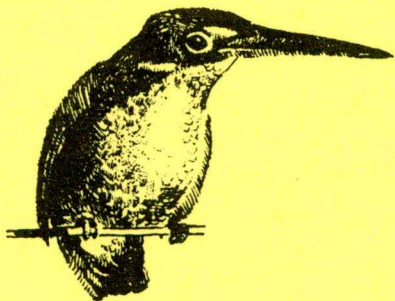


# AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



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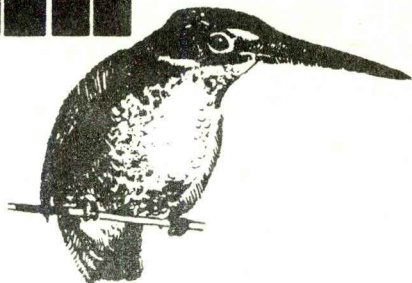
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# AUSTRALIAN BIRDS




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## BIRDS OF BALL'S PYRAMID, LORD HOWE ISLAND

IAN BROWN

During the period 19-26 November, 1978, a rockclimbing party visited Ball's Pyramid, some 17 km south-east of Lord Howe Island. The party consisted of Ross Vining, William Blunt, Ian Brown and Don Fletcher. Approximately four days were spent above base level, climbing to the summit and back via the south-east ridge. The rest of the time was spent at sea level, on the south-east end and below the east face. The following observations by the party were made on these sections of the Pyramid, but information from the west and east faces, and the north-west end is limited. However, the west face showed virtually no bird activity, probably due to its vertical and featureless nature. Photographs of most of the sea-birds found breeding on the Pyramid were taken, and it is from these that positive identification of the Kermadec Petrel was made. Alan Morris of Coonabarabran confirmed the identification of the seabirds from my photographs.

### Kermadec Petrel *Pterodroma neglecta*

Common at higher levels above 400 metres altitude, up to the flanks of the summit pinnacle. A minimum of 100 birds was seen, nesting and in flight. Their nests were located in shallow holes and tussock ledges on steep faces, sometimes grouped into discreet zones. The development of young ranged from eggs to large downy chicks. Contrary to what is generally stated, i.e. that the Lord Howe Island population has the highest proportion of pale phase examples, the majority of birds observed were of dark to medium colour phase.

### Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*

A burrowing shearwater of dark, uniform colour, dark narrow bill, pale feet, and small size present on the Pyramid was almost certainly this species. It was common at lower levels, wherever burrowing was possible.

### Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*

Numerous on all ledges and terraces, right to the summit at c. 560+ metres, where two pairs were breeding. At least 45 pairs were seen along the south-east ridge, about 30 of these on a large terrace on the ridge at c. 150 metres altitude. Most boobies were nesting, from eggs to adult-sized chicks with some juvenile plumage.

#### Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*

Only two birds were actually observed nesting, both at egg stage. Many more were seen in flight, especially around the east face, 30 to 40 birds at a time. The terraced east face of the Pyramid seems to be the stronghold of the species, as none were seen around the west face.

#### Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

A single flock of about ten birds was seen at sea level.

#### Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*

Abundant at all levels except the top 100 metres or so, but concentrated on the lower terraces with at least 1000+ pairs present on the Pyramid. All stages of breeding, from unhatched eggs to chicks with the beginnings of juvenile plumage were observed. These terns preferred nest sites on ledges and terraces, with or without vegetation, and were not seen on the steep faces.

#### Common Noddy *Anous stolidus*

Flocks were seen frequently around sea level. Only one breeding bird was observed, at about 50 metres altitude – a single egg on a *Melaleuca howeana* bush, without nest.

#### Grey Ternlet *Procelsterna albivittata*

Fairly common on the lower half of the Pyramid, with fewer towards the top. They were nesting on small ledges and in holes on steep rock faces. Only young chicks were seen, about ten. The number of adults observed was at least 50 pairs.

These were the species identified on the sections of Ball's Pyramid which were traversed. Other species and populations may have been present elsewhere.

### DISCUSSION

Close observation of the birds on Ball's Pyramid without using climbing techniques would generally be limited to the base of the island. However, a slanting terrace on the east side of the south-east ridge would provide *relatively* easy access to nesting Sooty Terns, boobies, shearwaters and tropicbirds, up to an altitude of about 70 metres.

The status of birds on Lord Howe Island including Ball's Pyramid was summarised by Fullagar *et al* (in Recher (Ed.) 1974 Environmental Survey of Lord Howe Island, Appendix F). The information gained from our visit has confirmed that Kermadec Petrels and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters breed in significant numbers on Ball's Pyramid. Additional information on the breeding status of the Grey Ternlet is provided. The observed population of Masked Boobies (45+ pairs) was far in excess of the 12+ pairs stated by Fullagar *et al* (Recher *loc. cit.*).

