

## Probable New Bird for Australia.

THROUGH the courtesy of Mr. H. G. Barnard, the editors of *The Emu* have received loose leaflets, presumably from *The Proceedings* of the Linnean Society of N.S.W. (there being no head-lines), giving a description of a probable new and interesting bird for Australia. Mr. Barnard shot the bird at Bimbi, Dawson River district, Queensland, on the 10th June last year. When he first noticed the stranger it was running on the ground like the Pipit (*Anthus australis*). It was the only one he had ever seen, and his attention was attracted to it by its sharp whistling note.

Mr. Barnard, having occasion to forward a parcel of bird-skins to the Australian Museum, Sydney, enclosed the new bird for identification, with the result that Mr. A. J. North, ornithologist of that institution, pronounced it to be a *Motacilla* or Wagtail, an entirely new genus for Australia. The bird appears to be closely allied to European forms (*M. borealis* and *M. cinereicapilla*). The Australian bird, according to Mr. North, is an adult male, in perfect plumage; it has a well-pronounced white superciliary stripe, as is shown in Dr. Bowdler Sharpe's fig. 6 of the head of *M. cinereicapilla* (Cat. Bds. Brit. Mus., vol. x., pl. vii.), but the throat is yellow, not white; the lores and feathers below the eye are black, and a blackish wash extends over the anterior portion of the ear coverts, and the chin is white. On the under parts it resembles fig. 1 on the same plate, *M. borealis*, in having the throat yellow and a blackish narrow band across the fore-neck. Total length, 6.15 inches; wing, 3.08; tail, 2.9; bill, .5; tarsus, .9. Owing to seasonal changes and varying phases of plumage, considerable difference of opinion exists among ornithologists who have made a life-long study of the genus *Motacilla*, as to the validity of certain of its species or sub-species. Should the specimen obtained by Mr. Barnard not be an unusually plumaged visitor or straggler from another clime, and the characters pointed out above, in which it differs from *M. cinereicapilla*, prove constant, Mr. North proposes to designate the new bird under the name of *Motacilla barnardi*, a well-deserved honour for its enthusiastic discoverer.

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## Stray Feathers.

GULLS NESTING INLAND.—Silver Gulls have been nesting this season at Ennendale, in the Western District, Victoria, and many miles from the sea coast. The swamp is about half a mile long by a quarter broad. The nests are made on the tussocks, which are rather sparsely spread over nearly the whole of the swamp.—H. QUINEY. Mortlake, Victoria.

SOUTHERN RANGE OF WARBLING GRASS-PARRAKEETS.—Surely it a rare thing to see the little Green Parrakeets, commonly known as "Budgerigars," in the Western District of Victoria! I saw to-day a flock of about 30 on the Lismore polo ground, flying into a plantation of blue gums.—ERNEST G. AUSTIN. Borriyalloak, 20/1/06.

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FALCONS.—On the 20th February I shot a Black Falcon (*F. subniger*) as it was endeavouring to seize and carry away a wounded Marsh Tringa (*Heteropygia acuminata*) from the ground on a three-chain road that runs through Wyuna estate about 10 miles from here. Is this Falcon common in any part of Victoria? It is the first of its kind I have seen. Driving back we saw a Little Falcon (*F. lunulatus*) dart at express speed through some dead timber, to the usual accompaniment of small birds' twittering; and nearer home, at Taripta, a Black-cheeked Falcon (*F. melanogenys*) flew out of a box tree alongside the road. Its flight was slow for a Falcon, and yet the wings seemed to beat quickly. This is not a great place for Hawks, and to see three kinds of Falcon in one day is for me at least a "local record."—C. F. B. Kyabram, 4/3/06.

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A QUEENSLAND BIRD SANCTUARY.—It may interest you to know that since my coming here (seven years ago) the island has been an informal sanctuary for birds; and that this year, on my suggestion, the Government proclaimed it, with two neighbouring groups of islands, a perpetual reserve, shooting being entirely prohibited. I hold the honorary office of ranger. Fifteen islands and islets are included in the reserve, and some of them are favourite haunts of the Torres Strait or Nutmeg-Pigeons, which breed in immense numbers. I believe the islands under my control are the only unmolested breeding-places for this bird on the east coast of Australia. So far I have identified 114 birds native of or visitors to this island, the area of which is only  $3\frac{1}{2}$  square miles, and there are several others I have been unable to name, my works of reference being inadequate.—E. J. BANFIELD. Brammo Bay, Dunk Island, 20/12/05.

