

to the Brisbane area, the date on this occasion being June 22, 1947. The bird was a plain brown one, either female or immature male, and I distinctly saw and heard it several times deliver a series of notes, which would have been more appropriate coming from the Variegated Wren and the Striated Thornbill. In between this it indulged in the usual 'see-swit' of the Golden Whistler. I have never seen a Golden Whistler act like this before, and I have met plenty of them.—N. JACK, Brisbane, Qld., 26/6/48.

**Atherton Tableland Birds.**—While residing on the Tableland many years ago, I encountered two species not recorded by Mr. P. A. Bourke, *The Emu*, vol. 47, pt. 2, Oct. 1947, p. 87. These are the Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*), which occurred sparingly at Tolga and also between Atherton and Yungaburra, and the Pied Goose (*Anseranas semipalmata*) of which species I saw only one individual, a bird shot near the Barron River in a locality between Atherton and Yungaburra.—ERIC H. SEDGWICK, Caron, W.A., 25/11/47.

The foregoing five 'Strays' were inadvertently lost sight of for a considerable period.

**A Prion Comes to Grief.**—On Saturday, July 2, 1949, a dead sea-bird was picked up in Studley Park, Kew, Vic., between Walmer Street bridge and Kane's bridge, by my brothers, E. and R. Center. It appeared to be a prion. The bird was taken to the National Museum, Melbourne, and identified as the Medium-billed Prion (*Pachyptila salvini*)—a very rare bird, one should imagine, to be found in the particular locality, five miles from the nearest bayside beach, and a considerable distance further from the open ocean. Although apparently fresh when found, the body was too far gone for a skin to be made. There had not been any heavy southerly 'blows' just previously.—J. CENTER, Richmond, Vic., 20/8/49.

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## Obituaries

ROBERT HALL

Robert Hall, whose death occurred at Hobart on September 19, 1949, was an ornithologist of the 'old school', of which so few members remain. He was a competent field observer, a somewhat prolific writer with a distinctive literary style, a keen cabinet worker, and, in addition, a collector with no mean knowledge of the art of taxidermy and display.

He died in his 82nd year after a useful life as an ornithologist and general naturalist. His several books on Australian birds will be his memorial; and there are few ornithological publications in Australia as well as abroad

over the past 50 or 60 years in which articles from his pen have not appeared. Past numbers of *The Emu*, *The Victorian Naturalist* and *The Tasmanian Naturalist*, are among those which contain his papers, many of considerable value. The books he wrote included *Key to the Birds of Australia and Tasmania* (1899), *Insectivorous Birds of Victoria* (1900), *Some Useful Birds of Southern Australia* (1907), and *Australian Bird Maps* (1922).

A foundation member of the R.A.O.U., he retained his membership of the Union until failing health compelled him to sever associations in recent years, and for a time he concentrated on activities connected with breeding of possums for fur and the production of fish meal, though those ventures met with little success. Before coming to Hobart in 1908 to accept the position of Curator of the Tasmanian Museum, he lived in Melbourne, and it was from there that he left in 1903 for a trip to Siberia, being probably the first British naturalist to travel to the mouth of the Lena River. On that expedition he collected bird specimens to the number of 401 and added materially to the knowledge of Siberian ornithology: the skins went to Rothschild's Museum at Tring. Other important expeditions which he undertook were to Northern India, and Kerguelen Island in the Antarctic.

Honours which were awarded him included that of Corresponding Member of the Zoological Society of London and a Fellowship of the Linnean Society.

In Tasmania, Mr. Hall did much to promote public interest in ornithology, suggested avenues of special study, and generally assisted and encouraged young students. The present writer recalls that it was Robert Hall who gave him his first lessons in making bird skins, at which time his kitchen was liberally cluttered with loose feathers from the mutilated bodies of pigeons and some other species on which the initial experiments were made. Hall himself possessed a comprehensive collection of Australian skins and an egg collection as well, and many of the skilfully-executed skins in the existing collection of the Tasmania Museum were the work of his hands.—M.S.

