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RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE TASMANIAN BIRD LIST (By David Milledge, Sandy Bay, Tas.)

LOOKING at the two most recently published books on our birds — "A Catalogue of Tasmanian Birds" (R. H. Green) and "Tasmanian Birds" (Michael Sharland) — one can obtain a list of 243 species for Tasmania and its offshore islands (including King Island and the Flinders Group). Both these books cover records up to 1958 and, as the list now stands at 263 (June 1966), it can be seen that 20 new birds have been added in eight years. This is indicative of the increasing interest in field ornithology in this State over the past few years. The possibility of new records has induced observers to visit remote, out-of-the-way areas and spend more time on estuarine mudflats, with the result that 12 of the 20 new species have been recorded from such places.

The new birds fall into three categories :

1. 7 waders (Charadriiformes), 5 recorded from the Ralphs Bay — Pittwater area in the south of Tasmania and 2 from the north-east.
2. Another group of 7 species, (3 hawks, 3 egrets, and a tern), seen in northern and southern Tasmania and also on the East Coast.
3. A group of 6 birds from the Bass Strait Islands, being 3 honeyeaters, 2 wood-swallows and one petrel.

The new waders were found during a survey of mud-flats in southern, eastern and north-eastern Tasmania carried out over the past two seasons by Hobart observers, D. G. Thomas, L. E. Wall and the writer, and also by F. T. H. Smith while on a visit from Melbourne. All the waders have been recorded since January 1965. On the 23rd of that month, I saw a single Little Whimbrel (*Numenius minutus*) feeding with Greenshanks at the southern end of Ralphs Bay near South Arm. David Thomas recorded the next new wader for Tasmania when he found a Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) with Eastern Curlews, also at South Arm, only a week later, on January 28. Then, on February 28 of the same year, Len Wall recorded the third new wader at Ansons Bay in the north-east, where he saw several Sanderlings (*Crocethia alba*).

The Pectoral Sandpiper (*Erolia melanotos*) was the fourth wader added, a single bird being tentatively identified by the writer at Cambridge on November 19, 1965. This wader was next seen by David Thomas, and later positively identified by Fred Smith. Other observers also saw this bird as it stayed near Cambridge for several months. During an excursion together on November 28, Fred Smith, David Thomas and the writer then added two waders in one day, a Mongolian Dotterel (*Charadrius mongolus*) and two Great Knots (*Calidris tenuirostris*). The Dotterel was seen at Lauderdale, Ralphs Bay, and the Knots in Orielton Lagoon, Pittwater.

The last of Tasmania's new waders was recorded by Len Wall and David Thomas early this year, when they saw a flock of 60 Ruffs (*Philomachus pugnax*) at Cape Portland in the north-east.

The first of the new hawks was a Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*), recorded by Len Wall and Roy Wheeler near Falmouth on November 10, 1964. This was the first positive record of a Whistling Eagle in Tasmania. The next hawk to be recorded was a Fork-tailed Kite (*Milvus migrans*) seen by a Melbourne observer at Western Junction late in 1965. After this, David Thomas also reported one from Pawleena, near Sorell. A Black Falcon (*Falco subniger*) was yet another new record for David Thomas when he

reported one from Orielton Lagoon, Pittwater, early this year (1966).

Of the three new egrets, the first recorded was a Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) seen by Peter Bolger on May 15, 1957, at Blackmans Bay, near Dunalley. Len Wall then reported a Plumed Egret (*Egretta intermedia*) at Howrah on June 7, 1958. Although both these egrets were recorded before and during 1958, they were not mentioned by Michael Sharland, so presumably reports of their presence in Tasmania were published after his book was published. The third new egret for Tasmania was the long-awaited Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), seen by David Thomas at Rostrevor Lagoon, Triabunna on April 19, 1965.

Tasmania's newest tern was the rather surprising record of a White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucoptera*) by Len Wall at Sandford on December 16, 1961. This bird was collected by the Tasmanian Museum and made into a study skin.

The six new species from the Bass Strait Islands are — Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Meliphaga chrysops*), White-naped Honeyeater (*Melithreptus lunatus*), Brown-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*), White-breasted Wood-swallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*), Masked Wood-swallow (*Artamus personatus*) and Silver-grey Petrel (*Fulmarus antarcticus*). Four of these, the two Wood-swallows, the Petrel and the Yellow-faced Honeyeater were recorded by Max McGarvie from King Island. There is a report of his observations in "The Tasmanian Naturalist", No. 2. The other two honeyeaters are somewhat of a mystery and it is not clear how they came to be on the Tasmanian list. In his book, "Australian Honeyeaters", Brigadier H. R. Officer lists the Brown-headed Honeyeater from King Island and the White-naped Honeyeater from "Bass Strait Islands". Possibly both birds were recorded by Max McGarvie, but I can find no published references to their occurrence in Tasmania other than in Brigadier Officer's book.