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FROLICSOME MUSK-DUCKS.—The Musk-Ducks appear to terrorize all the other Ducks on the lake. They are continually chasing the clutches of young Black Duck and Teal, apparently for sport, as I have never seen them kill one, but they scatter the young flocks far and wide, and so leave them an easy prey to the Brown Hawks before the old birds can collect them. The Musk-Duck will dive about a chain away from the clutch and come up in the middle of them. The old Ducks appear to

be just as alarmed as the young ones. Should a Musk-Duck with her pair of young approach another with young, one has to go, and the young are left to shift for themselves. While the chase goes on—sometimes for a quarter of an hour—one will chase the other at a good pace, flapping along the surface of the water. I have never seen one rise from the water.

As showing how necessary it was to extend the close season, I counted eight clutches in the down of Black Duck and Teal to-day on the lake.—J. C. FITZGERALD. Neuarpurr (Vict.), 29/12/05/.

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“WHERE SWALLOWS BUILD.”—I noticed some time ago in *The Emu* a query as to where Swallows built before the advent of Europeans. A pair of Swallows built in a cave in the hills behind Mitcham, S.A. I first remember the nest in 1874 or 1875, and every year since then that I have visited the cave there has been an occupied or recently occupied nest. The last time I visited it was about 5 years ago, when there were young birds in the nest. On Brown Hill Creek, also near Mitcham, there are some cliffs about 20 or 30 feet in height where a few pairs of Swallows built every year. When in the Mt. Gunson district in 1900 I found a Swallow's nest containing two fresh eggs built in the inside of a hollow gum stump; this was about 15 miles from the nearest habitation, and the country is very sparingly inhabited. In 1902, in the Gawler Ranges, about 45 miles west of Port Augusta, where there is a deep gorge, at the back of Corunna H.S., there were about half a dozen Swallows' nests on the precipitous sides of this gorge, some of them of much greater size than usual, and all of them quite white from the droppings of successive generations. All of these situations seem to be natural breeding spots, and have probably been occupied for years before the Europeans built sheds and stables for the Swallow's accommodation.—(DR.) A. M. MORGAN. Adelaide, 23/7/05.

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NOTES ON GYMNORHINA LEUCONOTA.—Some eight years ago a neighbour of mine in the Heytesbury Forest had a tame one-legged Magpie (the other leg having been cut off by a rabbit trap) which he taught to whistle “Merrily danced the Quaker's wife, merrily danced the Quaker,” which she did to perfection. But, yielding to the persuasion of some gallant of her own species, she deserted her home and took to the bush, where she built a nest and reared a family. She most assiduously taught the young birds her own accomplishment, and they all whistled “Merrily danced the Quaker's wife” more or less perfectly. She then disappeared, but succeeding generations of Magpies have retained scraps of the old tune, and there

are many now in the forest who still conclude their beautiful wild notes with the ascending notes which terminate the old air. This being a very late season, I had many opportunities of watching and listening to the young Magpies at school, while the parent birds educated them in their own native notes and the artificial notes of "The Quaker." Indeed, these parent Magpies resembled some human parents in that they seemed to take more pains to teach that which was artificial than to teach the more natural and beautiful notes which are characteristic of this species.—FRANK MADDEN. Melbourne.

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MECHANICAL ADVANTAGES OF THE SHAPE OF SWANS FOR FEEDING.—While watching recently some Swans—two of the domestic White and one Black (*Chenopsis atrata*)—the perfect adaptation of their shape to the method of feeding was strikingly manifest. In shallowish water they will be frequently noticed while thus engaged with the tail projecting vertically and with head and neck stretched downwards to seek the weeds growing on the bottom. It will be seen that this movement from the horizontal is executed with wonderful ease, the whole body swinging round a transverse axis at about the level of the legs and through the centre of gravity. The bases of two cones then meet at this level—one, whose apex is the head, pointing while thus feeding directly downwards, and the other a shorter and more compact cone, whose summit is the tail, looking upwards, and keeping the bird with ease in its apparently awkward position. Then, when the Swan wishes to advance a little, two or three paddles with its webbed feet sends it on the requisite distance. To assume again the erect position, the lower cone is shortened and tilted forwards by raising and bending the neck, with the result that the upper one falls backwards and the bird floats on the surface of the water.—(DR.) J. BURTON CLELAND. Adelaide.

