

SHORT NOTES

Eastern Silvereye on the Nullarbor Plain

McEvey and Middleton (1968, *Emu* 68: 191), Condon (1967, *Rec. S. Aust. Mus.* 15: 577), Ford (1968, *West. Aust. Nat.* 11: 20) and Mees (1969, *Zool. Verh., Leiden* (102): 13–50) have recently shown that the Western Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis gouldi* is continuously distributed between south-western Australia and Eyre Peninsula on the coastal fringe of mallee between Eyre and Eucla, and along the extreme southern edge of the Nullarbor Plain east to Streaky Bay where it hybridizes with the Eastern Silvereye *Z. l. halmaturina*. Introgression of *gouldi* genes, as evidenced by a greenish wash on the back, in the grey-backed *halmaturina* to as far east as Kangaroo Island (Condon *loc. cit.*) indicates that the two subspecies have been in secondary contact for a considerable period.

On 20 May 1970, J. Dell, R. Johnstone and I collected one of six Silvereyes in a row of Chinese Pepper Trees at Cook on the Nullarbor Plain. The specimen (WA Museum Reg. No. A10468) belongs to the subspecies *halmaturina*; the middle of the back is grey, the throat has hardly any yellow and the flanks are buff-brown. Other details of the specimen are: ♂, testes small, skull pneumatized, weight 12.5 g, entire bill 12.5 mm, tarsus 17, tail 50, total length 125, wing formula $9 < 8 = 7 = 6 > 5 < 9$, numbered from inner primary.

This record shows that silvereyes observed in the region of the Nullarbor Plain must be critically examined before they are assigned to either *gouldi* or *halmaturina*. Observers cannot assume *a posteriori* that such silvereyes are the western subspecies.

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5 October 1970.

Grey Petrel, a specimen from King Island, Tasmania

Learmonth has noted three records of Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea* for Australia: a beach-washed specimen from Portland, Vic., on 29 August 1959; one dead at Port Fairy, Vic., on 5 May 1955; and a beach-washed specimen at Busselton, WA, in 1941 (*Emu* 60: 103–107).

On 12 July 1970 I was carrying out a normal weekly patrol of Porky Beach (39° 51' S, 143° 52' E) on the western coast of King Island for beach-washed birds, when among the birds collected was a strange petrel, partly decomposed and damaged, which I was unable to identify. The birds were sent to the Queen

Victoria Museum, Launceston, and this specimen was identified by Mr R. H. Green as a Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*, and made into a skin, Reg. No. 1970.2.38. Measurements in mm taken from the dried skin are wing 341–345, tail 119, tarsus 62.4, middle toe without claw 72, exposed culmen 47.

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12 November 1970.

Further records of Sarus Crane in northern Queensland

Since December 1967 when I reported the occurrence of the Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* (*Emu* 69: 49–52), I have recorded the birds quite frequently in northern Queensland, and evidently they are now well established. The following are my records from late 1967 to 1970.

Normanton Area

Maitland Creek, one 8 January 1969.

Karumba, thirteen 13 October 1969, five 25 October 1969, two 19 May 1970 (Brannigan Creek).

Normanton, six adults and two half-grown young, 8 January 1969, fourteen 13 October 1969, nineteen 24 October 1969, two 18 May 1970, eleven 19 May 1970. In addition Dr L. Walkinshaw of Michigan, USA, on 5 February 1969 found a nest in green grass on dry land, with the adult incubating. It contained two light-blue eggs, 'sparsely spotted', bigger and bluer than the eggs of the Brolga *Grus rubicundus*. The sitting bird did not have a white collar below the red on the neck.

Inverleigh Station, four 26 October 1969.

Floraville Crossing, Leichhardt River, two 21 May 1970.

Atherton area

Willets Swamp, eighty-five 20 August 1968, thirty-two adults and two half-grown young 6 July 1969, seventy-two 13 September 1969, 350 counted coming in to roost 21 August 1970 (many juveniles in this number).

Hasties Swamp, three 20 August 1970.

Atherton, seven 16 November 1967 on ploughed fields.

Leslie Creek, Youngaburra, two adults and two juveniles on ploughed field 11 August 1970.

Kaban

Two on ploughed field 16 September 1969, first record for the Evelyn Tableland.

