

Drought and Flood in Queensland.

AN ORNITHOLOGIST'S EXPERIENCE.

THE following strongly contrasted extracts are from letters by Mr. F. L. Berney, A.O.U., written from Spring Valley, Hughenden, N.Q., and received by one of the editors of *The Emu*:—

"24th November, 1905.—I am camped out away with some of our sheep, and there is no chance of getting home (to Richmond, N.Q.) until early in the year. We are having a wretched time out here with the drought; things ornithologically in this district are dead. Nesting with most species of birds that we have here is out of the question; it takes them all their time to keep themselves alive. The Emus were the first to feel it, and most about here are now dead; the Bustards were the next, and many of these are now too weak to fly. I caught two last week; unable to fly, they tried to run, and fell at the first little bit of obstruction they came to, and lay there until I set them on their legs again. I picked up a dead Dollar-Bird; they have not long been here. This one was in perfect plumage, showing that it had arrived in good health; but it had died of starvation, and was only a feathered skeleton. The bush cats (domestic breed gone wild) on the open downs are dying, I believe, of hunger; there are no birds on the bare, brown country, and no grasshoppers or lizards or mice as a substitute."

Again:

"24th March, 1906.—I have not troubled you much lately, not because I had nothing to trouble you about, but because I had not the time to do it. We had an awfully bad time all last year—drought, everlasting drought; but with the advent of the new year there came a change, and we have already had 20 inches of the best rain we have had for 15 or 16 years. I look forward to a season (the longer the better) of peace and prosperity—we are due for it after 8 years—8 bad years in succession. I cannot consider my own good times as commencing until I get settled down again at Wyangarie (Richmond), which I hope will be in about two or three weeks' time. Part of my sheep are gone, and the balance start away in a couple of days, and then I shall shake the dust of these parts from my feet. There has not been much dust lately; my own camp, placed on a well-drained sand ridge high up on the river bank (Flinders), was under water for a couple of days. The diningroom (table under a bough shade) stood in 2 feet of water, and the river ran a foot deep through the tents—however, all's well that ends well."

From Magazines, &c.

RUFIOUS BRISTLE-BIRD.—In the March number of *The Geelong Naturalist* are field notes by Mr. C. F. Belcher on the Rufous Bristle-Bird (*Sphenura broadbenti*), dealing chiefly with the nidification of the species and its distribution on the Otway coast.

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HEIGHT AT WHICH MIGRATING BIRDS FLY.—In *The Auk* for January is a paper by Mr. Frederic W. Carpenter, which sums up the results obtained from attempts to gauge by astronomical instruments the height at which birds fly when on migration. The highest distance yet noted would seem to be

slightly over a mile, while observations of birds travelling at half a mile from the ground are numerous.

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BIRD LODGINGS.—It has been reported to the Ornithological Society of Bavaria that a suggestion by one of its members that the providing of nesting opportunities for Swifts might be taken into consideration in the building of the new tower of the House of Parliament at Munich has been adopted by the architect, and that nesting space for about 100 pairs of these birds has been allowed for (*Verh.*, p. 14).

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CUCKOOS.—*The Australian Naturalist* for January contains "Notes on Cuckoos," by Mr. L. Harrison. Of the voice of the Cuckoos he says:—"I have stood under a fine large eucalypt for nearly half an hour, whilst a Cuckoo shrieked (?) himself hoarse amongst the branches, without being able to see him. It is not that the voice is really ventriloquistic, as with a number of birds, but it rings through the air in a disembodied fashion, which renders it difficult to trace it to its source."

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THE GENUS POMATORHINUS.—A perusal of Mr. E. C. Stuart Baker's notes on "The Nidification of Certain Indian Birds" in *The Ibis* for January suggests wide differences in nest structure and egg colouration between the Indian and Australian species of the genus. Apparently the Indian birds build cup-shaped nests and lay white eggs; all the Australian species dome their nests over and lay eggs hair-lined with brown or black on a dark ground colour.

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Bird-Lore.—The Jan.-Feb. number of *Bird-Lore* contains some capital photos of birds and nests in the open. A list is published of the gentlemen who form *Bird-Lore's* Advisory Council. This Council was formed for the purpose of placing students in touch with authorities on the bird life of their particular district; accordingly, each member is a specialist for some one part of the country, and those who wish to avail themselves of his experience have but to write and get it. The idea is a good one.

