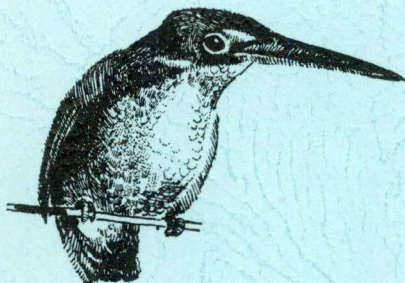


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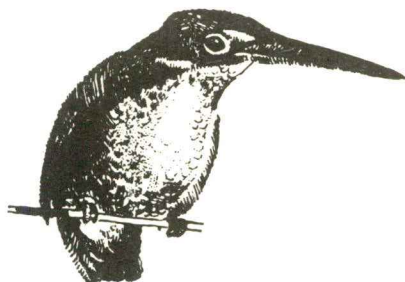
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AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



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THE "REDISCOVERY" OF THE FIRST RECORD OF THE BUSH-HEN FOR AUSTRALIA

WALTER E. BOLES

The Bush-hen *Gallinula olivacea* was first described by A. R. Wallace (1865) from specimens collected from the Moluccas in 1861. A bird taken in 1869 on the Cape River, Queensland by Mr. Rainbird and sent by Mr. F. G. Waterhouse to J. Gould who described it (Gould 1869) was the first known record for Australia. Since that time, specimens and observations have been reported from Cape York south along the Queensland coast to the vicinity of Brisbane (see Morgan and Morgan 1968, Beru'dsen 1975, Clarke 1975) with several unsubstantiated records from coastal Northern Territory (Condon 1975). Recently, the occurrence of *G. olivacea* in New South Wales has been confirmed by specimens and sightings (Rogers 1974, 1975; Fraser and Mendel 1976). During an inventory of The Australian Museum egg collection, the author "rediscovered" a breeding record of this species from 1864, which due to repeated misidentification, remained virtually hidden until this time. The record consists of a clutch of four eggs (Australian Museum registration numbers 0.19703, 0.19704, 0.19707 and 0.19708) contained in the Dobroyde Collection of Mr. E. P. Ramsay.

The identity of the bird responsible for the eggs was a subject of debate for some years. There is an interesting history surrounding the controversy and misidentification of the eggs.

Ramsay's description (1882) of these eggs, which he attributed to the Dusky Moorhen *G. tenebrosa*, read —

"Eggs white or cream colour rather rounded in form, spotted with light reddish spots thicker on the larger end sparingly dispersed over the rest of the surface. 1.55 to 1.6 (sic) X 1.2 (inches) " (p.56).

A. J. North (1889) later provided a more detailed account in his Australian Museum Catalogue:

"This bird *G. tenebrosa* frequents the weedy margins of rivers and creeks and is particularly plentiful on the Richmond and Clarence Rivers. Mr. J. Macgillivray found a nest of this species in a bush on the edge of the latter river on 11th January 1864; it was composed of rushes and other aquatic herbage, and contained four fresh eggs, rather rounded in form, of a pale creamy-white ground colour, freckled and blotched all over with reddish-chestnut and lilac spots, the former colour greatly predominating and becoming larger and more thickly disposed towards the thicker end of the egg. Length (A) 1.55 X 1.15 inch; (B) 1.53 X 1.18 inch; (C) 1.37 X 1.2 inch; (D) 1.55 X 1.2 inch.

Upon comparing these eggs with those of *Gallinula ruficrissa*, (Gould) from Northern Australia, and with those of *Amaurornis moluccana*, (Wallace), from New Britain, (the two latter of which are declared to be identical by some ornithologists) it will be seen that there is little or no variation in either their colour or measurements." (p.325).

The identification of the eggs as those of *G. tenebrosa* by both men was disputed by A. J. Campbell. In a review of North's Catalogue, he stated (Campbell 1893: 74) —

"The description I particularly take exception to is the Gallinule (*Gallinula tenebrosa*, Gould). Mr. North has evidently re-described the same set of eggs that Dr. Ramsay used in the "Proceedings Linnaean Society N.S.W.," Vol. vii., p.56 (1882), and I informed Dr. Ramsay I was of the opinion he had described Rail's eggs instead. And so sure was I of it that I took the opportunity of personally collecting the eggs of the Gallinule in an arm of Lake King, Gippsland, where the birds were numerous. I also shot a pair of birds which, together with the eggs, I presented to Dr. Ramsay, at The Australian Museum, in order that he might have an opportunity of correcting his own error. He has not, however, seen fit to do so. They have probably described the eggs of the Red-necked Rail *Rallina tricolor*, Gray, instead of the Gallinule, which is a larger bird. Here are the cardinal points of their two descriptions of the eggs, given in parallel columns, which it will be seen are almost identical:-

Gallinule (page 325). --	Red-necked Rail (330). --
Pale creamy white --	Pale cream --
blotched with reddish	spots reddish chestnut,
chestnut and lilac spots	and a few of lilac tinge.
First egg measured 1.53 X 1.15 inches	First egg measured 1.55 X 1.1 inches."

In his own work on nests and eggs, Campbell (1900) elaborated further on the controversy.

