

"Astray" for 77 years! Recently (April, 1901) I described a black and white Malurus (*M. edouardi*) in the *Victorian Naturalist*. Since I have been induced to refer to Quoy and Gaimard's original figure of *M. leucopterus*, which Gould queried, and substituted for the species his own blue and white figure (vol. iii., pl. 25). This transposition was apparently accepted as being correct by the "British Museum Catalogue" (vol. iv., p. 290). In Quoy and Gaimard's figure I at once recognized a generally fair drawing of *edouardi*. Should the black and white Wrens of Barrow Island and Dirk Hartog Island (isolated localities about 500 miles apart) eventually prove the same species, then after a lapse of 77 years the real *M. leucopterus* has been re-discovered, while Gould's long-standing provisional *M. cyanotus* will become the proper name for the blue and white bird.

A. J. C.

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DR. CHARLES RYAN, when out quail-shooting, near Melbourne, the season just closed, captured a number of Plain Wanderers. In one day he caught six. The Wanderers squatted so closely (sometimes on the bare ground without any cover) before the dogs that the Doctor had only to drop his hat on the sitting bird. The captives, which are exceedingly tame, have been divided among some private aviaries, where the birds exhibit indications of breeding.

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MR. E. D. BARNARD, about the middle of July, found near Gladstone, Queensland, a nest containing eggs of the Spotted Ground Bird (*Cinclosoma punctatum*). Surely a northern range and an early season for this species.

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"PAINTED FINCHES (*Emblema picta*) have been quite common lately (June)."—Tom Carter, Point Cloates, W.A.

### From Magazines.

A CORRESPONDENT in a recent number of *The Ibis* chronicles the fact that the Rhinoceros or Buffalo Bird (*Buphaga*) has earned the vernacular name sometimes applied to it (Beef Bird) by combining with its old quest for insects on the skins of cattle, &c., an attack on the bodies of the beasts. It is now, like the Kea of New Zealand, a flesh-eater. It would be interesting in such a case to discover why the change of habit took place. The only change of environment apparent at first sight is the substitution of sheep, oxen, &c., for the native fauna, and for many years after the introduction of these animals the *Buphaga* was looked upon with favour by the settlers. Its bad habits are of recent growth.

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ACCORDING to *The Ibis* (July, 1901) the specimens of birds collected by the Governor of New Zealand (the Earl of Ranfurly) during various trips to the outlying southern islands have been received at the British Museum. Although the birds were merely preserved in formalin, successful skins were made. Besides two Southern Mergansers (*Mergus australis*) and the Flightless Duck (*Nesometia aucklandica*), there are specimens of a new Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax ranfurlyi*)—named in honour of His Excellency—and of other rare birds.

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*The Victorian Naturalist*—the organ of the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria—has the distinction of having published more matter in ornithology and oology than any other Australian magazine. The issues for July, August, and September (1901) contain a series of field notes by Dr. Wm. Macgillivray on "Some North-West Queensland Birds." The notes, although more or less brief, are sufficiently succinct, and many are quite new. Through the instrumentality of the Doctor and his brother, Mr. A. S. Macgillivray, two new birds from the district in question have been described by Mr. A. J. North, of the Australian Museum—namely, *Ptilotis teitavalensis* and *Barnardius macgillivrayi*.

In the August number Mr. Robt. Hall has described a distinctly new and interesting Owlet Nightjar, which he has called the Rufous—*Egothales rufescens*. Its characteristic name adequately describes the creature. In the September number he also describes a new Pseudogerygone—*P. tenebrosa*, or the Dusky Fly-eater. This little bird, on account of its sombre-coloured tail and general unassuming dress, and by having the least conspicuous markings, is distinguished from the other known members of its genus. It is noticeable of late that Australian authors in describing new birds also coin an appropriate vernacular name for the species—a distinct step towards popularizing ornithology. Under "New Nests and Eggs," Mr. Hall furnishes descriptions of the nest of the Yellow-tinted Honey-eater (*P. flavescens*) and the nest and eggs of the recently described Rufous Bush Lark (*Mirafra woodwardi*, Milligan). Mr. Hall acknowledges his indebtedness to Mr. J. P. Rogers, who collected all the above-mentioned material in North-Western Australia. Regarding *M. woodwardi*, some ornithologists (*Naturalist*, p. 70), without having seen the type, hint that the bird is possibly the well-known *horsfieldi*. The authority, and not his critics, is responsible for the naming of the new species. Mr. Milligan is starting in a new and comparatively unexplored field. Whatever ornithologists do, let them not discourage one another.

