

In Newton's (and Gadow's) *Dictionary of Birds* (p. 139) the relative length of the intestinal canal of a species is estimated by dividing the absolute length of the intestines by the length of the body of the bird from the root of the neck to the anus. 'Short-gutted' birds are those with a relative length of not more than 5, 'long-gutted' ones those where it is more than 8. Amongst the examples given are *Corvus corax*, absolute length of intestinal canal 120 cm., relative length 8, and *Manucodia atra*, 29 cm. and 2.3 respectively. The Manucode is very short-gutted—the shortest in the sixteen species in the table given, the Crow barely long-gutted. These authors say that the intestinal canal is very short in all purely frugivorous and insectivorous birds, and very long in those which live on fishes, carrion, grain and grass.

I am indebted to the late Professor T. Harvey Johnston for calling my attention to the following works dealing with the intestines of birds. F. E. Beddard in *The Structure and Classification of Birds*, 1898, gives a table, on p. 177, in which the lengths of the small intestines of two Satin Bower-birds are given as 10.25 and 10.5 ins. (25.6 and 26.2 cm.), of the large intestines as 0.75 and 1.25 ins. (1.8 and 3 cm.), and of the caecum as 0.25 and 0.5 ins. (0.6 and 1.2 cm.), and of a Crow (*Corvus corax*) as 29.75 ins. (74 cm.), 2.5 ins. (6 cm.) and 0.5 ins. (1.2 cm.) respectively. It will be seen that Beddard makes the small intestines much the longer in all, whilst Mr. Patten, who is a veterinary surgeon, finds the large intestines the longer. Dr. Hans Gadow's paper 'On the Taxonomic Value of the Intestinal Convolutions of Birds', *Proc. Zool. Soc.*, 1889, p. 303, and Chalmers Mitchell 'On the Intestinal Tract of Birds', *Proc. Zool. Soc.*, 1896, p. 136, have nothing bearing on the question.

Stray Feathers

Swift Parrot in South-west Victoria.—In *The Emu*, vol. 52, page 212, E. F. Boehm expresses the opinion that the Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) may migrate westwards or south-westwards through south-west Victoria into South Australia, though he does not quote any actual records of the bird in the south-east area of his State. In the *South Australian Ornithologist*, vol. 19, parts 6-8, page 78, S. E. Merrill and C. E. Rix, in their paper on the distribution of South Australian birds, do not suggest that the Swift Parrot occurs in the south-east of their State in any numbers, if at all. In view of the extreme rarity of this species in south-west Victoria, I feel that the South Australian birds which occur near Adelaide must come from an inland source. Until yesterday I had not seen this bird in western Victoria, and the only record of which I know in this area

is an isolated sighting by the late Eric Simpson near the mouth of the Glenelg River. Yesterday (March 11, 1952) at 9.30 A.M., I observed a flock of twelve strange parrots approaching my garden from the north. They were flying in a leisurely manner with many minor alterations of direction, about 40 feet above the ground, and eventually settled in a flowering gum (*Eucalyptus ficifolia*) within 10 feet of my head. Until settling they had been calling continuously but when in the tree became silent and fed hungrily on the blossoms, which were full out. I had no difficulty in identifying them with absolute certainty, and I believe that the flock consisted of six males and six females, all in good plumage. After feeding for less than fifteen minutes they took off with one accord, and continued what I believe must have been a migration flight in the same direction and in the same manner as they had arrived. I was able to watch and hear them continue their journey for about half a mile and though they passed near or over several flowering eucalypts they gave no indication of stopping.

The three lorikeets of the genus *Glossopitta* have been rather more common than usual during the last few weeks and some eucalypts have been flowering profusely, but similar conditions have existed previously in recent years and I believe the Swift Parrot to be a very rare visitor to the south-western corner of Victoria.—CLAUDE N. AUSTIN, Coleraine, Vic., 12/3/52.

Turquoise Parrot.—In *The Emu* for May 1952 is an account of this species (*Neophema pulchella*) at Griffith, N.S.W. I recorded the species at Stanthorpe, Qld., in 1950. In view of the fact that I can find no recent recording of this bird for Queensland I am giving details of my record.

