

## REFERENCES

- Alston, G. 1903. Peculiarities in the Flight of Birds. *Avicult. Mag. New Ser.* 1: 150-151.
- Goodwin, D. 1956. Observations on the voice and displays of certain pigeons. *Avicult. Mag.* 62: 17-33 and 60.
- 1963. Observations on voice and behaviour of the Red-legged Partridge, *Alectoris rufa*. *Ibis* 95: 581-614.
- 1965. A comparative study of captive blue waxbills. *Ibis* 107: 285-315.
- Serventy, D. L. and Whittell, H. M. 1962. *Birds of Western Australia*. Perth.
- Simmons, K. E. L. 1957. The taxonomic significance of the head-scratching methods of birds. *Ibis* 99: 178-181.

*British Museum (Natural History), London, England.*  
*Manuscript received February 7, 1966.*

**The flight of the Marsh Sandpiper.**—From my earliest interest in bird study I can recall that flight powers aroused in me the greatest admiration. The way certain species fly not only creates a degree of fascination, or even a measure of surprise, but after prolonged observation becomes a means of identification. Those factors that appeal most to the observer are speed, manoeuvrability, effortlessness and stamina. Many have, at some time or other watched (or surely must have read about) the speed of the Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*, the manoeuvrability of the Grey Fantail, *Rhipidura fuliginosa*, the effortlessness of the Wandering Albatross, *Diomedea exulans*, and the stamina of the Spine-tailed Swift, *Hirundapus caudacutus*. Perhaps many species possess, according to personal judgment, all four attributes, but after careful analysis I regard the flight of the Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatilis*, as placing it as avian aeronautist No. 1.

My long interest in migratory waders, and the many hours spent watching and admiring them, convince me that almost all species in that group are masters of flight and possess all the abilities already mentioned. Possibly my admiration reached its peak when, on a sunny day in Spring, by a quiet lagoon not far distant from Sydney, I was watching a Marsh Sandpiper, some few yards from a small party of its kind, when it (for no apparent reason) suddenly took to the air. In the few short minutes that followed it turned on speed that made it difficult to keep under observation in the field-glasses, swerved back and forth as if dodging imaginary flying hazards, rose higher into the blue sky until it was nearly lost to view, then with its wings semi-folded showed that it could continue as it wished with the minimum of effort. Finally, and all too soon, not surely because it was tired but merely to indicate that its mad escapade in space was ended, it came back with great speed almost to the spot from whence it had departed, and after suddenly "braking" with no apparent movement with its wings, landed as softly as a wisp of thistledown.

That bird had mastered the powers of flight to such an extent

that even the fastest and most manoeuvrable of modern aeroplanes could scarcely bear comparison with it.—ARNOLD R. MCGILL, 119 Wollongong Road, Arncliffe, N.S.W.

**Discovery of the nesting of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.**—The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Erolia acuminata*, is a common species in Australia as a migrant during our Russian winter. As I understand from my Australian correspondents, the fact that its nest and eggs have now been discovered is not yet generally known there, and that is why I have prepared this note, the substance of which appeared in my book, *Fauna of the USSR, Aves, Charadriiformes*, Vol. 2, fasc. I, part 3, Moscow, 1962.

In 1957 and 1960 the Russian ornithologist Dr. K. A. Vorobiev obtained several nests with eggs, some downy young and adult birds in the tundra of the following regions: (1) just west of the delta of Kolyma River and (2) between the Rivers Yana and Indigirka (exact locality; basin of Khroma River, long. 143° E, lat. 71° N).

According to Vorobiev (*Birds of Yakut Land*, 1963), the four nests and four downy young were found on grassy, damp, low-lying tracts of tundra. The first nest was obtained on June 10, 1957 (region of Kolyma River delta), containing four fresh eggs. Two other nests from the basin of Khroma River were found on June 9 and 13, with full clutches of fresh eggs. Another nest, with four slightly incubated eggs was secured on June 23 in the same locality, as also four downy young, just out of the nest, caught on July 2.

All 16 eggs found by Vorobiev have a ground colour from olive-grey to olive-brown, marked with dark brown spots; the obtuse end of each egg is entirely brown. Size of eggs (Vorobiev, *op. cit.*): maximum: 27.8 × 36.9, 26.8 × 39.5 mm; minimum: 26.0 × 38.0, 26.6 × 35.6 mm; average length: 37.7 mm; average breadth: 26.6 mm.

Vorobiev informed me that the colour pattern of *E. acuminata's* eggs distinguishes them at a glance from the eggs of all other sandpipers, including *E. melanotos*.

According to Dr. E. P. Spangenberg (Moscow) the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper breeds also in the scrub-tundra and the moss-tundra in the north-eastern part of the delta of the Kolyma River. Additionally, a female with a brood-patch was obtained by the collector G. P. Rutilevsky south-east of the delta of the Lena River in Tiksi Bay on June 15, 1938. On the label of this skin Rutilevsky wrote that the bird was killed on its nest. The clutch of eggs was not preserved but Rutilevsky's description of them in his diary agrees with the colour and markings of the eggs in Vorobiev's collection. These nesting localities are marked with dots in the map, Figure 26, on page 124 of my book.—E. V. KOZLOWA, Zoological Institute of the Academy of Sciences, USSR, Leningrad.