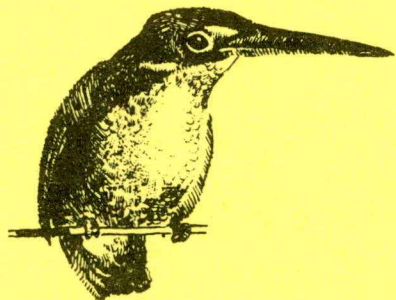


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THE N.S.W. FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS CLUB

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SUPPLEMENT TO 'AUSTRALIAN BIRDS' - VOL.13, NO.2. DECEMBER 1978.

HANDBLIST OF THE BIRDS OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

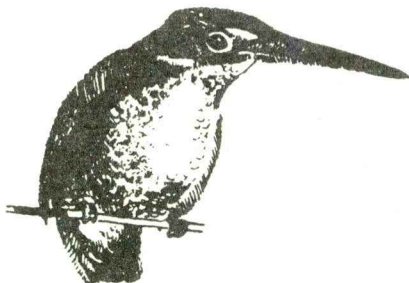
The revised Handlist is coming on, but a bit slower than we first planned. Copies of the draft list have been circulated, and the comments made by the reviewers have been noted. Considerable rewriting is required, but all distributional data has now been collected. Beryl Marchant is to be commended for the efficient and accurate manner in which she typed the draft. Our thanks to R.Cooper, A.E.F.Rogers, D.Gibson, R.Noske, H.Bell, G.Holmes, J.Hobbs, E.Hoskin, D.Barton and J.Forshaw who commented on the draft. In the next Newsletter members will be advised of the pre-publication price and a tear-off portion will be available to enable people to place their orders.

A number of people have offered pen and ink (black and white) sketches with which to illustrate the list. We would be happy to hear from anyone else who would have suitable small sketches that could be used in the book. Doug Gibson drew the maps and we were grateful for his efforts, as well as for those people who offered assistance for this purpose.

Finally, we respectfully ask birdwatchers in New South Wales not to find any new species until the list is published otherwise it will upset the numbering in the book!

A.R.McGILL and A.K.MORRIS.

AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



Volume 13, No. 2

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BIRDS OF THE COBAR REGION, NEW SOUTH WALES CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS

B. L. SCHMIDT

A number of errors occurred in my article "Birds of the Cobar Region, New South Wales" 1978 Aust. Birds 12:61 and the following corrections are therefore made:

Page 63 line 6 should read – "Intensity of coverage was not uniform in this area and can best be illustrated by figure 1 . . ."

Page 66 in the Residential Status List, several lines were moved to the left to make the meaning obscure, viz. line 3 "other" means "Other summer visitors"; line 6 "from area in winter" means "Partial migrants from area in winter"; line 9 "Mostly summer" means "Nomads mostly summer".

The References cited at the end of the text (page 88) appeared to be those for the following article instead of the Cobar article. As well as being misplaced the References had an error, viz.:

Schrader, N. W., 1977 Letter-winged Kites at Parkes, N.S.W., Aust. Birds 12:15.

Appendix 1 which gives the scientific name of plants mentioned in the text was omitted from the article and hence is appended at the end of this note.

The following species were omitted in error from the systematic list:

White-eyed Duck *Aythya australis*. Moderately common nomad.

Blue-faced Honeyeater *Entomyzon cyanotis*. 18%. Moderately common, particularly in timber and near water.

Since writing the article the following species has been added to the list:

Brolga *Grus rubicundus*. Two birds at White Tank, Marwarre, 9 km N.N.E. of Merrylands H.S. at least from 4 to 21 October, 1978. (N. Coombes *pers. comm.*).

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*. Male in grassy area by creek near Mt. Merre, 24 February, 1976 (J. Ford *pers. comm.*).

