

## The White-tailed Tropic-bird in Australia

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The White-tailed Tropic-bird (*Phaëthon lepturus*) has seldom been recorded from Australia. Some years ago I gave<sup>1</sup> details of three definite occurrences, based on specimens, for the east coast of the continent, together with notes on a mutilated skin from Lord Howe Island. A subsequent record<sup>2</sup> refers to a bird seen in flight by Norman Chaffer at Neutral Bay, a suburb of Sydney. Mr. Warren Hitchcock has kindly sent me particulars of two specimens, from Australian localities, which were not included in my paper. The skins are in the H. L. White Collection, National Museum, Victoria.

The known occurrences of the species in Australia and Lord Howe Island are given below; localities are from north to south.

Gulf of Carpentaria, northern Queensland. Specimen no. H. L. W. 52, ♀, immature; National Museum, Victoria. Collected by W. McLennan, July 7, 1921. (See *The Emu*, vol. 21, 1922, p. 191, for notes on this bird, which was obtained near Cape York).

Cairns, north-eastern Queensland. Specimen no. 728933, ♂, adult; American Museum of Natural History. Collected in October, 1906, 'near Cairns', and purchased in May, 1913, by Gregory M. Mathews from Tost and Rohu, dealers in natural history specimens. Original collector or precise locality not recorded. Type of *Phaëthon lepturus dorotheæ* Mathews.

Lord Howe Island. Specimen no. 0.3737, immature; Australian Museum, Sydney. Collected May, 1890, by Mr. D. Love. (Portion of skin only).

Manly, near Sydney, New South Wales. Specimen no. H. L. W. 53, ♂, adult; National Museum, Victoria. Collected June 6, 1890, by Robert Grant. "Found on beach after a storm".

Neutral Bay, near Sydney. Adult seen in flight by Norman Chaffer, January 29, 1939. (See *The Emu*, vol. 39, 1939, p. 32).

Botany Bay, near Sydney. Specimen no. 0.10003, immature; Australian Museum, Sydney. Collected February 13, 1898 by Mr. Henry Burns. "Picked up in a dying condition after extremely heavy easterly gales".

Murramarang Beach, south coast, New South Wales. Specimen no. 0.36962, immature; Australian Museum, Sydney. Collected February 2, 1938, by K. A. Hindwood, following a period of stormy weather. (Portion of skin only).

It will be seen that there are six records for Australia—five for the east coast and one for the Gulf of Carpentaria. Lord Howe Island, where a specimen has been taken, lies some 300 miles east of Australia.

The dispersal of these birds from their normal range has probably been caused by cyclonic disturbances or strong gales extending over a wide area. The nearest known breeding place to any of the localities on the east coast of Australia, where the species has been recorded, is more than a thousand miles away: it is Walpole Island, a coral islet of about 320 acres, 150 miles south-east of New Caledonia<sup>3</sup>. Birds from that island, or from other parts of the south-west Pacific, no doubt range over a considerable area though they seem to remain, from choice, within the tropics. Four of the seven records listed are for immature birds, a fact indicating that yearlings, especially in pelagic species, are more likely to be lost or blown out-of-bounds than adults.

No authentic occurrences are available for Western Australia. A. J. Campbell remarks<sup>4</sup> that the species ". . . has been observed as far south as Houtman's Abrolhos, on the west coast . . .". C. G. Gibson states<sup>5</sup>—"Both the Red-tailed and the White-tailed Tropic-birds have been recorded as seen on these islands [Houtman's Abrolhos] but we did not note any. The fishermen state that it is several years since any have been seen. They used to frequent the Wallabi Group principally". Such statements are too indefinite to be acceptable as evidence of the presence of the species in Western Australian waters.

There is less chance of the occurrence of the White-tailed Tropic-bird in Western Australia than in eastern Australia; this is due partly to the prevailing trade winds which are away from the north-west coast, but also to the absence of breeding grounds close to the mainland. With the exception of Christmas Island, near Java, where a distinct subspecies, *fulvus*, nests, the nearest breeding grounds are in the north or north-west Indian Ocean, some thousands of miles from Western Australia.

There can be small doubt that many more sea-birds reach our shores than are recorded. Unless regular beach surveys are made the chances of the discovery of rare birds are slender. Scavengers such as foxes, feral cats, gulls and ravens carry off carcases or else tear them apart; rough seas often cover the bodies with sand. It is an ornithological truism that the discovery of stragglers or vagrants depends to a large extent on the chance combination of the observer and the event. Especially is this so with sea-birds, because beaches are seldom combed during prolonged stormy weather which seems to be a major factor in the destruction of pelagic species.

REFERENCES.

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3. Sullivan, C. S., 'Bird Notes from Walpole Island', *The Emu*, vol. 28, October, 1928, p. 136.
4. Campbell, A. J. *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*, 1901, p. 995.
5. Gibson, C. G., 'Notes on Some Birds of the Abrolhos Islands (W.A.)', *The Emu*, vol. 8, October, 1908, p. 65.

## Subfossil *Nestor* (Psittacidae) from New Zealand

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### INTRODUCTORY

In the course of work on bird bones from Pleistocene-Recent sand-dunes and from Maori middens, a number of apparent novelties have come to light. One is discussed in this paper as a contribution to the present state of knowledge of our fossil avifauna.

The fossil bird species which is the subject of this paper has been found in a number of localities in the South Island. Its description and discussion here will facilitate subsequent accounts of the avifauna of any particular locality (*e.g.* Lake Grassmere or Pyramid Valley) and comparisons of the avifauna of such places with the present-day life zones and faunal associations. The material consists of the bones of a form of *Nestor*, closely allied to the present-day Kaka of the South Island (*Nestor meridionalis*) and apparently identical with the North Island form of this species. The subfossil material may provide data to fix the date of separation of the two Recent species in the phylogeny of the Nestoridae.

### HISTORY

H. O. Forbes (1892a, 581), discussing the possible former existence of the Kakapo (*Strigops habroptilus*) on the Chatham Islands, stated that he found no Kakapo bones in his collections made there\*, "the Psittacine bones being the head and beaks of *Nestor notabilis*, the Kea." Later (1892b, 232-3), he listed further determinations from his subfossil Chatham Islands collections including '*Nestor meridionalis*' and '? *Nestor notabilis*.' Forbes did not state his method of separating the two species, but, judged by various other determinations made by him and by his somewhat inadequate descriptions, his *N. notabilis* may

\* I have recently found a tibio-tarsus of a Kakapo in the Dominion Museum, from the W. T. L. Travers Collection, Chatham Islands, Oct. 30, 1899. There appear to be no other records of Kakapo from this region.