

THE SUNBIRD

Volume 9 Numbers 1,2

March/June, 1978

A SIGHT RECORD OF THE DUNLIN ON THE CAIRNS WATERFRONT

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According to Voous (1960), the Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) is not recorded from the southern hemisphere; he apparently overlooked a record for Queensland (Hindwood, 1944). The lack of records up to that time may have been due to difficulties in identification, but on the other hand extensive collections of waders on their wintering grounds had been made. In recent years however, there have been several records in the Australasian region, but its true status remains unclear. Sightings in Australia and New Zealand have been summarized by Brown (1975) and McKean (1976) respectively. The following appears to be the third recorded Queensland sighting.

On 3 December 1977 we were watching waders on the Esplanade in Cairns. It was about 4.00 pm and the tide was high. We found a Dunlin feeding with a group of Curlew Sandpipers (*Calidris ferruginea*). Our field description of the bird is as follows:

very similar to Curlew Sandpiper but slightly larger, plumper and with shorter legs; hunched posture, very different from slim, alert posture of Curlew Sandpiper; breast grey, and colouration in general was a darker, dirtier grey; bill black, slightly downcurved at tip. At one point the bird fluttered to another feeding spot about a metre away and we had excellent views of the diagnostic dark rump. The call was heard several times, an abrupt, high "treep", almost monosyllabic and with a harsh, grating quality.

The bird was watched for about 10 minutes at a range of about twenty metres. 10x50 binoculars and a 20X spotting telescope were used. One of us (TL) is very familiar with this species on both its breeding and wintering grounds in the northern hemisphere.

A Dunlin, presumably the same bird, was seen again by us on the Cairns waterfront on 18 December. This time we were accompanied by David Bishop, who is also familiar with the Dunlin in Britain, where it is the commonest wader. We found the bird at the northern end of the Esplanade close to the mangroves, about a kilometre from the previous sighting. We watched it for about half an hour and the details of the first description were confirmed.

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CO-OPERATIVE BREEDING IN THE AUSTRALIAN LITTLE GREBE

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During March and April of 1978 I observed family behaviour in the Australasian Grebe (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*) on both the University of Queensland pond and on a newly made pond at Long Pocket in Brisbane. Observations on two separate broods, one at the University pond and the other at Long Pocket, showed in each case three adult grebes in breeding plumage feeding a single brood.

At Long Pocket each of the three adult grebes acted as a parent in feeding the four chicks and carrying them on its back so that I could not recognize individual birds. Some courting was observed among the three adults, but it was not clear which individuals were taking part. When the chicks were four weeks old, one of the adults had lost its breeding plumage. Although the origin of the third adult grebe in both cases was not known, it should be mentioned that before the four chicks had hatched there had been a second grebe's nest approximately five metres away from the first. This nest was more roughly built and lower in the water and only one grebe in breeding plumage was observed sitting on the eggs and bringing nest material. The nest disappeared in a storm on 9 March, 1978, at about the time that the third bird joined the pair and the four chicks hatched out.

On the University pond a third bird in breeding plumage occasionally swam in from some distance away, fed the two chicks, then swam away again.

A great deal more information could be gained from a detailed study of marked birds. However, these observations do suggest a case of co-operative breeding in this species. Such behaviour may have advantages to the survival of the chicks, particularly as items of food are small (water-spiders and aquatic insects) and the feeding rate appears to become remarkably high before they become independent of their parents for food.

No grebe is listed by Rowley (1976) as a co-operative breeder and a search through the available literature has failed to reveal any mention of such behaviour for non-Australian species.

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SOME REMARKS ON THE TAXONOMY OF AUSTRALASIAN OYSTERCATCHERS,
HAEMATOPUS SPP.

J.L. MCKEAN

The recent series of papers by Baker (1973a, 1973b, 1974a, 1974b, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c) is a sufficient stimulus to initiate a discussion on the taxonomic status of the forms of *Haematopus* in Australasia. Baker's initial assessment of the New Zealand situation was that three forms should be recognized, viz., *Haematopus chathamensis*, *H. ostralegus finschi* and *H. unicolor* with the proviso that should *unicolor* prove to be morphologically similar to *H. longirostris* then the name *longirostris* will have priority over *unicolor*.

In a paper given at the XVth International Ornithological Congress, of which only a summary is available, Baker (1975c) apparently considers *H. longirostris* and *H. unicolor* conspecific. Although Baker's taxonomic work is sound, I do not think his conclusions should be taken as a final solution of the names to be used for the forms of *Haematopus* occurring throughout Australasia.