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THE HYBRID PLATYCERCUS ERYTHROPEPLUS.—Mr. D. Seth-Smith, F.Z.S., writing anent the Red-mantled Parrakeet (*Avic. Mag.*, Feb., 1906), states:—"A friend of mine in Sydney wrote to me last August to say he had secured a fine specimen of the

Red-mantled Parrakeet that was caught with two others on the northern rivers. The two others had died, but this one he hoped to send home to me. It has recently arrived, and is now in my aviary—an undoubted specimen of Salvadori's *Platycercus erythropeplus*." As Mr. Seth-Smith has already explained (*Emu*, vol. iii., p. 197), this bird is a hybrid between the Pennant Parrakeet (*P. elegans*) and the Rosella (*P. eximius*). It is interesting to have found examples in the wilds, because Count Salvadori's type was a living specimen in the Zoological Gardens, London.

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NAME CHANGES.—In *The Ibis* for January, Mr. A. J. North contributes remarks on the names of some Australian birds. In strict obedience to the law of priority, the Fan-tailed Cuckoo will, the writer says, henceforth have to be known as *Cacomantis rufulus*, and the Brush Cuckoo as *Cuculus flabelliformis*. The Pallid Cuckoo will, on the same grounds, become *Cuculus inornatus*, the White-naped (Lunulated) Honey-eater be renamed *Melithreptus atricapillus*, and the Tasmanian species now known as *M. melanocephalus* will become *M. affinis*. The Wattle-Bird genus (*Acanthochæra*) becomes *Anthochæra*, and the yellow Tasmanian Wattle-Bird ought to be specifically renamed *A. paradoxa*. One is inclined to think that the upholders of the law of priority have hitherto rather neglected this last specific name in their choice of substitutes.

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BIRDS OF THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS.—From the "Hand-List" of Messrs. M'Gregor and Worcester (Manila, 1906) the connection between the avifauna of the Philippines and that of Australia is easily discernible. Among familiar species common to both areas may be noted *Excalfactoria australis*, *Hypotaenidia philippinensis*, *Poliolimnas cinereus*, *Hydrochelidon hybrida* and *H. leucoptera*, *Sterna anæsthes*, *S. fuliginosa*, *S. sinensis*, and *S. melanauchen*, *Anous stolidus*, *Himantopus leucocephalus*, *Plegadis falcinellus*, *Dendrocycna arcuata*, *Falco melanogenys*, *Pandion leucocephalus*, *Caprimulgus macrurus*, *Artamus leucogaster*, and, of course, a number of the wide-ranging Limicolæ. The absence of the Snipe (*Gallinago australis*) from the list is noteworthy, as is also the presence side by side of the Peregrine Falcon (*F. peregrinus*) with the Black-cheeked species (*F. melanogenys*).

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PRIORITY IN NOMENCLATURE.—Some remarks of the president of the Ornithological Society of Bavaria (*Verh. der O. G. in Bayern*, 1904, p. 13) are interesting in this connection. "He

believed" (runs the report) "that all these changings of long-established names, even when the alteration was justifiable, should be most rigorously guarded against, as the greatest confusion would be the only result. He would consequently under no circumstances concur in the transposing of *Turdus musicus* and *iliacus*, recently declared to be necessary. In this case, moreover, it was evident that Linnæus in the 12th edition, 1766, of his "Systema Naturæ," desired to correct an error contained in the edition of 1758, and that the description of *Turdus musicus* given by him on that occasion could in every respect only apply to our Song-Thrush. Even though it had been agreed to recognise only the 1758 edition of Linnæus, it must appear contrary to common-sense to take as a basis of nomenclature a description which the author himself openly acknowledged to be incorrect."

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SQUARE-TAILED KITE IN CAPTIVITY.—*Lophoictinia isura* does not strike one, at the first glance, as a likely-looking cage-bird, but Mr. J. L. Bonhote tells in the *Avicultural Magazine* for April how he has succeeded in keeping one since June, 1903. Says the writer:—"I may as well sum him up once for all as the tamest and most sluggish of the Raptores that I have ever met, and I suspect that much of his tameness is due to the fact that it is too much trouble to move. . . . It was presumably born in November, 1902. The general colour of its plumage was rufous, each feather being broadly marked or streaked, especially on the upper parts, with dark brown. The new plumage (after moulting in October) was similar to the last, but darker on the back, lighter on the head, and redder on the under parts, while after the next moult, which was accomplished between May and July last year, it assumed the fully adult plumage, as figured in Gould's 'Birds of Australia.' . . . The peculiar build which has gained for it a generic title is probably correlated with a mode of life different from that of the true Kites, but on this point information is lacking, and I can only hope that, having pointed out this deficiency, some of our Australian friends may send us a future communication dealing with its habits and food in a wild state."