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THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME "PETREL."—On a recent voyage from London to Australia, *viâ* the Cape, I was much interested in watching the various birds following in the wake of the ship. Amongst these the Petrels, especially the graceful Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*), claimed special attention. The movements of this group of birds when flying against a strong head wind with high billows were especially noteworthy. They would skim over the summit of a wave into the trough on the other side, and then apparently *run up* the opposite slope with legs half outstretched, being protected in this situation from the force of the wind. Thinking afterwards of the etymology of the word "Petrel" and its derivation from the Greek *pētra*, a rock, I could not at first see why, apart from other sea birds, they specially

deserved the name, not being associated in any particular way with rocks, and spending their time on the face of the waters. Then suddenly it occurred to me that the interesting method of flight I had already observed had struck the fancy of the mariners of old as well, and that they had dedicated the bird to St. Peter, since like him it too seemed to walk on the strong waters. On my return to civilized parts I found, on reference to an encyclopædia, that my surmise was correct, and that Buffon had likewise attributed the name to this origin. It is an interesting point, not only as showing the accurate observation of the old voyagers, but also as emphasizing an important and characteristic trait, illustrating the conservation of energy, in the birds in question.—(DR.) J. BURTON CLELAND.

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BIRDS OF KANGAROO ISLAND.—During the last week of 1897 a friend and myself paid a visit to Kangaroo Island, walking along the north coast from Point Morison to Hog Bay. Unfortunately we experienced during our whole stay one of the severest heat waves felt for some while, which materially hindered collecting. Of the birds encountered I can only add to Mr. A. G. Campbell's list (*Emu*, vol. v., No. 3) the Honey-eater *Ptilotis penicillata*, which my notes say we met with at Queenscliff. I secured a specimen of *Acanthorhynchus halmaturina*, and, noticing points of difference between it and the Adelaide bird, showed it both at the Adelaide Museum and later at the Australian Museum in Sydney, but nothing further came of the inspection. Of *Acanthiza halmaturina* we obtained specimens, and my notes say :—"A little *Acanthiza* inhabiting the trees near the coast at once attracted us by its whistle, the 'swish-swish' note being varied by a low bugle-like sound which gives the bird its vernacular name of 'Trumpeter'—in fact, the first time that I heard it, I thought it must be an imported Goldfinch singing." Of *Pardalotus ornatus* the notes say :—"A pair of these birds had built their nest in a most peculiar position, but so placed as to be out of reach and sight. During our walks we came upon a well and trough on an exceedingly hot day in the midst of dry mallee country about 5 miles from Hog Bay. In the trough an iguana lay immersed up to his neck, apparently on the watch for the numerous small birds which continually flew there to drink. Amongst these the pair of *Pardalotes* were conspicuous, since they bore in their beaks green grasshoppers and other insects nearly half as long as themselves. They would fly on to the rope, hop downwards a little, head foremost and then drop down the well, the upper part of which was brick-lined, but the lower was unprotected and shelved away. From the latter part, on the arrival of the old birds, the cries of the young could be heard. We sat by

the well some time, and the differences in disposition even in wild birds were conspicuous. One with a grasshopper in his beak would hop from twig to twig, fly to the rope, and then go off again, afraid to venture while we were near. The other, however, without the slightest dread, flew straight down and took no notice of us. I took out my watch, and found that the two birds fed their young four times in five minutes; watching them later, however, they did not keep up this rate, but an average of once in that time would be well below the mark. If this rate were continued for 12 hours, 144 insects would be destroyed—but then what would be the size of the nestlings?"—(DR.) J. BURTON CLELAND. Adelaide.

