

Stray Feathers

White-throated Nightjar in Otway Ranges, Victoria.—In Victoria the White-throated Nightjar, *Eurostopodus mystacalis*, is by no means numerous and its range is apparently limited between the Great Dividing Range and the coastal regions of Gippsland and central Victoria.

There are few central Victorian records, however, and these are listed by W. R. Wheeler as follows:

Wheelwright 1854-58—summer visitor to heathlands. Not common.

The Australasian December 30, 1865—first Victorian bird list names this species.

Isaac Batey *Emu*, vol. 7—frequently seen in 1846. Between 1855/60 last seen Jacksons Creek near Sunbury.

A. J. Campbell *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*—eggs found in foothills of Dandenong Ranges.

A. Coles *Victorian Naturalist* 1902—exhibited two specimens from Mt. Bulla (April) and Beaconsfield (March).

J. A. Ross *Emu*, vol. 28—one shot at Mt. Evelyn, and one flushed from egg at Killara. Another seen at Whittlesea.

L. W. O'Connor 1961—flushed a bird from egg at Toolern Vale, October 22.

There is also an interesting note from Mr M. Hodges of Colac, who records seeing the egg of a nightjar taken near Anglesea in recent years; in his opinion the egg was that of *mystacalis*. Apart from this observation it appears that the first record of the species from the Otway Ranges was a specimen found on the road between Bambra and Peters Hill on January 13, 1963 by L. H. Barrow and T. I. Fletcher. This area is basically the dividing line between the sclerophyll stringybark scrubs to the north and the heavily-timbered Mountain Ash forests of the Otway Ranges to the south. Much of the sclerophyllous scrub has been cleared and it was adjacent to this cleared area, and in the damp Otway region, that the nightjar was found.

The specimen was sent to the National Museum of Victoria and given the preliminary number W-6201. The Curator of Birds, Mr A. R. McEvey wrote: "This would appear to be the only Victorian specimen in our collections but it is possible that such specimens exist in other museums."

The only measurements obtainable were: tarsus 27.5 mm, wing 255 mm.

Efforts by members of the Otway Survey, a branch of the Geelong Wildlife Research Group, have been fruitless in finding any further trace of *E. mystacalis* in that region. It is of interest to note that the Spotted Nightjar, *E. guttatus*, has been recorded on a few occasions in the Anglesea heathland country, where it

was regarded as the characteristic species.—T. I. FLETCHER, 27 Frank Street, Newtown, Vic.

Red-backed Wren in central Queensland.—In *The Emu* (63: 333) Liddy suggests that the southern limit of the Red-backed Wren, *Malurus melanocephalus*, in western Queensland is about Cloncurry, some 200 miles south of the Gulf.

I have a passable colour slide of a male Red-backed Wren taken in August 1963 at Rosedale Station, some 70 miles north of Blackall, which is about 400 miles south-east of Cloncurry and 400 miles west of Gladstone on the coast. The family group was with the male and it took quite a while to get the picture, even with a 200 mm telephoto lens. The area is just west of the true Dividing Range and right on the line of the Dingo Fence. We saw two other Red-backed Wrens in the area.

Rosedale is in the so-called "desert" country—named after the "desert sandstone", and not because of low rainfall. On the eastern side of the Divide, Cypress Pine, *Callitris hugelii*, occurs in profusion, but is absent at Rosedale. The country is flat, open sclerophyll forest with the Silver-leaf Ironbark, *Eucalyptus melanophloia*, predominating, Poplar Box, *E. populnea*, and a sprinkling of Kurrajong, *Brachychiton populneum*. Around claypans are *Casuarina*, and along the few creek beds the ubiquitous Red Gum, *E. camaldulensis*. There are patches of Mulga, *Acacia aneura*, and gidgee. The main grass is "kangaroo grass", with areas of spinifex, and there is no understorey.

The wrens were at the edge of a cleared area that had been planted with *Sorghum alnum* and grazed down by cattle. They were among coppiced eucalypt regrowth 5-6 ft high, and sparse. The nearest water—a single "tank"—was about a mile away.