Haematopus chathamensis Hartert

It is agreed that this form is distinct morphologically and that the best treatment is to regard it as a separate species. Nevertheless, it is not possible to predict what might happen if another form invaded its limited distributional range.

Haematopus finschi Martens

The morphological diversity that has occurred in Australasian *Haematopus* makes it extremely difficult to assess their relationships with *Haematopus* from elsewhere, particularly when the geographical isolation of Australasian forms is taken into account. In placing *finschi* as a race of *ostralegus* yet separating *longirostris* as a distinct species Baker asks us to believe that *H. ostralegus* invaded New Zealand over the Indo-Malay distributional gap apparently bypassing Australia and New Guinea. The Palearctic form *ostralegus* differs from *finschi* (and also *longirostris*) in the greater amount of white in the wing and its pure white under wing-coverts, and more importantly in its possession of a distinct winter or eclipse plumage. Body measurements, particularly those of the feet and bill are characters that modify relatively quickly under selection, particularly in the face of competition. Accordingly I feel that it is unwise to consider such characters beyond the relationship of species that are in contact with each other or which may have been in contact in the relatively recent past. Our conclusions are that *H. finschi* is best regarded as a distinct species and that there is scarcely any more reason to include *finschi* as a race of *ostralegus* than there is to include *longirostris* and *unicolor*.

Haematopus unicolor Forster

An analysis of measurements of bill length, breadth and depth, and wing length taken from specimens assembled from all Australian public collect-

ions showed that in these characters this species is closest to *H. longirostris*. This conclusion was also reached by Baker (1975c) who carried out extensive statistical tests to analyse variation in thirteen morphological characters. There was, however, extensive overlap in measurements between *fuliginosus* and *unicolor*. Bill length measurements extensively overlapped, and bill depth, bill breadth and tarsus measurements slightly overlapped between *ophthalmicus* and *unicolor*. As the possibility of convergence is high I consider that lumping *longirostris* with *unicolor* on the ground of measurements alone to be rather premature. There are some plumage differences particularly in underwing colour, wing pattern and breast demarcation between the pied phase of *unicolor* and *longirostris*. Gene flow from black phase *unicolor* has probably produced such differences and as such they are not of great use at the specific level.

Haematopus longirostris Vieillot

This species is often regarded as a race of *H. ostralegus* (eg. Condon, 1975). It differs in its wing pattern and lack of an eclipse plumage and is best regarded as being specifically distinct from *ostralegus*. *H. fuliginosus* and *H. ophthalmicus* differ from *H. longirostris* in longer wing length and slightly longer tail. *H. fuliginosus* and *H. longirostris* have essentially similar sized and shaped bills. *H. ophthalmicus* differs from both these species in its more massive bill. *H. fuliginosus* and *H. longirostris* commonly feed together in estuarine situations and then probably compete for food. During the breeding season territories of *H. fuliginosus* invariably occur on rocky shores while those of *H. longirostris* occur along sandy beaches. *H. ophthalmicus* feeds mainly on coral reefs and its massive bill probably enables it to deal with prey items that are avoided by *H. fuliginosus* and *H. longirostris*.

Haematopus fuliginosus Gould

Haematopus ophthalmicus Castlenau and Ramsay

H. ophthalmicus has long been regarded as a race of *H. fuliginosus*. It differs in its stout bill and in having a prominent red fleshy eye ring; differences that I feel are important enough to warrant specific separation. Comparative measurements are shown in Table 1.

The fleshy orbital ring is conspicuous in the field but will shrink and can be less obvious in the dry skin. The feet and toes of *H. ophthalmicus* seem fleshier and stouter in the hand and field but this too is difficult to see in a dry skin.

In eastern Australia, distribution seems discrete (Storr, 1973), *H. fuliginosus* ranging northwards to about Brisbane and *H. ophthalmicus* south to Lady Elliott Island at the southern extremity of the Great Barrier Reef.

