

Stray Feathers.

Lyre-Birds.—In a letter to me lately, Mr. L. C. Cook spoke of the tameness of a Lyre-Bird (*Menura victoriæ*). He visited, in company with a lady, a Lyre-Bird's nest that had just been finished. "On approaching it the female bird flew off and at us again and again, and finally raked the earth about and picked up stray morsels and ate them within 4 feet of us, alternately flying and running into the tree-tops around, but never leaving us during the time we were there—about half an hour. I then placed the lady in a favourable position, and, making a detour, frightened two females and one beautiful male bird to within 3 feet of her. The birds ran along the log on which she was concealed, and she had a beautiful view of them." —D. LE SOUËF. Melbourne, 14th August, 1912.

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Notes of Restless Flycatcher.—In my article on Eyre Peninsula ornithology I spoke of the Restless Flycatcher (*Sisura inquieta*) as uttering the strange grinding notes only when hovering above the ground. In many years of observation I have found this to be the rule; but "there is an exception to every rule." Mr. A. H. Chisholm, of Maryborough, Victoria, in a letter to me, says:—"You may be interested to hear that I have found this habit, while general, not constant with the Restless Flycatcher. A year ago I saw one of these birds in the act of uttering the grinding note while resting on a stump, and I was surprised. Strangely enough, a day or so after reading your article in *The Emu*, I verified the previous observation by seeing and hearing a Flycatcher uttering the grinding notes in good style *while sitting on the ground*." This is very interesting to me, for I have never before heard of the Restless Flycatcher behaving like this.—(CAPTAIN) S. A. WHITE. Fulham, S.A., 8th August, 1912.

From Magazines, &c.

Gould League of New South Wales.—The Gould League of Bird Lovers of New South Wales is making steady progress. In connection with Bird Day, 9th October, 1912, a "bird-life" supplement to the *Public Instruction Gazette* has been issued. Printed on art paper, enclosed in a neat cover, the supplement is well illustrated, and contains some interesting articles and notes. Mr. W. W. Froggatt writes upon "Insectivorous Birds"; Miss Amy E. Mack contributes a fable, "Why the Bronze-Cuckoo Wails?" which is characterized by her usual delicate fancy; and Mr. A. G. Hamilton deals with the subject of "Protective Colouration," and gives a useful list of publications relating to Australian birds. "Bird-Life Near Home," by Thos. P. Austin, is an article (abridged) from *The Emu*. Bird paragraphs, Gould League notes,

and poems are among the other contents. Some of the illustrations are from photographs by Mr. A. H. E. Mattingley, C.M.Z.S. A copy of the Gould League (N.S.W.) certificate forms an inset.

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Mutton-Birds.—Adverting to the excursion of the B.O.C. to Phillip Island rookeries (*vide* page 58), the following observations made on the Aleutian Islands (a far cry from Phillip Island to the Aleutians) by Mr. A. C. Bent, June, 1911, and published in the *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collection*, vol. lvi., No. 32, will be read with interest:—"Among the vast flocks of dark-coloured Shearwaters (*Puffinus griseus* and *P. tenuirostris*)* seen in and about Unimak Pass, it was impossible to separate these two species at any great distance. Certainly both species were present, for we identified both at close range, though none were shot, as we could not pick them up. I never saw anything approaching their abundance in Unimak Pass when we went through there on 4th June; small black whales were numerous, and the Shearwaters were following them about to feed upon the remnants of food left on the surface by the whales; on account of this habit they were called 'Whale-Birds.' The water was literally black with birds all around us as we sailed through acres and acres of them, wildly scrambling to get out of our way or rising in great clouds to sweep away over the smooth water. For several hours we were almost constantly seeing or passing through these great rafts of Shearwaters, and I should not dare to hazard a guess as to how many hundred thousand we saw."

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"Reference-List to the Birds of Australia."—Mr. Gregory M. Mathews, in *The Emu*, vol. vii. (1908), published a "Hand-list" of Australian birds showing 883 species. He now publishes, in the *Novitates Zoologicae*, vol. xviii. (1912), a "Reference-List" bringing the species and sub-species up to 1,448. Mr. Mathews has found it necessary to add and alter numerous names, and to create many new genera, the whole being an example of a great amount of research and laborious toil.

In reviewing the "Reference-List," *The Ibis* (1912), p. 346, remarks:—"We quite agree with Mr. Mathews in pronouncing this proceeding to be 'revolutionary.' Nothing like it, we believe, has been done before, and it is evident that Mr. Mathews takes quite a different view from his fellow-workers of what is sufficient variation to necessitate the recognition of a sub-species. So far as we can make out, the sub-species first described in the present list are about 540. Each of them is accompanied by a short statement as to how it differs from its nearest ally, but the characters assigned to them are in most cases extremely meagre. Such slight variations as being 'paler above,' or 'darker below,' or 'size less,' especially when there is a difference in locality, seem to

* Both birds are Australian, the latter being the Phillip Island species.—EDS.

Mr. Mathews to be quite sufficient for the foundation of a new sub-species, and he proceeds accordingly. It is quite impossible for us to go into controversy with one who 'has personally handled' 30,000 specimens of Australian birds, but we are quite certain that there must be a mistake somewhere, and leave it to others who are better acquainted with the Australian Ornis than we are to find out where these mistakes are."

"Additions and Corrections" to Mr. Mathews' "Reference-List" appear in *The Austral Avian Record*, vol. i., No. 3, pp. 73-80.

Correspondence.

MR. MATHEWS' LIST OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS: A QUERY.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

SIRS,—Is there any necessity for ornithological students to have so many sub-species to wade through as Mr. Mathews has created in his latest list of Australian birds? Are we to assume that through force (or possibly change) of environment some comparatively small differences are created that form a sufficient basis for a new sub-species? Were there not too many before this list was issued?

Granted that the new "sub-species" should be so described, why give personal names instead of descriptive ones? To give a name which describes the sub-specific character, if necessary, would be an advantage from an educational standpoint. Is this new list such aid as it should be for purposes of identification?

The use of personal names in science is always understood to be complimentary to persons who have made some noteworthy discovery, or who have performed a signal service to the particular branch in which they are interested—not merely for collectors who may by chance (or for gain) forward some local variety or phase of bird or other life procured in their own neighbourhood in the hope of their names being handed down to posterity. Does not giving the name of the collector to every new sub-species (?) sent in discount its worth and the value of distinctions which have been worthily bestowed?—I am, &c.,

H. KENDALL.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

SIRS,—My attention has been drawn to the preface in Mr. Gregory Mathews's work, "The Birds of Australia," wherein the learned author makes the following statement regarding the nomenclature of Australian birds:—"The most gratifying feature in connection with my work is the declared intention of the Royal Ornithologists' Union (voiced by Mr. Milligan, *Emu*, vol. xi., p. 136, 1911) to give loyal adherence to the system, presently adopted by the national authority on ornithology within the British Dominions, namely, the British Museum.