

Stray Feathers

Through inadvertence the following Stray Feathers (and three others to be published later) have been overlooked for some time.

Thornbills Huddling Together.—Yesterday, May 31, a cold and windy day, I noticed a subdued twittering above me. On looking up, I could see a row of small birds and thought it was just a brood of young finches huddled together, these birds being mainly autumn breeders here. However, on really giving them my attention, it was seen they were Striated Thornbills. I went around to the side of the bush nearest to them, where they were about three feet from me and at eye-level. There were 23 of them packed as tightly as possible along a horizontal branch, not all facing the one way but sitting so closely together that they were difficult to count even at such a short distance. The wind, of course, was blowing their feathers about and that made it even more difficult. Only once did I count the whole 23 at rest together—mostly there were about 17 sitting tight while the other half-dozen hopped about on neighbouring twigs or tried to break into the line by running along the backs presented to them. It was a rapid, sideways, fluttering run from end to end of the line and appeared definitely designed to find a space in the middle but rarely succeeding. The only way a bird in the middle could be forced out was by pressure from both ends—the line would buckle, so to speak. Once, when one stood up, an outsider hopped in between its legs from underneath, but could not prise it off the perch.

The birds appeared to be huddling together for warmth, but I cannot believe that that was the sole reason for the interesting performance. The day was not excessively cold, and the birds, though common, are not seen in flocks of that size, small parties of six or eight birds being the usual thing in my experience. After about five minutes some of the birds began to move away, but of course I do not know how long the line had been formed before I discovered it.—E. L. HYEM, Barrington, N.S.W., 1/6/52.

Blue-winged Kookaburra and Snake.—Yesterday I saw a Blue-winged Kookaburra (*Dacelo leachii*) fly across the road carrying a small snake, probably a little over two feet in length. It disappeared into a cluster of trees, and I followed, to find a Kookaburra, presumably the same bird, sitting quietly in a poplar gum, whilst two or three yards away about twenty inches of snake (tail end) hung out of a hollow branch where it had evidently been fed to a nestling. Another adult arrived from the opposite direction, and perched beside the entrance, whereupon the first bird flew away. Every now and then the snake moved as

though tugged or shaken, after which it would be two or three inches shorter. When this first happened, the body writhed convulsively, and the parent bird seemed to jab at it with its beak. Thereafter it merely watched closely while the snake was gathered in a few inches at a time with a breathing space between each gulp. When I left, about three inches of tail still protruded. I had no watch but estimated that the nestling had swallowed the greater part of the snake in fifteen minutes. Though it must have been killed first, the victim did not appear to be at all mangled.—NANCY HOPKINS, Townsville, Qld., 3/11/53.

Reviews

Migrations of the Sooty Shearwater.—A very significant banding recovery from the north Pacific Ocean is reported by Dr. L. E. Richdale in the *Ibis*, vol. 99, January 1957, p. 116. A Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*), which he banded as a breeding bird on Stewart Island, New Zealand, was caught alive and then released at the northern Coronado Islands, Mexico, about July 11, 1955. This indicates that New Zealand breeding Sooty Shearwaters migrate into the northern Pacific and possibly follow a somewhat similar circuit to that of the Australian Short-tailed Shearwater (*P. tenuirostris*). This has been the general belief until recently, when overseas ornithologists began to speculate on the origin and destination of the vast flocks of migrating shearwaters moving westwards along the Antarctic continent in the Indian Ocean sector in late summer. They had been reported first by Dr. R. A. Folia, and subsequently seen by Martin Routh, the biologists of the Australian National Antarctic Expeditions and members of Dutch expeditions. G. J. van Oordt and J. P. Kruijt (*Ibis*, vol. 95, p. 624; *Ardea*, vol. 42, p. 264) offered the startling explanation that these birds were from New Zealand and adjacent islands bound for the Atlantic via the Cape of Good Hope! Richdale's record would dispose of this theory, unless the immature age classes have a radically different migratory pattern from the breeding adults. The final solution of this intriguing problem must await more observations at sea, and, above all, more extensive ringing programmes at the various breeding stations.—D.L.S.

Bird of Paradise Anatomy.—In a paper 'On the Anatomy of the Red Bird of Paradise, with Comparative Remarks on the Corvidae', by Andrew J. Berger, *The Ark*, vol. 73, no. 3, July 1956, pp. 427-446, the author has examined in detail the pterylosis, osteology and the musculature of a single specimen of the Red Bird of Paradise (*Paradisaea rubra*) and compared the results with relevant data concerning the Corvidae. Whilst several workers have indicated the possible relationship of the two families, Berger shows that much more information on anatomical features generally is needed before such a grouping can be satisfactorily maintained. He states that so little is known about the pterylosis and osteology of passerine birds that it is difficult to select characters which reveal affinity. His contribution is valuable because it provides a basis for future research on other species of the Paradisaeidae and also because of the twenty titles cited in the bibliography.—K.A.H.

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