In Western Australia the two species may make contact and it might be thus possible to discover whether specific status for *H. ophthalmicus* is warranted. Specimens of *fuliginosus* have been collected as far north as the Abrolhos Islands while specimens of *ophthalmicus* have been collected some 340 km to the north on Dorre Island. Sightings by Whitlock (1921) on Dirk Hartog Island and Peron Peninsula reduce the distributional gap to about 250 km. Condon (1975) errs in placing

TABLE 1
 Range and mean in millimetres of *Haematopus fuliginosus* and
H. ophthalmicus measurements

| Species | Sex | Sample size | Bill length | Bill breadth | Bill depth | Tarsus | Wing |
|------------------------|-----|-------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|
| <i>H. fuliginosus</i> | ♂ | 10 | 66.4-90.5 (73.0) | 12.6-16.2 (14.0) | 14.9-17.0 (16.0) | 51.6-56.8 (54.2) | 283-300 (289) |
| <i>H. ophthalmicus</i> | ♂ | 5 | 65.0-78.0 (67.9) | 15.4-17.0 (16.8) | 16.1-16.8 (16.5) | 51.0-57.6 (52.9) | 264-290 (274) |
| <i>H. fuliginosus</i> | ♀ | 6 | 69.5-85.8 (80.8) | 13.2-17.6 (14.9) | 15.7-17.2 (16.6) | 50.0-55.6 (52.8) | 271-300 (285) |
| <i>H. ophthalmicus</i> | ♀ | 4 | 78.4-80.1 (78.2) | 16.7-19.8 (18.0) | 16.2-17.7 (16.9) | 51.6-56.0 (53.6) | 273-289 |

Haematopus unicolor bernieri Mathews 1912 in the synonymy of *H. fuliginosus*. It belongs in the synonymy of *H. ophthalmicus*.

Finally, an appropriate common name for *H. ophthalmicus* would be the spectacled oystercatcher.

Speciation

A number of alternative hypotheses on how *Haematopus* may have speciated in Australasia, could be advanced. At this stage however it is probably better to suggest further studies which may render such hypotheses less speculative. A comparative study of the vocalizations could well be rewarding as would studies of comparative functional anatomy particularly the myology of the hind limbs and cranial region. Unfortunately there is not enough skeletal and spirit material in collections at present for the latter study to be undertaken.

The diversity of forms in the Southern Hemisphere and in particular Australasia tempts one to speculate that the family could well have originated in Gondwanaland; the Northern Hemisphere forms deriving from birds spreading northwards through Africa and South America. An origin such as this would at least explain the Indo-Malayan distributional gap and the phenetic relationships (Baker, 1975c) between *H. ophthalmicus* and the African species *H. moquini*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All Australian Museums loaned me material for this study and I am grateful for this. Dr. J.H. Calaby kindly commented on the manuscript.

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FOOD OF PRIONS WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO FAIRY PRION, PACHYPTILA TURTUR

D.P. VERNON

On 14 September, 1975, C.J. Corben found a specimen of a Fairy Prion, *Pachyptila turtur*, washed up on the beach 5 km south of Point Lookout, North Stradbroke Island, south eastern Queensland, 27°25'S., 153°33'E. The specimen was preserved in alcohol, later dried out and registered QM016155.

The finding itself was not surprising as a number of specimens of this species have been found there in recent years. However, this prion had a Sharp-nosed Pufferfish partly protruding (about 35 mm) from the cloacal opening. It would seem that on occasions small fish are taken as food by *P. turtur* and by other prions.

Macdonald (1971) and Serventy *et al.* (1971) list only crustaceans as food for *P. turtur* while Fullagar (in Frith, 1976) wrote "Like all prions, this bird feeds by collecting planktonic organisms, particularly crustaceans and squid, from the surface of the sea, apparently for the most part at night". Oliver (1930) found small crustaceans in the stomachs of Fulmar Prion, *P. crassirostris*, from Bounty Island, south west of New Zealand and Whitlock (1931) when discussing the stomach contents of prions "found the eyes and beaks of very small cuttlefish, with a few equally small shells, and sometimes fragments of sea-weed mingled with grit."

The author is aware of two references to prions taking fish. In discussing the remains of food taken by a Dove Prion, *P. desolata* Murphy (1936) wrote "It contained chiefly remains of small *Macrura* and *Schizopoda*, probably with larval stages of other crustaceans. There were also bones and fragments of bones of very small fishes." Also Oliver (1930) in regard to the food of Broad-billed Prion, *P. vittata*, states "The food of the parara, as recorded by Richdale, for birds nesting off Stewart Island, consists of Crustaceans mainly copepods, stalked barnacles, pteropods and small fishes."