#### GREGORY M. MATHEWS

When Gregory Macalister Mathews passed away in England, on March 27, 1949, at the age of 72, there died one of the most provocative of ornithologists of modern times. The pen of some person better acquainted with him might well have written his obituary, but several ornithologists asked to undertake the provision of a suitable notice failed to respond. This account therefore owes much to that published in *The Ibis*, vol. 91, no. 3, pp. 521-4, and to the autobiographical notes in *Birds and Books*, 1942.

Mathews was born on September 10, 1876, at Biamble, N.S.W. He evinced an early interest in natural history and developed it whilst engaged on a cattle station near Charters Towers, Qld. Apparently he spent some time "learning how to assay gold and studying the cyanide process of extraction", but the purchase at £2, and sale at £100 each, of some gold-mining shares, appears to have brought a better return than more direct participation in mining. Shortly afterwards he met his future wife, Mrs. Marian Wynne, married, and, in 1902, set off for England.

The idea of producing a book on Australian birds must have exercised his mind whilst he was actually in the bush—when, for example, he saw "the wild cassowary and its nest for the first time", on a trip with cattle between Ingham and Cardwell. It was when he settled down to the life of an English gentleman, with encouragement and assistance from his wife, and with money behind him to finance the project, that the ideas began to take shape. He began assiduously to garner details, and commenced the formation of both a collection of skins and of books on ornithology. With these concomitants, with zeal, and with determination and energy, he began to pattern the volumes that ultimately resulted in a work of 12 volumes, a bibliography and checklist and, later, two supplements. The first part appeared in 1910, the last in 1927.

There can be no doubt that *The Birds of Australia* was directly responsible for an extension of interest in our birds. Australian aviformes have always attracted birdmen of all classes—systematists, aviculturalists, and the man merely interested in birds as such. True the volumes were designed rather for the academic ornithologist than for those others, but the work soon became to be considered as indispensable and, from its vexed and sometimes extreme views on nomenclature, as well there expressed as elsewhere, attention was focused on Australian birds. Thus systematists argued over birds well-known to them for their naming and re-naming though scarce to be recognized in the hand, because of the bright light directed upon them by Mathews.

There were some to whom Mathews' work was disconcerting always, to say the least, and who allowed him little credit, but out of confusion a clearer concept often arises, just as the pond reveals more after the waters have been stirred and allowed to settle. His worst offence to these critics was an extreme tendency to splitting, particularly generically so that, at the ultimate, Mathews' groupings averaged out at less than two species per genus. He appeared to lose sight altogether of the principle that whereas the species is based on differences, the genus is founded on similarities. In the trenchant criticism by Leach (*Emu*, vol. 27, p. 203) of the first volume of *Systema Avium*

*Australasianarum*, we see a reference to "Mr. Mathews in his best form for extreme splitting". Comparisons—though 'contrasts' would be the better word—with Sclater's names in the companion *Systema Avium Ethiopicarum* indicated the extent to which Mathews had departed from the agreed principle of 'standardized' nomenclature. Thus eight species of terns common to the two lists were all placed in *Sterna* by Sclater, but in six different genera by Mathews, whilst the seven falcons and kestrel here were divided into five genera whereas the 22 African species were all classed as *Falco*.

There can be no doubt that Mathews was indefatigable in his researches into matters of nomenclature, priorities and other taxonomic matters. Here, too, there were critics, but these had poorer weapons with which to assail him, and often the author who deprecated the devaluation of standard works was merely expressing a personal resentment at having his own writings depreciated. Towards the end Mathews had begun to change his views on genera, evidently realizing that the tide was racing strongly against him, a matter exemplified in the final 'skit' in *The Emulet*, vol. 1, p. 23. In a letter to me that accompanied his last contribution to *The Emu*—see vol. 48, p. 327—he used the significant words—"As we are evidently to accept large genera . . ."

Whilst the 'big work' was in progress, other publications appeared and constant contributions were made to the ornithological journals. One of these more important works, in collaboration with Tom Iredale, was the first volume of *A Manual of the Birds of Australia*. This contained some excellent plates by Mrs. Iredale (Lilian Medland) of young birds in down, and sketches of bills and feet, and was a "concise and useful work" that, complete, would have greatly enhanced Australian ornithological literature.