LEIGH SCHMIDT

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APPENDIX I LIST OF TYPICAL VEGETATION SPECIES

a. Trees and Shrubs

<i>Acacia aneura</i>	Mulga
<i>Acacia brachystachya</i>	Umbrella mulga
<i>Acacia doratexylon</i>	Currawong
<i>Acacia excelsa</i>	Ironwood
<i>Acacia homalophylla</i>	Yarran
<i>Acacia tetragonophylla</i>	Dead Finish
<i>Apophyllum anomalum</i>	Warrior-bush
<i>Atalaya hemiglauca</i>	White wood
<i>Brachychiton populneum</i>	Kurrajong
<i>Callitris columellaris</i>	White Cypress Pine
<i>Canthium oleifolium</i>	Wild Lemon
<i>Capparis mitchelli</i>	Wild orange
<i>Cassia eremophila</i>	Punty bush
<i>Casuarina cambagei</i>	Belah
<i>Dodonaea visca</i>	Broad-leaved Hopbush
<i>Eremophila longifolia</i>	Emu Bush
<i>Eremophila mitchelli</i>	Budda
<i>Eremophila sturtii</i>	Turpentine
<i>Eucalyptus dumosa</i>	Congoo Mallee
<i>Eucalyptus intertexta</i>	Red Box
<i>Eucalyptus morrisii</i>	Grey Mallee
<i>Eucalyptus populnea</i>	Bimble Box
<i>Flindersia maculosa</i>	Lepard Wood
<i>Fusanus acuminatus</i>	Quandong
<i>Geijera parviflora</i>	Wilga
<i>Grevillia striata</i>	Beef Wood
<i>Hakea leucoptera</i>	Needle Wood
<i>Heterodendrom oleifolium</i>	Rose Bush
<i>Pittosporum phillyraeoides</i>	Wild Apricot
<i>Rhagodia spinescens</i>	False Saltbush

b. Grasses

<i>Aristida arenaria</i>	Feather Grass
<i>Aristida jerichoensis</i>	Wire Grass
<i>Bassia birchii</i>	Galvanised Burr
<i>Bassia uniflora</i>	Copper Burr
<i>Chloris acicularis</i>	Windmill grass
<i>Danthonia caespitosa</i>	Wallaby grass
<i>Stipa variabilis</i>	Corkscrew grass
<i>Xanthium pungens</i>	Noogoora Burr (introduced)

COMMENTS ON SOME OF THE SCIENTIFIC NAMES USED IN THE "INTERIM LIST OF AUSTRALIAN SONGBIRDS"

R. NOSKE

INTRODUCTION

Ingram (1977) has drawn attention to the "unique" opportunity presented by the Interim List of Australian Songbirds (Schodde 1975), in which the "Ornithological masses" can comment on a proposed checklist. I do not, however, share his optimism as the Interim List has already been adopted by the R.A.O.U. and the Australian Bird-Banding Scheme, and was followed in the Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds (Frith, 1976), despite considerable opposition (for example, Chisholm 1976; Disney 1976; McGill 1976). As the bulk of critical remarks concerning the list have dealt with changes in vernacular names (Cole 1976; Glover 1976; Sedgwick 1976; Cooper et al 1977), I shall confine my comments to some of the taxonomic changes at the generic and specific level. In this paper I examine the evidence cited in relation to such changes and question the supposition of Glover (1976) that "there have been few controversial decisions (in the scientific nomenclature adopted by the list)".

GENERA

Schodde has attempted to eliminate many monotypic genera, although reasons for this approach are not clearly established. No consistent set of criteria has been used to confer congenerity and in many cases few characters have been used. *Pteropodocys* (Ground Cuckoo-Shrike) has been lumped with *Coracina* merely on the grounds that "it is closer to that genus than to any other" (Schodde 1975:7). Similarly, *Lacustroica* (Grey Honeyeater) is included in *Conopophila*, "because it is evidently more closely allied to that genus than to any other; their eggs are identical and their bills similar" (Schodde 1975:19). However, the bills of honeyeaters from many genera are "similar", and if eggs are important, the White-throated and Little Treecreepers *Climacteris leucophaea* deserve separation from the rest of their genus.

By contrast, Schodde retained monotypic *Trichodere* (White-streaked Honeyeater) and *Grantiella* (Painted Honeyeater) apparently on the basis of distinctive eggs and plumage coloration (Schodde 1975:18). As in the case of *Lacustroica* only two generic criteria are given, of which the latter is doubtfully reliable (see for example discussion of flycatchers; Schodde and McKean 1976:535). Obviously, plumage differences were considered unimportant in the case of *Lacustroica*.

Three examples of generic change will now be discussed in detail.

Mangrove Robin

Schodde has united this species, formerly in the monotypic genus *Peneoanthe*, with *Eopsaltria* (yellow robins) because it seemed closest to this genus "in juvenile plumages, calls and nests" (Schodde 1975:7). No supportive evidence is given and the only reference cited is Storr (1973), which is a bird list and does not attempt to explain nomenclatural changes.

What of the stated similarities between this robin and the yellow robins? Galbraith (in Hall 1974) described the juvenile plumage of the Mangrove as unmarked, except for buff terminal spots on the upper wing coverts and secondaries. This is quite different from the white-streaked upperparts of the juvenile Eastern Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria australis* (Wilson in Frith 1969; Lane 1976). On a recent visit to Cape York I noted at least three separate

calls of the Mangrove Robin, none of which reminded me of the latter species (with which I am well acquainted). One of the calls was like the rasping notes given by *Myiagra* flycatchers. In the literature, reference is often given to its "musical song" (for example, Macdonald 1973; Slater 1974) a call clearly absent or at least undescribed in *E. australis*. The remaining criterion of nests is of doubtful value as Keast (1958) stated that all the robins have "a generalised cup-shaped nest".

