

Stray Feathers

Fishing-net Hazard to Blue-billed Ducks.—The Blue-billed Duck (*Oxyura australis*), rarely met with by ornithologists, apparently not infrequently meets its fate in fishermen's set nets when such are used in its native haunts (see F. R. Zietz, *Sth. Aust. Orn.*, vol. I, 1914, p. 29, and *Emu*, vol. XII, p. 121). That, fortunately, is not often the case in Western Australia, where such waters are not commercially fished. A striking instance of the damage which may result, however, impressed itself on me in January, 1940, when, in the course of fisheries investigations at Albany, Western Australia, we had occasion to use mesh nets in Lake Seppings, a local fresh-water swamp. The work was done by arrangement with the State authorities as the lake is a sanctuary for native game and is closed water to fishermen. We used two lines of mesh nets, set on the evening of January 24 and examined early the following morning. The first line stretched across the middle of the main part of the lake and consisted of three 60 fathom nets of $3\frac{3}{4}$ inch mesh linked together with 50 fathoms of $3\frac{1}{4}$ inch mesh net. The catch comprised six mullet (*Mugil dobula*), four long-necked tortoises (*Chelodina oblonga*) and five Blue-billed Ducks. The second line of netting, 170 fathoms of $2\frac{1}{4}$ inch mesh, ran across the lake at the south-west end, with a portion running parallel with the reeds on the north-west shore. It caught thirty-eight mullet, six tortoises and four Blue-billed Ducks. Of the nine ducks five were adult males, three adult females and one a fledgling. One male was still alive and swam off when released from the net. The eight drowned ones were salvaged as specimens and five are now in the Western Australian Museum collection. Several Musk Ducks (*Biziura lobata*) were present on the lake at the time, but for the most part they managed to remain clear of the nets. The exception was a young bird which became entangled in the second line of netting just after it was set; we freed it almost immediately. The comparatively-large mortality of the Blue-billed Ducks was a surprise as I had seen only one bird on the lake previously. Another male was seen on the morning we examined the nets, in addition to the one we rescued.—D. L. SERVENTY, Sydney, N.S.W., 27/11/40.

Abnormal Bills.—Twice I have found wild birds with abnormal beaks. The male of a pair of local Black-backed Magpies has the lower mandible about a quarter of an inch longer than the upper one, which, however, does not seem to hamper him much, for the birds have reared numerous young since I first knew the male many years ago. The upper

mandible has a large dent in it as if it had been broken at one time.

Whenever we have "smoke-o" in his territory the pair will come and beg for food. He cannot manage large pieces of bread, and, when given such a piece, will always run away and hide it in a patch of grass. A pair of Butcher-birds are also our guests, but they are more nervous and will not take food from the hand. Whenever the Magpie goes to hide his bread (sometimes 20 to 30 yards away) a Butcher-bird will follow him, and, no sooner is the bread hidden, than it is stolen by the Butcher-bird.

The other bird with the abnormal beak was a Bower-bird (*Chlamydera nuchalis*) on Long Island, Whitsunday Passage. She had the lower mandible broken and the upper one had grown into a great hook like that of a bird of prey. She built a nest, but no male bird was seen. Two eggs were laid. These, too, were abnormal, being much narrower than usual. After several weeks the bird left the nest. I took the eggs and still have them. They measure 1.06 x 1.87 inches and 1.00 x 1.81 inches.—H. THOROGOOD, Kelsey Creek, Proserpine, Qld., 4/11/40.

Marsh-Sandpiper.—The account by Mr. John Reed, elsewhere in this issue, of a record of Marsh-Sandpipers (*Tringa stagnatilis*) on the western shore of Port Phillip Bay, Victoria, probably establishes the first occurrence of the species for the State. None of the standard ornithological works extends the species so far south, and even New South Wales records must be few. Reed's notes fail to do justice to his own observations, however, as actually he is a reliable and careful observer, basing his records only on positive identifications. I confirm both the Grey-tailed Tattler and the Marsh-Sandpiper as Victorian migrants, the former having been observed by me at Mud Island, independently of Reed's note (see *Emu*, vol. XXXII, p. 294), and the latter by his taking me to the locality of his observation.

