is even longer, and the range in width is much greater than that given by others. The average width is also greater, but that could be accounted for by the probability that the measurements given in Table XXII are from specimens which have dried.

LITERATURE CITED

Falla, R. A., 1940. 'The Genus *Pachyptila* Illiger,' *Emu*, vol. XL, p. 218, Melb.
Fleming, C. A., 1939. 'Birds of the Chatham Islands,' pt. 1, *Emu*, vol. XXXVIII, p. 380, Melb.
1941. 'The Phylogeny of the Prions,' *Emu*, vol. XLI, p. 134, Melb.
Guthrie-Smith, H., 1914. *Mutton Birds and Other Birds*, N.Z.
Mathews, Gregory. Private Communication.
Murphy, R. C., 1936. *The Oceanic Birds of South America*, vol. I, New York.
Oliver, W. R. B., 1930. *New Zealand Birds*, Wgtn.
Potts, T. H., 1873. 'Notes on the supposed New Species of Prion,' *Ibis*, vol. III, 3rd ser., p. 85, Lond.
Richdale, L. E., 1942. 'Whero: Island Home of Petrels and Other Birds,' *Emu*, vol. XLII, p. 85, Melb.
1943. 'The White-faced Storm Petrel,' *Trans. N.Z. Inst.*, vol. 73, p. 97, Wgtn.
1943. 'The Kuaka or Diving Petrel,' *Emu*, vol. XLIII, p. 24, Melb.
'The Titi Wainui or Fairy Prion, *Pachyptila turtur* (Kuhl),' unpublished.
Travers, H. H., and W. T. L., 1872. 'On the Birds of the Chatham Islands,' *Trans. N.Z. Inst.*, vol. V, p. 212, Wgtn.

Stray Feathers

Flame Robin.—The Flame Robin (*Petroica phoenicea*) is not often seen close to Sydney, although four or five other robins are comparatively common in the Cumberland area. During a day spent with Mr. Norman Chaffer on the Blue Mountains recently (January, 1943) it was therefore a pleasure both to meet with this pleasingly-coloured bird and to find it nesting.

We were forced to seek cover from a heavy shower, in a small shelter-shed on Leura golf links, and whilst there were surprised to find a substantially-built nest attached to the horizontal wooden beam across the open entrance. Both parent birds fed the young in the nest whilst we sat a few feet distant, and showed little concern at our presence. As the links are most popular with holidaymakers, the small rest-shed must be in constant use by golfers.

An interesting possibility is also here worthy of mention. More than one pair of birds were in the vicinity, and as another partly completed nest was noted on the beam a few feet distant from the occupied one, could it be assumed that some instance of community nesting was contemplated? Or had an earlier structure been partly built and then abandoned?—A. R. McGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 24/5/43.

Black Falcon.—In January, 1942, I was privileged to be able to watch a pair of Black Falcons that had their 'sphere of influence' on a rice farm near Yanco, New South Wales. The farm was the home of many different birds, as the bays were still flooded, and, after the long ripening period of the grain, the abundant water and vigorous growth had created a very favourable feeding ground. Ibis, Pacific Herons, White-faced Herons and Swamp-Harriers were fairly well dispersed over the area. Native Companions were in the district, but I did not see them. On the dry ground were a number of Crows, Magpies and Starlings and one pair of Black Falcons. It was wonderful to watch the flight of these hawks, as they were so swift in direct movement and were able to turn with the utmost quickness.

It was necessary to flood some of the dry rice bays, which brought to the surface hosts of insects and a number of mice. The Crows, Magpies, Starlings and White-faced Herons were soon attracted by the abundant food supply, and it was then that the Falcons demonstrated how they were masters of the rest of the bird world. They were on the lookout for mice, and when one appeared they would come down with a swift, direct swoop, and pick up the luckless prey with absolute precision, without slackening speed. Between times they would have some fun with the other birds. Directly the Falcons appeared the Crows and the Starlings went away, but the Magpies and the Herons stayed, and the hawks amused themselves by swooping over their heads, until the Magpies also flew off, although the Herons remained, evidently thinking that they were safer on the ground than in the air.