Schodde's reasons for lumping *Peneoehanthe* with *Eopsaltria* are less than satisfying, particularly when he stated elsewhere that "consensus of current opinion leaves it in *Poecilodryas*" (Schodde and McKean 1976:534). He has ignored the advice of Keast (1958), who, in his detailed revision of the flycatchers, says:

"Its characteristics of a long, strong bill and prominent rictal bristles, rounded tail, and absence of wing-bar, are such that it is surprising its distinctiveness . . . has not been more widely stressed . . . The Mangrove Robin is without close relatives . . . there is no alternative but to place it in a monotypic genus (*Peneoehanthe*)" (Keast 1958:78).

Field-Warblers

Chisholm (1976) described the merging of *Chthonicola* (Speckled Warbler), *Hylacola* (Heath-Wrens), *Calamanthus* (Field-Wrens) and *Pyrholaemus* (Redthroat) with *Sericornis* (Scrub-Wrens) as "an absurd example of lumping" (see also McGill 1976). Differences between the first four genera in "breast and forehead markings, tarsal scutellation, frequency of tail cocking, and degrees of out-of-breeding flocking" are considered "trivial" (Schodde and McKean 1976:532), as presumably are "disparities in epigamic displays" (Ford in Schodde 1975), unstreaked underparts in *Pyrholaemus* (Schodde 1975:12), and a different bill shape in *Chthonicola* (Schodde and McKean 1976). In their description of three distinct patterns of sexual dimorphism (some hitherto undescribed in the literature). Schodde and McKean (1976) have highlighted differences between these genera, more so than similarities! "Furtive, solitary behaviour" (Schodde 1975:12) hardly describes the Speckled Warbler, a species which is usually confiding and easily observed, commonly seen in groups of four or more individuals (McGill 1970; *pers. obs.*) and a co-operative breeder (Rowley 1976).

Yet even if we accept that these four genera are closely related, what evidence exists to suggest they are scrub-wrens? The sole reason Schodde gives for lumping these two groups is that one of the genera (*Hylacola*) closely resembles *Sericornis frontatus maculatus* (Spotted Scrub-Wren) in its pattern of plumage. Having broadened *Sericornis* to include *Hylacola* Schodde feels the other three genera "must also be taken in" (Schodde 1975:12). Differences in calls, nest-sites (arboreal in most scrub-wrens), eggs (typically pale, freckled darker in *Sericornis*), and pattern of plumage (unstreaked in the majority of *Sericornis*) are apparently insignificant in this case.

Black, Banded and Pied Honeyeaters

Schodde has transferred *Myzomela* (sometimes *Cissomela*) *pectoralis* (Banded Honeyeater) and *M. nigra* (Black Honeyeater) to *Certhionyx* (Pied Honeyeater) because of similarities in plumage, eggs and tongue shape. In reference to the first of these criteria, Schodde (1975:19) states "That these sexually dimorphic species (The Banded and the Black) . . . are unrelated to *Myzomela* . . . is indicated most obviously by the lack of iridescent red in males". However, the Banded is not obviously sexually dimorphic (Colston in Hall 1974). Moreover, red is completely lacking in some other *myzomelas* found outside Australia and is only faint in the monomorphic Dusky Honeyeater *M. obscura*.

The second criterion is questionable as some texts (for example, Officer 1964; Cayley 1966; Macdonald 1973) imply that the eggs of the Banded Honeyeater are not spotted,

while those of the other two species are spotted. According to Frith (1977), however, the eggs of all three species are dissimilar. Of the final criterion, Schodde mentions that the furcations at the tongue-tips of Banded and Black Honeyeaters are meliphagine, and not myzomeline, in proportion. The situation in the Pied is not clearly stated. However, Schodde and McKean (1976:538) admit that there is some difference between the Banded and the Black in the depth of the median furcation of the tongue. Schodde and Mason (1975:17) advise that "there is ... so much individual variation in the tongue in species of honeyeaters that structure can be used only with caution as a criterion of taxonomic relationship".

Schodde and McKean (1976:537) also mention that the Black and Banded differ from other myzomelas in their long wings with very short first primary, a character which reflects differing degrees of nomadism. However, the wing of the banded is proportionately even shorter than that of the Scarlet Honeyeater *M. sanguinolenta* (Keast 1968). In addition, its second primary is noticeably shorter than the third, whereas in the Black it is not (see Keast 1968, plate opposite p. 159).