In addition to standard volumes several Victorian avifaunal lists have been perused, such as Campbell (*Geelong Nat.*, vol. 3, pt. 4, 1894), Kearland (*Handbook*, A.A.A.S., 1900), and Mack (*Victorian Year-Book*, 1933-34). In the second of such lists only does the Marsh-Sandpiper appear, it being stated that "Solitary birds of this species are often seen on the margins of lagoons at Heidelberg." I am inclined to discredit that statement, despite my now supporting some other observer's casual record, Kearland's reputation notwithstanding. Conditions along the river there, although admittedly influenced to some extent by building in the vicinity, are probably little different now, around the billabongs and swamps, from when Kearland wrote, and as Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, in particular, and

other waders, are annual visitors, it may be that some other species was mistaken for the "Little Greenshank." The most likely bird, the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, was often called, in the vernacular, Marsh Tringa (for examples of such use see Campbell, *loc. cit.*, and *Nests and Eggs*; Gould, *Handbook*, etc.), and Keartland may easily have applied the wrong scientific name to that bird when preparing his list. It is significant that, with the exception of the Snipe (*Gallinago hardwicki*), no other species of this group of birds is included in Keartland's list.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 5/2/41.

An Early Item of Ornithology in Western Australia.—William Nairne Clark, solicitor, of Albany, achieved some notoriety in the State. He carried out exploratory work along the southern coast, and the following are extracts from accounts of two expeditions by him which were published in *The Inquirer* newspaper of Perth in 1841. The records are interesting as being early accounts of the bird-life of the southern coast.

The first item appears in the newspaper published on August 25, 1841.

Journal of an expedition to Nornalup, or the Deep River of the sealers, Western Australia, in the months of March and April, 1841.

"... I started from Princess Royal Harbour on the 15th of February last. ... We pulled for Mistaken Island, and disembarked. ... There are several wild goats on the island, and abundance of rabbits. ... I noticed the Bronze-winged Pigeon in numbers. ... On the 19th ... we put into Torbay, and landed first on an island in the bay quite close to the main, where we obtained some mutton-birds in holes."

22nd. "Early in the morning we proceeded [from the mouth of the Deep River] to a large island something more than a mile from the mouth of the river, which we named Saddle Island, from its resemblance to a saddle with the flaps extended. ... Our object in going to the island was to obtain a supply of mutton-birds, as our salt provisions were nearly expended. We found a considerable number of petrels and salted them with that useful commodity, which is produced in quantity on this island. ... The mode of catching the birds is simple. During the day they are ever skimming over the restless wave with their light wings, but at sun down they return to roost on the island in innumerable flocks. Parties then arm themselves with sticks, and as the birds are running about in all directions in search of their holes, with which the island is covered, they are knocked down with the sticks. Penguins abound. ..."

5th March [inside bar of Nornalup Estuary]. "... of the birds in this district, I saw the black swan, common duck, diver, quail (on the hills) in many coveys; parroquet, magpie, common crow, bronze-winged pigeon, pelican, black cockatoo, and crane, common sea-gull and shag or cormorant, sand-piper or beach-snipe (large and small), and the eagle-hawk, measuring about 7 feet from tip to tip of the wings. Of these birds, the black swan, pelican, duck, sea-gull, shag, and, on the island off the coast [?Saddle Island], pigeon, mutton-bird or sooty petrel (the variegated petrel, white under the belly and wings, and black on the back), may be classed under the generic name of *anceres*; the magpie under the name of *picæ* or *pye*

kind; the eagle-hawk and crow under the name of *accipitres*, or *birds of prey*. (I saw none of the class *gallinae*, or *poultry kind*, comprehending the *emu*, *bustard*, or wild turkey, *swamp-hen*, &c.) . . . March 6. [Cape Chatham Island] . . . It is full of Sooty Petrel holes where ground appears. . . . In the evening we caught plenty of birds above described. . . ."

The next account appeared in *The Inquirer* of October 6, 1841.

Journal of a second expedition to the westward of King George's Sound as far as Point Entrecasteaux in the months of April, May, and June, 1841.

" . . . May 20. . . . Arrived at Sandy Island. . . .

"May 21. . . . We caught some mutton-birds, or sooty-petrel (in ornithology *procellaria fuliginosa*), this island being full of holes, or nests. Most of the birds had taken their annual migratory flight to some other region, but a few still remained. These birds leave all the islands on the coast in the month of May, and after the winter season is over, they return to their old haunts. Where they migrate to is a mere matter of conjecture, for nobody knows. They have a curious mode of feeding their young; the old birds are at sea all day, and on their return to the islands at sun-down, they empty the contents of the stomach through the beak into the mouth of the young one. Two of a progeny are never seen in one nest. The birds feed principally on the squid-fish, and the supply of food for the young is consequently of an oily, glutinous nature, which makes them so fat as to be almost too rich food for the human stomach. This mode of feeding the young is a wise ordinance for the nurture of these sea-birds. . . ."