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CLARKE ISLAND (BASS STRAIT) NOTES.—It is curious to note how erratic birds are laying in various seasons. All those down in the Strait this year are a month later in nesting than their accustomed time. The Black Swan, Musk-Duck, and other water-fowl which almost invariably lay in August, have this year postponed laying until the middle of September, and even later. The winter has been very wet, but that could not affect them in any way. I discovered a Swan's nest amid reeds on the bank of a small creek, in water knee-deep, containing several eggs. Shortly afterwards the creek's mouth broke out, and the water receded to a lower level, leaving the nest dry. The birds at once deserted it.

28/7/05.—The Cape Barren Geese (the exception) were up to their usual time in laying. I visited an adjacent island, and discovered three nests, and noted that some persons had broken one or more eggs from them, with a view, I presume, to see if they were fresh, but finding them hard-set had left the remainder. I made certain the birds would desert the nests, but on examining same a fortnight later was pleased to find they were well tended, one of the clutches being just hatched. I was also down at the chief breeding-places, and counted over 35 nests, with an average of four eggs in each, also numbers being built.

15/9/05.—I visited the island again and found as many more nests, with fledglings all over the place. I saw six in one clutch—fine, strong little fellows. I noted nests that had been robbed a month formerly and were all occupied. The birds will always lay again if deprived of their first setting. They are certainly not going back in numbers, as I have remarked nests this year in places where I have never known them to lay before.

The Black Oyster-catcher and the Pied are much in evidence, as is also the Pacific Gull, although late in nesting. I have seen very few of the Caspian Tern, only finding a single nest, although, no doubt, they have patronized the islands in the

neighbouring Sound, but, unfortunately, I have had no time to visit them. The Dottrels (Red-Capped) are fairly numerous, but I have not found many of their eggs, as, owing to their laying in the sand and old sea-tang, one often passes them by without noticing, their colour, like most other birds' eggs, assimilating with their surroundings.

8th November.—Saw two Mountain-Ducks with six fledglings. One of the parents fled with the young ones into the centre of a lagoon, whilst the other followed me for hundreds of yards, settling on the ground a short distance ahead of me with wings fluttering, as one will notice many small birds do, to decoy us from the vicinity of the nest.

28/11/05.—Discovered a Reef-Heron's nest in a cranny of rock on a small island. It consisted of a perfectly flat nest of coarse grass stems, on which were deposited three light blue eggs. The young were just emerging from the eggs. The Wood-Swallow, Whistling Shrike-Thrush, Olive Thickhead, and a lot of the Honey-eaters are very scarce this year. The Brown Quail are now laying, but I cannot see any of the Painted (*Turnix*) variety, which always lay a month earlier than the former. We have the Black Crow-Shrike in fair numbers, and have found several nests, and the detested Ravens (from a sheep-farmer's point of view) are always much to the fore.—J. D. MACLAINE.

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YOUNG CUCKOO FED BY TWO PAIRS OF HONEY-EATERS. —When in the bush on 23rd December, 1905, with my mate, we were attracted by the familiar cry—"Chirrip, chirrip, chirrip"—of the young Pallid Cuckoo. Proceeding in the direction from whence the sound came we soon located the bird sitting on a branch near the ground, to all appearances not more than a day out of the nest. As we approached a pair of Black-headed Honey-eaters appeared; then a pair of New Holland Honey-eaters arrived, making a great commotion, but keeping at a distance. The Black-Caps took no heed of us whatever, but fed the Cuckoo and flew away. Great was our surprise when the "New-Hollands," as soon as the "Black-Caps" left, came down and fed the Cuckoo also. Making up our minds to see more of this we sat down and filled our pipes just as the Black-Caps returned, and a second or two brought the New-Hollands, the latter keeping in the background till the Black-Caps had gone again; then like lightning they would pop down, feed the youngsters, and off. My mate was bent on capturing the Cuckoo, but I would not hear of this till we had spent half the morning watching this performance, the same thing taking place each time. Then, armed with a green branch, my mate swept the Cuckoo to the ground and held it

there and secured it in his hand. Then came the fun, which is hard to describe. The New-Hollands went for him like little bull-dogs, flying almost into his face, and tumbling about on the ground in front of him, but the Black-Caps showed no fight and kept in the branches above, making a plaintive cry. I forgot to say that while the feeding performances was going on the youngster never once ceased his "Chirrip, chirrip, chirrip," and swallowed all the food with a greed that very nearly cost the foster-birds their heads. There is no doubt but that the Black-Caps were the real foster-parents, but what possessed the others to take to the bird and feed it?—ARTHUR E. BRENT. Austin's Ferry, Tasmania, 8/1/06.

