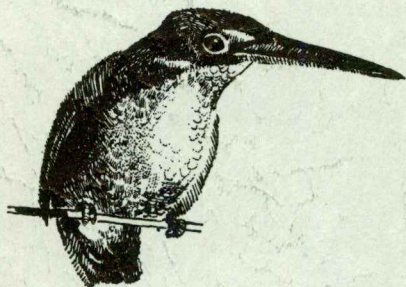


AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



Journal of the
N.S.W. FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS CLUB

Volume 9 No. 2

December 1974

Registered for Posting as a Periodical, Category B — Price \$1.00.

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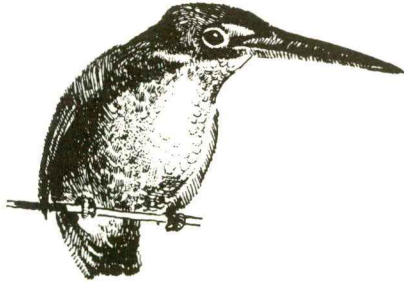
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AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



Volume 9, No. 2

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A WESTERN SANDPIPER IN NEW SOUTH WALES

J. N. HOBBS

At about 1600 on Saturday, 11 May 1974, a Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* was identified at Ticehurst Swamp, 10 km north-east of Ivanhoe in western New South Wales. One was seen in Tasmania in 1969 (Thomas, 1970) but this is the first recorded observation for the Australian mainland. Ticehurst Swamp is a large area of canegrass about 3 km in diameter with a wide fringe of open water in which there are many small islets of grass and various types of herbage, with a few box trees on the larger islands. At the water's edge the grass is very short or muddied.

After spending 3 hours of the afternoon of 11 May at the swamp I was driving along the Ivanhoe-Cobar Road which follows a causeway across the western end of the swamp. I stopped to count a party of Black-fronted Dotterels *Charadrius melanops* on an open grassy stretch and immediately saw among them an obvious stint. The most obvious feature of this bird was the brightness of its upperparts, an almost brilliant chestnut-red. With glasses (7 x 50) the bill could be seen to be black. Observation continued for one hour. The sun, of course, was lowering and the light although bright was subject to shadow. The dotterels, 21 in all, were restless, flying at any close approach and the stint always flew with them so that I never got closer than 30 m to it. Best views were obtained when the party settled on the hard surface of the road and the stint stood briefly against a small puddle — its bill and legs silhouetted against the water and illuminated by light reflecting from it.

The head, nape and upper neck were a grey-brown, the head at times appearing marked, possibly streaked, darker. There was slight light or whitish superciliary stripe before, over and behind the eye where it was the most conspicuous. With the head held high this stripe was apparent but when feeding became less obvious. A mark passed from the bill to the eye and behind the eye. At times this appeared slightly reddish behind the eye. The chin and throat were whitish but a grey-brown, possibly tinged buffish, wash extended across the upper breast. This was the same width across the whole breast and although it merged or shaded into the white of the remaining lower parts it formed a well defined band. The scapulars and all wing coverts, and possibly some of the secondaries, were a warm chestnut-brown, startling in its bright beauty, individual feathers being dark, almost black centred, with prominent chestnut-brown edges and some white. Primaries and secondaries were darker being greyish to brown, but in looking at the wings one was distracted by the overall redness and found it difficult to concentrate on the other parts. The grey-brown of the nape and neck seemed to extend down into the mantle as a wedge between the wings contrasting greatly with the chestnut and at times this was accentuated by twin white lines extending down each side of the mantle. This promptly reminded me of the Little Stint *Calidris minuta* which has similar markings; but in that species they form a V whereas in the one before me they were almost parallel and did not meet. Baird (1966) has described these for the Semi-palmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*. At times the grey-brown of the head and nape appeared tinged reddish but I could not make up my mind whether this was actual fact or a reflection from the real redness of the remaining upperparts.