R.J. McKay, Curator of Ichthyology at the Queensland Museum, identified the fish as *Canthigaster* sp. of the family Tetraodontidae. He said members of this family are known as sharp-nosed puffers and usually inhabit shallow waters in the vicinity of coral reefs. They have poisonous flesh and possess a skin toxin. Like their close relatives, the Pufferfish, *Sphaeroides*, they are capable of inflating the body with water when frightened or molested. Stranger (1970) reported the Silver Gull, *Larus novaehollandiae* feeding on pufferfishes but recorded that other seabirds such as Australian Pelican, *Pelecanus conspicillatus*, Caspian Tern, *Sterna caspia*, Crested Tern, *S. bergii* and Cormorants, *Phalacrocorax* spp. rejected them often after mere visual recognition. For readers interested in this group of fish, Allen and Randall (1977) have reviewed the sharp-nosed pufferfishes of the Indo-pacific.

In regard to *P. turtur*, QM016155, the toxic properties of the fish no doubt had a deleterious effect on the prion and an attempt to void the fish probably caused its death.



Ventral view of specimen of Fairy Prion, *P. turtur*, QM016155, showing Pufferfish, *Canthigaster* sp., partly extruding from the bird's cloaca.

Photo: Queensland Museum.

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FIRST NORTHERN TERRITORY RECORD OF ARCTIC SKUA

H.A.F. THOMPSON

At about 07.30 hours on 10 February 1978, Ms. Carole Peterson and the writer were watching terns (*Sterna* sp.) at high-tide at Lee Point near Darwin N.T. We were attracted by an unfamiliar call and saw a little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) being attacked in flight by a mainly brown, gull-sized bird which we identified as a Skua (*Stercorarius* sp.). At first sight we noted its stocky build, gull-like flight but with wings much more sharply angled at the carpal joint and white 'flash' on the flight-feathers. Its behaviour in attacking the little tern and subsequently in disturbing a resting flock of Crested Terns (*Sterna bergii*) was also distinctive of a skua.

We observed the birds more closely and in addition to the above, took the following notes: Upperparts dark brown with white 'flash' on the flight-feathers formed by the feather-shafts, cap a darker brown or blackish clearly demarcated from the rest of the head which was yellowish-white to white. Underparts off-white, tending to cream on the lower face and upper breast with a diffuse but obvious brown pectoral band merging into the brown of the axillaries and underwing. The tail was brown, fan-shaped and without protruding central feathers. The overall size of the bird was about that of a Silver Gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*) which was also present; the bill was relatively longer than a gull's but of similar shape, not pointed like that of a tern. The legs and

feet, observed when the bird was at rest briefly on the sand, were blackish. The only call heard, when the bird was harrassing terns, was a harsh, repeated, gull-like "rork".

Mr. J. Estbergs saw the bird again in the same place at about 15.00 hours on 11 February 1978.

From this description, the bird was identified as a light-phase adult Arctic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). The central tail-feathers, absent in this bird, are generally the best distinction between this species and the Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) which could also occur, but the latter is larger, 20 inches overall as against 18 (Slater, 1970; Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom, 1954) and would probably seem noticeably bigger than a silver gull. In addition, both Slater and Peterson *et alia* refer to the well-defined 'cap' of the arctic skua; Slater describes the light-phase with "often a pectoral collar and dark skull-capped appearance". Other skuas can be ruled out on size and build alone.

This is the first known record of any member of the Stercorariidae in the Northern Territory (Storr, 1977). The Arctic Jaeger has a holarctic breeding distribution in the arctic and sub-arctic and is a regular non-breeding visitor to eastern Australia and New Zealand (Condon, 1975). Storr (1973), in a Queensland context, describes the species as a scarce visitor to north-eastern seas with a few observations in Moreton Bay. Griffin (1972) collected a dead bird at Townsville Common. The occurrence of the species at Darwin at a time of little apparent migration or bad weather is perhaps surprising.

My thanks go to Mr. J. McKean and Mr. J. Estbergs of the C.S.I.R.O., Division of Wildlife Research, Darwin, for help with references for this note.

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A SIGHT RECORD OF THE COMMON PARADISE KINGFISHER,
TANYSIPTERA GALATEA, AT DARNLEY ISLAND, QUEENSLAND

Robert Draffan

Darnley Island (Islander's name, Erub) 09°35'S, 143°46'E is some 76 km south-east of Daru, the nearest landfall in Papua New Guinea, and 180 km north-east of Cape York.

At first light on the morning of 22 February 1978, I was walking through the wooded area near the village water supply. This is a small shallow gully with trees and secondary growth on the flat gully floor and steeper banks. Above the banks, forest is replaced by grassland. A plaintive 'Tu' call was heard seven or eight times in succession in the gully. After a short silence, the call started again and it was constantly repeated.