"Dr. Ramsay was good enough to show me the eggs referred to and collected in the Richmond and Clarence River districts by Mr Macgillivray, 11th January, 1864, which

(1.58 X 1.15) are much too small for the Gallinule, resembling those of a Rail and being exactly like those of *Rallina tricolor*. During a visit to Sydney, 1885, I presented Dr. Ramsay, then the Curator of the Australian Museum, with the birds I shot in Gippsland, together with a pair of the eggs I collected there. When the "Descriptive Catalogue of Nests and Eggs" issued by that institution appeared, it was natural that I expected to see these specimens, the eggs at any events, referred to, more especially as there had been a dispute about the species. But nothing was mentioned, except again to redescribe the wrong eggs for this species." (pp.755-756).

In the second volume of "Nests and Eggs", North (1909) illustrated two eggs of *R. tricolor* and two of the Chestnut-bellied Rail *Eulabeornis castaneoventris* (plate B.XII. figures 3-4 and 5-6 respectively). When the accompanying text appeared in volume four (North 1913), he stated under the discussion of *Amaurornis moluccana* (= *G. olivacea*) that all four illustrations were attributable to this bird. He also gave a valid description of the eggs of *G. tenebrosa*, but made no mention of the eggs in question or the surrounding controversy. It is possible that this was due to North's intense dislike of Campbell. Throughout his work, no reference was made of Campbell or any of his findings (Serventy 1972).

The label on the eggs reads: Name — *Gallinula tenebrosa*; Loc. — Grafton, N.S.W.; Date — 1864. This has been annotated (ca. 1912) by Mr. Roy Kinghorn, former Curator of Birds at the Australian Museum, to read "*Amaurornis ruficrissa*". Although he appears to have been the first to correctly determine the eggs' identity, he regrettably did not pursue the matter further and thus did not realise the significance of the record. It was the annotation, an earlier name for the Bush-hen, that caught the author's attention.

A comparison of the Grafton eggs with *G. olivacea* eggs from northern Queensland, New Guinea and Solomon Islands and those of *G. tenebrosa* and *R. tricolor* easily resolves the controversy. The eggs of *G. tenebrosa* have a much darker background colour and darker spots and are considerably larger. "A set of five eggs of *G. tenebrosa*, taken at Gordonbrook, on the Upper Clarence River, measures — Length (A) 2.05 X 1.42 inches; (North 1913: 227-228). Oological specimens of *R. tricolor*, although slightly smaller than eggs of *G. olivacea*, differ markedly in colour. The white eggs are unique among Australian rallids. Eggs of other species with which confusion could develop are also noticeably different in size, colour and/or shape. Alternatively, there is close agreement between the 1864 eggs and those of *G. olivacea* from other localities. There is little doubt that the eggs in question belong to *G. olivacea*.

The misidentification as *G. tenebrosa* by Ramsay and the perpetuation of this error by North are difficult to understand considering the relative size of the eggs and the abundance of the Dusky Moorhen in the area of collection (see North's (1889) statement above). Admittedly, Ramsay's oological description was the first for "*G. tenebrosa*" in Australia, but undoubtedly valid eggs of this species had been found by the time of North's Catalogue seven years later. Eggs of *G. olivacea* were known from other localities and were available for comparison; one was described by North (1889: 326).

Campbell's assertion that the species involved was *R. tricolor* is also unusual. At the time of the controversy, this species was not known further south than northern Queensland

(Campbell 1900: 742). Although the collecting site of the 1864 eggs was not given in Ramsay's original description, it was listed by North (1889). There is a consistent size difference between the eggs of both species, while a comparison of the colours should have been diagnostic. Unfortunately, the authorities were also having disagreements over the true colour of *R. tricolor* eggs (see the description by North (1889) quoted by Campbell (1900)). The arguments concerning the egg colour have been summarised by Boles (1976). Locality, colour and size would deny Campbell's claim that *R. tricolor* produced the Grafton eggs.

Eggs of both *G. tenebrosa* and *R. tricolor*, as well as all other Australian rallids, except *G. olivacea*, differ significantly from the Grafton specimens. This record of *G. olivacea* predates Wallace's (1865) original description which did not appear until the following year so it is understandable that the early authorities encountered difficulties in dealing with it. As the collection of these eggs occurred five years prior to the record reported by Gould (1869), it is the earliest known record of *G. olivacea* in Australia.

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WALTER G. BOLES, *Australian Museum, Sydney, N.S.W. 2000.*

* * *

THE BUSH—HEN IN NEW SOUTH WALES

G. C. FRASER and G. J. MENDEL

The Bush-hen *Gallinula olivacea* was only known from the Northern Territory and Northern Queensland until 1964 when Morgan and Morgan (1968) observed the species breeding at Gold Creek, a Brisbane suburb. The Bush-hen has subsequently been reported in South Eastern Queensland on several occasions (Beruldsen 1975, Clarke 1975) and in 1973 a specimen was found at Wardell on the Richmond River in North-eastern New South Wales (in Rogers 1973). This report describes that specimen and records some recent observations in the Tweed-Richmond Region.

The first specimen was collected (GCF) as a roadside casualty 5 km north of Wardell on 13 January 1973. The bird was photographed but the specimen has since been lost. The plumage was in good condition although the right wing was missing. The upperparts were a warm olive brown, grading to a steel grey on the breast, throat and head. The undertail coverts were rufous and this shaded into greyer tones on the thighs and abdomen. The bill was dark olive green except for a small basal orange area on the upper mandible. The legs and feet were olive brown.

