

SHORT NOTES

A specimen of the Herald Petrel from Queensland

Recently (1971, Mem. Qd Mus. 16: 141-143), we published details of specimens of petrels previously unrecorded from Queensland. Another recent record of interest is the occurrence of a Herald Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana heraldica* near Burleigh Heads, Queensland.

The bird was found alive, but presumably not well, in the sea just off Burleigh Heads, south-eastern Queensland. It was taken to Mr D. H. Flcay's Fauna Reserve at West Burleigh, where it died a few days later. On 22 January 1971, a short time after its death, it was presented to the Queensland Museum. It was prepared as a study skin with one wing separate, and registered as Qd Mus. Reg. No. O11534.

Details of the specimen are: female, oviduct straight, ovary 8 x 4.5 mm; measurements: (total length 342.0 mm, wing-span 875 mm) wing 271.0 mm, tail 107.0 mm, tarsus 31.6 mm, exposed culmen 27.1 mm; weight 161 g. In plumage it agrees well with a specimen of *P. a. heraldica* from Oeno Island (Nat. Mus. Vic. Reg. No. 7850). The dark wing-quills, size, underwing pattern and scaled forehead of the specimen from Burleigh Heads distinguish it from other similar forms of *Pterodroma*.

The only previous record of *P. a. heraldica* from Australia appears to be that of Mr J. Warham (Emu 59: 153-158), who captured a live bird on Raine Island, north-eastern Queensland, on 22 February 1959. In view of the proximity of known breeding stations, lack of previous records of the species in Queensland waters probably reflects a dearth of observers. Warham suggests, and we agree, that *P. a. heraldica* may well breed on the islands and cays of the outer Barrier Reef.

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20 August 1971.

Removal of feathers from nest by Spur-winged Plover

The survival of eggs in nests of waders on the ground depends mainly on concealment. The nests are normally far apart and the eggs are cryptic in colour. Egg-shells are removed soon after hatching or breakage by many kinds of waders and by some other kinds of birds (Armstrong, E. A., 1964. Article 'Parental Care' in Thomson, A. L. (ed.) New Dict. Birds. London: Nelson).

It is therefore of interest to note an additional method of maintaining the concealment of a nest. At 08:50 on 3 September 1971 in a field of the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research at Canberra, a Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus miles novaehollandiae* that had been foraging in the field walked slowly towards its mate sitting on a nest. The incubating bird stood up, and the approaching bird picked a white feather about 100 mm long out of the nest. It flew out of sight with the feather in its beak. At 08:55 it returned, and nest-relief followed, with the old guard flying out of sight at 08:57.

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7 October 1971.

Swamp Harrier drowned during predation

On 5 October 1971 the entangled carcasses of a Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans* and an immature Darter *Anhinga rufa* were found in a lignum bush growing in water at Lake Cowal, NSW.

The talons of the Harrier's right foot had penetrated the skin of the middle section of the neck of the Darter and the closed claw was clamped around the vertebrae of the neck. The left foot of the Darter was gripped around a branch of the lignum bush. Possibly the Harrier mistook the swimming Darter for a swimming Tiger Snake. After being hit, the Darter must have dived under water and drowned the Harrier and then climbed out of the water into the lignum bush before dying. Accounts of such deaths of predators are rare. Patterson (1928, Br. Birds 22: 162-164) records a Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* drowned by an eel and a Heron *Ardea cinerea* strangled by an eel.

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26 October 1971.

Fairy Martin in southern Tasmania

In 1968 I reported the discovery of a nest of the Fairy Martin *Petrochelidon ariel* in Tasmania (Emu 67: 266), but birds were not seen then.

On 24 October 1971 I was observing migratory waders at Clear Lagoon, a small freshwater lagoon about 16 km south-east of Hobart. Among fifty to sixty Tree Martins *Petrochelidon nigricans* flying over the lagoon, I noticed a bird which was quite obviously different. It was not a Welcome Swallow

Hirundo neoxena, and because of its size, shape and flight I suspected that it was a Fairy Martin. I was able to confirm that this was so when at 14:30 it perched on a fence with approximately forty Tree Martins, and I could observe it from a distance of about 10 m. The day was fine and sunny.