It was difficult to locate the bird as it was well hidden and quickly flew off when approached. However, it flew only about 20 m each time it was disturbed. Eventually I obtained a good sight of the bird, sitting on a branch about 2 m above ground level. Its previous perches had also been at about this level.

My field notes read: "Kingfisher, red bill, white underparts, blue back with white centre, long blue tail with white racquet, pale legs and pale blue crown." I have previously seen this bird in the rain forests near Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea.

According to Rand and Gilliard (1967) its range from the Moluccas to Papua New Guinea includes that section of the Papuan mainland closest to Darnley Island and it is probable that this is where this bird came from. Peckover and Filewood (1976) say that breeding takes place even in small isolated patches of scrub in open country. It is thus possible that the bird could become established in the small forested areas of Darnley Island.

I believe this to be the first Australian record of *Tanysiptera galatea*.

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RANGE EXTENSIONS OF THE GREY-HEADED HONEYEATER AND FAN-TAILED CUCKOO

Richard NOSKE

On 4 June 1977 I was birdwatching with Monty Schrader, about 50 km west of Cunnamulla in south-western Queensland (28°05'S, 145°15'E). The vegetation at this site consisted principally of Mulga, *Acacia aneura*, Lancewood *A. petraea*, Emu bush, *Eremophila longifolia*, and Hop bush, *Dodonaea tenuifolia*.

At 1400 hours M.S. briefly observed a honeyeater which he did not immediately recognize. Possibly two or three birds were present. Ten minutes later I located a bird (presumably of the same species) preening about 2 m from the ground in a wild lemon tree, *Coelospermum reticulatum*. I identified it as a Grey-headed Honeyeater, *Meliphaga keartlandi*, because of its uniform grey forehead and crown, blackish lores and ear-coverts, and bright yellow chin and throat. I had seen this species previously on a trip to north-west Queensland, where I photographed it beside Yellow-fronted Honeyeaters, *M. plumula*, at Mount Isa.

The Grey-headed Honeyeater is frequently seen at Opalton (for example Gill (1973), Dawson and Morgan (1974), personal observation), but I cannot find any records for Queensland south of there. However, M.S. states he has seen this species once previously, just north of Cunnamulla. As this is his only record for the species in many years of birdwatching around Cunnamulla, it is likely that it is only an occasional or rare visitor to this region. Nevertheless, these observations extend the known distribution of this honeyeater about 600 km southwards.

The Fan-tailed Cuckoo, *Cacomantis pyrrhophanus* has been recorded in New South Wales from as far west as Bourke (Rogers, 1975), but Storr (1973) described the western limits of this species in southern Queensland as Carnarvon Range, Chinchilla, and Warwick. On 12 June 1977 I observed a single Fan-tailed Cuckoo, about 108 km west of Cunnamulla, in Mulga and Gidgee *Acacia cambagei*. This locality is over 600 km west of the range as given by Storr (1973).

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THE ASIAN DOWITCHER ON THE EAST COAST OF AUSTRALIA

S.G. LANE

On 11 January 1976, T. & P. Gardner (*Aust. Bird Watcher* 6(6): 177-179) reported observing an Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* on the foreshores of Moreton Bay near Brisbane; this was probably the first record of this species for Queensland. In their report they referred to and listed the published records of observations on the species in Australia. In addition, there is an as yet unpublished record from Port Headland.

On 19 September 1977 I observed an Asian Dowitcher on the waterfront at Cairns, Queensland. The bird was in a mixed group of waders at a high tide roost. Other species close by were Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Bar-tailed Godwit *L. lapponica*, Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Great Knot, *C. tenuirostris* and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata*. The dowitcher was in a close group containing both species of godwits and great knots which gave excellent size comparison.

I observed the bird for some 40 minutes with 8x binoculars from about 30 metres. Then I was joined by John Crowhurst and we both watched it for a further 30 minutes, during which time it was occasionally prodded by a godwit, stretched its wings, then bathed and preened before moving off with the other birds as the tide receded.

The description from my field notes follows:

| | |
|-------------|---|
| General: | very snipe-like |
| Size: | slightly smaller than godwits |
| Plumage: | overall somewhat like a sharp-tailed sandpiper |
| Bill: | about the same length as a godwit's but appeared to be very slightly down-curved towards the tip; colour dark grey to blackish, paler at the base |
| Legs: | darkish (dark olive-green) |
| Crown: | darkish brown |
| Eye-stripe: | buffish. |
| Flanks: | slightly spotted |
| Nape: | darkish rust-brown |
| Rump: | finely barred, extending halfway up the back |

Subsequently Crowhurst observed a single bird twice, a week and a fortnight after the first sighting, but has not seen it since. However, one was seen in the same location in October/November 1976 by Messrs Roy Wheeler, John Crowhurst and others after it had been reported in the area by a group of visiting American ornithologists.