Two more road casualties were subsequently collected (GJM). A badly damaged specimen was found on 13 December 1973 at the Wardell locality and a second 3 km west of Alstonville on 23 February 1976. This specimen was forwarded to the Australian Museum and the following information was kindly supplied by Mr. W. E. Boles:-

Registration Number: 045372 Data Sheet Number DSN 5419, Weight 175 g, Total length 285 mm, Wing 155 mm, Tail 65 mm, Wing spread 485 mm, Culmen 33 mm, Tarsus 55 mm, Skull: hard but not pneumatized; Molt: no wing, tail or body molt; Sex: no gonads found due to internal damage; Soft parts: iris — dark brown; bill — green; legs — dark olive green; Stomach contents: reddish seeds.

A fourth specimen was given to us by Mr. R. Smith who found it under the transmission tower on Mount Nardi near Nimbin on 9 March 1974. This find followed heavy

rain and flooding associated with cyclonic conditions in the area. This specimen was smaller than the other three and lacked the orange patch at the base of the upper mandible.

We have observed the Bush-hen at two different localities. On 9 January 1974 one of us (GJM) obtained excellent sightings of a pair of adults and three juveniles at a pond on the Ballina Golf Course. The adults were similar to the dead birds but their legs were yellowish-brown. The juveniles were predominately grey and the most striking features were the tuft of sprouting tail feathers and the well developed legs and feet. While the birds were exposed on a track beside the pond the adult birds called frequently. The call could best be described a "click-click". Single adult birds were subsequently seen at this location by ourselves and other observers (in Rogers 1975).

On 14 February 1976 at Alstonville only 1.5 km from the site where our third specimen was obtained one of us (GCF) saw a pair with a single young crossing a road. As the observer's vehicle approached, one adult and the juvenile rushed into dense grass while the remaining bird moved slowly backward and forwards flicking its wings repeatedly. This bird remained on the road approximately 5 metres from the car for about 30 seconds before finally disappearing with its mate.

The location at Wardell is near the source of a natural drain. The vegetation is dominated in the wetter areas by the Broad-leafed Paperbark *Melaleuca quinquenervia* while in the drier areas, species typical of marginal rainforest are found. These include Black Wattle *Callicoma serratifolia*, Brown Kurrajong *Commersonia bartramia*, Bangalow Palm *Archontophoenix cunninghamiana* and *Euodia ellergona*. The ground cover is a variable mixture of grasses, ferns and sedges and there are thickets of Lantana *Lantana comara* between the trees. The area is surrounded by land which has been cleared for grazing and the cultivation of sugar cane. At the pond at Ballina the wetter areas are again dominated by Broad-leafed Paperbark while the rainforest species include Corkwood *Duboisia myoporoides*, Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon* and a Bleeding Heart *Omalanthus sp.* There is a dense thicket of Lantana on the drier margin of the pond. The sites at Alstonville are at the sources of tributaries of two creeks. They are surrounded by cleared grazing country with very few rainforest trees left standing. Both sites are overgrown by Lantana. Mount Nardi is surrounded by dense sub-tropical rainforest but there are several creeks nearby which would provide suitable habitat.

Several other observers have seen the Bush-hen in North-eastern New South Wales. In the early 1960's, Mr. N. Jackson of Teven saw the bird and his observations were responsible for the species' inclusion in a list published by the Richmond Valley Naturalists Club. The sightings made by J. Izzard on 7 May 1973 and on 4 May 1974 at Ballina are notable as they are the only records falling outside the December to February period and coincide with the latest records of Clarke. The report by Pratt (1976) of a breeding record of the Bush-hen near Murwillumbah confirms previous sightings (in litt.) on 26 December 1960 and 28 December 1971 by the same observer. In 1960 a nest containing six eggs was observed and in 1971 one adult was seen giving a broken wing distraction display. Miss Pratt's most recent observation here was on 15 January 1976 when a pair with young chicks was seen.

The discovery of a clutch of eggs of the Bush-hen in the Australian Museum by W. E. Boles (1976) has proved that this species was present in New South Wales in 1864.

At the present time the Bush-hen is an uncommon breeding resident on the Richmond River. Most observations have been made in mid-summer when the bird is breeding and the behaviour of the adult birds makes them more likely to be seen. At this time the habits of the Bush-hen make it no more difficult to see than other Rallidae such as Land Rail *Rallus philippensis* and Spotted Crake *Porzana fluminea* and it seems improbable that it could have been overlooked in south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales since MacGillivray collected the clutch on the Clarence. Perhaps the species has undergone periodic expansion and retraction of its range during this interval. The lack of records from May until December may indicate that the species is migrating as discussed by Clarke and Beraldsen (loc. cit.).

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THE COLOUR OF RED-NECKED RAIL EGGS: A HISTORICAL DEBATE

WALTER E. BOLES

In the initial stages of Australian ornithology, considerable knowledge was accumulated through the efforts of naturalists such as E. P. Ramsay, A. J. North and A. J. Campbell. Yet much of these pioneers' energies were not directed to objective pursuits but expended in heated debates developing from the intense rivalries among them. For common species, few areas of controversy arose, but for those in remote sections of Australia or with secretive habits, difficulties were occasionally encountered.

One of these controversies involved the question of the true egg colour of the Rednecked Rail *Rallina tricolor*. Unless the parent was collected while actually incubating, the sulking habits of this bird made it difficult to obtain positively identified oological specimens. The problem was compounded by its restricted occurrence to Cape York. The controversy began when J. Gould (1869) provided the first description of *R. tricolor* from Australia. In it he said:

"Mr. Cockerell states....he once found the nest and eggs, which he says were white; if this be the case it is the only instance known to me of the eggs of a Rail being destitute of colour". (facing plate 78).

