend activities to the banding of sea birds, mainly Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) and the Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*) that breed along the coast.

W.A. Bird Group

Meetings of the W.A. Bird Group designed to cater alternately for senior and junior students of ornithology, continue to be held at monthly intervals in the W.A. Museum. Some of the bird skins collected on the W.A. Museum expedi-

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tion to the Hamersley Ranges during July and August 1958, were discussed and exhibited by Dr. G. F. Mees at a subsequent meeting.

Two prominent overseas ornithologists, Drs. D. S. Farner and A. J. Marshall, have been working in this State in conjunction with the C.S.I.R.O. Dr. Marshall, at a W.A. Naturalists Club meeting, delivered an informative lecture on factors influencing the breeding seasons of birds.

Western Australian Gould League

Though the Western Australian Gould League since 1957 has been linked with the Education Department's Nature Advisory Service, and therefore covers a wider field of study than previously, the study of birds still remains the League's chief aim and function.

In the junior section, 13,000 school children have paid membership fees this year (1958) and over 350 Gould League clubs have been reported by schools as actively working.

Four hundred adults were also financial members for 1958, half of these being interested students from high schools and from the Teachers' Training Colleges. The League has attempted to supply the needs of this intermediate section by means of week-end camps for the demonstration of field work and by specially arranged lectures held at the W.A. Museum. The lectures are also attended by local members of the R.A.O.U. from whose ranks the lecturers are drawn.

The bird selected for special study during 1958 was the Regent (Smoker) Parrot. By means of questionnaires sent out through the medium of *The Gould Leaguer* (Nature Advisory Service Guide for the year's study) schools and Gould League clubs throughout the State have returned information on the present distribution of the species, which has been extending its range of late years. A summary of the results will be made for publication in *Gould League Notes* (annual magazine) by Mr. E. Sedgwick, who prepared the inquiry.

Besides the annual magazine (*Bird Life*) the League launched two new publications this year, titled respectively, *The Easy Way to Bird Sketching* and *Suggestions for Craft Work*. Both are compiled from articles taken from the out-of-print back numbers of the *Gould League Notes* and are useful references for schools. Further publications of a similar nature are in course of preparation, one being notes on the work of John Gould and John Gilbert.

The usual Annual Camp School for primary children took participation in the Annual Wild Life Show, and the celebration of Bird Day took place. All were well attended and very successful functions.

Fauna Administration

Hereunder is a detailed list of all birds exported from Western Australia for the period 1/1/57 to 31/12/57 (Departmental names)—

Gouldian Finch 10,611, Masked Finch 1,230, Yellow-rump Finch 108, Chestnut-eared Finch 56, *Emblema picta* 48, Crimson Finch 120, Longtail Finch 4,330, Double-bar Finch 132, Blood Finch 392, Parson Finch 12, Mixed Finches 12, Pictorellas 3,651, Star Finch 2,672, Smoker Parrot 126, Twenty-eight Parrot 168, Galah 4, Budgerygahs 26, Western Rosella 308, King Parrot 61, Major Mitchell Cockatoo 2, Yellow Rosella 8, Eastern Rosella 6, Hooded Rosella 1, Crimson Wing Parrot 2, Stanley Rosella 36, Rainbow Lorikets 24, Tasmanian Rosella 5, Northern Rosella 2, Crimson Rosella 4, Elegant Parrot 10, Blue Bonnet 10, Rock Parrot 6, Barraband Parrot 3, Rufous Tree-creeper 3, Splendid Blue Wren 7, Miners 2, Hooded Robin 2, Kookaburra 2, Mongolian Pheasant 2, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater 4, Canaries 4, Emu 4.

P. J. FULLER

BRANCH SECRETARY

Stray Feathers

Alfred J. North as a 'Taxonomer'.—It is now generally agreed that, as remarked by Mathews, with the death of A. J. North in 1917 Australia "lost her foremost ornithologist". Mathews also says that "North was no species maker nor did he indulge much in the naming of subspecies, but he had a good eye and constantly discriminated the racial forms . . . as a general rule his names have remained valid".

An interesting sidelight on North's taxonomic views is provided by some letters written by him to the late A. H. C. Zietz in the year 1906, when the latter was Assistant Director at the South Australian Museum. The correspondence deals mainly with Kangaroo Island birds and contains some forthright but completely justifiable (and commendable) criticisms of the work of certain ornithologists. He says "Australian ornithology is being overburdened with unnecessary synonyms in addition to those created by quite needless separation". At the present time many of North's 'species' are considered geographical races and it is worth pointing out that he also held the same view. For instance, of '*Platycercus melanoptera*' (the Kangaroo island race of *P. elegans*) which he described in *The Emu*, vol. 6, p. 78, North writes "a variety of subspecies, what you will of *P. elegans* Gmelin, differing from that species by the greater amount of black on the feathers of the back, but principally by the inner half of the upper wing coverts (except the margins of some of the median and greater series) being black, and for which I would suggest the distinguishing name of