## SHADING AND SUNNING IN THE GREY BUTCHERBIRD

D. LARKINS

### INTRODUCTION

Between 1972 and 1974 an intensive study of the Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* was made in bushland adjoining my garden at Turramurra, New South Wales. The species was also studied in other locations on a more casual basis, one of the secondary areas being a Hoxton Park garden, west of Sydney.

During breeding seasons, observations began at first light and lasted about two hours; further observations were made during the early afternoon and again about sunset. When broods fledged, study was less intensive and at more convenient times. In late autumn and winter the birds were very cryptic and more time was then given to checking literature. Results of the study will be prepared in a series of papers of which this is the first. All times quoted are adjusted to Eastern Standard Time.

### SHADING

On 24 August 1972, a Grey Butcherbird with a tuft of feathers protruding from the right flank visited the barbecue in my garden at South Turramurra looking for meat scraps. Later observations of this bird during courtship identified it as a male bird. The tuft survived successive moults and this bird still held the study territory at the end of the 1977 breeding season.

On 16 September, 1972, a nest was located by following the territorial advertising of the tufted Grey Butcherbird and its mate. At this stage the nest comprised only a few twigs, and was sited in the first crotch of a sapling Bloodwood *Eucalyptus gummifera* at approximately 8 metres.

The habitat was dry sclerophyll forest dominated by mature and sapling *Eucalyptus sp.* which provided good shade, although the canopy was not complete. This forest had regenerated well after a fire in November 1968, when some saplings were killed by crown burning.

The tufted male bird was easy to identify in the field, even from a distance. Only females brood (Hindwood 1967), and on 26 October this female's restless behaviour suggested young were hatching. First feeding of brood was observed on 27 October. However on 25 September, probably ten days after the nest under study was commenced, a second nest was found in the same territory, with a dead bird in the brooding position. No eggs were found in the failed nest. It was concluded that after the death of his previous mate, the tufted male soon found a new partner and with her began the territorial posting by which the second nest was located. This delay in raising a brood probably lessened the chances of its survival.

On 6 November, two nestlings showed strong head lift and beak gape when adults brought food to the nest. The female brooded very high on the nest that day. At 13.32 with cloud cover one eighth, she sat on the nest edge with slightly raised wings, then stood right in the cup with the sun directly behind her, shading nestlings with her raised wings. At this stage the young were gaping widely. Only their heads were visible and the down was short and sparse. Later the female sat in the nest.

On 7 November, the nestlings were gaping vigorously for food. They received skinks, moths, lacewings and larvae. This day was cooler with almost total cloud cover; with no shading recorded the longest period of brooding was eight minutes. On 8 November only one head appeared above the nest at a time which was unusual. The adults were not in the nest vicinity at 13.12 but attacked an Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* in the territory. The sun was not directly on the nest and there was no cloud cover. At 13.32 the female attended, standing in the nest with back to the sun which was now directly on the cup. During sun sheltering behind slightly elevated wings, the nestling visible held a wide gape. The function of this did not appear to be food begging as no calls were made, and the adult female did not respond to the gaping by bringing food to the nest. The shading bird also gaped wide during the sheltering period of 32 minutes. Shade temperature was 24°C.

The male brought food unsolicited by begging calls from young during the shading period. The female shaded until the canopy again sheltered the nest. After six minutes' absence she returned to feed the brood and then recommenced shading with her back to dappled light. After leaving to feed, she sheltered by standing in the cup, wings slightly elevated, adjusting position so that the sun, now striking from a different angle, was still behind her.

No observations were made on 9 November. On 10 November the female did not brood overnight. Both adults brought food to the nest on 11 November, but there was no sign of nestling activity, and by the following day both dead nestling had been taken by the adults to hang in forked twigs nearby. Removal of one young was witnessed, and the second was later located and from its condition appeared to have been the first to die. The brood was probably lost on 8-9 November. The bodies were sparsely downed and some primary quills were appearing.

Shading was again observed in the same territory on 3 December 1976, when the shade temperature was 32°C at 14.15. A disastrous fire fanned by gale force winds swept down the Lane Cove River Valley about an hour later and was controlled only about 400 metres from this nest. This observation was not followed up, but no young birds were seen or heard in the study territory later that season.

### SUNNING

On 29 July 1973, at 15.30 a Grey Butcherbird in mature plumage perched on a Bunya Pine *Araucaria bidwillii* branch at Hoxton Park, New South Wales. The site was an open position at about 15 metres. The bird's back was to the sun, with the left wing held low and partly open. From this position it flew to take food casually from the branches before adopting a new perch, again with back to the sun. The right wing was now extended, primary feathers exposed to the sunlight as before. It was not convenient to stay for the whole sunning period but the bird did not groom while under observation.