E. P. Ramsay (1875) took issue with this description and related, "I received a fine set of these eggs from Inspector Robert Johnstone, to whom the bird is well known, and who assures me that after finding the nest and eggs he left it until he had twice seen the bird sitting thereon, that he might be perfectly sure there could be no mistake as to their identity. I had informed Mr. Johnstone of my doubts as to the authenticity of the eggs mentioned by Mr. Gould, on the authority of Mr. Cockerell, who, I have been informed, did not actually take them himself the eggs in question having been brought to his companion, Mr. J. Thorpe, by a black fellow. I have before me one of these white and so-called Rail's eggs, which I obtained from Mr. Thorpe on his return with Cockerell from Cape York, and can only say that it is remarkably like that of a Pigeon (!) in every respect. The eggs forwarded by Inspector Johnstone, of the authenticity of which I have not the slightest doubt, have pale cream or whitish ground-colour, sprinkled all over, but more thickly at the larger end of some, with irregular-shaped spots light reddish chestnut, and a few of a lilac tinge appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell, having the characteristic form, marking and colour of all true Rail's eggs. They are four in number, in length 1.5 to 1.6 inch, in breadth 1.07 to 1.1 inch". (p.604).

A. J. North (1889) presented Ramsay's description verbatim in his Descriptive Catalogue and illustrated a spotted egg for *R. tricolor* (plate 17). This description was later quoted by A. J. Campbell (1893) in a dispute with North over the identity of a clutch of rail eggs from Grafton, N.S.W. (see Boles 1976).

In his "Nest and Eggs of Australian Birds", Campbell (1900) regarded the eggs of *R. tricolor* to be "fairly blotched and spotted, particularly about the larger end with rufous or reddish-brown and purple" (p. 743), but he described other clutches that he had seen including eggs:

"taken in the Cooktown district....also white....as mentioned by Mr. Cockerell, attributed to a Rail, whether this Rail or some other bird has yet to be proved. A set of three of these white eggs may be seen in the collection of Mr. D. Le Souef. They resemble in shape and size those of the Red-necked Rail, minus the markings, but apparently stouter in the shell and have more gloss on the surface". (p. 743-744).

Campbell mentioned that Kendall Broadbent felt "from very strong circumstantial evidence the white eggs are Red-necked Rail's" and quoted from Broadbent's field notes:

".... one morning, when crawling as usual in the ferns, I nearly broke two beautiful eggs laid on the ground amongst the ferns in a little circular basin lined with a few bits of leaves and small pieces of dead sticks, just scrub rubbish. The eggs were quite warm. I shot the female (Red-necked Rail) just as she was beginning to sit, judging by her breast feathers". (p. 744).

Both G. M. Mathews (1910) and A. H. S. Lucas and W. H. D. Le Souef (1911) attributed spotted eggs to *R. tricolor* but the latter authorities qualified this by adding "occasionally pure white".

When the second volume of North's (1909) "Nests and Eggs" appeared, it illustrated two spotted eggs for *R. tricolor* (plate B.X11. figures 3 and 4). Four years later, however, he referred both these figures, as well as numbers 5 and 6, originally labelled 'Chestnut-bellied Rail *Eulabeornis castaneiventris*', to the Bush-hen *Gallinula olivacea*. The description for *R. tricolor* has changed significantly:

"The eggs are five in number for a sitting, oval in form, dull white, the shell being close-grained, smooth and lustrous. An egg of a set of four taken by Mr. B. Jardine, in January, 1901, measures:- Length (A) 1.45 X 1.03 inches. A set of five in Dr. W. Macgillivray's collection, taken at Cape York on the 27th February, 1913, measures:- Length (A) 1.42 X 1.03 inches; (B) 1.43 X 1.02 inches; (C) 1.43 X 1.02 inches; (D) 1.39 X 1.01 inches; (E) 1.38 X 1.01 inches". (p. 208).

This change was in response to evidence provided by several other notable collectors. Both J. A. Thorpe and K. Broadbent have assured North that *R. tricolor* laid white eggs while H. G. Barnard provided the following notes, quoted by the author:

"One nest, containing four pure white eggs, was found by the bird dashing from it as I walked past. The nest, or what there was of it, was placed at the foot of a tree, and merely consisted of a hole scooped in the ground, in which a few dead leaves were placed. Being very anxious to secure this bird from the nest, and knowing my only hope of doing so was to shoot her while sitting on it, I took the Rail's eggs out and placed in their stead four eggs of *Tanysiptera sylvia*, which I had in my collecting bag, and retired a short distance and lay beside a tree from where I commanded a view of the nest. It was ten o'clock in the morning when I took my position,

but it was four o'clock in the afternoon before the bird crept quietly on to the nest and sad down. I at once fired, with the result that I killed the bird, and smashed the Kingfisher's eggs to atoms". (p. 208).

Dr. W. Macgillivray also related to North several experiences with white *R. tricolor* eggs, prompting North to conclude "It is not safe always to reason by analogy that the eggs of a certain group of birds bear a resemblance to one another".

From the descriptions by the various authorities and in recent reference works (e.g. Macdonald 1973), it appears that white is indeed the predominant, if not the only, egg colour for this species. One cannot be certain whether the eggs described by Ramsay (1885) were truly those of *R. tricolor*. The illustration in North (1889) is very similar to the eggs of the Bush-hen *G. olivacea* which is found in the same habitat in Cape York. Additionally, the measurements of the spotted eggs given by North (1889) and Campbell (1900) are very similar to those of *G. olivacea* (23 specimens cited by North (1913) average 1.55 X 1.10 inches), while the measurements of the white eggs presented by North (1913) in his later work are consistently smaller (average of five specimens is 1.41 X 1.02 inches).