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EXPERIMENTING WITH DISEASE.—A letter from the hon. sec. of the A.O.U. (Mr. A. H. E. Mattingley), which appeared in *The Argus* of 11th April, under the above heading, has called forth considerable discussion on the subject of Dr. Danysz's proposed endeavour to exterminate the rabbit from Australia by inoculating it with a bacillus. Dr. Danysz has been engaged for a term of two years, and will shortly reach Australia. No doubt the

experiments on Broughton Island will be carried out under every possible safeguard, but what if the bacillus be communicable to birds, and by them transferred to the mainland before its harmlessness (or otherwise) to living creatures other than rabbits has been determined? Even assuming the disease proves deadly to rabbits, the community ought to be assured of a far more important negative fact—viz., that it will not hurt anything else—a very difficult matter, it would seem, to settle on Broughton Island. Knowledge of the workings of micro-organisms is not yet out of the empiric stage, and the possible effects of change of environment on Dr. Danysz's bacillus can only be learned by experience, which may be too dearly bought. Then there is the likelihood of time rendering the rabbit immune, so that even the present excuse for the introduction of the disease may fall to the ground, while the countless evil possibilities remain. Ornithologists generally, seeing how many agencies destructive to our native birds are already at work, are likely to be very chary of assisting in this importation of what may prove to be a fresh one.

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Avicultural Magazine.—Dr. A. G. Butler relates his aviary experiences in 1905 in the March number. He bought a pair of Wonga-Wonga Pigeons (*Leucosarcia picata*), and turned them first into a garden aviary, where they built but did not lay. They seem to have rendered themselves unpopular in the vicinity. "I received," says the author, "an impertinent anonymous letter complaining of the song of the cock-bird, and requesting me to wring its neck or get my son to poison it." Eventually he brought the birds inside and put them in a bird-room, where the female laid several eggs on a platform of branches, through which some of them fell to the ground, and later the hen deserted the nest and died.

At the Crystal Palace Bird Show the first prize for the Parakeets was won by a pair of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets. The second prize was awarded to two Mealy Rosellas. Other Parrots shown were King Parrots, Crimson-winged Lories, Barnard, Yellow-naped, Pennant, and Barraband Parrakeets. A Banksian Cockatoo took first prize in the class for larger Parrots. Latterly the Yellow-rumped Finch (*Munia flaviprymna*) has been freely imported into England, and specimens exhibited failed to score prizes. A novelty from Australia was a Shining Starling (*Calornis metallica*), which, however, is said to have been entirely overlooked by the judge. Australian birds were well forward in the class for foreign hybrids. Here the first prize went to a cross between a Red-rumped Parrakeet and a Mealy Rosella, the second to a Bicheno-Zebra Finch, the third to a hybrid between Barnard and the Yellow-naped Parrakeet, which showed clear evidence of both sides of its parentage.

VERNACULAR NAMES.—Mr. D. Seth-Smith, F.Z.S., writes to the *Avicultural Magazine* (April, 1906):—"I quite admit that in this country we ought to recognise the vernacular names employed in other English-speaking countries for birds which are natives of those countries, so long as they are appropriate. . . . In cases in which the vernacular name is eminently unsuitable, as it often is, we in this country are surely entitled to adopt a term that is more appropriate. For instance, in Australia several of the Parrakeets are termed 'Lories' which are in no way entitled to this designation. The well-known King Parrakeet is called the 'King Lory,' the Crimson-wing (*Ptilinopus erythropterus*) the 'Red-winged Lory,' and sometimes the Pennant Parrakeet is called the 'Crimson Lory,' and the Yellow-rumped Parrakeet the 'Swamp Lory.' The term 'Lory' should, of course, be confined to the Loriidæ, the brush-tongued, honey-eating Parrots. But there is no reason why we should not, where possible, follow the Australian vernacular names. Where is the sense in calling their Red-browed Finch (*Egitha temporalis*) the 'Sydney Waxbill,' or their Spotted-sided Finch (*Steganopleura guttata*) the 'Diamond Sparrow?'" One reason probably is that these birds are called "Waxbills" and "Diamond Sparrows" respectively by at least ten Australians for every one who calls them anything else, and it is natural enough that the bird-fanciers who take Australian birds to England should take with them their "popular" and not their "vernacular" names, though these should theoretically be identical. The fact seems to be that our Vernacular List is badly in need of further revision, so as to make it "understood of the people," who can hardly be blamed for failing to recognise their favourite Magpie when it appears as a White-backed Crow-Shrike, nor for inability to pierce the disguise of the Yellow-rumped *Acanthiza* and discover the homely "Tomtit" that they have known from childhood.