A further observation of the Asian Dowitcher on the east coast of Australia was made by J.L. McKean (pers. comm.) in company with J. Bywater and E. MacGibbon on 20 February 1977 at Shoalhaven Heads, New South Wales.

ROOSTING OF SITELLAS

G.R. BERULDSEN

Late on the afternoon of the 27th August 1977 I spent several hours watching a party of seven Varied Sittellas (white-headed form) - *Daphoenositta chrysoptera* at Kenmore, Brisbane. During the half hour or so before sunset their feeding activity increased to a point that could only be described as a frenzy. Shortly after sunset, six of the seven, suddenly, flew a short distance to a thin dead horizontal twig approximately 18 metres above the ground and close under a leafy canopy. They clustered side by side all facing the same direction. There was no jostling for positions, but the outer two appeared to press in as much as possible as the line of birds could be seen to compress. A half minute or so later the seventh flew to the perch and forced a way head to head into the line then turned around to face the same as the other six. Again there was no jostling or squabbling, just soft twittering that quickly died away. The interesting point was that all seven perched head downwards and tail upwards, at an angle estimated to be between 30° and 40°

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A DAYTIME ROOSTING NEST OF THE WHITE-BROWED
 SCRUBWREN, SERICORNIS FRONTALIS

Peter and Bevly HUGHES

The White-browed Scrubwren is relatively common in patches of rainforest and dense wattle on our property. Between a near patch of rainforest and the house is a large, sprawling *Cassia* that forms a dense thicket next the tank stands. It was to a coil of wire netting under one of the tank stands that we followed a presumed pair of White-browed Scrubwrens with nesting material on 6 September, 1977. Construction of the nest took about two weeks. Each morning the two birds approached the nest by the same route, stopping for a few minutes on the way in a lantana bush. On reaching the edge of the *Cassia*, about 7 m from the nest, they ceased their chattering calls as they approached the nest. One bird, male or female, entered the nest while the other remained about a metre away. Most of the morning for about 10 weeks was spent in or near the nest before returning to the rainforest by the same route. On a single occasion the birds came to the nest in the evening. The nest was lined with a scattering of red, yellow, and blue feathers of the noisy pitta, but had no special area for egg-laying. Indeed, no eggs were laid and

it appeared that the nest was used solely as a day-time roost.

Peter and Bevly HUGHES, Hawkins Road, Widgee, via Gympie, Queensland.

BIRDS BATHING BEHAVIOUR

ELLA PRATT

At our family farm late on the afternoon of 27th January 1978, there was a brief heavy sun shower. A group of ten Southern Figbirds (*Sphecotheres vieillotii*) sitting on the western or sunny side of some fig trees were seen to be bathing in the rain as it fell.

The birds started by lowering their heads and fanning their tails. They then let themselves slide gradually over and under the perching twig into the upside-down position when they cupped their wings for from one to three seconds. After they had returned to the upright position, they did much wing shuffling and tail buzzing as when they bathe normally in water or amongst wet leaves.

These figbirds repeated this whole performance a number of times while the rain lasted. At one stage there were five of these birds in the upside-down position simultaneously.

On other occasions, Bar-shouldered Doves (*Geopelia humeralis*) have been observed bathing in rain as it falls. Whilst perched, say, on the top of a fence post or on a fence rail, the bird will fully extend one wing and gradually lie over on one side for a short time before repeating the process with the other wing. This is similar to their behaviour when sun-bathing.

On 5th August 1978 an Olive-backed Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*) was watched bathing in the rain in a similar upside-down manner to that of the figbirds. The oriole, however, had its wings fully opened, its tail fully fanned, and its head thrown right back. This attitude was reminiscent of that of a displaying Paradise Riflebird (*Ptiloris paradiseus*).

MISS ELLA PRATT, Reserve Creek, Murwillumbah, N.S.W. 2484.

SPINE-TAILED SWIFT - TAKE OFF METHOD

ELLA PRATT

A few kilometres east of Murwillumbah in north-east New South Wales on 15 December 1976 my sister picked up from the Condong Range road a disabled Spine-tailed Swift (*Hirondapus caudacutus*). The only damage apparent on the swift was a small graze on its forehead, possibly from collision with a nearby aerial wire used as a banana transport cable from the mountainside down to the road. A great number of swifts were flying very low over the road in the same general area.

