

Stray Feathers

The Coot in Tasmania.—During the past six years or thereabouts, there has been a remarkable increase in the numbers of the common Coot (*Fulica atra*), which frequents the lakes and watercourses of our island. During mid-April of the present year I had a trip on the Derwent River as far up as boats usually run, and noted hundreds of the birds all the way along, wading and swimming; some were in small parties, others in a score or two together, and so little disturbed were they by the presence of the boat, that they manifested no alarm—simply moved a little further away, and went on feeding. Anglers who go trouting to the lakes of the Tasmanian midlands report great numbers there also, and attribute it to the increase of the “water-grass” at the bottom of the shallower parts, the Coots apparently using this weed as food. Parties have recently made their appearance on the Mersey River, N.W. Tasmania, and have a pretty effect, floating *en masse* in mid-stream. While the beautiful Swamp-Hen (*Porphyrio melanotus*, Temm.) and the Native Hen (*Tribonyx mortieri*, Du Bus) seem just about to hold their own, the black Coot steadily increases, although all three appear to feed upon the “water-grass” common in the shallower parts of our lakes and streams.—H. STUART DOVE, W. Dept., Tas., 15/6/23.

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Spine-tailed Swifts in Tasmania.—The first Spine-tailed Swift (*Chaturus caudacuta*) of the season was seen at 6.30 p.m. on 18th January, 1923, about an hour before sunset, going at a great rate towards north-west, at a moderate height. Wind was fresh south-westerly; frequent showers, sky mostly overcast.

On the evening of 21st January, a fairly large party of Swifts was overhead from about 7 o'clock until nearly dark; they came from south-east and went north-west, then returned and circled at various heights, from about 150 ft. to 300 ft., and higher, evidently feeding. The white chin and whitish rump showed very distinctly during their evolutions. There had been light showers during the day, and heavy cloud was in evidence during the evening hours; wind south-east, fresh, most of the day.

The next party was not sighted until 31st March, when a large number went over in the evening on migration, from south-east to north-west, at a height of 200-300 ft., going direct, not feeding. They looked very beautiful with the light of the evening sun blazing upon the plumage of the underside. In singles and small parties they were passing from 5 o'clock until close on 6; weather was fine, with a south-west breeze; but the previous day had been stormy, with wind veering from north-west to south-west. This was the final party of the summer.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., W. Dypt., Tas.

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Pacific Heron and Hawk.—On a lagoon at Moorook, S.A., on a fine bright day, in September, 1922, water birds were numerous. Pelicans, Cormorants, and Ducks were on the water, and Spoon-bills, Herons, and many other birds were on the shore. Close to me a Pacific Heron (*Notophox pacifica*) was standing just in the water when my attention was drawn to a Hawk soaring in great circles in the sky. Suddenly the Hawk swooped down at a fish floating on the water, and the many birds scattered in alarm. The Hawk, however, missed its prey. The Pacific Heron with a flight like that of an arrow, seized the fish just as the Hawk on a quick return swept back, but he was too late. The Hawk did not attempt to take the fish from the Heron, but continued its search for food. The whole scene was interesting, and lingers in the memory.—SAMUEL SANDERS, R.A.O.U., Warra-dale, S.A.

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Colour Changes in Pacific Herons.—Four White-necked Herons (*Notophox pacifica*) taken from the nest in 1916, and kept in Taronga Park since, have shown some interesting colour changes in the spotting of the neck and striping of the breast. When they arrived the neck showed profuse spotting, as will be seen in *The Emu*, vol. xvii., p. 57. In 1919 this marking had been considerably reduced. In 1921 the marking has gone completely in three birds and just shows as a single line down the centre of the neck in one bird; the striping of the breast is also much less conspicuous. In the spring the neck is washed with pale cinnamon, but becomes whiter about January. In captivity these birds are adept fly-catchers, taking all flying insects attracted by their food.—A. S. LE SOUEF, C.M.Z.S., Taronga Park.

Bird Notes from Bega.—About October last I had an opportunity of observing at fairly close range a company of Sharp-tailed Stints, or Sandpipers, which had congregated on a mud-pool of about an acre in extent, left by a flood beside a main road near Bega, South-east Coast of New South Wales. The birds would not then, I think, have long arrived from their breeding-grounds in Northern Asia.

At first only ten Sandpipers appeared, but by degrees the number increased, until about one hundred of the grey-brown birds were feeding at the pool. Others, no doubt, passing in the night, heard the calls of those feeding at the mud-pool, and descended to join them. After they had fed, the birds packed together in companies, and remained thus for hours, almost without movement. One of the Sandpipers was picked up dead at some distance from the pool, near an elevated bridge. It had probably either been struck by a hawk or had flown into the railings of the bridge during the night.

Several Brown Hawks sat on fences near the mud-pool, but made no attempt to interfere with the Sandpipers. These Hawks, I think, rarely or never injure other birds. I have observed a Magpie-Lark calmly perched on the same tree and within two feet of one of these sluggish birds. On one occasion, however, a Hawk attempted to rob an Egret of a small eel, but was easily repulsed. The Sandpipers remained at the pool about three weeks, and then disappeared in the night. I had previously seen odd couples and small companies feeding at pools about salt lakes on the South Coast, but never before so close to a town. On a damp flat near the mud-pool and about its margins a company of about forty Straw-necked Ibis solemnly fed, and I afterwards saw about twenty of these clerically-attired birds dozing in the sunshine on a large gum-tree. Immediately on formation of this mud-pool, and while it still held a fair depth of water, twenty Little Grebes mysteriously appeared upon it, accompanied by Silver Gulls, Cormorants (three varieties), and White-faced Herons, while numerous Black-fronted Dotterels ran nimbly along the margin, picking up worms and aquatic insects, and a White-necked Heron paid a short visit. Just recently I saw a single Leaden Flycatcher, which is rare in this quarter. Neither this bird nor the Rufous Fantail seem to nest in the South Coast scrubs. I have often had the latter bird under close observation for hours during the breeding season, but could never discover a nest, while the Flycatcher above-mentioned usually occurs singly. The Black-faced Flycatcher I have seen once only in this district.—H. V. EDWARDS, R.A.O.U., Bega, New South Wales.