In 1923 the late Dr. Spencer Roberts recorded a single male Turquoise Parrot at Stanthorpe (*Emu*, vol. 29, part 4) but I know of no further record until my 1950 one. I was informed of considerable numbers of small green grass parrots which were new to the district and, on coming here in November 1950, I discovered a party of about twelve birds about thirty miles from the town. The birds were breeding, as during the limited time at my disposal I discovered two nests, each containing young, and one nest in a low stump, which I was able to examine thoroughly, containing three fully-fledged young and two infertile eggs.

Visiting the area where they had been observed by others, after some weeks of watching I saw one pair, and from then on (December 1950) odd ones and up to four were to be found flying around the 40 acre orchard where they had evidently found good feed. The numbers gradually increased until it was not uncommon to see flocks of twelve

to eighteen birds and, at odd times, as many as thirty. They appeared to consist fairly evenly of mature and immature birds. They were at their maximum by October 1951, and from then on gradually decreased again until February and March 1952, when once again I was able to count as many as seventeen in a flock. From March they have again decreased and during the last few weeks (to mid-June) I have not seen a single bird despite a close watch for them. This may be due to the inclement weather as the particular period has been very wet and cold.

I found that with caution I could approach within a few feet of the feeding birds. They were very fond of the seeds of a type of chick-weed which was growing right through the orchard. They would walk away from me, feeding as they went, and almost invariably fed in the shade. If they had occasion to cross a patch of sunshine they would either run rapidly or cover it with a short flight. In the shadow amongst the green grass they were almost invisible. All birds appeared to be very well conditioned and many male birds were in beautiful plumage, quite a few, both male and female, showing the orange patch between the legs and on the lower abdomen.

During the heat of the day the birds usually sat quietly in the trees around the orchard, apparently preferring to feed in the early morning and afternoon. The usual signs of the birds' presence were a sharp double whistle and then the sight of them flying across the orchard. I was told that during the middle months of 1950 there were hundreds in this area, and I have no reason to doubt my informants as they are reliable, competent bird observers so far as local birds are concerned, though not familiar with birds outside their own particular area.

I would also like to record for this area one Brown Pigeon (*Macropygia phasianella*) which I observed in February 1951. I had not previously (nor since) seen this bird in this area, and inquiries lead me to believe it to be otherwise unknown here.—W. BARKER, Amiens, via Stanthorpe, Qld., 17/6/52.

Polygamy in the Pied Butcher-Bird.—Pied Butcher-birds are about the house here at West Burleigh, Queensland, every day and all day throughout the year, so that their comings and goings and their glorious flute-like notes are familiar to us.

In September 1952 two nests were under simultaneous construction in neighbouring ironbarks within easy view of the kitchen window. These two eucalypts grew just thirty yards apart, and as I had occasion to walk that way frequently it was interesting to watch the birds at

home. It seemed at first that the one pair had built an extra nest, perhaps by way of trial and error for the best site, but it transpired that three birds were concerned—one cock and two hens. In view of the final result I would like to emphasize that at no stage of this double nesting event was a second male Pied Butcher-bird observed among those present.

The one and only cock bird hunted grasshoppers, cicadas and lizards, whilst periodically attacking visiting Red-backed and White-breasted Sea-Eagles and odd tree goannas on behalf of both households. He carried all his food, as far as I could make out, to the ever-calling hen bird incubating eggs in the nearer tree (apparently his regular mate) and, following the beginning of incubation by both hens in the respective nests, was not seen to visit the far hen again. He had associated with her in nest construction.

In early November young birds hatched in both nests and when they eventually developed sufficiently to stand on the nest edge it was seen that the near nursery had produced three fledgelings whilst the far and male-neglected nest had but a single young bird. Possibly this poorer yield was due in part to the unaided hunt for food of the hen concerned.

Several possibilities in explanation of the whole unusual nesting event occur to me—(1) The 'neglected' hen may have been a favoured child of some previous season still lingering with her parents, or (2) a bereaved or single hen associating temporarily with the mated pair.