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MR. THOMAS CARTER, in *The Zoologist* for July last, contributes an exceedingly interesting and chatty chapter on "Notes from Point Cloates, N.W. Australia." A favourable rainfall had

created a "lake" in the locality, on the "islands" of which were rookeries of White-headed Stilts, Avocets, Gull-billed Terns, Red-kneed Dottrels, &c. This was in the winter of 1900. A Crow's nest with the unusual number of 7 eggs was found on the 29th June. A Spotted Harrier's nest was observed on the 12th July. "Western records" were established for the Black-throated Butcher Bird and the Yellow-throated Miner, both nests being secured on the 20th July. Some hours before daylight, by the light of the moon, the "beautiful, rich, flute-like notes of the Butcher Bird" were heard. Other "oologists" were about besides Mr. Carter and his dusky "Native Companion." In a colony of breeding Fairy Martins under a slightly hanging, shaly cliff, two of the nests were discovered occupied by snakes. Mr. Carter went below and fired shots into the respective nests, when out dropped Carpet Snakes, so tightly coiled that they rolled down to the foot of the cliff. Each reptile contained two or three of the Martins. On another occasion, on poking a snake out of a hole in a rock and killing it, Mr Carter found it had "got outside" of four Chestnut-eared Finches, which had evidently come to slake their thirst at a small waterhole near

### Review.

[Australian Museum, Sydney. Special Catalogue No. 1. "Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia," by Alfred J. North, C.M.Z.S., Ornithologist, Australian Museum (Second edition of Catalogue No. 12, entirely re-written, with additions). Part I., containing pages 1-36; plates A 1, B 1. Printed by order of the Trustees of the Australian Museum: R. Etheridge, jun., J.P., Curator. F. W. White, printer, Market-street west, Sydney. 1901.]

ALL ornithologists and lovers of birds will hail with satisfaction the advent (of the first part at least) of the Australian Museum's "Special Catalogue No. 1," under the title "Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania."

Judging by the initial part a great deal of laborious study and patient toil have been bestowed upon the production, which is really more of a "life-history" of our birds than a work on "Nests and Eggs." The title does not do justice to the wide, not to say ambitious, scope of the author's work, and, as it will be commonly cited, is misleading. It is cumbersome, too; hence one wonders why it was unduly lengthened by the words "and Tasmania." Every zoologist reckons Tasmania as a part of Australia, and even in Gould's day the species found in that island were included in his "Birds of Australia." And surely it is an inadvertence that "Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds" has been printed on some of the plates, that title having been previously used by another author, who had announced his appropriation of it long before his book actually appeared. As a whole the work promises, when completed, to be the greatest publication on Australian birds since Gould's great volumes, and alike to scientific or non-scientific student will be invaluable. It

should be in the hands of every ornithologist and in every public library. Gould's work will always be the standard authority, but Mr. North's possesses the advantage that our fuller knowledge of native birds and their ways is embodied in it.

The concisely written descriptions of the adult birds (male and female) are valuable aids for the identification of species; those of the eggs are hardly so succinct, and are rather over-elaborated as to detail. A scientific work, such as a museum catalogue, should doubtless, to be complete, record all known variations of form and colouration; but in this case would it not have been more advantageous and less confusing for the ordinary student (and the majority of readers will belong to this class) if the variations had been more clearly differentiated from the "type?" The remainder of the book is admirably written, and must give pleasure and enjoyment to all who peruse it, and the whole work is such as is only begotten by the experience of a lifetime, or penned by one whose heart is in his task. The study and research that have gone to the making of it are revealed in the chapters on the perplexing species of the genus *Strepera*, of which Mr. North's handling is both good and lucid. It is indeed interesting to learn that he has identified *S. fuliginosa* from as far north as Central Queensland; but is he justified in omitting South Australia from the geographical range of *S. cuneicaudata* and *S. graculina*?