### DISCUSSION

Although H. J. Frith (*in litt.*) considers the habit of shading Australian birds is reasonably widespread, I have not found references to either shading or sunning by Grey Butcherbirds. In fact, references dealing with sunning appear restricted to short notes under titles not directly related to the habit, and this may also apply to observations of shading behaviour in Australia.

Some interesting accounts of shading are found in overseas sources. Morse Nice (1943) considered it "an important function of the parent" and includes descriptions of the habit as practised by various species. An observation by Charles (1909) led her to think that shading behaviour was not necessarily released by signs of distress in the young, but may have been a direct response to the sun.

Nelson (1969) describes the effect of rising temperature when direct sunshine causes distress to birds of prey just out of down into feathers, when exposure can kill in less than half an hour at a temperature around 32°C. He comments on the late nesting of Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* in the north-west U.S.A. making them "doomed to nesting failure . . . if exposed to direct rays of the sun".

Landsborough Thomson (1964) quotes the body temperature of all birds as 41°C when awake and inactive. In both precocial and altricial young the temperature is a few degrees below this for the first few weeks of life. Heat stress sets in when environmental temperature is close to body temperature, resulting in rapid panting.

Between 1972-76 shading was observed in the study area only three times. Both broods concerned were raised late in the season, birds in this territory and at nearby Thornleigh (B. Howie, *in litt.*) not re-nesting after failure in November or early December. The male breeding song in the study area ceased in November. As sunlight may strike the nest at any time during the July-December breeding season, the shading response appears to be triggered by a factor other than sunlight itself. It would be difficult to gather evidence sufficient to suggest at what temperature shading begins. Other factors such as light intensity or angle of the sun may be involved. Humidity could well be a factor influencing the response.

Sunning, or sunbathing, is dealt with by Landsborough Thomson (*loc cit*) in Feather Maintenance. A number of sunning postures of varying intensity are described. Gifford (1941) refers to doves and pigeons as "ardent sun-bathers", and perhaps this is why instances of sunning by them are more frequently documented than observations of the habit in other species. Morse Nice (*loc cit*) describes the posture adopted by Song Sparrows *Melospiza melodia* and other North American and European species.

In Australian literature a reference to sunning by Humphries (1963) under the title "Camouflage by Partridge Pigeons" describes the posture, which he may have mistaken for a camouflage position. Tubb (1964) then pointed out this was an attempt to "warm . . . areas otherwise covered". He listed six species of pigeons and doves in which he had observed the habit. Johnston (1965) then commented that instances of sunbaking were not well known, and cited overseas summary papers on the behaviour.

More recently D. and R. Keller (1977) described attempts to photograph a Plumed Pigeon *Lophophaps p. plumifera*. Like Humphries (*loc cit*) they were impressed by the camouflage of the bird under observation. Their description is of a variation of shading behaviour, the bird protecting itself by sheltering its face in the shadow cast by its own body when brooding in an exposed position.

## CONCLUSION

A search has been made for references to shading and sunning in the Australian literature. My lack of success leads to the question of whether these aspects of behaviour have been overlooked or not documented. References may be contained in articles dealing primarily with other aspects of behaviour. In any case, it would appear that Johnston (*loc cit*) was correct in saying that summary articles on sunbathing were not well known.

It could not be positively determined what caused the loss of the late Grey Butcherbird brood in 1972. In 1973-74 the early broods fledged. However, as food was brought to the nest consistently, even for two days after nestlings died, starvation can be discounted, and the loss was probably due to heat stress. I therefore suggest that late broods of Grey Butcherbirds are subject to high losses because of climatic factors.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alan Morris encouraged me to begin and continue this study of the Grey Butcherbird, and David Purchase sent a reading list as guidance. H. J. Disney, E. S. Hoskin, A. R. McGill, and J. Worthington of the National Parks and Wildlife Library helped to locate references. M. Dibley, J. H. Frith and B. Howie were among those who offered suggestions in answer to my enquiries. Throughout the study my family overlooked many long absences in the field and their co-operation allowed me to complete the work. In this initial paper I thank all these people for their generous help.

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## A BLACK-CAPPED PETREL OFF LORD HOWE ISLAND

JOHN L. McKEAN

Fullagar *et al* (1974 *Environ. Survey of Lord Howe Is.*) lists the Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma externa cervicalis*, as a rare visitor to Lord Howe Island. It seems desirable to document this record of a species which otherwise has not been reliably reported from Australian waters.

