

## Correspondence.

### FIELD CHARACTERS OF THE GREY PLOVER.

(TO THE EDITOR.)

SIR.—In *The Emu*, Vol. XXVI, p. 315, Messrs. A. M. Morgan and J. Sutton state:—"As the migratory waders are, almost without exception, in the non-breeding plumage it is well-nigh impossible to identify a bird such as this," referring to the Grey Plover (*Squatarola squatarola*).

Whilst I agree that in many cases it is difficult to identify waders in non-breeding plumage, it so happens that the Grey Plover is one of the easiest members of the group to distinguish. The only bird with which a competent observer could confuse it is the Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominicus*). Even when the bird is settled I have found it quite possible to recognize the larger size and greyer colour of the Grey Plover, and directly it flies the white in the wing and especially the black axillaries are conspicuous, and make it impossible to mistake it even a hundred yards away.

I have never seen the Grey Plover in Australia and can only assume that Messrs. Morgan and Sutton are unfamiliar with it in life. The recognition-marks in this species, as is so often the case in birds, are concealed when the bird is settled. They are, of course, equally inconspicuous in the skin with the wings folded.

The most recent books on the birds of the British Isles and of North America include under each species a section entitled "Field Characters" or "Field Marks." Reference to Witherby's *Practical Handbook of British Birds*, 1923, Forbush's *Birds of Massachusetts*, 1925, or Taverner's *Birds of Western Canada*, 1926, will show that none of these authors agree with Messrs. Morgan and Sutton as to the difficulty of recognizing the Grey Plover in the field.

Yours, etc.,

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Croydon, England.

June 24, 1927.

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### DECEPTION AMONG BIRDS.

(TO THE EDITOR.)

SIR.—In *Chambers Journal* (May, 1927) is an article by Mr. Douglas Dewar in which he asserts that in the case of birds that indulge in strange antics when one approaches the nest: "It is not correct to speak of such procedures as feigning injury. The bird is deliriously excited and has a fit. She does

not know that she is behaving as though injured, much less is she deliberately trying to deceive."

While I have not read the reasons which he states are given in his *Birds of India* book, and while reluctant to advance my limited observations against those of one who is doubtless a skilled observer, I think many will agree the above is a sweeping statement to make. Without going into the question of whether any bird or animal is conscious of what it does in a human sense, I believe some birds are just as capable of deliberately trying to lead an enemy from the nest as a fox is of running in water or a hare who "doubles to mislead the hounds."

I have watched a Dusky Robin (*Petroeca vittata*), while I was engaged near its nest, indulge in fluttering and broken-wing antics almost continuously for 20 to 30 minutes at a time. If I followed, it would fly another 10 or 15 yards and repeat the antics, and so on until I was perhaps 50 to 80 yards away. Then it would fly back more or less towards the nest and perch. The action was too sustained to mean "delirious excitement;" in fact, the Dusky Robin is not an excitable bird. It appeared a deliberate and methodical attempt to get me away.

Curiously enough, while all or almost all these birds in one district (Circular Head), where I used to watch them, had this habit, I have not noted it in the same bird nesting in this district.

Are all such and similar antics to be called "nerves" in future?

Yours, etc.,

B. ANDERSON.

Westbury, Tasmania.

July 26, 1927.

[Mr. Dewar's view on this interesting question is an echo of that held by the late W. H. Hudson, who laid it down that it would be a great mistake to suppose that the bird, when fluttering on the ground to lead an enemy from the neighbourhood of its nest, is in full possession of its faculties, acting consciously, and itself in little danger of capture. "When the bird drops to the earth," he says, "its pain has caused it to fall as surely as if it had received a wound . . . and when it flutters on the ground it is for the moment incapable of flight, and its efforts to recover flight and safety cause it to beat its wings, and tremble, and gasp with open mouth." But most Australian observers will agree with Dr. Anderson, and hold that both Hudson and Dewar are wrong. Anyone who has studied the domestic habits of such birds as the Dotterels, the White-fronted Chat, the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, and sundry other "deception artists," must have become convinced that these birds deliberately feign injury. Such a bird is not only able to recover flight immediately it desires, but it will fly back to the vicinity of the nest, if it feels impelled to do so, and repeat the performance again and again. Manifestly, then, it is quite erroneous to say that such a bird has a fit, or that it flutters its wings merely in an effort to regain flight. It makes no attempt to regain flight until well away from the nest, and then does so in an instant, apparently without effort.—EDITOR.]