The Morning Dip at the Seaside.—As an annual summer visitor to the Tweed Heads districts I have always been interested in the honey-eating birds that are plentiful there at that time. They are the Scaly-breasted Parrakeet (*Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus*), the Brush Wattle Bird (*Anthochaera chrysopatera*), and the Leatherhead (*Philemon corniculatus*). They frequent the Banksias that are everywhere along this part of the coast, from which they reap a rich harvest. It is noteworthy that whilst the Parrakeets and Leatherheads keep almost entirely to the *Banksia serrata*, the Brush Wattle Birds rarely visit that tree, but are usually found in the *Banksia integrifolia*, even though both trees are indiscriminately mixed with one another, and with other vegetation. This year at Bilinga, on the Tweed Heads line, a party of Brush Wattle Birds had discovered a house at which the guttering along the front verandah sloped the wrong way, and therefore held a little store of water from the last rain. A company of 20 or more were lined along its edge alternately hopping into the water and out again, and thoroughly enjoying their morning dip. This is the first time I have seen these birds alight anywhere but in a tree, and a fact that adds further interest is that the house was occupied.

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The Moulting of the Blue Wren.—I was much interested in Mr. Dove's fine notes on the Moulting of the Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*), (vide *Emu*, vol. xxii., pp. 323, 324). Like Mr. Dove, I had been puzzled as to the date of moulting, and had decided to take dates in reference to a pair of Wrens that inhabit my garden, but alas, my resolution was not carried out to satisfaction, as I had to be absent from home for numerous lengthy occasions, and the actual date of the first sign of the moult has been lost. For information I am sending on a few notes.

October 29.—A pair began carrying nesting material to a hedge in the garden; nest observed, probably half built.

November 14.—Inspected nest; 3 eggs.

November 30.—Young birds heard in nest; both birds carrying insects to young.

December 10.—Young out of nest, just able to fly short distance; fed by both parents.

February 1.—Male in full plumage, female and 3 young in grey plumage in garden.

February 13.—Male bird still in full plumage, and family in garden.

February 14 to April 12.—Absent from home—no notes taken.

April 15.—Five Wrens in grey plumage in garden.

April 29.—Only two birds in grey plumage in garden; considered to be the old pair from actions, etc.; both birds quiet, and seen frequently on lawn and open spaces.

May 27.—Male bird showing dead black on back and round collar, tail feathers blue. Have not been able to find male bird for over a week, but female constantly about. When found the male was hard to view, as he kept to hedges and creepers, as if ashamed of his dress (which is shabby), quite a contrast to his usual habit, when in full plumage, as both are very quiet and trusting; only the pair in garden.

June 1.—To-day male showing more markings of a dark blue or black collar, especially on neck and collar, showing himself a little more, but still hanging about in shrubs, creepers, and dense bushes.

June 4.—The male bird is now very much brighter in plumage.

June 7.—After observing male bird daily, I view for first time distinct appearance of pale blue on forehead.

June 8.—Pale blue now showing at ear coverts.

June 14.—Have observed male every day, and have been astounded at the rapidity of the change in plumage. To-day I consider that he has his "superb" coat on, that is, he has fully developed his full plumage. He is now as "show-off" as ever, and feeds with his mate almost at one's feet.—J. NEIL, McGillp, R.A.O.U., King's Park, S.A.

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Gould's "North-west Coast of Australia."—Gould described many birds from the North-west Coast of Australia collected by Gilbert and also by the Officers of surveying vessels.

It became necessary to determine what this meant, but after much research, exactitude was not found possible. I therefore arbitrarily selected "Derby, North-west Australia," in many cases. Witmer Stone, upon examination of the Gouldian collection under his care, found that many specimens so localised were labelled Port Essington, and I accepted this and altered my selection accordingly. Recently Mr. A. J. Campbell, F.A.O.U., recording collection made on account of H. L. White, of Bell-trees, queried in some cases this latter determination.

In Gould's time, and by extra-limital workers even to-day, Port Essington was sometimes referred to as being in the North-West of Australia, as the following passages show.

In his Handbook, vol. 1, p. 419, 1865, Gould has written: "A specimen is contained in the collection formed by Mr. Bynoe at Port Essington." P. 428: "Bynoe . . . procured it on the banks of the Victoria River." On p. 410: "This species was one of several collected by the officers of H.M.S.S. *Beagle*, and for the specimens from which my descriptions were taken I am indebted to Messrs. Bynoe and Dring. The bird has also been brought to England by Sir George Grey. All these specimens were collected on the North-West coast, and it is not infrequently seen on the Cobourg Peninsula"; while on p. 423: "This beautiful and

well-marked species of Grass Finch is a native of the North-West coast of Australia, where several specimens were shot by Gilbert during an excursion from Port Essington toward the interior of the country."

These instances conclusively prove that under the name "North West Coast of Australia," Gould at least sometimes included Port Essington.—GREGORY M. MATTHEWS, F.R.S.E.

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Members will regret to learn of the death of Mr. E. J. Banfield, R.A.O.U., the "Beachcomber," on his "Tropic Isle."—Dunk Island, and also Mr. J. E. Chubb, R.A.O.U., of the National Museum, Melbourne, formerly curator of the skin collections of the R.A.O.U. A more extended notice will appear in our next issue.