The Black and Banded Honeyeaters differ from the Pied in at least three characters, the most obvious of which is size. They both have a sweet, chattering or tinkling song (Officer 1964; Frith 1977 for Banded; Ford *in prep.* for Black), which has been likened to that made by the Scarlet Honeyeater (R. M. Cooper, H.A. Ford, *pers. comm.*). By contrast, the Pied's call is usually described as a piercing and plaintive whistle, which resembles the call of the Little Grassbird *Megalurus gramineus* (Serventy and Whittell 1951; Officer 1964). Thirdly, the flight of both Black and Banded sometimes resembles that of the chats *Epthianura* (See Frith 1977 for Banded; Ford *in prep.* for Black). Furthermore, nest-building is performed by both sexes in the Pied, but only by the female in the Black and the majority of other honeyeater species (Immelmann 1961). However, a distinctive tumbling flight display is exhibited by both Pied and Black Honeyeaters (see Serventy and Whittell 1951 for Pied; Ford *in prep.* for Black).

Clearly these three honeyeaters require further study before their inter-relationships and affinities can be assessed.

SPECIES

"Union of parapatric forms that are quite distinct morphologically or ecologically or both ... is often based wholly or partly on the evidence of a few hybrids or intermediates ... such specimens are assumed to represent zones of intergradation (see Short (1969) for types of hybridisation and their taxonomic implications)" Schodde (1975:2).

Admitting the shortcomings of this approach, Schodde has nevertheless accepted it wholeheartedly and has dissolved many "species" of the 1926 Checklist frequently on the basis of a "few hybrids". Although he refers to Short (1969), the conclusions of the latter have clearly been disregarded in the compilation of the Interim List. Schodde has confused the terms "hybrid zone", and "zone of overlap and hybridisation" (see also Burton and Martin 1976). Short (1969) defines the former as "an area occupied by a hybrid population connecting two parental gene-pools. The parental phenotypes together comprise less than 5 per cent of the hybrid zone population", and as such represent subspecies only. However, "zones of overlap and hybridisation" are occupied by numerous hybrids and both parental phenotypes. Such zones are formed by semi-species, which Short regards as good species.

A probable example of the latter phenomenon concerns the stripe-crowned pardalotes *Pardalotus substriatus*, *ornatus* and *striatus*. A number of parental phenotypes occur in many areas where two forms or more overlap and hybrids are the exception (Hindwood and Mayr 1946). Such forms should thus be treated as species, using Short's (1969) definitions. Schodde, however, has lumped them all.

If Schodde's blanket interpretation of hybridisation was invoked for all Australian birds, we might see the lumping of such distinct species as the Crimson and Eastern Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* and *eximius*. Courtney (1967) reported a natural Crimson-Eastern Rosella hybrid, which was mated to an Eastern at Swan Vale, near Glen Innes, New South Wales. Yet no less than 12 hybrid individuals, usually in the company of apparently pure Crimson Rosellas, have been seen since the publication of that article (J. Courtney, *pers. comm.*; *pers. obs.*). Courtney and I recently observed the nesting and successful rearing of young by two pairs of Crimson and hybrid Rosellas; thus, the hybrids are apparently fertile.

Indeed, interbreeding of closely related yet normally distinct forms is not such an unusual event and in Australia it has been recorded in the Scarlet and Redcapped Robins *Petroica multicolor* and *P. goodenovii* (Cooper 1971), White-browed and Masked Wood-Swallows *Artamus superciliosus* and *A. personatus* (Boehm 1974), Grey and Pied Butcherbirds *Cracticus torquatus* and *C. nigrogularis* (Hall in Hall 1974), Little and Fairy Terns *Sterna albifrons* and *S. nereis* (Cox and Close 1977), Grey and Brown Goshawks *Accipiter novaehollandiae* and *A. fasciatus* (Cupper 1976), Spotted and Yellow-rumped Pardalotes *Pardalotus punctatus* and *P. xanthopygus* (S. Parker *in litt.*), and Cinnamon and Chestnut Quail-Thrushes *Cinclosoma cinnamomeum* and *C. castanotus* (Ford 1974, 1976). Naturally, the offspring produced in some circumstances may be sterile or fail to reach sexual maturity and in such cases, hybridism would generally be considered insignificant. It may be useful to look at some examples of species-lumping in the Interim List, and the evidence – the frequency of hybridisation – on which they are based.

Quail-thrushes

Ford (in Schodde 1975) has lumped the Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush *Cinclosoma castaneothorax* with the Cinnamon *C. cinnamomeum*, despite their "many differences in morphology and ecology" (Ford 1976:551). The evidence is two presumed hybrid specimens collected in the Beale Range in south-western Queensland (see Ford 1974). This is later interpreted in the following way: "Hybridisation between these rufous-breasted forms occurs in south-western Queensland . . . and presumably wherever their habitats are contiguous" (Ford 1976:548). Yet Ford did not find any more hybrids despite intensive sampling in that region (see Ford 1974:83). Indeed, parental phenotypes of each form were found only two km west and 10 km east of the hybrid locality, respectively. These forms must, therefore, represent true species.