On 1 March 1971, whilst travelling by launch between Ball's Pyramid and the main Island, a medium-sized petrel with a conspicuous black cap, grey black above, white below, passed close by the boat. It was closely followed by a Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis* which was noticeably smaller. The following identification points were noted at the time; short black bill with elevated tubular nostrils typical of the genus *Pterodroma*; black-capped head; white-neck collar; and white underwing with thin black leading edge.

Observers present included J. and M. Foster, H. J. de S. Disney, G. F. van Tets, H. F. Recher, J. H. Lewis, D. A. Stewart and the writer.

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## THE SUPERB PARROT IN THE CENTRAL WEST OF NEW SOUTH WALES

M. KAVENEY

Rogers (1977 Aust. Birds 11-81), in his annual bird report for New South Wales gives details of some interesting records of the Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* in the central west of N.S.W. As I was resident from 1965 to 1969 at Albert, 15 km east of Tottenham, my records and observations of the Superb Parrot in that area may be of interest, particularly, because, for the years 1966 to 1969 inclusive, I recorded an apparent southward movement of Superb Parrots during the month of June.

In 1966 the movement was first recorded on 26 June. I was birding, during the late afternoon in woodland, four kilometres east of Albert and observed small parties of between 10 and 15 birds flying south-south-east. On a few occasions flocks alighted in the taller Bimble-boxes *Eucalyptus populnea* for two to three minutes before again heading off. In all 70 birds passed over in the space of 30 minutes. For the next two days small flocks were seen flying south over Albert.

In 1967 the southward movement was again evident when on 20 June, 200 birds were recorded passing over Albert in small flocks throughout the day.

In 1968, birds were first reported to me on 13 June from Tottenham by Constable John Clark. On the 20 June at Albert, small numbers were seen flying south and parties were recorded around Albert each day until 2 July. The pattern of movement was similar in 1969 with the birds first appearing on 15 June and last recorded on 17 June.

From these records it would appear that there is an annual southward movement of Superb Parrots in the Tottenham-Albert area. It is also noteworthy, that the 1976 records were for winter months. While the movement and direction was quite definite each year there was some variation in the apparent rate of movement. In all years, with the exception of 1968, the flocks were compact and their flight direct. They were not seen to feed but kept moving through. In 1968, however, the movement appeared to be much slower, with flocks alighting on the ground to feed. one female, banded at Albert, was retrapped two days later at the same spot. (On each occasion the trap was baited with wheat.)

During my stay at Albert no northward movement was observed. In view of the currently held view that the alleged "northern" population as mentioned by H. T. Condon (1975 Checklist of the Birds of Aust. Part 1) is in fact winter migrants from southern New South Wales, my observations give additional information on the status of these birds in the "middle" region.

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## A FURTHER VISIT TO BROUGHTON ISLAND, NEW SOUTH WALES

S. G. LANE

On 26-27 November 1977, with my wife and a group organised by the Hunter River Naturalists' Club, I again visited Broughton Island, N.S.W. Almost four years had elapsed since my previous visit and there were some obvious changes.

Two of the "weekender" huts had disappeared; one of these, illegally constructed about the time the island was included in the Myall Lakes National Park, had been removed. The other, one of the older huts, had been demolished by waves during a severe storm. A toilet structure, recently constructed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service is situated to the north behind Esmeralda Cove. A second similar structure, erected near North Beach, had blown down in a gale.

The regeneration of vegetation on the island was noticeable. Three Coral Trees *Erythrina* sp. near the swamp in the centre of the island were now about 4 metres high; Prickly Pear *Opuntia stricta* had spread considerably in the south-eastern corner and at the north-western end.

About 80 pairs of Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* and some 40 to 50 pairs of Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* were nesting on Snapper Rock. The gull nesting was at all stages from fresh eggs to flying young, though most were at the "runner" stage. A few of the terns were on eggs but of about 100 "runners", most were well developed. The only previous breeding recorded for these species on the island was in 1959 (Hindwood and D'Ombraïn, 1960) when "small numbers apparently nested", and a few gulls nests with eggs were found in 1972 (Lane, 1976).

This visit was my sixth to Broughton Island, the first being from 18-20 December, 1959 (Hindwood and D'Ombraïn, *loc. cit.*). No estimate of the number of breeding shearwaters (*Puffinus* spp.) was made at that time. In fact, the first such estimate was made during this recent visit. F. W. C. van Gessel (1978) with other members of the group conducted a survey of the shearwater colonies and estimated that about 22 000 pairs probably were breeding on the island. During the visit 47 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters *Puffinus pacificus* and 11 Short-tailed Shearwaters *P. tenuirostris* were banded. However, the ratio is not indicative of the overall situation as particular efforts were made to check the known *tenuirostris* locations. Also, 29 of the *pacificus* were captured on the surface at night.

