

## Stray Feathers

**Birds With Six Rectrices.**—In Neville Cayley's work on Fairy Wrens of Australia, in the chapter on the Emu-Wrens, there is a footnote referring to a statement by K. A. Hindwood in *The Emu*, vol. 31, p. 99, in which he (Hindwood) states that the only other genus of birds with only six rectrices of which he is aware is a South American genus (*Sylviorthorhynchus*). In each of the two works on the birds of British India, written respectively by Blandford and Oates and by Stuart Baker, there is an account and description of a genus of small birds (*Pnoepyga* Hodgson, 1845), consisting of two species which the authors describe as wrens (Troglodytidae), but which Delacour in his work on Malaysian birds places with the babblers (Timaliidae). This genus has only six rectrices.—F. BOYER BROWN, Beerburum, Qld., 16/4/51.

**Notes on Introduced Birds.**—The paper by A. H. Chisholm (*The Emu*, vol. 50, pp. 97-100) on introduced birds leads me to contribute some of my own records. They suffer from the disadvantage of being negative observations in several cases, but as far as they go they tend to confirm previous reports.

Indian Turtle-Dove: Not seen at Cairns, Innisfail or Townsville, Qld. At Townsville the common dove of gardens and quiet streets was the Peaceful Dove. Perhaps the Indian Dove is not really aggressive. The conspecific Chinese Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia c. chinensis*), introduced at Los Angeles, California, has not spread very much.

Starling: Seen at Gundagai, N.S.W., June 27, 1944. At Brisbane it apparently arrived between May 22 and June 4, and by October 10 there were few left. In the United States it was rather slow to colonize the south-eastern States, although the reasons are not clear. It is still rather rare as a breeding bird in our southern States.

Myna: Not seen at Toowoomba, Qld., during a brief visit on July 18, 1944, but I could easily have missed it if scarce. It is more strange that it has not worked along the coast to Brisbane, unless it is, in fact, too sedentary to extend its range, which seems incredible. Ringing would give help here.

House Sparrow: Not seen at Townsville, Innisfail or Cairns. Has this species ever been a successful invader of the tropics?

Goldfinch: Seen at Cootamundra, N.S.W., on June 27, 1944, in considerable numbers. It was not seen about Brisbane.—CHARLES H. BLAKE, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A., 15/1/51.

**Rails Moving Eggs.**—Just after the forme containing my query concerning Landrail behaviour was printed (*Emu*,

vol. 51, p. 73), I discovered a reference in Robert Hall's *Australian Bird Maps*, p. 135), to *Rallus pectoralis* moving its eggs to a "quickly made rough nest some dozen yards away". It is not quite clear from the paragraph in question whether Mr. Hall or the bird ultimately had the eggs, but the account supports my belief that rails here may exercise the egg-moving attribute observed among their overseas relatives.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 17/9/51.

**Olive Whistler in Heathlands.**—During a visit to the Anglesea/Airey's Inlet area in south-western Victoria on July 1, 1951, I encountered the Olive Whistler (*Pachycephala olivacea*) in coastal heath about two and a half miles east of Airey's Inlet.

The Olive Whistler is fairly common in the densely-timbered gullies of the Otway Ranges, some twenty miles to the west, but this is the only occasion I have recorded it in the district as far east as Airey's Inlet, particularly in such an unusual habitat.

The bird was located in low scrub ranging from a foot to eighteen inches high, comprising dwarf beard-heaths (*Leucopogon* spp.), heath, (*Epacris impressa*), and guinea-flowers (*Hibbertia sericea*). I heard movements in the bush and so I called the bird up for identification. The bird hopped through this low shrub layer to an open patch about a yard in front of me, paused sufficiently long for identification by me to be certain, then flew silently to some light *Melaleuca* scrub some fifty yards away, where it was lost to view. The area in question is less than 150 yards from the edge of a cliff overlooking Bass Strait.