Eastern coastal area

Swamp south of Ingham, at Cattle Creek, two adults and two juveniles on 29 September 1970, first coastal record.

Mr Bravery (pers. comm.) estimated that at least sixty pairs with flying young were in Atherton Shire in 1970, and I estimated more than one hundred over the whole tableland in 1970. The birds apparently arrive on the tableland about July and leave sometime after Christmas. During the day they scatter in pairs or flocks over farmland and gather to roost in large concentrations.

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16 November 1970.

Record of the Fulmar Prion off southern New South Wales

Pachyptila crassirostris has been recorded from Australia only once previously, viz a beach-washed bird found dead at Portland on 1 November 1954 (Learmonth 1957, *Emu* 57: 57–59; McEvey 1957, *Emu* 57: 199–200).

On 24 August 1970 small groups of prions were observed approximately 65 km due east of Moruya Heads. Two specimens were collected and these proved to be a Fulmar Prion *P. crassirostris* and a Fairy Prion *P. turtur*. *P. crassirostris* may thus be more common offshore than hitherto suspected.

Measurements (mm) of the specimen of *P. crassirostris* are: total length 278; wing 179; tail 86.5; tarsus 31.9; culmen: exposed length 22.4; total length 32.3; depth at front of nostril 7.5; breadth at feather line 11.4. Weight 102 g. Sex ♂. The specimen has been preserved as a study-skin.

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12 January 1971.

Extension of range of the Common Paradise Kingfisher

Rand and Gilliard (1967, *Handbook of New Guinea Birds*: 295) give the range of the Common Paradise Kingfisher *Tanysiptera galatea* as New Guinean lowlands except the areas between the Ramu and Kumusi Rivers in the north-east and between Etna Bay and the Digoel River in the south-west. Mayr (1942, *Systematics and the origin of species*: 153), in figuring the ranges of subspecies of *galatea* and allopatric species, shows these gaps and another on the eastern side of Geelvink Bay.

Despite expeditions to the Huon Peninsula, knowledge of the lowland avifauna in north-eastern New

Guinea is still vague. Published reports indicate that collectors concentrated on the montane forms and that lowland collecting may only have been incidental. However, some species definitely do not occur there, such as *Pitohui kirhocephalus* and *Casuarus unappendiculatus*.

In November 1969 Mr B. J. Coates identified a Common Paradise Kingfisher at Wasu on the northern side of the Huon Peninsula. Coates's description and his extensive experience of the species leave little doubt as to the record. On 15 February 1970 I netted an immature *T. galatea* at Igam Barracks, Lae, in primary rainforest before dawn, as befitting the crepuscular habits of the species. The specimen, a female, is in the Papua-New Guinea Museum, Reg. No. B853. Unfortunately subspecific identification is impossible; the two subspecies on either side of the area, *minor* and *meyeri*, are very similar. I believe that future collecting will establish that *T. galatea* occurs in all New Guinean lowland rainforests.

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5 February 1971.

Subspeciation in the Gilbert Whistler

Mayr (1954, *Am. Mus. Novit.* (1653): 1–22) recognized two subspecies of the Gilbert Whistler *Pachycephala inornata*, nominate *inornata* in the mallee areas of south-eastern Australia and Eyre Peninsula, and *gilberti* in south-western Australia, and suggested that the differences between them indicate an existing or former barrier in the region of the Nullarbor Plain. This arrangement was followed by Condon (1968, *Handlist of Birds of South Australia*). Ford (1971, *Emu* 71: 31) showed that the species was continuously distributed between Eyre Peninsula and south-western Australia in the Great Victoria Desert, and that birds from Eyre Peninsula, the Great Victoria Desert and the drier parts of south-western Australia were identical, but paler than those from the wetter parts of the range of the species in Western Australia. The Western Australian Museum did not have specimens from the eastern States and, because previous reviewers had included Eyre Peninsula birds in the subspecies *inornata*, I obtained on loan specimens of only the Eyre Peninsula population.

Specimens from the Murray-Mallee and the Adelaide Plains have now been examined. Clearly all populations west of the Flinders and Mt Lofty Ranges, including that on Eyre Peninsula, belong to *gilberti*, while birds from the Murray-Mallee, north-western Victoria and the mallee areas of New South Wales should be referred to nominate *inornata*, the

easternmost specimens of *gilberti* seen by me being from Buckland Park. Consequently, as with many other species of the mallee and semi-arid areas in the southern part of the continent, the geographical barrier that allowed subspeciation in *P. inornata* corresponds with a zone through Spencer Gulf and the Flinders Range (Ford in prep.).