From my own recollections, it appears that the shearwater breeding colonies on Broughton Island have slowly but steadily increased in area during the 18 years since my first visit.

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## COLOURATION IN REED-WARBLERS' EGGS

L. M. COURTNEY-HAINES

I found the observations made by G. R. Beruldsen (1976 Aust. Birds 10:58) of the utmost interest. It would most certainly appear that variation in ground colour within clutches of Australian Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus australis* (Gould) is not uncommon, despite the fact that I have only ever found one such clutch (1975 Aust. Birds 10:15-17).

I must make it quite clear at this point, that by variation in ground colour I mean, a ground colour of a different tint, not just a lessening of the same tint, this does not count.

Beruldsen considers the statement I quoted from the section dealing with colour in birds- eggs in G. M. F. Prynne (1963 Egg Shells: Barrie and Rockliff) as applying to the texture and composition of the eggshell, and not as thought by me to the ground colour. However, a few pages further on in his book and after having discussed colour generally and at some length, Colonel Prynne writes – "The following theoretical axiom is therefore postulated;" – and then in italics, – "The colour of egg shell is dependent upon the blood type of a bird, the pattern upon the pigmentary gland formation". Continuing in normal letterpress, the author then enlarges upon the pigmentary cover marks.

If indeed the ground colour of an egg is dependent upon the blood type of the hen, it would therefore seem necessary that for variation in ground colour to occur within an individual clutch, a variation would also be demanded in a hen's blood type during the period when she was depositing her clutch.

It might be asked, is the variation in a clutch the result of the laying of one hen or of two hens in the one nest? Mr. Beruldsen believes that the former is the case and his view is undoubtedly strengthened by the fact, that Reed-warblers inhabiting Eastern Australia, with few exceptions, are C/3 layers. If two hens laid in the same nest, one would expect to find clutches in excess of the normal C/3, unless, of course, the brooding hen and true owner of the nest cast out the surplus egg or eggs, and in doing so dispensed with her own and not that or those of the intruder. If this merely suggested explanation were true, it would account for nests containing the usual C/3, of which the ground colour tint of one egg differs noticeably from that of the other two.

As I was interested to know whether a similar trait occurred within clutches of British *acrocephali*, I appealed within the pages of "The Bulletin of the Jourdain Society", for information dealing with this most intriguing subject, and in due course received from the well-known oologist, Mr. Gordon Douglas, of Surrey, England, a most interesting letter containing the following information. Before quoting direct from his letter, I must mention that my correspondent's warbler cabinet contains good series of clutches of Sedge-warbler *A. schoenobaenus*, 20 clutches of Marsh-warbler *A. palustris* and 24 clutches of Reed-warbler *A. scirpaceus*.

Mr. Douglas writes: "Sedge-warbler, the eggs show very little variation at all and the ground colour is rarely seen. I have only one such clutch, and the ground is constant. I have seen a pure white set once. Marsh-warbler, there is no variation in ground colour, and very little in the markings within the sets, although different clutches vary considerably in both respects. Reed-warbler, there is only one clutch which shows any real difference in ground

colour. Three eggs have deep brown blotches and caps on a yellowish ground, the fourth egg has deep bluish green marks on a green ground. This egg is most noticeably different and shows up in sharp contrast in the clutch. It is the only example I remember seeing, although there is a great variation from clutch to clutch in this species.

The area where I took this clutch, had many pairs of Reed-warbler breeding quite close together, as is normally the case; they are semi-colonial as you will know. Although I took the set in all good faith, it could possibly be a case of a bird laying in its neighbour's nest, which is always possible with many species, especially if its own nest has been destroyed.

Looking through the rest of my collection I would say that variation in ground is nil, except in a very few species. It is true that some show a difference in depth of colour. For instance, Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* which usually lays one egg, I believe the last laid, a much paler blue than the rest. This difference tends to disappear as the clutch ages."

It will be noted that Mr. Douglas also suggest the possibility of community nesting birds like reed-warblers at times depositing an egg in a nest other than their own.

I am at present engaged in writing a monograph on the reed-warblers of the world and I would very much like to hear more of Mr. Beruldsen's birds. Though I would much like to see a clutch in which ground colour varies, I refrain from asking for any such clutches being sent to me, lest I cause offence; however, a coloured photograph would be more than welcome. Mr. Beruldsen may rest assured, that any information sent to me will be properly acknowledge in my forthcoming monograph.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to Mr. Gordon Douglas for kindly sending me details regarding ground colour of acrocephaline warblers' eggs in his collection. I would also like to thank Cpt. A. L. Mansfield, Hon. editor of "The Bulletin of the Jourdain Society", for publishing my appeal for information in his magazine.