It was of some interest to me to find this forest dweller in pure heathland of such an exposed nature. However this species may, like some other well-known species, undergo short local migrations from the forest to more open country in the winter, such as the heaths, where it was in association with the Southern Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*), Striated Field-Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*), and Tawny-crowned Honeyeater (*Gliciphila melanops*).—DAVID G. MORGAN, Parkville, Vic., 7/7/51.

**Tawny Grass-bird (*Megalurus timoriensis*): A Correction.**—Mr. T. A. Everitt has drawn attention to an error in our paper on the birds of the 'Derra Derra' 1950 Camp-out. (*The Emu*, vol. 50, pt. 4, April, 1951, p. 232). Concerning the Tawny Grass-bird, we state—"... previous records for New South Wales have all been for the eastern or coastal side of the Dividing Range". Gould in his *Handbook* (vol. 1, 1865, p. 399), remarks—"This is a scarce species in New South Wales, the few individuals I have seen being from the grassy districts of the Liverpool Plains". Gould's observations were later quoted by A. J. North (*Nests and Eggs*, vol. 1, pt. 4, 1904, p. 255). Both publications were

readily available to one of us (Hindwood), who is primarily responsible for the mis-statement. The Liverpool Plains lie about 100 miles south of 'Derra Derra' and form the southern portion of what is known as the North-western Slopes, i.e. of the Dividing Range. Gould indicated that the Tawny Grass-bird frequented grassy districts, a habitat apparently similar to that figured in our paper (plate 24). His record lends support to our suggestion that the few birds seen at 'Derra Derra' were probably remnants of a former larger and more widely distributed population in that part of New South Wales, now much reduced through the impact of settlement. — K. A. HINDWOOD and A. R. MCGILL, Sydney, N.S.W., 1/8/51.

**Sexing the Red-eared Firetail.**—H. E. Tarr, in a note on the above species in *The Emu*, vol. 48, pt. 2, p. 161, states that he observed two males and two females of this species near Albany in 1948. It would be of interest to know how he determined the sex of these birds as aviculturists in South Australia have found it quite impossible to determine the sex of birds of this species by any difference of plumage in the adult bird.

Incidentally, it is worthy of note that the only recorded breeding of this species in captivity was that of Dr. M. E. Chinner, of Adelaide, in 1938.—ALAN LONDON, Adelaide, S.A., 22/7/51.

**Fortuitous Mimicry: A Note of Warning.**—Recent experience with House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), whose calls deceived me into thinking I was listening to distant calls of Masked Wood-Swallows (*Artamus personatus*) in one instance, and calls of some grass parrot of the genus *Neophema* in another case, serves once more to focus attention on the need for extreme care in recording examples of vocal mimicry in birds.

Many years ago Bernh. Hoffmann, *Verhandlungen der Ornithologischen Gesellschaft in Bayern*, XVI (3/4), 269-273, 1925, expressed the opinion that some of the extant records of mimicry seemed to be based on wrong observations and deductions. The variation of song-motif and/or convergence, can, and has, led to erroneous records of mimicry, he contended.

In more recent years an Australian observer, L. G. Chandler, *Wild Life*, 8 (8), 266, 1946, writing on the apparent mimicry of the Shy Ground-Wren (*Hylacola cauta*), asked: "Is this really mimicry? It is certainly a splendid imitation of other birds' notes, but can it be proved that these notes are not natural to the bird in certain circumstances"?

Whilst the reality of avian vocal mimicry has been established beyond any doubt, in my mind we should all be on guard against an altogether subjective and uncritical

acceptance of closely related calls of birds of different species and genera as true mimicry.—ERHARD F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 25/6/51.