The swift was inspected by a veterinary surgeon in Murwillumbah and it was considered to be merely stunned and without broken bones. The swift was given a drink of water and then placed in a small cage. Later that day the swift, which was now very lively, was returned to Reserve Creek, banded and released.

For its release the swift was held out at arm's length on the palm of the hand. It clung to the hand without movement for a few seconds, then raised its wings upward and started to flap them. Almost immediately this wing movement raised the swift vertically and it continued this vertical flight upwards for about eight feet before it levelled out into normal horizontal flight. When last seen it was moving away strongly to the south west. The time of release was 1655 hours.

It is stated by MacDonald (1973) that swifts' legs are short and weak and serve only to carry the clawed toes used for clinging to vertical surfaces. Thus this observation may throw some light on the method by which a spine-tailed swift overcomes the possible difficulty of becoming airborne from a horizontal surface.

This type of flight is referred to under the headings of "Rocketing" and "Winnowing" and described in detail with action photos of other bird species in Jack (1953).

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Macdonald, J.D. 1973. *Birds of Australia*. Reed: Sydney.

MISS E. PRATT, Reserve Creek, Murwillumbah, N.S.W. 2484.

AN OLD RECORD OF THE TURQUOISE PARROT

N.M. JACK

In "Emu" Vol. 43 p. 281 A.H. Chisholm wrote of "An interesting old note-book", first attributed to John Gilbert, then to Eli Waller, and eventually ("Emu" Vol. 65 p. 234) to Henry C. Rawnsley.

One item in the list of species recorded (p. 287) reads: "Grass Parroquet (*Euphema*). This beautiful bird was killed on the hills on the way to the Gap near Brisbane."

Euphema is the obsolete name for the genus of parrots now called *Neophema*. A study of the distribution of this group can only suggest that the specimen collected was the Turquoise Parrot (*Neophema pulchella*). The use of the terms "beautiful" and "grass parroquet" further supports this view.

The Gap is a Brisbane suburb approximately 12 kilometres from the city. The date was, at an estimate, in the late 1850's.

Don Vernon of the Queensland Museum, the author of "Birds of Brisbane and Environs" (1968) informs me that the basis of the inclusion of the Turquoise Parrot in his list was the collecting of a specimen (Q.M. 010422), now in the Queensland Museum, at Esk, about 90 kilometres from Brisbane, in 1965. Vernon's list covers an area extending well beyond the limits of the City of Brisbane.

Evidently the Turquoise Parrot, at one stage thought to be on the verge of extinction, had a much more extensive range in the past, and there is no reason why it should not have occurred here. There is no trace of it around Brisbane or the suburbs at present, so it can be concluded it has died out in the area.

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REVIEW

BIRD COUNT - A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BIRD SURVEYS by Humphrey M. Dobinson, 1976. Penguin Books (Kestrel \$7.50; Peacock (paperback) \$1.95).

Humphrey Dobinson read English at Oxford prior to embarking on a teaching career, latterly concerned with remedial education. He has been an active amateur ornithologist all his life, and has run ornithological clubs at high schools in England. This book is largely based on experience with these clubs, but in addition includes experience gained from sea watches at the Cape Clear Observatory in Ireland. The author has written primarily for enthusiastic young ornithologists in a similar situation to his own students. Let no reader dismiss the book on these grounds, nor on its orientation to English ornithology, for there is much for us all to learn here. Furthermore, his style is concise, lively and enjoyable.

The first part of the book covers identification of common English birds, and will be of little interest to other than expatriates. However, this leads into such topics as describing appearance and behaviour, and writing accurate notes on what has been seen. The remainder of the book is concerned with counts of one form or another. It is interesting to note that counts of the type represented by the Queensland Ornithological Society's Annual Bird Count are not mentioned. This reviewer has long held that such counts achieve little other than a hectic day's bird listing, for such counts usually make no real attempt to cover the same areas from year to year, nor do they attempt to relate species and numbers to habitats, for example. Societies would do well to embark on something more worthwhile and of more lasting value. Dobinson's book provides many ideas for such useful projects. The key is to select small areas, to map them adequately and monitor them regularly. Readers fortunate enough to own or have regular access to a hectare or so of land, whether bush, farm or garden, and particularly bird clubs at country schools, will be able to gain much from these accounts of well-designed census methods. Nesting receives considerable attention, as does migration, although the latter again will be slightly less relevant to Australia than to Europe. The segment on sea watching is equally pertinent to Europe, Australia, or to any other coastline. The book is rounded off with the mention of ringing (banding), ornithological societies, journals, and a particularly useful list of books.