It appears to me that the 20 new records mentioned in this article will set a pattern for additions to the Tasmanian list. Obviously, new records from the Tasmanian mainland are going to come from waders, terns, petrels and other long-winged sea birds, and also from those birds of prey and swamp birds not already recorded as visitors from the Australian mainland. Small bush birds will probably be added from the Bass Strait Islands, but it appears observers have seen nearly all those likely to occur on the Tasmanian mainland.

NATURALIST'S LAST NOTES — THE BLUE WREN

MR. JOHN R. SKEMP, a leading Tasmanian field naturalist and an author, died in May this year. The following interesting notes on plumage changes in the male Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) were his last literary effort; they were written on his sick bed, from which he did not recover. His notes have been submitted for publication in "The Tasmanian Naturalist" by Mr. W. Frank Ellis, Director of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston. "There can be few Tasmanian naturalists who will not know of Jack Skemp's long and deep study in Tasmanian fauna and flora," Mr. Ellis wrote. — THE EDITOR.

Colour Changes in Male Blue Wren By J. A. Skemp, B. Sc.

FOR the past twenty years I have been watching Blue Wrens at close range — several of them have learned to feed from my hand; and I have had a dozen to twenty under fairly continuous observation. Consequently I believe that the facts of changes in colour plumage of males follows a pattern slightly different from that usually postulated in bird books. In them you may read that male Blue Wrens after reaching the age of five or thereabouts do not shed their blue plumage in the autumn but wear it continuously. Over a period of twenty years I have never yet seen a male Blue Wren that did not go into eclipse plumage in February, and most years I have had at least a dozen males under close and constant observation.

The first signs of eclipse show about the beginning of February when a few gray or brown feathers begin to appear on the back, head and breast. Progressively the grey feathers push out the blue feathers, both the very dark blue and light blue plumage, until in about three to four weeks the little bird is completely grey-brown, except for a dark blue tail (a conspicuous feature) and black beak and eyes. In the female the beak and eye and the feathers round them are chestnut brown, and the tail

is dark grey, giving an easy method of distinguishing the sexes in eclipse. All young birds at first resemble the female — the tail is only about half length for the first month of plumage — but the males progressively develop a blue tail and black beak.

The eclipse period for males usually lasts until September. But one year I observed some males, whom I am almost certain were birds of four or more years old, going back into full breeding plumage, one in April, one in May and one in June, though the rest (eight of ten of the little mob) did not get their full plumage until September. (This early change from eclipse was noticed in several years.) For the younger ones it was late October before they had their full blue pattern. One year a young male who had had the misfortune to lose one foot began to get blue feathers in October, but he never completed his colour change before the February moult began. The next year, however, he was in full breeding plumage by the end of October. Unfortunately, by the next year he had disappeared.

It seems to me that the sighting of fully plumaged male birds in autumn (and sometimes quite early autumn,) has given rise to the suggestion that some males, presumably older ones, never lose their blue plumage; but as I have said, over twenty years and with numerous wrens under observation, I have never yet seen a male that did not go into eclipse. Obviously each male blue wren must have two moults each year — one to gain the blue breeding feathers and one to lose them.

The colour itself, both the dark blue (almost black) and the light cobalt blue are enamel-like and iridescent. The colour is apparently due to light refraction rather than pigmentation and the refracting material is deposited on the tiny barbules of the feathers, heavier on the outside than the inside of the feather. A fairly powerful magnifying glass will show the granules on the feathers. They may be washed or carried in minor amounts onto adjacent grey feathers, since under the dark blue of the breast there is often a very light blue margin. As the birds age the area covered by the colour pattern seems to spread further over the body. The first (light) blue feathers to come and the last to go are those around the beak.

OBITUARY — Mrs. Evelyn Fleming, one of the Club's most active women workers, died suddenly at Hobart on June 14 last. Her death will be a great loss to the Club. Her interest in nature study brought her into the Club many years ago and she attended nearly every field outing and annual camp and entered into the spirit of all social events. Members will best remember her as "honorary camp cook," a duty she cheerfully performed for the advance party on the annual Easter camps. She was a staunch worker for returned servicemen and in this realm also will be missed. The Club's sympathy goes to the family she left.