L. COURTNEY-HAINES, "Viney Cottage," 10 Loquat Valley Road, Bayview, N.S.W. 2104.

## THE INLAND OCCURRENCE OF TROPIC-BIRDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES DURING MARCH, 1978

A. K. MORRIS

Both the Red-tailed Tropic-bird *Phaethon rubricaudus* and the White-tailed Tropic-bird *P. lepturus* are rarely recorded in New South Wales, generally occurring as storm-driven strays (Serventy *et al* 1971 *The handbook of Australian Seabirds*). The Red-tailed Tropic-bird up to December, 1977 was recorded in N.S.W. on 15 occasions (1898-1976) during the period November-July, the majority during summer. Over half of the observations relate to birds seen at sea in inshore waters and most records were for adult birds. The birds were found along the whole length of the coast except for one particular specimen which was picked up alive after a storm near Tamworth in June, 1945 (*Emu* 47: 57).

The White-tailed Tropic-bird has also been recorded on 15 occasions (1890-1976) during the period December to July with most records for the period January-April. Localities range from Murrumbidgee near Ulladulla, north to the Queensland border with one specimen found alive at Bulahdelah after a storm in February, 1956 (McGill 1960 *Handlist of the Birds of N.S.W.*). In contrast to the Red-tailed Tropic-bird, the majority of observations relate to juvenile birds washed up dead on the beaches following storms at sea.

On 19 March, 1978, a large rain depression, relict of a tropical cyclone, moved inland from the N.S.W. north coast apparently bringing with it numerous tropic-birds. These were blown inland by the strong gale-force easterly winds that had prevailed for the previous three days, carrying the birds beyond the extreme inland localities where previous tropic-birds had been deposited (Tamworth and Bulahdelah approx. 190 km and 18 km respectively from the coast). This tropical low depression brought rain to much of the State on 20 March 1978 with heavy falls about the south and central coast and adjacent ranges contracting slowly south, leaving some showers and thunderstorms in the north. North-east to south-east winds were gale force on the South Coast but easing slowly, with winds becoming variable in the west. Seas were very rough with a heavy swell in the south, grading to slight to moderate seas with moderate seas in the north. The synoptic weather chart for the 20 March 1978 is shown as Figure I and demonstrates the abnormal climatic situation that brought about the unusual fall of tropic-birds to inland N.S.W. Figure II is a map showing the localities where the birds were found.

Details of tropic-birds that were recovered after the tropical low depression moved into N.S.W. are set out below.

### Red-tailed Tropic-bird

- 20.3.78 Adult found alive in a paddock at "Biambil", Baradine but whilst being photographed flew away and has not since been found (D. Johnston *pers. comm.*).
- 20.3.78 Immature male found alive in Warrumbungle National Park, 36 km west of Coonabarabran, now AM O. 46743.
- 20.3.78 Adult male found washed up on Avoca Beach near Gosford AM O. 46745.
- 21.3.78 Adult female found alive in the main street of Barraba, now AM O. 47063.
- 21.3.78 Two birds, sex and age not known, found near Dubbo, and taken to the Western Plains Zoo, where they subsequently died and were buried (Anon. *pers. comm.*).
- 22.3.78 Adult female found at Silverwater, a suburb on the Parramatta River near Parramatta, now AM O. 46842.

- 21.2.78 Adult found alive at Bourke, fed for two days, and later released. The bird flew away to the west along the Darling River (J. Disney, *pers. comm.*).
- 21.3.78 Adult found alive at Armidale, where it was fed for seven days and subsequently released at Sawtell near Coff's Harbour, the bird flying strongly out to sea.
- 21.3.78 Adult male found 12 km northwest of Tamworth, now a study skin on display with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

#### White-tailed Tropic-bird

- 20.3.78 Immature male found alive in Warrumbungle National Park, 36 km west of Coonabarabran, now AM O. 467843.
- 21.3.78 Five found in Tamworth, one which was killed by a car, another an immature, was photographed and illustrated in the "Tamworth Daily Leader" newspaper, on 22 March 1978. Another, an adult male, found dead has been used in a NPWS display. The age and sex of the other two birds that were fed and released by a Tamworth resident is not known (R. Payne *pers. comm.*).
- 21.3.78 Immature female found 23 km north of Griffith now AM O. 46744.
- 21.3.78 Immature found dead beside access track to Widden Valley, location of specimen not known (NSW FOC Newsletter, June, 1978).
- 25.3.78 Immature, sex unknown, found dead on Garie Beach, Royal National Park, now AM O. 46727.

