

## SHORT NOTES

### Naretha Parrot in South Australia

Henderson (1972, *Emu* 72: 114) reported the occurrence of the Naretha Parrot *Psephotus haematogaster narethae* in Myall and bluebush savanna on the eastern side of the Nullarbor Plain, 200 km north-west of Ceduna. He claimed that this was the first record for South Australia and suggested that there are no significant natural barriers between the ranges of *narethae* and the yellow-vented form of the Blue Bonnet *P. h. haematogaster*.

However, Ford (1969, *S. Aust. Orn.* 25: 99) previously reported *narethae* in South Australia on the southern edge of the Nullarbor Plain between Eucla and Koonalda. Earlier Ford and Sedgwick (1967, *Emu* 67: 112) suggested that *narethae* encircles the entire Nullarbor Plain because Myall and bluebush savanna occurs all round it, but this suggestion was modified by Ford (*op. cit.*) because there are gaps in the belt of Myall encircling the Nullarbor Plain on its southern and north-eastern sides (Ford 1971, *Emu* 71: 29, fig 1) and *narethae* had not been observed east of these gaps until now. Thus the information supplied by Henderson demonstrates that these gaps are not significant barriers. Nevertheless, *narethae* may still be isolated from nominate *haematogaster* by a belt of mallee-vegetated dunes (a south-eastern extension of the Great Victoria Desert sometimes known as the Barton Sandhills) lying between the Nullarbor Plain and the Myall county associated with the extreme south-western corner of the Lake Eyre Basin (Ford 1971, *op. cit.*). All localities (Mulgathing, Commonwealth Hill Station and Lake Everard Station) where Henderson reported *haematogaster* are east of this ecological barrier. The Cinnamon Quail-Thrush *Cinclosoma cinnamomeum cinnamomeum* and the Nullarbor Quail-Thrush *C. alisteri* are also geographically separated by this barrier (Ford, in prep.).

JULIAN FORD, *WA Institute of Technology, Bentley, WA 6102.*  
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### First record of *Acanthiza robustirostris* in Queensland

Hitherto the Robust-billed or Slate-backed Thornbill *Acanthiza robustirostris* has not been recorded east of the Eyrean Barrier, the easternmost records being from the north-western edge of the Simpson Desert in the Northern Territory (Parker 1970, *S. Aust. Orn.* 25: 120), the Musgrave and Everard Ranges (Condon 1968, *Handlist of Birds of South Australia*) and near Tallaringa Well, Great Victoria Desert, (Ford

pers. obs. based on specimens) in South Australia. On 30 December 1971 we collected one of two birds in thick mulga scrub consisting of *Acacia aneura* and *A. sp. aff. kempeana*, 26 km west of Eromanga, Queensland.

Details of the specimen are: WA Museum Reg. No. A11750; sex indeterminate; skull fully pneumatized; weight 6.5 g; bill from base of skull 10.5 mm, tarsus 17.5, total length 93, wing 50, tail 40. These dimensions are within the range of size of specimens from Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. It is identical with western birds in coloration. The calls of the two birds seemed indistinguishable from those uttered by western birds.

In the field this species may be difficult to distinguish from the Chestnut-tailed Thornbill *A. uropygialis*. It differs from the latter in having reddish brown (not white) irides and the forehead streaked (not scalloped). The crown and back are slate-grey in *robustirostris* and olive-grey in the sympatric (arid zone) populations of *uropygialis*, but it is hard to decide which tone is involved unless the birds are side by side. Their voices are different; *robustirostris* has a loud voice and a varied repertoire, and often calls continually while feeding; calls of western birds include 'trit trit trit', 'tew tew tew', 'ptew pteu pteu', 'zrit zrit zrit' and the characteristic 'wi-pu-chew'. The calls of *uropygialis* are generally less voluble and less varied; usually only the contact call, 'tew tew tew', is heard. There are also differences in habitat: *robustirostris* prefers dense mulga whereas *uropygialis*, which nests in holes of trees, prefers more open communities with many dead trees. However, they sometimes occur in the same feeding parties.

In spite of assiduous efforts to find *A. robustirostris* in south-western and central western Queensland during a field tour from December 1971 to January 1972, we encountered it only once, but found *A. uropygialis* and the Broad-tailed Thornbill *A. apicalis* quite common. Nevertheless, *A. robustirostris* is perhaps widely if thinly distributed in mulga in central western Queensland.

JULIAN FORD, *WA Institute of Technology, Bentley, WA 6102.*

S. A. PARKER, 44 Mills Street, Clarence Park, SA 5034.

21 August 1972

### Port Lincoln Parrots feeding on moth larvae

A regular census of bird species in a 650-km<sup>2</sup> area 25 km south-east of Carnarvon, WA, where Wedge-

tailed Eagles are being studied, has been in progress since June 1969. Before the sightings outlined below, Port Lincoln Parrots *Barnardius zonarius* had been recorded there only once (one pair at a windmill in March 1971).

In March 1972, Port Lincoln Parrots were common throughout the eastern side of the area, usually in flocks of four to six. They appeared to be feeding exclusively on larvae in galls on the tips of stems of a shrub *Cassia chatelainiana* that grows on low sand-ridges. The parrots tore the side off the gall to remove the smooth pink larvae. The crop of a bird collected at 12:30 on 7 March contained sixty-five larvae plus a small amount of woody material. Galls were collected, and the larvae were reared to maturity in the laboratory. The adults were identified as a moth *Macrobathra* sp (Oecophoridae, Lepidoptera).

Port Lincoln Parrots were still numerous in April and found again in areas where *C. chatelainiana* was growing. They were also observed feeding on similar galls on *Cassia desolata* but seemed to prefer those on the other cassia. Larvae from the galls on *C. desolata* were reared and identified as a distinct, but closely related, *Macrobathra* sp.

References to the diet of *Barnardius* (e.g. Lea and Gray 1935, Emu 35: 63-98; Robinson 1960, West. Aust. Nat. 7: 109-115) list seeds, fruits and flowers, although McCulloch (1966, Emu 66: 45-46) described a male *B. barnardius* eating a caterpillar and

Dr S. J. J. F. Davies (pers. comm.) reports seeing a species of *Barnardius* eating larvae from the flower-spike of a Blackboy near Pingelly, WA, in 1968.

I thank Dr I. F. B. Common of CSIRO Division of Entomology for rearing and identifying the two species of moths.

M. G. BROOKER, *Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO, Clayton Road, Helena Valley, WA 6056.*  
14 August 1972.

#### Record of the Magpie Goose in central New South Wales

The Magpie Goose *Anseranas semipalmata* is now confined to the northern coast of Australia and a small region in southern New Guinea. It formerly ranged south in coastal areas as far as Adelaide and penetrated inland to western New South Wales and Victoria (Davies and Frith 1963, Emu 63: 266). Rare vagrants have recently appeared in Victoria (Wheeler 1967, A Handlist of the Birds of Victoria: 35); so, observations of the species in New South Wales are worth recording.

On 12 July 1971, Mr G. Craven of Canowindra (*in litt.*) observed a pair of Magpie Geese on the Driftway, which forms the north-western drainage to Lake Cowal, about 40 km south-east of Condoblin.

S. J. HERON, *PO Box 186, Dubbo, NSW 2830.*  
1 June 1972.