The significant birds in the area—in August, after eight months without rain—were Galahs, Pale-headed Rosellas, Blue-faced and White-plumed Honeyeaters, Crested Pigeons, Apostle-birds, and Double-bar Finches. We also saw the Spotted Bowerbird, a Crested Hawk, and a couple of Brolgas.—H. B. SOMERSET, 360 Collins Street, Melbourne, Vic.

Cattle Egrets in Brisbane.—On November 2, 1963, two Cattle Egrets, *Ardeola ibis*, were seen on open pasture land bordering the Brisbane River at Long Pocket. They were in full breeding plumage with buff on the crown, throat, and middle of the back, and feeding close to three cows. On November 17, 1963, six Cattle Egrets were seen in the same area; two were with cows and another four were seen in flight, the buff showing quite clearly as they flew over and landed near the others. During another visit to the area on December 7, about the same number as before was observed, but they were more scattered and alarmed easily as they constantly flew from one pasture to another where cattle were grazing. Later

PLATE 11



Cattle Egret on nest, Brisbane Botanic Gardens, December 7, 1963.
Photo by Barry Morgan.

that day, a visit to the Brisbane Botanic Gardens climaxed the earlier sightings with the discovery of four pairs of Cattle Egrets nesting in trees (Weeping Fig, *Ficus Benjamina*) with other egrets (see photo).

The recent report of the first Cattle Egret in New Zealand (*Notornis* 10: 316) marks the last isolated land mass to be penetrated by the species since it turned up in British Guiana in 1930. In 20 years it gradually built up and spread northwards; in 1953 it reached the United States, and the same year nested for the first time in North America. Its normal range is Africa and the warmer parts of Asia, with a few colonies in southern Spain and Portugal.

Cattle Egrets were first reported in the Northern Territory of Australia in 1948 (cf. Deignan, *Rec. Amer.-Aust. Sci. Exped. Arnhem Land*, vol. 4, Zoology, pp. 350-1), since when they have been reported in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia. They should be looked for wherever cattle graze, and any egret found with cattle could possibly be *Ardeola ibis*.

Perhaps the Cattle Egrets now nesting in Brisbane's Botanic Gardens came from the established colony at Grafton, N.S.W., or are new arrivals from the north. Fortunately they are most useful birds and a beautiful addition to the Australian avifauna.—BARRY and JOANNA MORGAN, Eastwood Street, Belmont, Brisbane.

Mortality and breeding of Short-tailed Shearwater on the mainland at Portland, Vic.—It has long been known, at least for the past 60 years or so according to older residents, that dead Short-tailed Shearwaters, *Puffinus tenuirostris*, are found in summer on certain headlands near Portland in south-western Victoria, but there was no definite evidence of their breeding on the mainland up till December 1963, when many birds were found nesting at Point Danger, three miles south east of Portland. The purpose of these notes is to summarize the information gathered during the last ten years on the mortality of Shearwaters at Point Danger, Cape Grant, and elsewhere in the Portland district, and to record their breeding on the mainland.

For several years prior to 1953 visiting ornithologists had counted up to 300 carcasses on Cape Grant, and all were satisfied that there were no nesting burrows on the Cape. Also, the local Fisheries and Wildlife officer, Mr. T. O'Brien, who investigated the cause of the deaths, confirmed the absence of burrows. In 1953 some members of the Portland Field Naturalists' Club undertook a night watch on the end of the Cape from November 19-24. Nothing happened until the 24th when, soon after dark, Shearwaters began to land in the low vegetation until there were more than 100 birds near the observers. From that date onwards, and in subsequent years, periodic searches were made for dead Shearwaters on local headlands, and the results of these are summarized in Table 1. In many cases, examination of dead birds suggested that foxes were responsible; on November 25, 1953, a fox was seen disappearing over the cliff at Cape Grant with a bird in its mouth.

TABLE 1
Counts of Dead Short-tailed Shearwaters at Portland

Date	Cape Grant	Point Danger
1953		
November 25	6	
November 29	7	2
December 6	148	
December 31	250	
1954		
January 7		220
1956		
December 4	75	
December 16	100 +	
1957		
February 10		60
1958		
December 18	150	17
1959		
November 29		13
December 15*		84
1963		
December 28		14
1964		
February 17		21

* 58 dead birds and some old skeletons also found on cliff opposite golf links, two miles from Portland post office.