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CAIRNS (N.Q.) NOTES. — Nutmeg-Pigeon (*Myristicivora spilorrhoa*).—On 29th October I went with a party from Cairns to the Frankland Islands, lying off the mouth of Russell River. The Pigeons were breeding much earlier this year than last, as some of the nests contained young almost able to fly, while nests were everywhere, containing eggs in all stages of incubation. Last year on 16th October I visited these islands and saw only a few nests, and they appeared to be old, while the Pigeons nearly all left the islands soon after daybreak, when the shooting commenced. This time most of the birds stayed on the islands all day, and, as they were very tame, numbers were shot. The birds do not seem particular about a site for their nests, which were placed at heights from 2 feet upwards, and situated in mangroves, she-oaks, scrub trees, or on "bird's-nest" ferns. Two young Pigeons, in pin feathers, that I brought home, took kindly to a diet of boiled rice and milk, with pieces of banana, which they are very fond of. The youngsters have now all their feathers and are distinctly different in colouring—one being creamy white and the other smoky white, except the tail and flight feathers, which are black in both birds, the flight feathers having a greyish wash. This difference may be on account of sex; perhaps the first moult will correct it. I believe the old birds have patches of yellow about the abdomen; these young birds have not, but their under tail coverts are distinctly rufous.

Varied Honey-eater (*Ptilotis versicolor*).—These pretty Honey-eaters, whose eggs I was fortunate in discovering last year, were fairly plentiful, considering the small size of the island, and their loud, musical call was frequently heard. I saw two pairs feeding their young, which were able to fly, but did not find any nests, it being evidently too late. The eggs which

\* Instances are recorded where more than one species of bird has been observed feeding young Cuckoos. See "Nests and Eggs" (Campbell), pp. 567 and 572.



I found last year on 16th October were only about two days from hatching.

Tooth-billed Bower-Bird (*Scenopæus denti-rostris*).—On 17th September I found a playground of this bird about two hours' walk from Hambledon Mill, and decided to spend some time, later on, watching it, in hopes of getting some clue to the position of the nest. So on 22nd October I seated myself near the bower and watched the bird from 10 till 12. As his cries seemed to be answered by another bird not far away, I then followed the sound and found another playground about 100 yards away, which I watched from 12 till 3. Only one bird was at each bower, and as their antics were the same one description will do for both. Throughout the time I watched only one bird was at the playground, and he appeared to have no interest in anything but his collection of leaves. He would fly away occasionally for another leaf or some fruit, returning in two or three minutes, when he would place the leaf in position, upside down, have a look at the others to see if they were all right—but at no time played with them—and then fly to a twig about 8 feet above the leaves, and there perform; but his repertoire was very limited, his favourite number being the harsh, scolding note of the Drongo (*Chibia bracteata*). Occasionally he would imitate the Rifle-Bird and the Little Thrush (*Collyriocincla parvissima*), and he would frequently give a short, piercing whistle, which seemed to be his natural call. There is a mystery about these birds that will take some explaining. How is it that throughout the three hours that I watched him no other bird put in an appearance? If the owner of the playground had a mate, it seems strange that she did not show herself. If his performance is to attract a mate, he is certainly a most persevering but unfortunate suitor, as he has been hard at it for two months to my knowledge, and the birds are not scarce in the scrub about there, as I have seen them several times. Perhaps his mate was sitting, or he may have been a confirmed old bachelor collecting leaves for a hobby.—A. F. SMITH. Hambledon, Cairns, 22nd November, 1905.

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### Forgotten Feathers.

By JAMES R. McClymont, M.A., Hobart.

AUSTRALIAN BIRDS IN THE "JOURNAL WEGENS EEN VOYAGIE NA HET ONBEKENDE ZUID-LAND."\*—In 1696 the Governors of the Amalgamated Chartered Company, trading to the Dutch East Indies, decreed that an expedition should be despatched to search for missing vessels, especially for the

\* Extracts from the "Journal" are given in *The Emu*, vol. iv., pp. 22, 23.