Interestingly, Ford (1974, 1976) has also obtained four hybrids between the Chestnut and Cinnamon Quail-thrushes *C. castanotum clarum* and *C. cinnamomeum marginatum*, and reported two or three mixed pairs. These forms, however, were retained as species apparently because they interbreed "only occasionally" (Ford 1976:551). Ford's inconsistency is again illustrated by his two interpretations of paler-plumaged Chestnut-breasted in the western parts of its range. First he suggests that this is due to "intrusion of *cinnamomeum* genes (Ford 1976:548), but later he attributes this colour change to clinal variation (p. 552). There is no real evidence for his "extensive" introgression (p. 548), and indeed Ford later admits that "introgression (between these two forms) is probably impeded because each parental gene-pool confers better adaptations to its particular environment" (pp. 551-2).

Fairy-Wrens

Parker in Schodde (1975) treated the Black-backed, Turquoise and Splendid Wrens *Malurus malanotus*, *callainus* and *splendens* as conspecific on the basis of ten hybrids between the last two forms (see Ford 1975). However, hybrids between the Turquoise and Black-backed Wrens have yet to be found (Reid *et al* 1977). Storr (1973) is cited here, presumably because he is the only one to have used the recommended name for the Black-backed.

The Lovely and Lavender-flanked Wrens *Malurus amabilis* and *M. dulcis*, distinguished by their blue-plumaged females, were united by Parker (in Schodde 1975) with the Variegated and Purple-backed Wrens *M. lamberti* and *M. assimilis*, which have brown females. This is based upon three possible hybrid females (see Harrison 1972, in Hall 1974), and the probability that they all occupy similarly structured habitats (S. Parker *in litt.*). However, there are numerous examples of largely allopatric congeneric Australian bird species which occupy similar habitats. The Blue-breasted and Purple-backed Wrens *M. pulcherrimus* and *M. assimilis*, for instance, are both known to inhabit mallee communities (see Ford 1966:50, 1969).

Sittellas

Macdonald (1969b; in Hall 1974) clearly stated that there is no evidence of contact or hybridisation between the Striated and White-winged Sittellas *Neositta striata* and *N. leucoptera*, though Schodde (1975:16) discards this observation as "sketchy" and inconclusive. It is, however, quite likely that these forms "are adjacent end products of a long circular cline of intergraded forms which, if they do come into contact, may behave as true species. This situation is already well-known elsewhere" (Macdonald 1969b:171).

Moreover, there is very little published information on the plumage coloration of young sittellas. Hando (1970) suggested that immature White-headed Sittellas *N. leucocephala* possess dark head colouring, but the immature Orange-winged *N. chrysoptera* is noticeably paler on the head than the adult (Slater 1974; *pers. obs.*). This factor could lead to some confusion in areas where these two forms approach each other.

Stripe-crowned pardalotes

Schodde had relegated the Black-headed Pardalote *Pardalotus melanocephalus* and stripe-crowned pardalotes *P. substriatus*, *ornatus* and *striatus*, to subspecific status. Contrary to his suggestion, however, there is little published evidence to suggest that the Black-headed interbreeds with the Eastern Striated *P. ornatus*. One of the references cited in this context, Disney *et al.* (1974), does not even mention the possibility. Macdonald (1969a) and Cowles in Hall (1974) report one possible case of a mixed pair of these species but the former considered that they do not hybridise.

Bell (1959) noted that the Black-headed was predominantly a winter breeder and "of distinctly different nesting habits to the Red-tipped species" (Bell 1959:135), in the Brisbane area. This is also the case in north-coastal New South Wales where it breeds from February to October (G. Holmes, *pers. comm.*). Differences between the breeding seasons of these two species could present a temporal barrier to hybridisation. The predominant call of the Black-headed in this region is quite distinct from any of the stripe-crowned species (tape-recordings in possession of G. Holmes). Striated and Eastern Striated Pardalotes also differ in their main call (Cooper 1961; Slater 1974; *pers. obs.*; tape-recordings in possession of G. Holmes). Such differences in calls may act as a

pre-mating isolation mechanism in zones of contact and overlap. Indeed, the two forms of Wedgebill, *Psophodes cristatus* and *P. occidentalis* were separated primarily on the basis of distinct calls (see Ford and Parker 1973).