On May 30 the party left Point D'Entrecasteaux to explore the country by land to Nornalup. The following day Clark records shooting a Swan on a lagoon.—H. M. WHITTELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 25/6/40.

The White Gallinule.—In 1923 Mr. H. V. Edwards, of New South Wales, who had contributed many interesting articles and notes to *The Emu*, sent me a small picture of the White Gallinule, of Lord Howe Island, which he had photographed from Phillips' "*Voyage to Botany Bay*," the illustration in which was made from a specimen taken in Phillips' time, *circa* 1787. For those who are not familiar with the illustration it is to be recorded that it is different from any of those reproduced in the Lord Howe Island article in *The Emu* of July, 1940. The bird faces to the left, has the beak closed, and a small black patch on the crown like an immature crest. The chief point that strikes one is the enormous development of the legs and feet compared with the rather small head and beak. The legs are flexed, and the toes spread out over the broad leaves of some aquatic plant. These spreading feet, with long hind-toe which, with the other toes, is armed with a formidable curved nail, are certainly the most remarkable features of the Gallinule.—H. STUART DOVE, Devonport, Tas., 2/8/40.

The Dawn Chorus.—The dawn chorus of birds is a well-marked phenomenon, but, perhaps by reason of its familiarity, it seldom excites more than casual interest.

So far as I know, this dawn chorus has no deep biological significance. Apparently under favourable weather conditions, and particularly during the breeding season, the newly-awakened bird gives vent to a burst of song before commencing its activities for the day. The chorus seems to do no more than give expression to vitality restored by rest.

Generally speaking, birds which retire late rise early. The Magpie, a late retiring bird, may, in the breeding season, be heard almost an hour before all other species. Indeed, on moonlight nights the Magpie, together with the Pallid Cuckoo and Black-and-white Fantail, may be heard at all hours.

The following notes, recorded on a forest border on the Peel Estate, Western Australia, one morning in August, 1940, indicate the order in which various species joined in the vocal medley which greeted the dawn. Most of the birds recorded continued to call frequently after first being heard, and, except among the less frequent birds, the first call was generally a signal for other birds of the same species to join in the chorus.

<i>Birds calling</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Notes</i>
	a.m.	
Pallid Cuckoo	5.55	
Kookaburra	5.56	
Western Magpie	6.0	
Red Wattle-bird	6.1	
Grey Butcher-bird	6.3	
Black-and-white Fantail	6.4	
Dusky Miner	6.6	
	6.7	Miner left roost.
	6.9	Butcher-bird left roost.
Magpie-Lark	6.13	
Red-capped Parrot	6.15	
Little Wattle-bird	6.16	
Twenty-eight Parrot	6.18	
Red-tipped Pardalote	} 6.22	
Western Warbler		
Western Shrike-Thrush	6.26	
	6.29	Observed Cormorants flying.
Western Spinebill	6.35	
	6.36	Raven seen flying.
	6.37	Sunrise (astronomical).
Golden Bronze-Cuckoo	6.39	
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike . . .	6.41	Sunrise observed.
	6.45	Observations concluded.

ERIC SEDGWICK, Wellard, W.A., 19/11/40.

Lowans at Wyperfeld.—While in company with Mr. E. S. Hanks and party last September, in the Mallee National Park, I saw three Lowans' mounds which had been prepared for the season by having from ten to fifteen bushels of dead leaves and twigs scraped into them. This is of

particular interest because they were on the alluvial soils or river terrace around Lake Brambruk. Many years ago, when that lake contained water, I knew the Lowans in the sandy mallee areas thereabout. I have not before seen them on the red-gum flats. Water has not been known in Brambruk for eighteen years, and the park, together with the surrounding country, is suffering from a period of super-dryness. Coriaceous tea-tree, and even porcupine bushes (*Triodia*) in places, are dead.