Has any other observer noted a similar phenomenon in this species?

The fact of the two nests being situated in such close proximity helps to rule out any possibility of a second cock bird ever having been present. The birds and their offspring are still with us, and they are particularly helpful to me as goanna, snake, owl and hawk 'spotters'. Their angry urgent notes are never uttered without reason. Their clear early morning musical fluting is a lasting joy and the dominant note on this property.—DAVID FLEAY, West Burleigh, Qld., 19/2/53.

'Injury Feigning' by Catbirds. A striking performance on the part of a pair of Green Catbirds (*Ailurædus crassirostris*) was observed by Mr. Norman Fearnley, his son, and me in the National Park of New South Wales on January 12, 1953. We had found the recently-used nest of a Catbird situated in a fork of a sapling at about 12 feet from the ground, and shortly afterwards I saw an adult bird with two chicks that were just able to fly. The parents

and one chick flew away, but the other chick 'froze' on a branch and was easily captured. Immediately it was taken in hand the chick uttered a loud alarm note, and as this persisted the two adult birds flew to the ground and simulated injury within a yard or so of our feet: both flapped about as though sorely stricken. The display was cut short by a Yellow Robin which had a nest near by. It attacked both Catbirds strongly and drove them both away.

Mr. A. H. Chisholm, who has paid considerable attention to this subject, informs me that he has never seen an example of diversionary behaviour on the part of either catbirds or bower-birds, nor can he recall any record of such conduct on the part of any member of the family. He was under the impression that members of the Ptilonorhynchidae relied on their strong and mainly harsh voices for the driving off of intruders.—HORACE A. SALMON, Beecroft, N.S.W., 26/1/53.

Size of Silver Gull's Eggs.—On November 1, 1952, a visit was made to the Five Islands, off Port Kembla, N.S.W., for the purpose of measuring eggs of the Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*). Although a larger sample would have been more desirable, our time was limited and the number of eggs measured was 153.

The average size was 53.52 x 37.52 with maxima of 60.0 x 36.9 and 58.4 x 41.0, and minima of 47.9 x 36.6 and 53.5 x 34.7. Dimensions are in millimetres throughout. These eggs were contained in 77 nests, 30 of which held a clutch of two eggs, and 23 contained three eggs each. The remaining 24 nests each contained one egg, which in most, if not all, cases was infertile.

It is an interesting fact that of the eggs measured, those contained in three-egg clutches were slightly larger, and those in two-egg clutches slightly smaller, than the average egg, both in axis measurement and diameter. The actual figures are:

Average size of three-egg clutches = 53.86 x 37.74 (or 0.34 and 0.22 above average in axis and diameter respectively).

Average size of two-egg clutches = 53.21 x 37.32 (or 0.31 and 0.20 below average in axis and diameter respectively).

Single eggs averaged 53.3 x 37.33.

Any assumption made on these figures alone would be dangerous because of the small sample involved, but it will be interesting to compare them with measurements obtained by the Altona Survey Group when they are made available.

In five visits to this colony during the last four years one case of erythrism was noted in a clutch of three eggs—in October, 1949.—J. DOUGLAS GIBSON and A. SEFTON, Thirroul, N.S.W., 1/12/52.

Wood-Sandpiper: Corrections, and Additional Records.—

In our notes on this species (*The Emu*, vol. 53, 1953, p. 9) we refer to a specimen from "Boriyallock, near Skipton, 33 miles east-south-east of Ballarat". We identified this bird (which was collected in 1921) with one obtained by E. G. Austin in 1905 (*The Emu*, vol. 5, 1916, p. 155). Actually there were two specimens, both obtained at the same place, one in 1905 and the other in 1921. The former specimen remained in the possession of E. G. Austin, but the latter, which was collected by his son, Claude, was donated to the National Museum, Victoria, not by the son but by the father, who collected the original specimen. The year 1921 in the Museum register is correct, though it it was doubted by us at the time of investigation as we could trace only one specimen.