These pardalotes are most likely still in the process of attaining full genetical and reproductive isolation. The complexity of the situation is exemplified by the finding of an apparently pure Eastern Striated in a flock of Black-headed x Striated Pardalotes in south-western Queensland (Macdonald 1969a). Indeed, whilst many hybrids between *melanocephalus* and *substriatus* have been collected, these two forms have yet to be found nesting together (Disney et al. 1974).

In conclusion, Schodde's (1975:22) remark that "there can be little doubt that *striatus*, *ornatus* and *substriatus* are conspecific" is unjustifiable confident.

Little Treecreepers

Schodde was "constrained" to treat the Little and White-throated Treecreepers as separate species on the basis of four characters possessed by the former. The first two, small size and rainforest habitat, are of doubtful significance since the White-throated *Climacteris leucophaea* also inhabits rainforest and according to Bergmann's Rule (Van Tyne and Berger 1971) a decrease in size is to be expected in a northern isolate (see for example Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* in Keast 1958:84).

According to Schodde (1975:16), the Little *C.l. minor* has "somewhat dissimilar vocalisations" but there is no cited evidence to substantiate his claims. I have identified at least nine separate calls in the White-throated during a long-term study (Noske 1976 and unpublished data) and on brief visits to the Atherton Tableland, Queensland, have noted two of the calls of the Little to be identical to two of those of the former. Another call of the Little is not identical but clearly analogous to the White-throated's call (tape-recordings in possession of myself and R. Swaby).

Finally, Schodde points out differences in ventral coloration between the Little and White-throated Treecreepers. Contrary to his suggestion, this ventral pattern is not closer to the Red-browed Treecreeper *C. erythrops*, as the edges of the ventral feathers are olive-brown as in the Red-browed. Schodde then suggests that the Little gave rise to both the White-throated and the Red-browed, but the latter species displays more affinity with the Brown Treecreeper *C. picumnus* in some anatomical features (Orenstein 1977 and *in litt.*), as well as in egg colour, nest-site calls, juvenile plumage and behaviour (Noske, unpublished data). Moreover, the Red-browed and Brown Treecreepers are both gregarious, and display a co-operative breeding system (Orenstein in Frith 1977, for Brown; Noske 1976, and *in prep.*, for Red-browed). This contrasts sharply with the solitary habits of the White-throated (Noske 1976).

CONCLUSION

Cooper *et al.* (1977) found many inconsistencies in vernacular names adopted by the Interim List. Although in this paper I have examined only a few of the changes in scientific nomenclature it is readily apparent that the list shows no consistency in the types and number of criteria used in assessing relationships.

One of the most frequently cited references in the list, Schodde and McKean (1976), does not present any quantitative data and in many cases barely expands upon the "evidence" mentioned in the list. References cited to support the merging of *Lacustroica*

with *Conopophila* are Colston in Hall (1974) and Salomonsen in Peters (1967) choice of genera for the Painted Honeyeater (*Conopophila*), White-streaked Honeyeater (*Lichmera*) and Banded Honeyeater (*Cissomela*). Similarly, Colston in Hall (1974) is not followed in his use of *Myzomela* for both Black and Banded Honeyeaters, and *Conopophila* for the Painted. Such references have been used only where Schodde sees fit.

It is obvious from the Interim List that there are very large gaps in our knowledge of Australian passerines. However, this fact does **not** excuse the sweeping conclusions evident in this list. Changes should only be made when information from comprehensive studies becomes available. I hope that birdwatchers have realised the desperate need for more bird-watching. We require the collection of objective, quantitative data on foraging behaviour, social organisation, calls (sonograms), and many other aspects of behaviour and ecology. Apart from Watter's (1968) as yet unpublished work, I know of no serious attempt to apply numerical taxonomy to Australian birds. In this case, information on plumages, detailed morphology and anatomy, ecology, ethology, vocalisations, nest, eggs, physiology and biochemistry are all included.

In view of the criticisms this Interim List has received one wonders why the R.A.O.U. accepted its recommendations so rapidly and unequivocally. Certainly, the R.A.O.U. Atlas Scheme will suffer, first through the loss of information on those species which are currently regarded as subspecies, as many atlasers will not bother to determine the form observed. Secondly, "beginners" must be confused by the difference in nomenclature between Slater's field guides, and that used in the scheme.

In conclusion, I urge the editors of Australia's various state journals to follow "An Index of Australian Bird Names" (C.S.I.R.O. 1969), in preference to this unscientific Interim List.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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POSTSCRIPT

Since the preparation of this manuscript, Keast (1978 Emu 78:20-24) has also disagreed with the inclusion of *Pyrrholaemus* and *Calamanthus* in *Sericornis*, and has shown (1978 Emu 78:110-125) that *Sericornis*, as previously defined, forms a natural and fairly well-delineated assemblage of forest-inhabiting species. Ford (1978 Emu 78:30) has also disputed Parker's (in Schodde 1975) decision to combine *Malurus dulcis* and *M. amabilis* with *M. lamberti*, but this appears to be based primarily on personal preference rather than any conclusive evidence.