The bill was definitely black, a shiny black, the whole of its length. This was noticeable because of the long length of it, much longer than a Little Stint or a Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*. It was tapered with a definite but slight decurve at the tip. This point was looked for closely as I knew it was diagnostic and it was seen repeatedly and it was actual fact, not an occasional illusion. In stressing the length I do not imply a bill like the Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* but it was probably about the length of the bird's head or a little longer. My impression at the time was that it was long in relation to that of other stints. The legs were black in all lights. In the excellent conditions on the road they lacked the shine of the bill but nevertheless could only be described as black. They appeared long and in fact gave the bird about the same height as the Black-fronted Dotterels.

In flight, which unfortunately was only seen clearly a few times owing to confusion with the mass of dotterels, there was a definite and clearly seen white wing bar. The chestnut contrasted with the darker primaries and somewhere on the wing was also a contrasting grey but flights were so short I never located it exactly. The rump was dark with a white stripe to each side. The tail was also dark and once as it settled with tail spread wide the outer feathers were seen to be paler, a light brown or very dirty white. Actually there was no white, my original notes being dirty, or pale brown.

The bird fed hungrily and rapidly, picking at the mud just above water-mark or on the ooze between islets. I did not see it probing. Its movements were hurried. In stance it lacked the horizontal, head down posture of the Red-necked Stint, it seemed to be a more upright bird. Whether this was due to the long bill not necessitating so much bending or the longish legs was hard to analyse but it certainly had an unmistakeable "jizz" about it. Twice, when alarmed, it raised its neck and head high as I have seen the Long-toed Stint and Pectoral Sandpiper do.

No call was heard but if made it would have been lost in the calls of the dotterels.

The bird was about the size of the Black-fronted Dotterels, possibly just a fraction smaller although this impression may have been gained from its more stint shape, not rounded like a plover. Certainly it stood about as high as the dotterels. It was apparently a little larger than a Red-necked Stint.

Only four stints have black legs. There was no resemblance to any plumage of the Red-necked Stint. The bill of the Little Stint is short and stubby and although it is twenty years since I have seen this bird in its various plumages there was no responding chord in my memory. This leaves only the Western and Semi-palmated Sandpipers, two very similar birds which, in fact, would probably be considered conspecific if their breeding areas did not overlap in Alaska. Nisbet (1963) summarises the differences between the two very clearly and his remarks leave no doubt in my mind that the bird I saw was the Western Sandpiper.

Nisbet stresses that the scapulars and back of the brightest *pusilla* are never brighter than buffy and Thomas (loc. cit.) claims that only *mauri* has reddish-brown margins to the feathers of the mantle, scapulars and wing-coverts. Nisbet in quoting a description — "black bill, slightly decurved at the tip, was slender and rather long for a stint and just about as long as the head" — says "could not possibly apply to *pusilla* and is typical of -- short-billed *mauri*". Nisbet also says that the upright stance and relatively long legs are useful subsidiary field-characters of *mauri*.

There seems a little discrepancy in that my bird showed no contrasting markings on the head or body, except perhaps a suggestion of reddishness. This may have been due to summer plumage not yet asserting itself on the body feathers although being very obvious on the wings. Slater (1970) describes the bird as grey above with variable amounts of rust mainly on the scapulars and adds that the head is pale in some. Thomas (loc. cit.) also apparently saw little distinctive about the plumage of these parts confining himself to saying "head: pale in contrast to the rest of the upperparts". He also had red and black mottling on the crown but I only noted the black (or dark).

On the rich chestnut colouring of the wings, the length and shape of the bill, the length of the legs and the upright appearance, the bird must be the Western Sandpiper *mauri* and not the Semi-palmated *pusilla*.

Its presence in Australia in mid-May is rather late (it was gone next day) but the extreme Arctic breeders do not nest until mid-June. At first thoughts its presence at Ivanhoe some 800 km from either eastern or southern coastline is surprising but Nisbet (1959) in discussing wader migration in North America describes the Western Sandpiper as "western arctic species whose main migration route is through the centre of the continent —". It therefore is not a stranger to non-coastal areas. Incidentally, the Semi-palmated Sandpiper is described as an "Arctic or subarctic species of eastern or central Canada which migrates down the Atlantic coast".