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MIGRATION.—A sub-committee was appointed by the British Ornithologists' Club in 1904 to collect and collate evidence regarding the movements of common migrants within England and Wales, and the results of this sub-committee's work are now published in the form of the Club's Bulletin (vol. xvii.) Twenty-nine species, which winter abroad and breed in Great Britain, were selected for observation. Over 150 individual observers and 50 lighthouses and lightships sent in returns on the slips furnished by the committee. The object was to trace when and where the birds entered the country, how they dispersed themselves over it, when they reached their breeding-places, and, finally, how some of them passed through, and out of, the country. It was found that immigration proceeded apparently

with little reference to weather conditions. Each species is dealt with separately in the report, and has its distribution in immigration illustrated by means of a separate map. Recognising the unwisdom of generalising on a single year's data, the committee say little in their introductory remarks about the conclusions towards which they are being led; but it is intended, if possible, to pursue the same plan of observation for a series of years, and so collect sufficient material for a proper understanding of the main principles governing the migration of birds. Seeing how very little is really known of the movements of our Australasian migrants, a similar method might with advantage be adopted here. Plenty of scattered observations have been made from time to time, but there has been little or no systematic tabulation of information from different localities. It is advisable not to make the field of observation too wide at the start. To take what is probably our most familiar migratory species, it would be of value if during the winter and spring of this year observers in as many parts as possible would note the date of arrival of the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*), and send in the result of their observations to the Editors of *The Emu*.

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SOUTH ORKNEY ISLANDS.—Mr. Eagle Clarke's article on "The Ornithological Results of the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition," in the January *Ibis*, is of great interest. Sixteen species of sea-birds were found frequenting the islands, including the Cape Petrel (*Daption capensis*), Skua (*Megalestris antarctica*), Giant Petrel (*Ossifraga gigantea*), Silver-grey Petrel (*Priocella glacialis*), Yellow-webbed (Wilson) Storm-Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*), Black-bellied Storm-Petrel (*Cymodroma (Fregeta) melanogaster*), and Banks Prion (*Prion banksii*), all of which species are found in Australian seas. The eggs of Wilson Petrel were found in hollows in the earth, in narrow clefts and fissures in the face of the cliffs, or under stones. The first egg was taken on 11th December. None of the eggs laid that summer had been hatched when the expedition left on 21st February. It is considered that the South Orkneys are this bird's southern limit. The eggs average 33.7 x 24 mm. Two eggs of the Black-bellied Storm-Petrel were found; one secured measured 3.60 x 2.55 cm. Of the Silvery-grey Petrel the writer states that it is highly probable that a few pairs nest on Laurie Island, one of the group. However, the actual breeding-place of this bird is still to be discovered. The Giant Petrel breeds in rookeries. There were about 5,000 of these birds on Laurie Island—a scourge to the Penguins, "upon which," says the writer, "and their eggs and young it was their one aim to gorge themselves to repletion."

The nests consisted of great piles of small angular stones. The first eggs were found on the 4th of November. Average length, 10.38 cm., and breadth, 6.57 cm. Two per cent. of these birds were pure white. The eggs of the Cape Petrel were a "first discovery," familiar though the bird is. Dr. Pirie took the first eggs on 2nd December, 1902, from nests composed of a few small angular fragments of rock and a little earth placed on open cliff ledges on Laurie Island. Only one egg is laid. Specimens average 62.35 x 43.11 mm. The eggs are pure white, and large for the size of the bird. The position of the nest varies from that adopted by Kerguelen Island birds of this species, which lay in burrows and grottos. Five hundred Antarctic Great Skuas spend the summer on Laurie Island. The first eggs were laid on 2nd December. The nests were hollows in moss on top of rocks or in the earth on moraine tops, and in that case lined with lichens. Two eggs formed the clutch. Two types of bird, a light and a dark, were noted; in one case a mated pair consisted of one of each type.

Correspondence.

PRINCIPLES OF MIGRATION.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

SIRS,—It is pleasing to find that the publication of my hypotheses regarding "The Principles Governing . . . Migration of Birds" (*The Emu*, vol. v., p. 147), has brought such a keen observer as Mr. J. Douglas Ogilby into the sphere of controversy—controversy that can but be beneficial, especially if Mr. Ogilby can prove his "hard, incontestable fact" that "home sickness" and the consequent tragedy of "suicide" are the sole concomitants of migration.

It is here necessary to quote in full my contention, as cited in *The Emu*:—"Then, again, an analogous case is the migration of birds, in which climatic conditions, apart from food and other conditions, bring about the unfavourable stimulus or stimuli from which the birds move to places where the stimuli are absent or modified. Were there no seasons in the year, birds would remain in the one place, and would lose their migratory habits, provided other unfavourable stimuli were absent. Hence we find the permanent stimuli of the seasons and their reflex actions causing migration always at the same season of the year, and mostly in the same direction, the date of migration varying according to the climatic condition of the season. This leads one to the supposition that migratory birds are of a delicate constitution, which, for their survival, causes them to shrink from the rigorous climatic conditions that cause unfavourable stimuli and travel to suitable zones."