The resolution of a concurrent debate among these authorities, involving spotted rail eggs misidentified as those of *R. tricolor*, was delayed for some years as a result of this controversy (see Boles 1976).

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SEABIRD MORTALITY IN NEW SOUTH WALES IN 1975

GLENN HOLMES

ABSTRACT

During 1975 members and friends of the Field Ornithologists Club travelled 2329 km of the New South Wales coastline and found 4228 dead or stranded seabirds. Large mortalities were observed in late summer, which mostly involved Short-tailed and Fluttering Shearwaters, and in June-July, which consisted mainly of Little Penguins, Fairy Prions and Fluttering Shearwaters. The mortality for October-December was unusually low but it contained a relatively large mortality of Sooty Shearwaters in November in the Coffs Harbour zone. Other relatively large mortalities included juvenile Short-tailed Shearwaters in the Coffs Harbour zone in May, White-headed Petrels and Sooty Albatrosses in the Wollongong zone in June and Australian Gannets in the northern zones in spring. Species rarely found beach-washed in New South Wales included two Grey-headed Albatrosses, a Yellow-nosed Albatross, nine sooty albatrosses, an Antarctic Fulmar, two Kerguelen Petrels and two Grey Ternlets.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the results of the NSWFOC beach patrol scheme for 1975. The zonal divisions of the NSW coastline (Morris, 1972) have been modified slightly with respect to local geography. The ten zones from north to south are now defined by the following : Queensland border; Evans River; Red Rock; Hat Head; Khappinghat Creek; Red Head; Georges River; Beecroft Head; Mullimburra Point; Pambula River; Victorian border. Within the 2329 km travelled 4228 dead or stranded seabirds of 41 species were found, giving the low mean mortality of 1.8 birds per km. A good coverage was obtained in the Maclean-Coffs Harbour-Hastings zones where Glenn Holmes travelled 1895 km using a motorcycle. In the Newcastle, Bega and Mallacoota zones coverage was poor or absent.

Table 1 shows the monthly rates of seabird mortality in birds per km. Tables 11 and 111 give the monthly and zonal distribution of seabird mortality for each species. Previous seabird reports for 1970 to 1973 were cited in the 1974 report (Holmes & Morris, 1975). These are the basis for any comparisons with species discussed in this report. When the 1975 records of a species are consistent with previous observations or do not add substantially to its known status in NSW it is not discussed in the following section.

The nomenclature follows Condon (1975).

PENGUINS

An exceptional mortality of Little Penguins *Eudyptula minor* occurred. Most of the 64 were found in June and July well after the fledging period. The most northerly record was of one at Port Macquarie on 28 July.

PETRELS

Two adult Grey-headed Albatrosses *Diomedea chrysostoma* were found, at Austinmer Beach on 21 June and at Woody Head on 23 September. These were the sixth and eighth NSW records (Rogers, 1976). An adult Yellow-nosed Albatross *D. chlororhynchos* was found near Woody Head on 30 July. Although present at sea in small numbers from May to September (pers. obs.) this species is seldom beach-washed in NSW. The nine sooty albatrosses *Phoebastria* spp. found in the Wollongong and Ulladulla zones were exceptional. In addition to the seven given by Rogers (1976), unidentified sooty albatrosses were found at Steamer Beach on 15 June and at Mary Bay on 27 October, both near Jervis Bay.

Two Antarctic Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialisoides* were the eighth and ninth found beach-washed in NSW; at Caves Beach near Jervis Bay on 5 September (Rogers, 1976) and at Ballina on 21 September. One Cape Petrel *Daption capense* was found, giving a second year of low mortality following the high mortalities of 1972 and 1973.

Of the 11 Great-winged Petrels *Pterodroma macroptera*, six were found in the Wollongong zone in June, which is a large number for this month. A freshly dead individual near Crowdy Head on 28 September was an unusual date. Holmes and Morris (1975) stated that the regular mortality of this species despite the low and irregular numbers observed on the continental shelf, especially in northern NSW, suggested a pelagic distribution. This supports the previous conclusions of Norris (1967) which were based on limited observation. The 13 White-headed Petrels *P. lessonii* were exceptional, especially the 11 in the Wollongong zone in late June, as only nine had been found in the preceding five years. The Providence Petrel *P. solandri* again occurred in reasonable numbers but only in the northern zones. As Norris (1967) observed only one in the Tasman Sea, 30 km south-east of Newcastle on 17 September 1962, this supports the contention of Holmes and Morris (1975) that the continental margin in northern NSW is an important feeding area. Once again the Kerguelen Petrels *P. brevirostris* found in NSW occurred within a limited time interval. Two were found in the Tweed Heads zone, on 9 and 14 September. A third individual was found nearby at Mermaid Beach in Queensland on 13 September (Vernon & Fleay, 1975). A Gould Petrel *P. leucoptera* found at Cronulla on 27 May was an unusually late date and an immature in worn plumage found near Woolgoolga on 15 November was early.