The two subspecies can be distinguished by the darker and richer coloration of *gilberti*, especially on the undersurface. *Inornata* is usually whitish, sometimes faintly cinnamon, on the abdomen and under tailcoverts, whereas *gilberti* is always cinnamonic. Specimens of *inornata* from the western parts of its range with a trace of cinnamon on the abdomen have presumably acquired this characteristic by gene-flow from *gilberti*.

Whether the slight differences in coloration between birds from the drier and more humid parts of the range of *gilberti* in Western Australia arose by ecotypic adaptation (Gloger effect) or by differentiation during a period of minor isolation is conjecture. Possibly the geographical separation in the region of the Nullarbor Plain and Great Victoria Desert lasted for a shorter period than that caused by the barrier of Spencer Gulf and Flinders Range when *inornata* and *gilberti* evolved.

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10 February 1971.

First record of the Yellow Wagtail in the Northern Territory

On 9 December 1969 D.N.C. collected an adult *Motacilla flava* at Harrison's Dam, fifty-six km south-east of Darwin, in a fairly open area of short grass with clumps of pandanus and small eucalypts. On 4 February 1968 he also saw a single bird in similar habitat at nearby Fogg Dam, and between 15 and 21 December 1968 parties of three to five birds on Harrison's Dam. These records suggest that the Yellow Wagtail may be a fairly regular visitor to the area during the wet season.

Other Australian records of this species are: Bimbi, Dawson River, Q. (specimen in the Australian Museum, collected on 10 June 1905, holotype of *Motacilla barnardi* North, 1905); eleven km east of Derby, WA, bird seen on 7 December 1960 (Lindgren and Slater 1961, West. Aust. Nat. 8: 36-38); Innisfail aerodrome, Q., several birds seen during the period November 1965 to January 1966 (Gill 1967, Emu 66: 369-371).

The NT specimen (now in the Northern Territory Museum, NTM 5105) was forwarded to Mrs B. P. Hall of the British Museum (Natural History), who felt fairly confident in referring it to *M. f. tschutschensis* Gmelin, a race that breeds on the Chukchen Peninsula (north-eastern Siberia) and in Alaska, and has been recorded wintering as far south as Java and West Irian (Grant and Praed 1952, Bull. Br. Mus. nat. Hist. (Zool.) 1(9): 260). Through the kindness of Mr H. J. de S. Disney, Mrs Hall was also able to examine the Dawson River specimen. Although this had been assigned to the race *M. f. simillima* Hartert (Hartert 1921, Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna, 3: 2096), Mrs Hall considered that it came very close to specimens of *M. f. tschutschensis* in the BMNH. Professor Mayr, from field-notes supplied by Lindgren and Slater, thought that the bird seen at Derby might also have been of *tschutschensis* (Lindgren and Slater *op. cit.*).

Birds of more than one race of *Motacilla flava* perhaps wander to Australia in the non-breeding season. Voous (1950, Treubia 20: 647-656) identified five races of this species among wintering birds collected in Indonesia - *taivana* (77 adults and immatures), *simillima* (100 adults), *tschutschensis* (1 adult, 1 immature), *zaissanensis* (1 adult) and *macronyx* (1 adult).

A description of the NT specimen is:

Upperparts: crown, mantle and back grey, tinged greenish yellow; rump lighter; few light-grey feathers on nape; wings blackish brown, the feathers with pale edges (from pale brown to off-white); tail blackish brown, the two outer rectrices on each side mainly white.

Underparts: chin whitish, throat pale dirty yellow separated from dirty yellow breast and abdomen by narrow necklace of dark-brown spots; sides of breast with olive-grey suffusion; crissum pale yellow; supercilium white, tinged cream above lores; cheeks and lores greyish brown, with indistinct white markings below eye. Plumage worn. Skull fully pneumatized. Gonads apparently destroyed by shot. Measurements in mm: wing 80, tail 65, bill from skull 16.5, tarsus 22.5.

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15 February 1971.