Whilst no "errors of commission" are noticeable in this first part of Mr. North's work, which deals with the families *Corvidæ* and *Paradisæidæ*, some of his omissions are likely to discount the high standard of his writings. Acknowledgment, or reference to prior work, is an "unwritten" law both in science and in literature; yet, whilst the author frankly acknowledges notes and specimens received from various correspondents, and refers to older, even ancient, authorities, he entirely ignores the work of contemporaneous authors on Australian oology. As he holds a high position in our ornithological world, and represents his branch in the premier natural history institution in the Commonwealth, one would hardly expect him to thus lay himself open to adverse criticism. He could afford to be generous. One example of this shortcoming may be cited. He refers with pardonable pride to his having first described the eggs from New Guinea of the rare genus *Phonygama*, but the first descriptions and historical findings of the eggs of three species of *Australian Rifle Birds*\* mentioned by other authors are quite ignored. Compared with *Phonygama*, these birds are equally interesting, rare, and beautiful. Ignoring such items as these is all the more remarkable when it is borne in mind that the

\* *Ptilorhis paradisea*—Campbell—*Vict. Nat.*, vol. xiii., p. 145, with plate (1897). *P. victoriæ*—Campbell—*Vict. Nat.*, vol. viii., p. 134 (1892); Le Souëf—*Proc. Roy. Soc. Vict.*, vol. v., fig. (1892). *P. alberti*—Le Souëf—*Ibis*, p. 394 (1897).

"type" egg of the Victoria Rifle Bird, discovered by Messrs. D. Le Souëf and H. G. Barnard on the Barnard Island, became the property of the museum to which Mr. North belongs.\*

From photo-mechanical and typographical points of view the work leaves little to be desired. It is admirably printed on coated art paper, quarto size, with broad margins. The half-tone blocks of nests are splendid, but the uncoloured figures of eggs suffer somewhat from "halation," affecting seriously the markings about the "high lights." Where subscribers have ordered coloured copies, however, this fault will probably not exist.

In conclusion, the author, and all concerned with him in his task, are to be congratulated on the book's general excellence, while the trustees deserve hearty thanks for allowing subscribers to obtain it complete (uncoloured plates), at 25s. It is a gift at such a price.

### Mr. Robt. Hall on the Genus *Gymnorhina* (Magpies).

IN the "Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria," vol. xiv. (August, 1901), Mr. Hall contributes an interesting and most remarkable paper on the Australian Magpies, of which there are four reputed species. Should the indefatigable author never write another article on ornithology, this one alone will render him famous—if all his deductions can be proved—for all time.

It appears to Mr. Hall that far away back in the dark ages an extinct or ancestral "Piping-Crow" took on the colour of its times, and was a "uniform black type," and out of it evolved "one species only, *G. leuconota* (White-backed Magpie), with one variety, namely, that having a black back, known as *G. tibicen*." As the original type was supposed to be black, one would have expected to find the bird with most black about it (the Black-backed) *the species*, and the further removed White-backed bird *the variety*.

The article bristles with hypotheses and exceptions. But do not exceptions prove the rule? It is hard to define a species from a sub-species or variety, but it may be fairly taken for granted that *a species* stands good where the specific markings or features are *constant as a rule*. Upon this rule, as well as on geographical distribution, the Magpies can be readily divided into four species or races, at least, which Mr. Hall has not apparently disproved. (1) There are the adult birds (male and female respectively) with white and grey backs (*G. leuconota*) confined to the south-eastern coastal region chiefly; (2) the lesser-sized white and grey backs (*G. hyperleuca*) to Tasmania; (3) the white and dark grey or black backs (*G. dorsalis*) to the western territory; while (4) the black backs (in both male and female), *G. tibicen*, represent the

\* Report of Trustees for the year 1893, p. 4.