The mortality of prions *Pachyptila* spp. was greater than the previous maximum of 1973 which was dominated by the Antarctic Prion *P. desolata*. The 1975 mortality consisted mainly of Fairy Prions *P. turtur*. There was an interesting occurrence of three Slender-billed Prions *P. belcheri* on northern Sydney beaches in early July; on 5 July one was also found dead about 8 km off Sydney Heads (A. Rogers pers. comm.)

The low mortality of Short-tailed Shearwaters *Puffinus tenuirostris* was comparable to that of 1973, which was a "below average" year (Holmes & Morris, 1975). In contrast the closely related Sooty Shearwater *P. griseus* suffered a relatively large mortality in November, mainly in the Coffs Harbour zone. The Grey-backed Shearwater *P. bulleri* was found near Ballina on 22 October. This species is a regular visitor to south-eastern Australia in small numbers (Holmes 1975) and is now recorded in three of the six seabird reports. The 120

Fluttering Shearwaters *P. gavia* greatly exceeded the maximum of 44 in 1974. The February mortality was again large but this year 72 were found in June and July.

GANNETS, CORMORANTS AND TROPICBIRDS

As in 1974 a large number of Australian Gannets *Sula serrator* were found but in 1975 they were confined to the northern zones. The maximum mortality occurred in September-October, whereas in 1974 it was in March-April. The 17 in this period consisted of 13 immatures and four adults. For the first time the Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* was not the most abundant cormorant, being displaced by the Little Pied Cormorant *P. melanoleucos*. An immature White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* was found near Coffs Harbour on 5 May.

SKUAS, GULLS AND TERNS

This was the first year when skuas *Stercorarius spp.* were not found. The proportion of Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* to Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* was smaller than in previous years, being less than two to one. The adult Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* found near Dee Why on 4 July may have been an early returning bird for this date is unusual in NSW. The number of White-fronted Terns *S. striata* was related to their abundance, for in 1975 they were observed in numbers north to south-eastern Queensland (C. Corben, pers. comm.). In 1974 they were completely absent from northern NSW (pers. obs.) and none was found dead anywhere in NSW. The two dead Grey Ternlets *Procelsterna cerulea*, at Windang on 19 January and near Sawtell on 2 February, occurred in a year exceptional for records of this species (Holmes 1976). A juvenile Common Noddy *Anous stolidus* found alive at Ballina on 20 December later died (Rogers 1976).

PATTERNS OF MORTALITY

The broad pattern of mortality in 1975 was rather unusual as the maxima occurred in late summer and in June-July. In late summer only two species were well represented, the Short-tailed and Fluttering Shearwaters. Most individuals were found in the Ulladulla zone in February. The Fluttering Shearwaters were fresh but the Short-tailed Shearwaters were thought to have mostly died in early January. No gales occurred in January and February, although strong winds on the southern coast during 2-4 January (anon, 1975) may have contributed to the Short-tailed Shearwater mortality.

Despite the occurrence of gales and strong winds in March and April (Anon, 1975) mortality was very low.

In May 41 Short-tailed Shearwaters were found in the Coffs Harbour zone; 30 of these were found freshly dead up to 8 May between Sawtell and Woolgoolga. These birds were juveniles as all had fresh plumage. Most were so emaciated that seven had a mean weight of only 269 g (pers. obs.). They were obviously part of the northward post-fledging migration that has been observed off Coffs Harbour from April to July, with a maximum in May (pers. obs.). This movement is probably not very extensive and most likely involves only the northern part of the breeding distribution. Weather did not contribute to this mortality, for strong winds did not occur before 14 May.

The greatest and most diverse mortality occurred in the Sydney-Wollongong-Ulladulla zones in June and July. Ocean gales and strong southerly winds in coastal waters during 12-15 June (Anon 1975) were apparently responsible for a large mortality in the Ulladulla zone, where 4 km were patrolled on 15 June. This included 429 Fairy Prions and 24 Fluttering Shearwaters. Easterly gales on the central and southern coasts followed during 21-22 June, with a maximum wind gust of 77 knots recorded at Newcastle (Anon, 1975). A large mortality in the Wollongong zone included 34 Little Penguins, six sooty albatrosses, 11 White-headed Petrels, 289 Fairy Prions and 21 Fluttering Shearwaters. In early July, following easterly gales in ocean waters and strong southerly winds on the coast (Anon 1975), 11 Little Penguins and 287 Fairy Prions were found in the Sydney zone and 97 prions and 16 Fluttering Shearwaters in the Ulladulla zone.

The occurrence of gales and strong winds in all months from August to December (Anon 1975) resulted in very little mortality. The only species that suffered relatively large mortalities in this period were the Australian Gannet, mainly in September and October in the northern zones, and the Sooty Shearwater in November in the Coffs Harbour zone. It is remarkable that of 29 gannets found in 1975 none occurred in the Sydney-Wollongong-Ulladulla zones. The high mortality of Sooty Shearwaters when compared to the low mortality of the closely related Short-tailed Shearwater suggests that these species have a marked food difference. A similar proportion was found near Newcastle in the 1970-1971 season. This possible difference is supported also by the 1968-1969 season, when the proportional relationship was reversed (*pers. obs.*). Perhaps the Sooty Shearwater is less dependent on plankton than the Short-tailed Shearwater.

It is interesting to indicate here the aspects of the 1975 mortality in New Zealand (Veitch 1976) that correspond to those in NSW. In July there were large numbers of Little Penguins, prions and Fluttering Shearwaters and in October-November large numbers of Sooty Shearwaters. David Crockett (*pers. comm.*) reported that on the Auckland west coast there were 299 White-headed Petrels found between July and December and 384 Antarctic Fulmars in September.