These flats are of dark soil, carrying red-gum, with an underscrub of a fine-leaved form of golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), silver mulga (*A. brachybotrya*) and a showy three-veined wattle (*A. trineura*), the last-named being in dense thickets much like coastal tea-tree. Here the Lowans have now become established where they can be certain of finding enough moisture beneath for their needs.

We made several excursions, on foot, out west into the "sandy desert" country beyond the present boundaries of the park. There it is a no man's land indeed of rolling fawn-coloured sandhills as far as the eye can see, but nevertheless singularly well clothed by nature with many tough drought-resistant shrubs, chief among which is the desert *Banksia ornata*. We discovered the Dark Thornbill (*Acanthiza hedleyi*) at home in several places, this record being more than 60 miles north of any previous one for this species in Victoria. Field-Wrens, probably *Calamanthus winiam*, were also heard and seen.—A. G. CAMPBELL, Kilsyth, Vic., 21/10/40.

Crest of Cockatiel.—The general belief that the crest of this bird is a fixed one was again brought to my notice by a correspondent's mentioning it as a fact when writing me relative to my note on the species in the January *Emu*. A passage in notes of some lectures by Dr. Leach, a dozen years ago, reads: "This bird has a fixed crest, and is therefore not technically a cockatoo." Leach refers, on page 94 of *An Australian Bird Book* to the bird's "immovable crest." These statements are probably largely responsible for the extent of the belief. The crest is apparently seldom lowered to any degree, but certainly is capable of some independent movement. References to the matter may be found in the *South Australian Ornithologist*, vol. I, pt. 4, p. 30, and vol. II, p. 33 and p. 71, Mr. M. Symonds Clark mentioning, in the first reference, several instances of the belief, and, in the last, claiming knowledge of the power of movement extending back to 1856.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 10/2/41.

Rock Parrots in the Albany Area.—Tom Carter in *The Emu*, vol. XXIII, 1924, p. 225, mentions that though the Rock Parrot (*Neophema petrophila*) was fairly common in the Albany coastal district in 1905, and for several following years, he had not seen any in the district for

many years, and he thought perhaps they had been exterminated by wild cats. On March 19, 1939, I saw a small flock of about a dozen Rock Parrots on the railway track near the Albany town jetty. They were picking up wheat spilled from the railway trucks. Next day I found two dead birds on the road near the post office, apparently just killed by a speeding car. During the following week I saw a few of the birds occasionally picking up wheat along the railway close to the town. They were fairly tame, and one could get within a few yards of them. Albany boys had a "shanghai" craze at the time and the Rock Parrots along the track at the waterfront were a favourite target.

On January 14, 1940, Dr. D. L. Serventy and I saw a flock of six Rock Parrots along the Albany road near Emu Point, and several were seen by him at the Gap, west of Albany, on January 27. The birds were fairly numerous at Nannarup, on the coast twenty miles east of Albany. Dr. Serventy and I stalked a flock of thirty or more in the high coastal sand-dunes at Nannarup, and two were shot to confirm the identification. Their crops were filled with seeds from the sand-dune plants. The parrots ranged about in the scrub and in the deep wind gullies, sheltering among the dunes from the strong sea breezes. A local resident told us that the parrots were not uncommon in the Albany district and frequent the jetty securing fallen wheat grains.

Tom Carter reports, in the notes quoted, that he had seen Rock Parrots elsewhere on the mainland in the extreme south-western corner of the State, but he does not mention having seen the birds north of Cape Naturaliste, on the mainland. Rock Parrots are numerous on Rottnest Island, off Fremantle, but there is no published reference to their being seen on the neighbouring mainland. Therefore the following extract from my notes may be of interest: "May 24, 1936: saw a parrot, which from my description Dr. Serventy says is a Rock Parrot, among the limestone rocks at Cottesloe. The recent westerly gale may account for its appearance on the mainland."—JOHN GREGORY, Perth, W.A., 21/11/40.

Locust Poison.—Some time ago an American University discovered the usefulness of Epsom salt as an effective grasshopper or locust poison. Comparison of the standard arsenic-poisoned bran bait with a bran bait prepared with Epsom salt proved to be as effective, cheaper to make and much safer to prepare and use. The formula is—bran 60-65 per cent., molasses 15 per cent., magnesium sulphate (Epsom salt) 20-25 per cent., and enough water to moisten. Members on the land might give this method a trial and endeavour to persuade other landholders to do likewise in the hope of minimizing bird destruction.—F. L. BERNEY, Rockhampton, Qld., 18/12/40.