

First occurrence of the Little Egret in South-western Australia.—Widely distributed in northern and eastern Australia, the Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*, usually only occurs in the Kimberley Division and along the north-west mangrove belt south to Exmouth Gulf and the Lyndon River in Western Australia (D. L. Serventy and H. M. Whittell, 1962. *Birds of Western Australia*, p. 115, 3rd edition).

On April 11, 1965, I observed an individual at Yangebup Lake, 8 miles south of Perth. There were also two White Egrets *Egretta alba*, feeding around the margins of the lake but the Little Egret was only seen in the company of ducks and White-faced Herons, *Ardea novaehollandiae*. My field description of the bird is as follows: Slightly smaller in body size than the White-faced Heron. Long pointed bill, black except for pale yellow basal portion of lower mandible. Bare skin in front of eye, yellow. Black legs. Two slender white plumes on the nape extend behind the neck. Filamentous plumes on the lower back and breast. A distinct S-shaped neck. Its movements were somewhat more rapid than those of the White-faced Heron, particularly when feeding. On one occasion it perched in a dead tree with several White-faced Herons, and when in flight pulled its neck well into the body. Compared with the White Egret, the Little Egret was a mere dwarf. An attempt to collect the egret failed.

On checking my description with that given by H. T. Condon (*S. Aust. Orn.*, 22: 1958, 77) in his excellent paper on the identification of the various "white egrets" in which the pitfalls concerning field differentiation are outlined, I found that the colour of the bill, legs and bare skin in front of the eye of the Yangebup Lake bird tallied with text-book descriptions and that the presence of the two plumes on the nape is absolutely diagnostic of the Little Egret in breeding plumage. The possibility that the bird was a Plumed Egret, *Egretta intermedia*, a species of similar size, can therefore be satisfactorily dismissed.

That a small influx of the species occurred into the South West was indicated by the observation of three small white egrets with White-faced Herons on the margins of Lake Monger by Mr. E. Garratt on April 16. Although not equipped with binoculars and consequently unable to note any diagnostic characteristics, Mr. Garratt suspected the birds were Little Egrets on the basis of them being smaller than the White-faced Heron.

Despite these occurrences being hundreds of miles from the species' normal range limits, that the species should wander to the South West is not really surprising in view of its sporadic movements over long distances as revealed by banding operations in eastern Australia. Little Egrets banded as nestlings by N. J. Favaloro at Balranald, New South Wales, have been recovered in New Britain, *Aust. Bird Bander*, 1(6): 1963, 144; W. B. Hitchcock, *C.S.I.R.O. Wild. Res.*, 6: 1961, 83, New Guinea, *Aust. Bird Bander*, 2(4): 1964, 116; 3(1): 1965, 19, and New Zealand, *Aust. Bird Bander*, 1(5): 1963, 104; W. B. Hitchcock, *C.S.I.R.O. Wild. Res. Tech. Paper*, 7: 163, 31.—JULIAN FORD, Perth, W.A.

Variant Plumage in Spur-winged Plover.—On March 14, 1965, a Spur-winged Plover, *Lobibyx novaehollandiae*, which showed variant plumage was present with others of its kind in a paddock at Blackman Bay, Tasmania. The bird was again present in the same paddock on April 3.

A description of the bird is as follows: *Upper-parts light grey*; crown of head black, extending to form a nuchal collar; tail white, with black terminal band; face and under-parts white; beak, iris and wattle yellow; legs red. *The upper surface of the folded wing grey*, with a black edge.

Such a colouration would arise if the bird lacked phaeomelanin whilst possessing normal eumelanin. The loss of phaeomelanin would cause those melanic areas of the plumage that are normally brown, the upper parts in this case, to be grey. The black and grey pigments would remain unaltered and the overall effect would be to produce a grey, black and white bird. The soft parts would remain unchanged.

Harrison 1963 lists 13 families for which there are records of variant plumages of the non-pheomelanic (grey) form and/or non-eumelanic (fawn) form. This list, which is not claimed to be exhaustive, does not include the Charadriidae.—D. G. THOMAS, Hobart, Tas.

REFERENCE

Harrison, C. J. O. 1963. *Bird Study* 10(4): 220.