The northward decrease in density shown in the 1974 mortality was repeated in 1975. From Table 1 there were 3347 birds found in the Sydney-Wollongong-Ulladulla zones and only 774 in the much better covered Maclean- Coffs Harbour-Hastings zones. The southward increase in density continued to New Zealand where 21130 birds were found in 3583 km (Veitch 1976).

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TABLE I
Monthly rates of seabird mortality (birds/km) in N.S.W. during 1975.

ZONE	Jan	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May.	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	TOTALS
Tweed Heads Km Birds		22 42		1 0	10 0	24 15		11 2	44 12	3 8	1 1	5 16	96
Maclean Km Birds	30 22	30 11	30 1	26 0	30 1	30 5	30 4	23 0	30 3	30 9	30 37	30 17	110
Coffs Harbour Km Birds	67 105	67 55	69 14	61 4	97 48	84 55	83 22	54 2	70 10	71 27	83 143	54 14	499
Hastings Km Birds	37 48	27 18	24 2	37 1	37 2	37 12	37 2	28 1	37 7	24 14	31 14	37 40	165
Newcastle Km Birds	12 11												11
Sydney Km Birds	4 7	10 10	3 1			23 55	27 306			10 130	2 28	6 29	566
Wollongong Km Birds	7 16	3 1	8 1	7 10	2 8	30 454	15 44	8 9	2 0	149 8	10 101	11 270	1063
Ulladulla Km Birds		9 942				4 510	7 121		3 7	3 106		2 32	1718
Bega Km Birds													
Mallacoota Km Birds													
Total Km patrolled	157	168	134	132	176	232	199	124	186	149	157	145	-
Total Km travelled (not listed)	191	182	146	153	236	296	216	142	198	193	203	173	2329
Total Birds	209	1079	19	15	59	1048	514	14	38	442	373	418	4228
Birds/km patrolled	1.3	6.4	0.1	0.1	0.3	4.5	2.6	0.1	0.2	3.0	2.4	2.9	-
Birds/km travelled	1.1	5.9	0.1	0.1	0.3	3.5	2.4	0.1	0.2	2.3	1.8	2.4	1.8

TABLE II

MONTHLY SEABIRD MORTALITY IN N.S.W. DURING 1975.

SPECIES	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	TOTALS
Little Penguin		2		2		37	17	3	3				64
Wandering Albatross						2					I		3
Black-browed Albatross						2				I		I	4
Grey-headed Albatross						I			I				2
Yellow-nosed Albatross							I						I
White-capped Albatross						2	I		I				4
Albatross species						I							I
Sooty Albatross						6							6
Light-mantled Albatross						I							I
Sooty Albatross species						I				I			2
Southern Giant-petrel						I			I				2
Giant-petrel species									I				I
Antarctic Fulmar									I				I
Cape Petrel						I							I
Great-winged Petrel	I		I			6			I			2	11
White-headed Petrel						12			I				13
Providence Petrel					I	I					I	2	5
Kerguelen Petrel									2				2
Gould Petrel		I			I						I		3
Medium-billed Prion						2							2
Antarctic Prion						26	4				I		31
Slender-billed Prion							3						3
Fairy Prion						818	371	4	3	2			1198
Prion species		2				46	81	I	2	I			133
Flesh-footed Shearwater	2	3							I	I	3	I	11
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	7	6	2	3	6				3	2	18	10	57
Grey-backed Shearwater										I			I
Sooty Shearwater	I	I				I				2	43	I	49
Short-tailed Shearwater	187	1018	8	7	48	6	2			401	290	386	2353
Fluttering Shearwater	6	31	I			52	20	3	I	3	2	I	120
Hutton's Shearwater											I		I
Little Shearwater					I	4							5
Shearwater species		5					2			12			19
White-faced Storm-petrel		I										I	2
Australian Gannet	I	2	4					2	11	6	3		29
Pied Cormorant						I	I		I				3
Little Pied Cormorant			I				I		I		3		6
Black Cormorant						I				2	I		4
Little Black Cormorant										I	I	I	3
White-tailed Tropicbird					I								I
Silver Gull	2	I	2	2	I		4			3		9	24
Sooty Tern		I					I				I		3
Crested Tern	I	4		I		I	2		I	3	3	2	18
White-fronted Tern						15	3	I	2				21
Tern species						I							I
Common Noddy												I	I
Grey Ternlet	I	I											I
TOTAL	209	1079	19	15	59	1048	514	14	38	442	373	418	4228

TABLE III

ZONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SEABIRD MORTALITY IN N.S.W. DURING 1975