After the completion of *The Birds of Australia*, the major publications by Mathews were the two supplements already mentioned, namely *The Birds of Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands* and *The Australasian South Polar Quadrant*, 1928, and *A Supplement to the Birds of Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands to which is added those Birds of New Zealand not figured by Buller*, 1936, the two volumes of *Systema Avium Australasianarum* (1927 and 1930), *Notes on the Order Procellariiformes* (with E. J. L. Hallstrom), 1943, and *A Working List of Australian Birds*, 1946. If there was a group upon which Mathews seemed inclined to concentrate it was the Procellariiformes. He had sought material, particularly skulls, for some years prior to his death, and it is believed that he had prepared a manuscript for a volume on petrels. The 1943 volume was written by Mathews and financed by Hallstrom, so the latter must strictly be exon-

erated from the apparent sin of creating (jointly) a genus named after himself.

Mathews made two return visits to Australia. The first was in 1914, when he came with his wife, during the course of a world tour, and the second following his presentation to the Commonwealth, in 1939, of his ornithological library. The war prevented his return to England until 1945. The splendid library, containing a great number of volumes and many rarities, is housed at Canberra where Mathews spent considerable time superintending its unpacking and cataloguing. Although a few years ago when the gift was made, press publicity gave the impression of a recent decision, the intention to house the library in Australia was of long standing. Reference is made to it in the *Emu* review of the last part of *The Birds of Australia* (*Emu*, vol. 27, p. 212)—“this unique library will be available for the new National Museum under the direction of Professor Colin MacKenzie, at Canberra”.

Gregory Mathews' association with scientific bodies was considerable. He was a member of the British Ornithologists Union, a Fellow of the American and our Australasian Unions, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and a member of many other scientific bodies. He had held office in a number and had been actively associated with their aims. As delegate for Australia he attended the International Congresses at Berlin (1910), Copenhagen (1926), Amsterdam (1930), Oxford (1934), and Rouen (1938).—C.E.B.

#### CLIFFORD COLES

The death occurred on August 28, 1949, at a Sydney private hospital, of Clifford Coles, C.M.Z.S., at the age of 73 years. Mr. Coles was a member of the Union for a number of years and was a keen aviculturist. The so-called 'Coles Lorikeet' (*Trichoglossus colesi* Le Souef) was named for him (see *The Emu*, vol. 10, 1910, p. 204, and vol. 28, 1928, pp. 81-2, plate 22, col.). This bird has since been treated as a synonym of *Trichoglossus moluccanus septentrionalis*.—K.A.H.

#### G. C. SHORTRIDGE

The death, on January 12, 1949, of the director of the Kaffrarian Museum, King William Town, South Africa, removes a figure of importance in Australian ornithology. Born on June 21, 1880, in Devonshire, Guy Shortridge served in the South African Constabulary during the South African War of 1899-1902 and, when that was over, was employed by the late W. L. Sclater, then director of the South African Museum, to collect mammals. Returning to England, he was engaged, at the instance of Oldfield Thomas, to proceed to Western Australia to collect mammals and

birds, the finance for the trip being supplied by W. E. Balston.

The visit to Western Australia lasted from 1904 to 1906, the itinerary being as follows—

- (1) Albany district and then north along the Great Southern Railway to Perth.
- (2) Bunbury and Busselton and the caves area (Margaret River).
- (3) The country some 40 miles east of the Great Southern Railway from York south.
- (4) Bernier Island.
- (5) The Gascoyne River district inland as far as Clifton Downs Station.
- (6) The country north of Southern Cross.
- (7) Kalgoorlie north to Laverton.

The mammals collected were reported on by Oldfield Thomas in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* and the birds were dealt with by Ogilvie Grant in *The Ibis* for 1909 and 1910, when the following new species were named—*Malurus bernieri*, *Sericornis balstoni*, *Climacteris wellsi*, *Zosterops shortridgei* and *Z. balstoni*, and *Certhionyx occidentalis*, all nowadays relegated to the status of geographical races or placed in synonymy. For a period Shortridge was assisted in his collecting by an Albany settler, J. Harry Charter.