Amateur ornithological societies, in the view of this reviewer at least, urgently need a Humphrey Dobinson to come forward from within their ranks. Societies have their professionals contributing to journals, but few of their amateurs are other than "bird-listers" and consequently contribute little of significance to ornithology. Many would like to contribute more, but need the disciplined guidance and enthusiastic leadership that a Dobinson would provide. What can be achieved with enthusiastic beginners should be apparent from the list of names of Dobinson's pupils in the introduction and their recurrence with items of information throughout the text.

If this review, and the book itself, help to find more Humphrey Dobinsons within ornithological societies, and encourage them to come forward as leaders, it will have well served its purpose.

Graham J. Leach.

BIRDS OF NEW GUINEA AND TROPICAL AUSTRALIA. by William S. Peckover and L.W.C. Filewood published in 1976 by A.H. & A.W. Reed.

'Birds of New Guinea and Tropical Australia', by Bill Peckover and Win Filewood, contains photographs and commentaries on 96 species found on the New Guinea mainland some of which extend to tropical Australia. A feature of the book is complete list of species of Papua New Guinea, Irian Jaya and the Solomon Islands.

In the introduction, it is explained that the region covered by the species list contains three distinct zoogeographical zones - the Admiralty Islands and Bismarck Archipelago, the Solomon Islands, and the whole of the New Guinea subregion. The book indicates in which of these three zones each species can be found, as well as its occurrence outside the region. It is not indicated in the species list which species occur in tropical Australia - an omission, considering the title of the book. Also, in the species list the authors draw a distinction between the eastern and western halves of New Guinea but offer no explanation, other than implying that it is because of the political boundary. A map of the region would have been a useful addition to the book.

The general information in the species list on distributions would be of little use to an individual trying to identify birds in his area, as the altitudinal and habitat preferences of birds in the region, and island zoogeographical influences, are so pronounced as to make such generalisations almost useless in identification. The breeding and migratory habits of species listed are also given, in general terms.

The vernacular names of the species whose distributions cover both New Guinea and tropical Australia were selected to agree with currently accepted Australian vernacular names. The authors hope that these, and the vernacular names they give the other species listed, will gain wide acceptance and therefore help end the confusion created by the proliferation of common names of New Guinea birds seen in the literature

The birds discussed in detail include 81 species from only four orders, comprising 60 species of passerines, five of pigeons and doves, seven each of parrots and kingfishers, the rainbow bee-eater and the kokomo. Another eight orders are represented by 15 species and the remaining six orders of birds found in the region, mostly sea birds, are not represented. There is a bias towards birds of the mainland forests of New Guinea and this is due to the method of obtaining the photographs. Birds had to be mist-netted first, then caged, photographed and released.

Unfortunately, the cage setting is often obvious from the evenly coloured background of blue, and the stark setting. Most of the photographs are of illustrative profiles, although there are some unusual shots of honeyeaters and parrots and pictures of two species of bowerbirds at their bowers, including the very rare tomba bowerbird. Having seen many of the photographed species at close quarters in the field, I find the colour reproduction is very accurate, and have no doubt this applies to all the photographs.

For each species illustrated one, or sometimes two, maps are included to show the known distribution pattern. Where altitude is relevant to the occurrence of a species, the map shows one of four altitudinal zones, whichever most closely corresponds to the distribution of the

species. The portrayal of altitudinal zones tends to be a little confusing at first, but once the reader becomes familiar with them, the maps prove very useful.

For each species in the main text, comments are included on the distribution and general features of the family and on the distribution, habitat, diet and breeding habits of the species. Species of the same, or a related genus, and their distributions are often mentioned, usually by reference to an ecological relationship between species. Complete descriptions are not included, but there are helpful notes on the appearance of adult birds and often of immatures, to supplement the photographs. Otherwise the information given on each species varies and may include interesting taxonomic relationships, roosting or feeding habits, appearance in flight, calls and mating displays. The general tone of writing is informal and often we are told of unusual encounters with birds.

A stated purpose of the book was to partly fill the need for an illustrated guide to the birds of Papua New Guinea. However, because of the limited number of species treated in detail I feel the book best serves as an introduction to the forest species of the mainland of New Guinea. There is some fine, original information contained in the book but much of its content has already been published in more comprehensive works.

P.V. DRISCOLL