SIGHTINGS OF THE ROSEATE TERN ON THE NORTH COAST OF NEW SOUTH WALES

D. G. GOSPER, W. D. WATSON and G. C. FRASER

INTRODUCTION

Occurrences of the Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* near Ballina on the far north coast of N.S.W. in 1973 and 1976 are reported. All sightings were made at Flat Rock (also known as Sand Point), a coastal rock platform situated about 4 km north of the entrance to the Richmond River. Flat Rock is regularly used as a loafing area by terns frequenting adjacent seas and nearby estuary. Since 1971 the writers have made frequent checks of the area. These visits, although not regular, probably averaged twice per week. To date (March 1978) three apparently separate occurrences of the Roseate Tern have been recorded.

SIGHTINGS

(1) 16 January, 1973: G.C.F. identified a Roseate Tern among a resting assemblage of terns that included Common Terns *S. hirundo* on Flat Rock. The bird was located again the following day by G.F.C. and W.D.W. and on subsequent visits. It remained around Flat Rock for at least five days.

The bird was considered to be an adult on breeding plumage. Although a full field description was not taken at the time, its outstanding features were noted down in comparison with *S. hirundo* and considered diagnostic.

Full black cap; upper surface otherwise very pale; long tail streamers; bicoloured bill with base red and remainder black; legs bright red; underparts white (no pink flush being discerned).

Call: a distinctive sparrow-like chirrup (interpreted as "Philip") uttered with head and bill raised.

Flight: faster, shallower wing beats (resembling that of Little Tern *S. albigrons*) allowing it to be picked out at first sighting when out to sea.

(2) 30 August, 1976: D.G.G. visited Flat Rock at high tide (1115 hrs.) following information that a White-fronted Tern *S. striata* was present. An assemblage of terns comprising mainly Crested Terns *S. bergii*, about 20 Common Terns, several Little Terns and Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* and a solitary White-fronted Tern were found.

Whilst comparing the White-fronted Tern, which was approaching full breeding plumage, with several of the Common Terns (all of which were in non-breeding plumage) standing close by, the observer noticed a distinct pink tinge to the breast of the one nearest. This individual had been resting with its head concealed; but when alerted it lifted its head, revealing a full black cap from bill to nape. It was immediately recognised that this bird was not a Common Tern and its pinkish underparts prompted suspicion of a Roseate Tern.

Over the next 30 minutes the bird was scrutinised closely. It remained hunched up for most of this time and was reluctant to flush, allowing approach to within 10 m. When it did fly it moved only about 10 m before settling again.

The observer then left, returning with W.D.W. at 1315 hrs. The tern was soon located again but almost immediately flew off to join a number of Common Terns feeding 100-150 m off shore. It fed for about 15 minutes before returning to the rock platform where it was again viewed at close quarters for a further 15 minutes.

The following description was built up during the two periods described and added to during a further 30 minutes' observation early the following afternoon. The bird was examined for much of the time from as close as 5 m using X10 and X8 binoculars. Conditions on both days were fine, mild with a slight breeze and occasional light cloud. Direct comparisons were made with *S. striata* and *S. hirundo*, both of which were present throughout.

Size: much smaller than *striata*; at rest approximately the same size as *hirundo* (marginally smaller than some) but in flight appeared noticeably sligher and more slender in overall body shape and size.

Upperparts: black cap to head extending from bill to nape in line passing immediately below eye; a small amount of white flecking on forehead visible at close quarters from front; black on head dull and lacking sheen of *striata* and *bergii* (in breeding plumage) suggesting feathers worn. Back and upper surface of wings pale grey though not as light as *striata*; in flight noticeably paler and more uniform than *hirundo*; slight greyish shoulder smudge, visible when perched, though less prominent than in *hirundo* (absent in *striata*); prolonged examination from close range (5 m; rear, side views) showed the outer vane at the ends of the longest primaries on both wings to be worn back to the whitish shaft exposing them at the tips; tail deeply forked with streamers white, very long and at rest projecting (estimated 20 mm) beyond tips of wings (as in *striata* but not in *hirundo*); streamers noticeably very long in flight compared with *hirundo*, flexing when hovering, wheeling and diving.

Bill: black, longer and more pointed than *hirundo*.

Underparts: white with distinct pink flush on neck, breast and abdomen visible at close range and in direct sunlight; apparently less readily discernible in cloudy bright conditions: the intensity of the pinkness seemed to be increased when the feathers were ruffled as the bird rested in a hunched posture.