Numerous further collecting expeditions on behalf of the British Museum followed to many parts of the world: Java, Malay States, Siam, United States, Mexico, British Honduras, Guatemala, Spanish Honduras, West Indies, and then back to the east to Ceylon, Borneo, Bali, Celebes and the Moluccas. Then followed another collecting trip of importance to Australian ornithology—with the British Ornithologists Union Jubilee Expedition to Dutch New Guinea for 15 months when, having contracted malaria, Shortridge spent some months in New South Wales in the Blue Mountains before again returning to New Guinea. Then he spent three years collecting in India and Burma followed by war service with the Indian Army (29th Lancers) in France and with the R.F.C.

Shortridge was a great collector and a leading authority on South African mammals. Appointed director of the Kaffrarian Museum in 1921 and holding the appointment for 28 years, scarcely one of which passed without his making an expedition to some part of South Africa, he left behind him a magnificent collection of some 20,000 specimens of South African mammals. It was during the recent war, when, although well over age, Shortridge was in charge of a base camp in Abyssinia, that the writer renewed by correspondence an acquaintance formed in France in the early days of the 1914-18 war. Ever helpful, only a few

months before he died suddenly while working alone in his museum, Shortridge wrote the writer some details of his visits to Western Australia and New Guinea.—H.M.W.

## Funds Required

The Union cannot continue to maintain *The Emu* at the present standard out of its income. The Council is at present considering a proposal to increase the annual subscription to 25/-. Members are asked voluntarily to pay that amount. They are also invited to make donations. Above all, members are urged to continue membership and to endeavour to persuade others to join the Union.

## Reviews

**Drongo Family Revision.**—The drongos comprise an essentially old world group, which is a "natural, self-contained and sharply-defined family". Their systematic relationships have been recently assessed by Charles Vaurie in 'A Revision of the Bird Family Dicteruridae' (*Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, vol. 93, part 4, 1949, pp. 201-342). He accepts twenty species, thus agreeing with the number recognized by Ernst Mayr in 'The Number of Bird Species' (*Auk*, vol. 63, 1946, pp. 64-69). All except the Papuan Mountain Drongo (*Chætorhynchus papuensis*) are included in the genus *Dicrurus* Vieillot. Only one species reaches Australia. This bird, called *Chibia bracteata* in the *Official Checklist* (1926), is regarded by Vaurie as a subspecies of the Hair-crested (Spangled) Drongo (*Dicrurus hottentottus*), which is accorded a wide range from India and north China, through the Philippines and Malaysia (omitting the Malay Peninsula) to New Guinea, Australia and the Solomon Islands. Thirty-two subspecies are accepted under *hottentottus*, *D. montanus* of the mountains of Celebes and *D. megarhynchus* of New Ireland being included in the same superspecies, which comprises no less than three genera and 34 'species' of Sharpe's *Hand-List* (1909).

The omission of Mathews' genus *Notochibia* from the synonymy of *Dicrurus* is surprising, as is also the statement (p. 212) that "... since the time of the 'Handlist' two additional generic names had appeared, but one, being a *nomen nudum* brought forth by Mathews, will not be quoted here". The acceptance of *Notochibia* can scarcely be feasible—(Mathews himself relegates it as synonymous with *Dicruopsis* in the *Systema Avium Australasianarum*, 1930, p. 862)—but it is not a *nomen nudum* as the type species is clearly designated in the *Austral Avian Record* (vol. 5, 1923, p. 41).

Field-notes, habits, ecology, etc., play little part in so many recent revisions, but they can be investigated to advantage, e.g. by Delacour and Mayr in 'The Family Anatidae' (*Wilson Bull.*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 3-55, 1945). Australian ornithologists would have gladly supplied such information as known concerning *bracteatus*. Australian distribution of its sole accepted subspecies is both brief and vague, possibly because the author believed little was available on the subject. However, one would have liked to see reference to K. A. Hindwood's recent article on 'The Spangled Drongo in Victoria' (*Vic. Nat.*, vol. 65, no. 1, pp. 4-5, 1948) where known Victorian records are detailed and the species' status as a migrant and breeding bird in south-eastern Australia is given.

The author is to be congratulated upon the free use of text-figures, maps and statistical tables.—A.R.M.