On December 28, 1963, I visited Point Danger with J. B. Hood and T. I. Fletcher. On arrival at the Point it was immediately obvious that there was great Muttonbird activity there: vegetation was flattened and there were droppings and feathers everywhere. Hood's suggestion that they were nesting was soon confirmed when he hauled a bird and egg from a burrow. Further search disclosed many burrows, most of them under horizontal Moonah, *Melaleuca pubescens*, blown flat by the wind and covered with a thick mat of Seaberry Saltbush, *Rhagodia baccata*, and Austral Noonflower, *Carpobrotus aequilaterale*. It was impossible to get under this to make an accurate count of burrows.

After this we made several trips to the Muttonbird landing spots, the most important being on February 17, 1964, in company with L. G. Chandler, C. Beaughole, and O. Lightbody. On this date, we found another rookery on the cliffs near the golf links.

An additional landing spot (and potential breeding area) has since been discovered by Ellis Tucker, of Coleraine, who wrote (14/3/64) that he had found 50-60 dead Muttonbirds on Cape Bridgewater, half a mile east of the 'Blow Holes'; these were scattered up a tussocky slope. He found another 60 birds half a mile farther east. He added: "In both areas we searched most carefully for nesting burrows but could find no sign at all."

The observations given above suggest that Muttonbirds have quite recently resumed (or attempted to resume) breeding on at

least two coastal headlands near Portland after a lapse of perhaps 70 years. This may be correlated with a marked reduction (causes unknown) in fox predation during the past ten years, although the figures quoted are too meagre to support that conclusion. Future observations will show how successful and sustained is this recolonization of mainland rookeries.—NOEL F. LEARMONTH, 33 Must Street, Portland, Vic.

Buff-tailed Thornbill caught on sticky leaves.—Birds are subject to many hazards apart from the ever-present dangers of predators, diseases and storms. Other accidents that result in death are noted from time to time; such incidents are best considered as chance happenings. In this latter category may be placed the enmeshment of small birds in the strong webs of certain spiders, or the entanglement of their tongues or feet (mostly in the case of nestlings) in horsehair or similar material used in nests.

An unusual fatality befell a Bluebonnet Parrot, *Psephotus haematogaster*, found dead with the whole of its breast covered with a dense mass of speargrass seeds, hundreds of the sharp points of which had penetrated the bird's flesh (*Emu* 47: 42, pl. 4). The "bird-lime tree", *Pisonia brunoniana*, is so-called because its fruit-clusters exude a viscous substance that so entangles the feet and feathers of birds, such as noddies and petrels, that they are unable to fly and so die slowly from starvation.

The trapping of a small bird through the presence of scale insects must be rare indeed. Such a phenomenon was observed recently in the Singleton district of New South Wales. On June 22, 1964, Delwyn Richards was watching several Buff-tailed Thornbills, *Acanthiza reguloides*, feeding among "spotted gum" suckers infested with scale insects, when he noticed one of the birds caught between two leaves by the sticky substance exuded by the insects. He released the bird, which left behind two tail feathers and a body feather adhering to one of the leaves and an adjoining twig. The branch was sent to me for examination a couple of days later; the mucilage-like matter on the leaves was then still moist and gummy.

Scale insects (*Coccidae*) have been given their name from the habit many species have of protecting themselves, after they have settled on their food plant, by forming a shield of scales over their bodies. In sucking the sap of the tree they ingest necessary food and get rid of any waste (which may be considerable) in the form of a clear, sticky exudation. This excretion either drops on to nearby leaves or is blown on to their surfaces by strong winds, forming a trap, in the case cited, for the unsuspecting thornbill fortunately liberated by Delwyn Richards.

The scale insect has been determined as *Eriococcus coriaceus*, or gum-tree scale.—K. A. HINDWOOD, 105 Middle Harbour Road, Lindfield, N.S.W.