**Honeyeaters in the Bendigo District, Vic.**—On May 31, 1951, while I was on a visit to the Epsom district, Bendigo, Vic., my attention was drawn to an amazing sight when approaching a small clump of eucalypts. Despite the fact that it was quite a calm day, two or three trees seemed to be shaking and quivering as though in the grip of a strong wind. The constant movement of the foliage was caused by a large flock of honeyeaters energetically feeding on a plague of scale insects which had infested many trees in the locality. I had never previously seen so many White-naped Honeyeaters (*Melithreptus lunatus*) concentrated in such a small area. The flock must have numbered several hundreds and there seemed to be more birds than leaves. Strangely enough the only sound to be heard was the continual rustling of the leaves. The birds were so intent upon feeding that they were not calling. In addition to the particularly strong force of 'White-napes', other species attacking the scale insects included Purple-gaped Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga cratitia*), White-plumed Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga penicillata*) and Brown-headed Honeyeaters (*Melithreptus brevirostris*).

I withdrew from this interesting spectacle to investigate the cause of a commotion among some birds in a nearby clump of trees. Once again the honeyeater family was in the limelight and their agitation was due to the presence of a Barking Owl (*Ninox connivens*). This Owl, obviously a female, was being attacked by Blue-faced Honeyeaters (*Entomyzon cyanotis*) and Noisy Miners (*Myzantha melanoccephala*), and was eventually persuaded to pursue her slumbers elsewhere.

The Purple-gaped Honeyeater has appeared in large numbers in the Bendigo district during the past month or so. I first noticed the influx of this species on May 13, when large flocks were observed feeding on flowering mallee eucalypts between Kamarooka and Bagshot. This month (June) the species is common in the Epsom district and may be seen feeding in roadside trees.

The Black-chinned Honeyeater (*Melithreptus gularis*), normally encountered in the neighbouring ironbark forests, has recently appeared in the main streets of Bendigo, where many of the street trees are in blossom.

It has joined the beautiful Regent Honeyeater (*Zanthomiza phrygia*), which appears in certain southern Victorian districts about November, but apparently is a resident species at Bendigo, where I have recorded it for every month of the year. Perhaps some do move further north, but as the birds are quieter in their habits, and therefore less conspicuous during the winter months, it is difficult to

determine whether or not the bulk of them sojourn further north for a few months. Last year I found many nesting in August throughout the Bendigo district.—J. V. RYAN, Bendigo, Vic., 12/6/51.

## News and Notes

### TESTIMONIAL FOR MR. D. J. DICKISON

In appreciation of his services as Hon. General Secretary for more than 25 years, the Council has decided to present Mr. Dickison with a testimonial and has appropriated an amount to start a fund. Any member wishing to subscribe (on a purely voluntary basis) is asked to communicate with the present Hon. General Secretary, Mr. W. B. Hitchcock.

### EXTRA PART OF *The Emu*

This present part is an extra, free part, issued in order to make the total contents of vol. 51, which will be completed in three parts, approximately of the same amount as usual for *Emu* volumes. It has been made possible by donations, some considerable, from members and from another source.

### HONOURS FOR ORNITHOLOGISTS

The highest scientific distinction in the British Empire, Fellowship of the Royal Society of London, has been bestowed on two eminent ornithologists in Great Britain. Dr. David Lack, director of the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology at Oxford, has been honoured for his work on behaviour and evolution of birds and his studies on the formation of species and races of the finches of the Galapagos Islands. Dr. W. H. Thorpe, of Cambridge, who is primarily an entomologist, has earned his distinction for his investigations on insect physiology and animal behaviour.

### STANDING COMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION

By a resolution passed at its meeting on June 20, 1950, the Council established a Standing Committee on Conservation to deal with matters of bird life conservation and protection on behalf of the Union.

State representatives appointed to this committee to date are as follows—

South Australia.—H. E. Jarman, 43 West Parkway, Reade Park, S.A.

Tasmania.—M. S. R. Sharland, 353 Sandy Bay Rd., Hobart, Tas.

Victoria.—F. G. Elford, 76 New St., Brighton, S.5, Vic.; J. Jones, 26 Warleigh Rd., Footscray West, Vic.; H. M. Wilson (chairman), 14 Torrington Place, Camberwell, E.7, Vic.

Western Australia.—E. H. Sedgwick, Wooroloo, W.A.

New South Wales and Queensland have not yet made appointments.