SPECIES	TH	MC	CH	HS	NC	SY	WG	UL	BG	MA	TOTALS
Little Penguin				2		13	41	8			64
Wandering Albatross		I					2				3
Black-browed Albatross							3	I			4
Grey-headed Albatross		I					I				2
Yellow-nosed Albatross		I									I
White-capped Albatross	I							3			4
Albatross species						I					I
Sooty Albatross							5	I			6
Light-mantled Albatross							I				I
Sooty Albatross species							I	I			2
Southern Giant-petrel	I						I				2
Giant-petrel species	I										I
Antarctic Fulmar	I										I
Cape Petrel							I				I
Great-winged Petrel		2		I		2	6				11
White-headed Petrel	I					I	11				13
Providence Petrel	2		2	I							5
Kerguelen Petrel	2										2
Southern Petrel	I		I				I				3
Medium-billed Prion						I	I				2
Antarctic Prion			2	I		2	19	7			31
Slender-billed Prion						3					3
Fairy Prion	9	3	65	5		327	345	444			1198
Prion species	I		I					131			133
Flesh-footed Shearwater	I	4	3	2		I					11
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	2	9	30	12		2	I	I			57
Grey-backed Shearwater	I										I
Sooty Shearwater		6	35	3		2	2	I			49
Short-tailed Shearwater	51	66	309	113	11	194	564	1045			2353
Fluttering Shearwater	5		13	9		5	31	57			120
Hutton's Shearwater		I									I
Little Shearwater	I					I	3				5
Shearwater species	5							14			19
White-faced Storm-petrel				I		I					2
Australian Gannet	I	5	17	6							29
Pied Cormorant	I	2									3
Little Pied Cormorant	2	3	I								6
Black Cormorant		I		2			I				4
Little Black Cormorant			2				I				3
White-tailed Tropicbird			I								I
Silver Gull			3	2		2	17				24
Sooty Tern			I			I		I			3
Crested Tern		4	9	2			2	I			18
White-fronted Tern	5	I	3	3		7	I	I			21
Tern species								I			I
Common Noddy	I										I
Grey Ternlet			I				I				2
TOTAL	96	110	499	165	11	566	1063	1718	0	0	4228

UNUSUAL FEEDING METHOD OF THE PIED OYSTERCATCHER

D. I. SMEDLEY

I was driving along the beach at Point Plomer near Port Macquarie N.S.W. on 20 September 1976 when a Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* wandered down from the debris at the base of the dune near the top of the beach.

Thinking the bird may have a nest nearby I decided to reverse and await developments. Nothing further occurred and the bird, after a short while, moved further down the beach and commenced feeding along the waterline with its mate. I then approached the area on foot. As the sand has been smoothed by the previous night's rain, I was able to retrace the birds' footprints to a large driftwood log, 0.6 metres in diameter, that had been left by the ebb tide.

By the number of disturbed footprints and the small handful of wood-chips at the base, the bird must have paid the log considerable attention. As there were no barnacles or other crustacea on the log I can only assume that the bird dug into the broken base of the log (evidenced by the wood-chips) to obtain some other sort of food; perhaps one of the wood boring marine molluscs.

As I could find no other reference to this method of feeding and had not previously observed it myself, the driftwood must have provided an opportunist food source which, because of its irregular occurrence on beaches, would not form part of the regular food supply.

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A THIRD OCCURRENCE OF THE GREEN PYGMY-GOOSE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

D. G. GOSPER

On 2 February 1975 I located a single Green Pygmy-goose *Nettapus pulchellus* on Swan Bay, a billabong of the Richmond River, near Woodburn in north-eastern New South Wales.

About 13:30 hrs a pygmy-goose was noticed amongst a large concentration of waterfowl, mainly Black Duck *Anas superciliosa* and Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*, along the western arm of the billabong. The bird was feeding on open water about 25m from the opposite bank. For the next two hours it was kept under constant observation from the western bank. However it remained well out and at no stage was I able to view it from closer than about 50m. Throughout this period it fed busily, apparently grazing the abundant sub-emergent vegetation mainly *Potamogeton*, *Vallisneria* and *Elodea* visible at and close to the surface. It flushed only once when disturbed by a passing boat, whereupon it flew low along the billabong for about 40m before settling again.

Conditions were fine and sunny and using 10 x 50 binoculars I was able to distinguish the general pattern of the head and dark greenish colouration of the upper parts. When it flew the back was seen to be glossy green and prominent white areas in the wings were noted. On the basis of their markings the bird was thought probably to be a female Green Pygmy-goose.

Next morning I returned to Swan Bay and positive identification was obtained. I took up a position on the eastern bank about sunrise (05:15) and soon located the pygmy-goose resting quietly about 20m from the shore near the previous afternoon's sighting.

It was watched closely for 55 minutes, at first in dull, even light and later in sunlight, the bird remaining inactive for most of the time. Twice it stretched its body and wings enabling the wing pattern and underparts to be clearly seen on both occasions.

The following description is compiled from notes made during the two periods of observation:

A pygmy-goose with crown, hind neck, back and tail dark greenish; face below eye back to hind neck, cheeks and chin white; rest of neck and flanks whitish marked darker with grey, brown or green and contrasting with white of face; in flight, back seen to be bright glossy green; belly white; large white patches in inner wings conspicuous in flight and when wings extended while at rest.

The bird remained on Swan Bay for at least 12 days, being last seen on 12 February by W. Watson. Both Watson and G. Frazer (*pers. comm.*) who also saw the bird during this period, had previous field experience with the White-quilled Pygmy-goose *N. coromandelianus*.

At the time of the occurrence the district was very dry. Following a normally dry spring conditions had intensified during summer and were not broken until the last week of

February. Seasonal swamps had dried up and waterfowl had become concentrated locally on semi-permanent and permanent swamps, notably Swan Bay.

Frith (1967 *Waterfowl in Australia*: 277) considered the Green Pygmy-goose to be more sedentary and restricted to the tropics than any other Australian duck. It apparently occurs only as a rare vagrant in New South Wales, there being only two previous published records for this state. Both were also from the Richmond River area and were of a bird shot at Tucki near Lismore in 1956 (Frith loc. cit) and a female seen at Leeville, near Casino in 1967 (Spinaze 1970 *Emu* 70:35).

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