A splendid exhibition of wing evolution was shown when the male Falcon caught a mouse, and was chased unmercifully by the hen bird. The male was determined not to give up his prey, so he raced, dodged and twisted, sometimes high in the air, and then in and out among the trees. How it ended I do not know, but I think that the female got the mouse, for presently the chase ended and one of the birds settled on a bough in the distance and enjoyed a quiet repast.—A. S. LE SOUEF, Mosman, N.S.W., 24/5/43.

Termites and Birds.—At dusk one evening in early December last, whilst chopping wood near the bird cabin in the National Park, near Sydney, I noticed a stream of winged termites (*Coptotermes lacteus*) issuing from a decayed stump nearby. Investigation disclosed thousands of the insects swarming out of crevices in the stump and when they took flight the effect was like that of a fountain of water, the insects moving upwards for 20 feet in a compact column before dispersing amongst the trees.

Soon, a fluttering of wings nearby heralded the arrival of the birds. Two Lewin Honeyeaters were first, followed

by a pair of Grey Fantails, a family party of five Blue Wrens, two Red-browed Finches and a White-browed Scrub-Wren. The honeyeaters and fantails took up points of vantage in the trees overhead and from there performed aërial evolutions about the wavering column. But the wrens, scrub-wrens and finches adopted different tactics. They carried the attack right into the 'enemy's home base,' by hopping on to the stump and picking the insects off as they left the crevices. Ten minutes later I approached the stump and was amazed to find that not a termite was to be seen—those that had not escaped had formed part of a real bird 'picnic.'

In the 'muggy' evenings of midsummer, these termites, after spending the early part of their lives underground, grow wings and emerge on a short nuptial flight. During this period they prove rather troublesome to anybody camping in the vicinity, finding their way into clothing, blankets and food. They make most welcome additions to the diet of the birds, frogs, lizards and other creatures and it has been estimated that of the many thousands leaving a colony not more than one pair survive to start a new colony.—J. A. KEAST, Rockdale, N.S.W., 29/3/43.

Birds and Wire—and War.—Accounts appear from time to time, in newspapers, of birds building on electric wires and tramway standards, occasionally accompanied by the atrocious photographs that press photographers are so brazen as to pass off as bird pictures. A number of cuttings have recently been forwarded. These include one from H. A. Purnell, of Geelong, Victoria, of an electrocuted Magpie (a common culprit) twisted out of shape after suffering a 22,000-volt shock. The paragraph naïvely concludes—"The bird was killed." The Electricity Commission stated that such incidents (the consequent interruption to electricity supply, of course: it is not concerned with the Magpie) would not occur if people refrained from leaving small pieces of wire near high tension mains where birds are likely to pick them up for nesting. That, at least, is an encouraging aspect, and better than a campaign to educate the birds and not the people.

Mr. J. D. Somerville, of Adelaide, sent another cutting concerning a Magpie-Lark nesting on overhead tramway wires. The situation would certainly not be conducive to tranquil domesticity and brooding, and every time a tram passed beneath the bird had to fly out and circle around until the 'all-clear' sounded. A further cutting from Mr. Somerville tells of an English bird—a Tawny Pipit—found nesting in the path of a tank on manoeuvres. The War Office, Ministry of Agriculture, and ornithological experts were consulted, which resulted in the manoeuvres being 'moved' elsewhere. The incident was filmed and it was said

that "The intention was to show that there are still small things worth fighting for, even in the middle of a war."—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 16/11/43.

Cabbage Tree Island as an Artillery Target.—Cabbage Tree Island, lying off the entrance to Port Stephens, N.S.W., is a sanctuary for the preservation of fauna and flora under the State laws. Recently Mr. Athol D'Ombrain reported that it was being used as a target for gunnery practice. The Secretary of the Royal Zoological Society of N.S.W. immediately communicated with the Minister for the Army, pointing out that the island is the nesting place of the rare White-winged or Gould Petrel (*Pterodroma leucoptera*), and that shells exploding on the island would seriously interfere with nesting, and perhaps lead to the extermination of the colony. The Minister replied to the effect that instructions have been issued that the island is not to be used for artillery practice. He also thanked the Society for bringing the facts to his notice.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 5/11/43.