I can find no records of observations of the Fairy Martin in southern Tasmania. The only records of sightings in the State apparently were made last century in northern Tasmania.

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28 October 1971.

Mangrove Heron at Mallacoota: new Victorian record

The Mangrove Heron *Butorides striatus* is a bird of coastal tropical and sub-tropical Australia, usually associated with swamps. It is rare on the far southern coast of New South Wales and, as far as I can ascertain, there are no records at all for Victoria.

Between 11 July and 31 October 1971 I frequently saw a Mangrove Heron at Mallacoota, on the same open mudflat. However, in December 1971, Messrs H. Beste, C. Cocum and I found at least two Mangrove Herons in a different part of the Mallacoota Lake about eight kilometres from where the first bird had been seen. We also found two old nests, flat flimsy platforms of sticks in melaleuca between five

and six metres above the water. One bird was usually perched near one of these nests. These nests could have been of the Mangrove Heron, but further observation will be needed before breeding can be proved.

The bird on the mudflat was fairly approachable and was observed with 12x50 binoculars at ranges down to 30 m. It always gave a furtive impression, standing with neck hunched and body held almost horizontal. When approached it preferred to walk away with a shambling gait, only flying if I continued to approach.

Description made in the field: A small dingy brown heron about the size of a Silver Gull *Larus novae-hollandiae*. Forehead, crown, nape and back of neck dull-black; black moustachial stripe; back, wings, rump and tail dark-brown, the primaries and secondaries edged lighter brown; lores, face, carcoverts and throat pale-brown, becoming darker on breast and belly, but not as dark as upper parts; iris yellow; bill dark-brown; legs orange.

In conclusion I should add that I also saw the Mangrove Heron at Merimbula, NSW, on 28 April 1965 and have seen it there once since, so that the bird may not be as infrequent in the south-eastern corner of Australia as has previously been supposed.

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4 March 1972.

CORRESPONDENCE

COMMENT ON ALLEGED SIGHT-RECORD OF UNIFORM SWIFTLET FROM NORTHERN QUEENSLAND

Sir,—Bravery recently reported sight-records of dark-rumped swiftlets from Atherton, northern Queensland (1971, *Emu* 71: 182). Using Slater (1970, *A Field Guide to Australian Birds*) as a guide, he claimed that the birds were without doubt the Uniform Swiftlet *Collocalia vanikorensis*. Though there is an alleged specimen of this species from Cape York (Mathews 1916, *Bull. Br. Orn. Club* 36: 77), we would like to draw attention to the possibility that dark-rumped uniformly coloured swiftlets in northern Queensland could be vagrants of any one of three species-groups resident in the nearest areas of New Guinea, namely the Mountain Swiftlet *C. hirundinacea*, Whitehead's Swiftlet *C. whiteheadi*, and the Uniform Swiftlet *C. vanikorensis*. All of these species are distinguished readily from *C. spodiopygia* by

their lack of a distinct pale rump. In our experience in New Guinea we have found it virtually impossible to separate *C. vanikorensis* from *C. hirundinacea* in the field, although the latter generally occurs at higher altitudes. The very similar third species-group, comprising forms at present referred to *C. whiteheadi*, can be recognized only by its slightly larger size; the component forms are c. 2.5 mm longer than either *C. vanikorensis* or *C. hirundinacea*. *C. vanikorensis* and *C. hirundinacea* can, in fact, be rather easily identified in the hand by the presence or absence of tarsal feathering, the amount of white in the bases of dorsal feathers and obscure but apparently consistent differences in the colour-tone of dorsal and ventral plumage. These characters, nevertheless, are hardly recognizable in the field.

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