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AN AUSTRALIAN DOTTEREL NEAR SYDNEY

DAVID SAWYER

The Australian Dotterel *Peltohyas australis* is a wide-spread endemic wader that normally frequents the arid interior of the continent. Maclean (1973 Emu 73:61) gives the distribution for New South Wales as generally west of the Darling River in an area equidistant between the 250 mm annual isohyet and the periphery of the semi-desert and vegetational types of seasonal grassland. It is therefore extraordinary to find one of these birds at a golf course by the sea at Long Reef, Sydney. On Sunday 5 January 1969 at 1600 hours accompanied by the late K. A. Hindwood we had under observation for a period of 30 minutes an

apparent immature Australian Dotterel. This bird was photographed as it fed quietly along the edge of the south-eastern fairway at Long Reef Golf Course. At all times it was no more than 30 m distance from us and we observed it through 8x and 10x binoculars. The bird was still in the area when we left.

The Dotterel showed a preference for the short grass between the edge of the fairway and the rough, where it appeared to be feeding on insects. The description of the bird under observation is as follows:-

Slightly smaller than Eastern Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*; otherwise bearing resemblance to that bird by reason of sandy-brown coloration, upright stance and slender figure. It did not make any call at all whilst under observation. The bird was quiet and tame, inclined to run away rather than fly. The most distinctive feature of its plumage was a faint blackish line running across the sides of the chest and converging at the front of the abdomen forming a faint "V" on the bird's chest when viewed front-on. The eye was large and dark and there was a vertical faint blackish line through the eye region and over the crown. The bill was greyish and plover-like. Head-bobbing was obvious and it also crouched once in the grass.

Through Mr. E. S. Hoskin I was able to re-examine the notes taken by Mr. Hindwood at the time. My thanks are extended to Mr. Hoskin for assistance in the preparation of this note.

MR. D. SAWYER, 11 Perrey St., Collaroy Plateau. N.S.W. 2098

COLOUR VARIATION OF A WILLIE WAGTAIL

MERLE BALDWIN

The Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* is an adaptive species common in the Inverell district of northern New South Wales. In spring-summer 1973-4 casual observations were made of what was considered a normally coloured breeding pair, I was therefore startled to find (after six weeks) that in one adult the black of chin and throat extended on to chest and abdomen. Only the undertail coverts were white.

This pair was noticed on 29 October 1973 feeding young in a nest built on a small dry branch of a yellow-box *Eucalyptus meliodora* 3 m from the ground. One parent of normal colour tried diversionary tactics, flitting close by, then away; the other sat tight. After a storm on 6 November the nest with three dead fledglings was on the ground, the broken branch nearby.

A second nest was built 2.5 m from the ground on a slender dead branch of privet. One bird was sitting with a white-fronted bird on guard. Three chicks hatched and were brought to the house 250 m away and there fed frequently by the normally coloured adult.

On 10 December one bird was sitting again in the same nest; the adult with fledglings kept watch. On 18 January 1974 one young fledgling was out of the nest and closely guarded by a noisily churring "black" adult. On 21 January this melanistic bird was looking after this young one whilst the normal adult rearing the older fledglings was ever ready to circumvent danger.

The black-fronted bird was seen many times by myself and other observers with the naked eye. One splendid view was obtained at 08:40 (4 m; sun over shoulder; 8 x 30 field glasses) when the bird obligingly sat on an overhead wire for two minutes. In this light, chest and flanks were shiny black, abdomen dark charcoal. It seems that only the black-fronted wagtail brooded the three clutches - at least in the daytime - thus escaping detection.

MRS. MERLE BALDWIN, Gilgai, via Inverell. N.S.W. 2360

BIRDS THAT INCLUDE ANTS IN THEIR DIET

A. BARCLAY ROSE

The late K. A. Hindwood (1967) wrote on "Birds and Ants" and he noted that Keast (1944) recorded birds eating winged termites (Isoptera). On 20th December, 1972 at Wahroonga there was a flight of termites coming up from a gully at dusk, four Red Wattle-birds *Anthochaera carunculata* were perched to advantage and hawked these insects, returning to the perch to swallow them. They must have caught a gizzard full by dark! Termites have not shown up as a food item of birds to any extent in gut contents analysed, although aviary birds eat them avidly, however ants (Hymenoptera, Formicidae) are commonly found in gizzards.

