

## SHORT NOTES

### Common Noddy in Northern Territory

The only record of noddies *Anous* spp from Northern Territory is a sight observation by D. L. Serventy of a flock of ten unidentified noddies seen five kilometres off Cape Wessel on 28 July 1949 (Storr 1967, List of Northern Territory Birds). On 15 October 1972 a single Common Noddy *Anous stolidus* was noted among a flock of c. 1500 terns (*Sterna dougallii*, *S. sumatrana*, *S. anaethetus*, *S. bergii* and *S. albifrons*) foraging in Cumberland Strait, which lies between Marchinbar and Guluwuru Islands in the Wessel Island Group. The specimen, an immature female, was collected and is lodged in the Research Collections of the Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife and National Parks Branch of the Department of the Northern Territory (Reg. No. NTM 5868).

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### Overnight torpidity in Australian arid-country birds

The evidence for torpidity in some Australian birds provided by Serventy (1970, Emu 70: 27 and 201) and Congreve (1972, Emu 72: 32) draws attention to a phenomenon that, I think, occurs far more generally in Australia than ornithologists in the past have ever contemplated. It is, naturally, one that is extraordinarily difficult to perceive, which is no doubt why it has remained unrecognized by them for so long. The ordinary field observer would never appreciate what was happening.

My experience in the Australian bush, in pursuit of birds for avicultural purposes, suggests that it is a physiological device that small passerines in particular would have to develop in order that they might survive in nearly desert climates. In the winter the nights are usually bitterly cold but after the sun rises the days are pleasant and equable. A small-bodied bird, if it acquired the property of suspended animation each night, would survive better in such an environment, by an economy of energy, than one that had to ingest extra food to keep warm.

I have noted the phenomenon of overnight torpidity in a number of species, including, in particular, young Crimson Chats *Ephthianura tricolor*, adult Banded Whiteface *Aphelocephala nigricincta*, adult Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii*, and adult White-fronted Honeyeater *Phylidonyris albifrons*.

The behaviour of the Crimson Chats is interesting. In this species the young disperse from the nest early and each little individual separately spends the night on the ground in a torpid state, superficially simulating death. I have picked them up like flowers early in the morning, the birds remaining inert for some time in the hand before warmth gradually revived them. I have observed young Banded Whitefaces captured by Mr Tom Spence, Director of the South Perth Zoological Gardens, on a recent winter tour of the desert, and found them to enter a torpid state each night in a very similar manner to that described by Heumann (1926, Emu 26: 110, cited in Serventy's second paper) for the Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*. They revived with increasing warmth in the mornings.

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