FRESHWATER FEAST : Flathead, mullet and cod, together with certain marine birds, are often provided with a feast of freshwater animals and insects as streams in flood pour their contents into sea or estuary. Have you observed the Silver Gulls feeding in the Derwent at Hobart when the Hobart Rivulet, after heavy rain, empties its contents into the estuary? With its source on Mt. Wellington, the capital's backdrop, the stream flows right through the city, beneath its buildings, and sometimes stains half the width of the estuary with mud and silt. Birds and fishes do well on the huge amounts of small animal life that the silt contains.

BUDGERYGAR SURVEY : Eric Lindgren, Department of Zoology, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, W. A., advises that he is making a survey of the nomadic behaviour of the Australian Budgerigar, one of our best known and most popular little parrots. He seeks the assistance of anyone who has watched these parrots in the wild. "I would like to ask the help of anyone who has personal records or knows of literature records of either — (a) breeding congregations of these birds, i. e., more or less high density breeding associations surrounded mainly by areas of little or no breeding, or (b) large non-breeding flocks as occasionally seen at waterholes, in flight, etc.," he says. Each item is important in itself, as the sum total of many records may give clearer understanding of the pattern of movement as a whole.

STUDY OF CAPE BARREN GOOSE

ADDRESSING the Club's June meeting, Dr. E. R. Guiler, chairman of the Tasmanian Animals and Birds Protection Board, spoke of the present status of the Cape Barren Goose (*Cereopsis novae-hollandiae*) on Tasmania's Bass Strait islands. He said there had been ill-informed criticism from other States that the numbers of this species were declining, when in fact the actual position was that the goose had probably never been so numerous. He said it was ridiculous for critics to say it was becoming extinct.

An annual count had been held for some years past and this had shown the goose to be increasing. Indeed, before long he envisaged they would be faced with a problem over too many geese, as farmers disliked the birds feeding on and trampling down their sheep pastures.

There was nothing in early records, despite what certain critics said, showing that the Cape Barren Goose was any more numerous on the islands than it was today. Indeed, because the birds were not protected in earlier years, they were probably far less common. But protection had now brought their numbers to new heights.

Dr. Guiler, speaking about the goose's breeding habits, said that although most nests were well concealed and therefore hard for anyone to find, some birds departed from routine and built their nests in extremely exposed situations, such as on the tops of low bushes and scrub. Also, most nests were to be found on the western fringes of islands, and thus exposed to the weather. He did not know the reason for this.

He assured the Club that the goose was doing well and its welfare would be further safeguarded.

SOUTH WINDS : When heavy storms sweep in the mouth of the River Derwent, some 12 miles south of Hobart, and line the foreshores with soap-sud foam, they are pretty certain to be coming from regions not far removed from the South Pole. There is no land between Tasmania and the Antarctic continent. With the storms come oceanic birds and mammals, including Sea-elephants, Skua Gulls, Giant Petrels, Cape Pigeons, Wandering and Black-browed Albatrosses. So, winter is an exciting time for observant naturalists. Crested Penguins should also be watched for, and while looking for these it might be possible to see a King Penguin which has come from distant Macquarie Island. This may be the only period of the year during which we have a chance of seeing these southern visitors.

FEDERATION : Tasmania has a federation of field naturalists clubs, probably the only federation of its kind in Australia. Its membership includes field naturalists' clubs at Hobart, Launceston, Burnie and Devonport, as well as walking clubs and the like. It is thus useful having a federation that can speak with a common voice on wild life protection.

TWO BIG FAUNA RESERVATIONS

TWO significant developments in Tasmanian animal conservation were initiated recently. One was the proclamation of an area of about 1,600,000 acres of bush country as a fauna protection district in south-western Tasmania. The other was a plan to take over Maria Island, on the east coast, as an animal sanctuary. Maria Island comprises a total of 23,000 acres.

These moves are reviewed in the "Tasmanian Fauna Bulletin," No. 3, June, 1966 published by the Animals and Birds Protection Board, Bathurst Street, Hobart.

Referring to the south-western fauna district, Dr. E. R. Guiler, says - "no detailed faunal survey has been carried out, but preliminary investigations along the northern and eastern borders give reason to believe that all of our marsupial fauna is represented therein, together with many of our avian species

Notes and news items for "The Tasmanian Naturalist" should be sent to the editor, Mr. Michael Sharland, 1 Erina Place, Hobart, Tasmania.