Legs: dull, dark reddish.

Flight: noticeably faster wing beats than *hirundo*; this feature together with its slimmer build, longer tail streamers and finer, more pointed profile of the head produced by the full black cap to bill, enabled the bird to be readily picked out among feeding *hirundo* up to 100 m off shore.

The bird remained around Flat Rock for at least ten days during which it was seen independently by each of the writers. It was also photographed by W.D.W. and R. Brown though results were only partially successful. On 8 September among the Common Terns present were several retaining almost full breeding plumage. These individuals were readily separable by their greyer backs and duskier underparts. The Roseate Tern was not seen again until 4 October when what was probably the same individual was observed by W.D.W. and D.G.G. On this last occasion noticeably more white flecking was visible on the forehead.

(3) 15 November, 1976: A Roseate Tern in breeding plumage seen at Flat Rock by W.D.W. was considered to be a different individual from that present in previous months

on the basis of the condition of its plumage. It differed from the bird described above (2) in the following ways.

- (i) sleek full black cap with no sign of white flecking on forehead;
- (ii) paler upper surface;
- (iii) legs bright red reminiscent of leg colour of bird seen in 1973 (1, above);
- (iv) pink flush extended unevenly over neck and breast.

The bird rested apart from a cluster of Common Terns preening for about ten minutes before suddenly flying off directly out to sea.

CONCLUSION

The Roseate Tern is a northern Australian breeding species. In the east off Queensland its breeding range extends south as far as the Capricorn and Bunker Groups though it ranges much further south in Western Australia (Serventy *et al* 1971). There appears to be little published information on its movements and distribution in northern and eastern Australia outside the breeding season. Storr (1973) gives its status in Queensland as: "Uncommon north of 12°S; scarce further south". It is seldom recorded along the south-eastern Queensland coast (Elks 1966, C. Corben *in litt*) and does not appear to have been previously recorded in N.S.W. (Rogers 1977). The isolated occurrences near Ballina, N.S.W., described herein therefore appear to be the most southerly yet reported in eastern Australia.

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A SIGHTING OF THE YELLOW CHAT IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

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The Yellow Chat *Ephthianura crocea* has been recorded from northern and north-eastern subcoastal districts and from south-western Queensland as stated by Ford and Parker (1972 Emu 74:189-190).

On 25 January 1978 while travelling from Borroloola to the Barkly Highway I saw the Yellow Chat 2 km north of No. 6 Hinkler Bore, between Brunette Downs and Aloy Downs, in the ten-minute block 19°05S 136°05E, a locality not given by Ford and Parker (*loc. cit*). The first bird was flushed with a group of Singing Bushlark *Mirafra javanica* from a wide

roadside drain. On stopping I flushed a pair of the birds from the same drain and followed them for twenty minutes.

The area is treeless, black-soil plain and the drain contained shallow water and exposed mud. The sides of the drain and nearby depressions were covered in seeding sedge about 300 mm high and the birds kept to this, seldom flying to the surrounding grass.

The male was more difficult to observe than the female because when flushed it usually dropped quickly to the ground after a flight of 20 to 30 m whereas the female often perched on the stems of the sedge. If the female was separated from the male it gave a repeated three-note call and then flew to where the male had landed. Both birds fed on the ground and occasionally while clinging to seed heads. Both call and habitat were similar to those reported by Ford and Parker (*loc. cit.*).

The male had a fine dark line from eye to bill, brilliant yellow underparts and rump, an orange tinge to the yellow of the throat, and on the breast a broad dark band with rounded ends. The female had the male's brilliant yellow rump, grey-brown wings with white edges to the feathers, and dark-centred tail with white edges and tip, but its breast was pale yellow, the bill brownish rather than black, and the band missing.

The nearest reported sighting to this one is on the banks of the Nicholson River, as stated by Jackson (1907 Egg Collecting & Birdlife in Australia), the headwaters of which are about 130 km to the north-east.

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CRESTED GREBE AT SEA

J. D. GIBSON

Though not unknown in other parts of the world, the occurrence of the Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* in coastal waters does not seem to have been previously recorded for Australia except in the immediate vicinity of estuaries.

On 30 July 1978 at c.1100 hours, during an albatross banding excursion, a single bird in non-breeding plumage was observed by H. Battam, myself and others about 4 km at sea off Bellambi Point near Wollongong, New South Wales. The weather was calm and sunny and no unusual conditions had prevailed during the previous week.

The grebe was tentatively identified at 50 m range where it gave the impression of a greyish bird with a pale, slender, stiffly erect neck and small head, swimming rather low in the water. At this range it took off and flew northwards about 2 m above the water until out of sight. In the air the flight style, white underparts and distinctive upper wing pattern put its identity beyond doubt.

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