

Land Birds Washed up on a Sydney Beach

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During my frequent patrols of the ocean beach at Cronulla, N.S.W., between 1938 and 1943, in search of derelict sea-birds, I occasionally picked up the remains of land birds which somehow or other had perished at sea and were washed ashore. There is a decided interest in records of this nature, the full significance of which may not have been realized by observers in the past.

One is not surprised, of course, to note individuals of migratory species: several apparently undertake a coast-wise transit while they are on their way either north or south. But other species met with dead on the beaches are birds one usually regards as sedentary land birds. Among these are some like the Starling, which, through population pressure or other causes, have an urge to take flights out to sea, part, perhaps, of a random dispersal movement. A fraction of them may reach unpopulated islands and, in still rarer instances, start colonies, though the great majority no doubt are doomed to perish. The Starling, without the aid of man, has populated several islands off New Zealand and has even managed to extend to distant Macquarie Island. K. A. Hindwood in his paper on the Birds of Lord Howe Island gives several instances of land birds sporadically appearing at that island. Not all these can be regarded as merely unfortunate individuals blown from the mainland by strong winds; one must assume some measure of voluntary sea-wandering, though the course taken would be conditioned by the direction of the prevailing winds, including upper-air currents, and a return home might not be possible. The significance of this method of bird-colonizing of isolated islands is discussed by Ernst Mayr in his paper 'The Origin and the History of the Bird Fauna of Polynesia,' *Proc. Sixth Pacific Sc. Congress*, vol. iv, 1941, p. 197.

There are anecdotal reports of land birds being driven out to sea *en masse* as a result of severe bush fires and gales (cf. *The Emu*, vol. III, 1904, p. 186 and vol. XXXVIII, 1939, p. 524) but more positive information on the matter is needed.

It would be of great interest if observers would keep records of their discoveries of land birds washed up on marine beaches, as the resultant information would give us much-needed data on the points alluded to above, namely (a) on the extent of coast-wise movements among the migrants; (b) on the species which indulge in 'walkabouts' over the ocean and the relative frequency of their occurrence, and (c) to provide evidence of the effects of land

catastrophes such as bush fires and intense storms in driving birds out to sea. The following list may be accepted as a fragmentary contribution to the subject and as an inducement to others to devote some attention to it. What is required now is an accumulation of precise records; the correlation with meteorological conditions, etc., can be attempted later.

Porzana plumbea—Spotless Crake. One specimen was found washed up on November 1, 1941.

The Rallidae are known for the tendency of many of their species to make great ocean wanderings and to set themselves up on remote islands. This particular species is a resident on numerous islands, including some in the Hauraki Gulf, New Zealand (see G. A. Buddle, *The Emu*, vol. XLI, 1941, pp. 63 and 130, for an interesting account of habits) and the Abrolhos Islands, W.A., existing at these places in strength in an environment quite unlike that which it favours on the mainland. Dean Amadon (*Amer. Mus. Nov.*, 1942, no. 1175, p. 10) enumerates the great number of islands the species inhabits in Polynesia.

? **Egretta alba**—White Egret. A few wing quills of what was perhaps this species were found on the beach on November 29, 1941, and parts of the plumage of probably the same bird on December 6, 1941.

Butorides striata—Mangrove Bittern. One bird was found on July 13, 1942.

Ninox boobook—Boobook Owl. Mr. J. A. Tubb found one on October 10, 1939.

Kakatoe galerita—White Cockatoo. One bird was found on July 13, 1941. There had been a severe storm three days previously.

Melopsittacus undulatus—Budgerygah. A specimen of the normal ('wild') green colour phase was found on October 7, 1942.

This bird would almost certainly be an escapee from captivity, and the possibility cannot be excluded that the White Cockatoo was also a cage-bird at large.

Dacelo gigas—Kookaburra. The wing of one bird was found on September 6, 1941.

Hirundapus caudacutus—Spine-tailed Swift. One example of this summer visitor was picked up on January 8, 1942: the bird was in moult.

Myiagra cyanoleuca—Satin Flycatcher. A female bird was found on November 7, 1942. There had been some moderate, though not really severe, south-easterly weather during the preceding two days.

This bird is a summer visitor in south-eastern Australia, and near Sydney it breeds only in the Blue Mountains, being only a rare transit migrant in the Sydney district itself. P. A. Gilbert (*The Emu*, vol. XXXV, 1935, p. 25) states "that

this species is intensely interesting with regard to its migratory distribution. It seems to take the same course as the Leaden Flycatcher as far as Ourimbah, then follows the hills to the west to where they gradually merge into the Blue Mountains. The Leaden Flycatcher, however, continues along the coast as well as along the eastern slopes of the Mountains." This is not strictly the case as there does appear to be a certain amount of coast-wise travelling with the Satin species. Mr. Hindwood has kindly let me have a summary of his own and other observations on this species in the Sydney district from which it is evident that during October and November (mainly November, the dates being 7, 8, 12 (twice), 15 and 17) and during late February and March, individuals obviously in transit may occur in the Sydney area. The suburbs in which the observations were made were Wahroonga, Roseville, Willoughby, Middle Harbour and now Cronulla.

Monarcha melanopsis—Black-faced Flycatcher. Mr. Tubb found a specimen on February 6, 1942.

The species is a transit migrant locally (*cf.* A. R. McGill, *The Emu*, vol. XLIII, 1943, p. 143).

Lalage tricolor—White-winged Triller. One male bird was recovered on October 7, 1942—the same day on which the Budgerygah was found. There had been southerly weather and on October 5 a severe local hailstorm. A transit migrant.

Sturnus vulgaris—Starling. One bird was found on October 30, 1942. The weather had been quiet and calm during the week.

The Black-cheeked Falcon

By NORMAN CHAFFER, Roseville, Sydney, N.S.W.

Throughout the spring and summer, the Black-cheeked Falcon is sparsely distributed through the district surrounding Sydney, but in the autumn and winter its numbers appear to be augmented. Certainly it is seen far more frequently during the two latter seasons, although that may be due, to some extent, to its closer approach to the city at those times.

It is a memorable sight to watch birds of prey harrying the Starlings, when those birds have gathered into their huge autumn flocks. While usually the attacks on the Starlings are carried out at such an altitude as to make identification uncertain, the aggressor is, I believe, mostly the Falcon. The Starlings, massing close together, mount high in the air, ascending in great circles, the whole company turning in perfect unison. Fast as the Starling flies, the Falcon can easily outstrip it. Rising above the flock, it turns and dives at the massed birds at a tremendous speed.