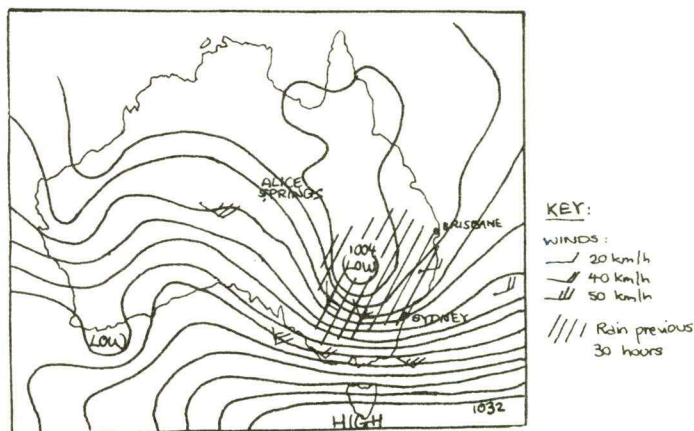


FIG. 1: SYNOPTIC WEATHER CHART  
3 PM 20-3-'78



FIG. II : N.S.W. LOCALITIES WHERE TROPIC-BIRDS FOUND 20-23 MARCH 1978

## DISCUSSION

The nearest breeding place of Red-tailed Tropic-birds to New South Wales is Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island and their associate outliers. The breeding population on Lord Howe Island has been estimated at 250+ pairs, P. Fullagar *et al* (in 1974 *Environ. Survey. Lord Howe Island*, Appendix F), whilst the population at Norfolk Island would be much greater. By March, most of the young birds would have fledged, so that birds of all age groups could be caught up in the cyclone and carried through into inland N.S.W. This could explain why both adults and immature Red-tailed Tropic-birds occurred in equal proportion during this seabird "fall" in contrast to mostly immature White-tailed Tropic-birds. The nearest breeding island of the latter bird to eastern Australia, is Walpole Island, a coral islet about 240 km south-east of New Caledonia and about 1280 km from coastal N.S.W. (Serventy *loc. cit.*). Apparently, adult birds are recorded at most seasons in the Coral Sea but it would appear that possibly immatures have a post-breeding dispersal southwards to more temperate waters.

Other possible sightings of tropic-birds were reported to me following an article I wrote for the Gilgandra, Coonamble and Coonabarabran Newspapers when the first birds were found. Some of these reports (near Mullaley and Gilgandra) were most certainly tropic-birds but the observers were not aware at the time of the importance of the observation and did not record full details. The fact that 18 tropic-birds were found throughout N.S.W. during a three-day period, the largest fall of tropic-birds ever recorded in Australia, is of particular interest. One wonders just how many other tropic-birds were also caught up in the rain depression but remained undetected. It is interesting to note that even though some other tropical seabirds were also blown ashore during this cyclone, none were reported at inland localities.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The assistance of Mr. J. De S. Disney, Curator of Birds, Australian Museum; staff of the Western Plains Zoo, Dubbo; R. Payne NPWS Grafton; and I. Archibald, Curator of Specimens, University of New England; in providing information about the specimens was greatly appreciated. E. Edmondson prepared the maps.

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### UNUSUAL JAEGER SPECIMEN

#### CHRIS SONTER

During drafting of the manuscript on derelict seabirds found on the Bherewerre Peninsula, A.C.T. (Sonter 1978), the validity of the Arctic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus* was challenged and the possibility of it being the much rarer Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicauda* was proposed. A close re-examination of the specimen, still in my possession at the time, was made. Having no reason to doubt the identification by J. D. Gibson or A. R. Sefton, and being satisfied myself, it was decided to adhere to it being *parasiticus*. However, the "blue" colour of the tarsus did present something of a contradiction to the descriptions cited in most literature. In discussing the problem with N. J. Favaloro a decision was made to have it compared with other specimens in the sub-genus in order to obtain a definitive identification. The specimen was then sent to the Victorian National Museum where it was examined. Doubt still persisted and, through the Curator of Birds, permission was then obtained to send the specimen to the British Museum (National History). A comparison with those in the Museum's collection confirmed it as being *parasiticus*. After collating the various comments gathered, and still being undecided over one or two aspects including the "blue" tarsus, a further opinion was sought through Dr. A. Wetmore of the National Museum (Washington D.C.) from Dr. G. E. Watson. After receiving, examining and comparing the specimen he (Dr. Watson) had no hesitation in describing it as a Long-tailed Jaeger *S. longicauda*, his judgement being based on the parti-coloured legs and feet. These, he stated, only occur in this species (even in sub-adults) but he did warn that sub-adult Jaegers are **notoriously difficult** to identify.