Mr. Claude Austin has kindly written (11/4/53) in explanation. He states that the date in the register in the Melbourne Museum is quite correct and that the bird was shot by him in the summer of 1921. It was one of two birds present in company with some Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, and was within a few yards at most of the spot where his father had obtained the 1905 specimen. This 1905 bird was mounted by Mr. Coles (as was the 1921 bird) and remained at Borriyallock till the 1944 fires destroyed the whole place.

Borriyallock, which is given as Booriyallock in *The Emu* (vol. 5, 1906, p. 155) is 33 miles west-south-west of Ballarat, not that distance east-south-east, as stated by us (*The Emu*, vol. 53, 1953, p. 9).

Mr. Austin continues—"The birds were among some basalt boulders on the shore of a brackish, not fresh-water, lake of about seventy acres in extent." [It is stated in *The Emu* (vol. 5, 1906, p. 155) that the lake where the bird was taken was fresh water. Both the 1905 and the 1921 specimens were collected at the same spot].

The Wood-Sandpiper appeared again in one of the localities near Sydney where it was noted a year previously (April, 1952). Mr. W. Lane reported a single bird at Pitt Town on April 6, 1953; subsequently two, and then three, birds were seen there, by several observers, on April 12 and April 18, respectively.

Another record of interest is that for a bird seen at the Umberumberka Reservoir, Broken Hill, western New South Wales, in September, 1942, by N. J. Favaloro (*in litt.* 14/5/1953).

It is regretted that both in the text (p. 1) and under the photograph (pl. 1) in our article, Grahame des Forges was referred to as Guy des Forges, an error for which only one of us (K.A.H.) is responsible, and for which an apology is proffered.—K. A. HINDWOOD and A. R. MCGILL, Sydney, N.S.W., 25/4/53.

Notes on a Frogmouth seen near Mt. Isa.—On a trip out from Mt. Isa, Qld., on August 16, 1951, during a journey to Ayers' Rock, I came on a pair of Frogmouths which were lying up on the ground during the heat of the day (3 p.m.). That is much at variance with any previous experience of mine regarding the Tawny Frogmouth. Was it just an unusual habit due to exceptional geographical conditions?

Mr. A. Gibson, of Mt. Isa Mines, was taking Miss Quodling, Mineralogist at Sydney University, by motor truck to examine specimens and outcrops beyond Mica Creek, 23 miles or so out, and I was asked along. A few miles beyond Mica Creek, Mr. Gibson led us to a semi-isolated rock outcrop about five feet high, and while the others were examining it, I circled around about within a few yards, looking for anything of interest. After about ten minutes there was a sudden scurry and flurry and the pair of birds mentioned flew up from a spot almost under foot. I must have almost trodden on them several times. One flew right away, but the other settled in a low tree a few yards away and about eight feet up, and immediately took up the usual almost vertical 'frozen' attitude with extended head and slit-like eyes. I took a photograph but I could only point the camera above my head against a bright sky and hope I had the bird more or less centred. While I was doing so the bird twice looked full face at me, opening the beak and eyes wide, but immediately resumed its stiff attitude—a quick alteration of the flight (or fright) and the fight psychology. Then it flew off to another tree nearby, again quite low, but too hidden for another attempt at a picture. The spot from which the birds flushed had some clumps of stiff greyish dead spinifex, with scattered white and coloured pieces of quartz around. The geologists were moving on to other localities and I only had time for a hurried hunt around to see if I could find any sign of a 'form', nest, or eggs, but could find nothing.

Checking the distribution and some other details of *Podargus* species I find

(1) Tawny (*P. strigoides*)—Australia generally and Tasmania. Upper brown, freckled greyish white and darker brown. Length 18 inches.

(2) Papuan (*P. papuensis*)—North Queensland and New Guinea and Aru Islands. Length 23 inches.

(3) Plumed (*P. plumiferus*)—South-east Queensland, north-east New South Wales. White stripe over eye, conspicuous tuft above nostril. Length 19.5 inches.

(4) Marbled (*P. ocellatus*)—North Queensland, Cape York Peninsula and New Guinea. Conspicuous white spots on wing; under marbled spotted, barred whitish brown, striped black. Length 15 inches.