Yellow-fronted Honeyeater in the Murray Mallee, South Australia.—Several ornithologists have recently questioned the occurrence of the Yellow-fronted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga plumula*) in the Mallee districts. However, there is adequate evidence to demonstrate its presence there. As long ago as 1883, the late F. W. Andrews secured a specimen near Overland Corner, Murray River, S.A., (*vide* North, *Nests and Eggs of Birds found breeding in Australia and Tasmania*, II, p. 137, 1907). The species was reported by me (*S.A. Orn.*, IX, 8, p. 266) from the mallee near Sutherlands, on the Mount Mary Plains, S.A., in 1928. Further observations and the record of two specimens collected in the same locality, were published by me in 1934 (*ibid.*, XII, 5, p. 159). There are two skins, a male and a female, from mallee country north-east of Sutherlands in the South Australian Museum, of which one, the female, was referred to by H. T. Condon in 1939 (*ibid.*, XV, 2, p. 26). The birds inhabit dense, low mallee shoots, and observations over more than a decade indicate that they are stationary.—ERHARD F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 2/11/43.

Incubation Notes on the Blue Wren.—Last season (1942) I was very interested in a pair of Blue Wrens (*Malurus cyaneus*) which built their nest in a shrub close to my window and near enough for me to observe them constantly.

When the first batch of young birds was hatched neighbouring cats caused a deal of annoyance to the parent birds, so I made a butter box ready for the young when they were old enough to leave the nest. The box was on the ground and I put the young ones into it on the tenth day. The parent birds flew into the box and fed the young ones during the

day, and at night I covered them with wire netting. The parents stayed in the bush above. The birds did not resent my interference for they continued with the same nest and help of the box for the four sittings, and I was able to go to the nest at any time. During the whole season the pair raised 14 young birds, and the birds of each previous 'batch' helped with the feeding of the young.

The information I was able to collect was that the incubation period is 10 to 12 days, and that about the same length of time elapses before the birds are ready to leave the nest. Then about 10 days to 14 days elapse, and the mother bird begins to lay again.

The record of the third and fourth sittings may be of interest. On October 26 the fourth egg was laid. It was rather cold and wet weather (temperature from 56° to 68°) for the fortnight. The young birds hatched out on November 8 and 9. By November 17 they were out of the nest but had I not had the box for them they may have stayed a day or so longer. In two days' time they were flying everywhere.

The next sitting was—First egg laid on November 30 and the fourth egg by December 3. The young birds were hatched by December 15 and flying about on December 25 and 26. The first incubation was a day longer on account of the colder weather, as the mother bird does not sit constantly on the eggs, but keeps guard on a tree nearby, and goes in and out the nest frequently.— (MRS.) E. R. A. CUTCHER, New Lambton, N.S.W., 18/10/43.

The Wood-Sandpiper in Australia.—Mr. Jack Jones, in his summary of the occurrences of *Tringa glareola* in Australia, has omitted mention of a specimen, duly recorded in *The Emu*, which I obtained at Gilbert Springs, a locality about fourteen miles to the west of the Hermannsburg Mission, Central Australia.* I am well acquainted with this species owing to my English experiences. The skin should be found in the H. L. White Collection in Melbourne. Writing from memory only, I feel sure that the late Mr. Tom Carter recorded another. He obtained it when living on his station at Point Cloates in the north-west of this State. Reference is made to the breeding of the Wood-Sandpiper in Northumberland, England, in volume III of Seebohm's *British Birds*.—F. LAWSON WHITLOCK, Bunbury, W.A., 20/11/43.

*This specimen is referred to in vol. XXIII, p. 256, under date August 25, 1923, when "an immature specimen was shot at a large pool on the Finke, near the foothills of the Macdonnell Ranges." The H. L. White Collection, being temporarily out of Melbourne for security reasons, was not available for personal inspection by Mr. Jones when he made his enquiries. The Point Cloates skin referred to above is probably the Maud's Landing specimen mentioned by him.—ED.