While the specimen was in transit between museums I made another review of the literature with the assistance of J. D. Gibson. Several authors variously describe the tail of *longicauda* as "pliant", "finely pointed", "long and thin" and "very flexible" and there are many fine drawings and photographs confirming these descriptions. However, the emerging central tail feathers on the specimen in question were broad and dissimilar to those of *longicauda*. As a feather grows from the base it develops and pushes the old one out but does not alter its shape as it grows longer (Heinroth 1959). On the other hand there could be close similarity between immature feathers in both species.



Colour variability in the *longicauda* tarsus may yet be shown to occur in some populations. Also it should be noted that some authors have borrowed from previously published descriptions and possibly others have not given due consideration to the change in colours of soft parts which often take place after death. Sibson (1967) states the "tarsus pale flesh" while Fisher (1947) says "legs grey, feet black". Both Murphy (1936) and Alexander (1954) give good details which serve to indicate that there is a variation in leg colour and colour distribution in *longicauda*. The specimen in question has the entire foot black and also the proximal and distal tarsal joints. There is also a small section of black mottling half way along the left tarsus. A curious comment regarding leg colour comes from Mathews and Iredale (1921) who describe *parasiticus* (not *longicauda*) as having "tarsus pale blue, toes and webs black".

Another seemingly important aid to identification is that of the "breast band". Thompson (1978) when describing a bird he believed to be an Arctic Jaeger near Lee Point, N.T., indicated the bird as having "a diffuse but obvious brown pectoral band". In the Jervis Bay specimen a dark smudgy band was found to be present when the loose but adhering feathers were replaced in position (this section of the specimen is now missing having become detached and lost during museum examinations). Godfrey (1976) says that in *longicauda* this band is absent (some Arctic and Pomarine Jaeger also lack a breast band).

There seems as much support for the specimen being *parasiticus* as *longicauda* but if no positive identification has been achieved certainly a lot of interest has been generated. For two eminent institutions, each presumably with extensive reference collections, to arrive at different identifications, shows the difficulties that can sometimes arise in identifying a Jaeger specimen in the hand. In the field, according to Godfrey (*loc. cit.*) . . . "first year birds (*parasiticus*) are almost impossible to distinguish . . . from young of other Jaegers".

Some further data on the Jervis Bay bird are as follows: Bill dark brown overall, culmen 26.4; tarsus 42, sky blue when fresh (not dull blue-grey); middle toe and claw 36.4; tail (in moult) 133. The specimen was of the light phase and is now in the Gibson/Sefton Collection No. G/S 1.344.

To those associated with this exercise I extend my sincere thanks and trust the prolonged lapse of time since the identification was first challenged and the publication of these additional notes will merit their indulgence.

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## MUSICAL CALL OF THE RED WATTLEBIRD

D. I. SMEDLEY

Nearly all bird observers are familiar with the hoarse, raucous, and somewhat unattractive call "tobacco box tobacco box" of the Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*. I wonder how many people know that the bird is also capable of another, more musical call? Certainly I was not aware of this fact, until recently.

At Epping, New South Wales, on 30 March 1978, I heard a loud, unfamiliar bird call above the noise of the morning peak hour traffic. At first I thought it was the first notes of the call of the Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*, but the call was infinitely more melodious and pleasant. The call, or sound, consisted of five short quick "round" notes ascending about three notes on the scale. The only bird in clear view was a Red Wattlebird and fortunately it repeated the call a few seconds later. The bird stretched almost upright on its perch and called with beak open and throat throbbing with each note. It repeated the call once again before flying off.

It was extraordinary to hear such a call from the throat of a bird with a reputation for harsh notes. However, it is not unknown, for Officer (1964 Australian Honeyeaters), has stated that "on rare occasions, listeners have claimed to have heard a musical song".

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## NECTAR FEEDING BY CURRAWONGS

M. DIBLEY

On 16 September 1978, J. Strudwick, B. Mannes, J. Wilson, G. and M. Dibley were south of Sydney, in the Royal National Park overlooking Heathcote Brook. A Grey Currawong *Strepera versicolor* was seen to alight on the flowerhead of a Giant Lily *Doryanthes excelsa* about 20 metres away from us and at eye level. The flowerheads are about 30 cm across on stalks 2.5 metres to 6 metres tall. On several occasions the Currawong was observed to plunge its bill into the flowers and then tilt its head back vertically. It appeared that the bird was swallowing nectar which is abundant in these flowers.

After this bird departed, a Pied Currawong *S. graculina*, alighted on the same flowerhead, crouched and fluttered its wings. Whereupon another Pied Currawong alighted alongside it and plunged its bill among the flowers and fed the crouching bird, large dribbles of nectar being observed to fall from their bills.

During this time an Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* on another flowerhead about 35 metres to the right, was busily tearing at the flowers and flinging fragments in all directions.

A subsequent search of a large number of flowerheads revealed no sign of insects and around the bases of practically all plants were fragments of flowers.

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