I find it difficult to place the bird under consideration. It was much smaller than any I had previously seen—at a guess not more than fourteen inches. It was of a plain light grey colour, apart from a slight mottling on the wings of lighter grey. There appeared to be no brownish colour, no white stripe above the eye, and no tuft above the nostrils. Its location, only about 100 miles east of the Northern Territory boundary, does not tally with any of the recorded distributions except that of *strigoides**—‘Australia generally’. The colour and size seem to rule out the other species. The size of *strigoides* is about 18 inches, and I thought that the small size of this bird would prevent its being placed in that species, but Mr. Allen Keast of the Australian Museum demonstrated to me that some Tawny Frogmouths are nearly twice the size of others, which, I must say, surprised me very much. However, there it is. I have known the Tawny Frogmouth (the only one of the species of which I have had any appreciable experience) to nest in the same spot year after year, and the same with its resting up locality. If any ornithologist is at Mt. Isa and could arrange for Mr. Gibson to take him to the position mentioned, it is quite possible the bird might be met with and some further worthwhile observations made.—ERIC POCKLEY, Avalon Beach, N.S.W., 20/3/52.

*Probably the subspecies *phalaenoides*, a small, ‘distinct’ form.—Ed.

Little Grass-birds in Strange Surroundings.—As one naturally associates the Little Grass-bird (*Megalurus gramineus*) with reeds, rushes, and lignum growing close to a stream, water-hole or lake, I was greatly puzzled on September 13, 1951, to hear a somewhat mournful three-note whistling bird-call, repeated at intervals, at the homestead, east of Sutherlands, S.A. Investigation subsequently revealed the source of the calls as two Little Grass-birds in hedges of African boxthorn (*Lycium ferocissimum*) and wormwood (*Artemisia argentum*) near a dam. There was a profuse growth of smooth mustard (*Sisymbrium erysimoides*) about the hedges and on one side of the dam.

I was able to see both birds at times at very close range and to satisfy myself that they were indeed Grass-birds. They remained for at least two whole days.

Evidently they were striking out overland across unfavourable country in search of new territory, and they may have come from the Murray River, 25 miles to the east, or from the Light River, about the same distance to the west.

However, at the time the far north interior of the State and Central Australia was suffering from the effects of severe drought. As birds such as the Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*), Fantail-Warbler (*Cisticola exilis*), and Grass-bird would be driven out of their haunts there by the unfavourable ecological factors which would have developed, it is reasonable to suppose that they would migrate towards some point on, or near, the coastline of the continent. Consequently, there is at least a remote possibility at such a time that the birds noted by me in strange surroundings had come some hundreds of miles on a southward migration.—ERHARD F. BOEHM, Sutherland, S.A., 1/6/53.

Obituaries

ALEXANDER J. GRAY

Alexander Gray, who died on April 20, 1953, after a long illness, was born in Dunkenny, Stirlingshire, Scotland, on June 30, 1888. In 1912 he came to Australia, where he followed his profession of engineer, but a few years later he enlisted in the A.I.F. and served overseas in the First World War. He became interested in the Sherbrooke Forest and its Lyrebirds during the 'thirties, and for a number of years took a very active interest in the welfare of the forest. It was only when he became stricken with a long fatal illness that he ceased to visit there. His interest in birds was almost entirely confined to Lyrebirds, and in conjunction with Mr. A. G. Campbell he published an article on these birds in *The Emu*, vol. 42. Two short articles on the same subject appeared later.—D.J.D.

F. LAWSON WHITLOCK

Frederick Lawson Whitlock, an honorary member of the Union, died in Bunbury, W.A., on June 15, 1953, aged 93 years. His wife pre-deceased him in December, 1952. For some years he had been living in retirement at Bunbury with his daughter. He was active to the end, despite the handicap of deafness. In latter years he became very interested in entomology, his ornithological activities being almost confined to patrolling the beaches in winter for storm-drifted sea-birds. His last published article, which appeared in *Gould League Notes*, 1952, dealt with that subject.