In Table 1 is a list of birds that I have recorded with ants in their gizzards. Many contained unidentifiable insect remains some of which could have been ants, but have not been included. Where the word "ants" occurs it will mean more than one wingless worker, but not the main contents, unless stated. Occurrence is the total number of gizzards examined containing food. The genera of ants previously recorded by other workers in the stomach contents of these birds is also indicated, however the summary excludes those mentioned in Rose (1973a & 1973b).

Hindwood mentions Noisy Friarbirds *Philemon corniculatus* and Noisy Miners *Manorina melanacephala* eating winged sugar *Camponotus* and meat ants *Iridomyrmex*. From stomach content analysis of road killed specimens, it has been noted that these honeyeaters eat other types of ants as well, including winged bull ants *Myrmecia* species. Apart from honeyeaters eating sugar ants, an Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus* was found to have eaten 15 sugar ants along with two other insects.

In addition, 63 out of 263 pellets disgorged by Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* and taken in all months of the year, contained ants. 23 of these were bull ants, seven being the most in one pellet which consisted of insects only, regurgitated immediately before the bird fed on figs. One third of the pellets containing ants were found to include only one ant, however ants were found in pellets of all food eaten. Two of the food trees where pellets were regularly picked up, are isolated in a park and definitely no bull ants were found on or around the trees, yet 20% of these pellets included a bull ant, indicating that Pied Currawongs do not take in the odd ant by chance. One pellet consisted of all flying ants, except a few fig seeds and one beetle. Further information on the food of the Pied Currawong can be found in Rose *op cit.*

In a study of the food of the Black-backed Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* at Canberra, Vestjens and Carrick (1974) examined the stomach contents of 1319 magpies of known age, sex and social status. It was found that insects taken in the largest numbers were ants of five genera. The ants are available and numerous throughout the year and were found in the stomachs of 70% of both territorial and flock magpies over a full year period. Ants do not figure so prominently in the gizzard contents that I examined of the ten magpies which came from Gloucester and Sydney Districts.

Standard reference texts, particularly that of Lea and Gray (1936) Frith (1967 and 1969), and Serventy and Whittell (1948) do not record ants in the diet of the following birds:- Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*, Black Duck *Anas superciliosus*, *Painted Quail *Turnix varia*, *Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*, Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*, *Spotted Quail-thrush *Cinclosoma punctatum*, *Grey-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis*, Dusky Wood-swallow *Artamus cyanopterus*, Yellow-tailed Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, Variegated Wren *Malurus lamberti*, Rock Warbler *Origma solitaria*, Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus*, *Noisy Friar-birds *Philemon corniculatus*, Satin Bower-bird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*, Regent Bower-bird *Sericulus chrysocephalus*, *Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina*. Those marked * have been mentioned in Rose (*op cit.*) as including ants in their diet.

SUMMARY

To date I have recorded 35 species of birds eating ants, although several species probably only took them by chance with their more natural food. Many more species examined

TA
ANTS AS FO

SPECIES	FOOD	OCCURRENCE	MONTH
Short-tailed shearwater	1 winged ant	1/5	Dec. (wing
Black duck	ants	1/44	May
Painted quail	ants	3/4	July, Oct,
Spur-winged plover	ants	1/1	Aug.
Owlet-nightjar	mainly ants	2/4	June, Sep.
White-throated nightjar	winged ants	1/2	Jan.
Spine-tailed swift	winged ants	1/1	Dec.
Laughing kookaburra	ants	3/28	Dec, Sep. 1 Feb. p
Sacred kingfisher	1 ant	1/3	not known
Superb lyrebird	ants	1/4	Aug.
Welcome swallow	winged ants	2/7	Jan. and b
Spotted quail-thrush	ants	1/3	Apr.
Grey-crowned babbler	ants	1/1	Sep.
Superb blue wren	ants	2/5	June, Apr.
Variiegated wren	ants	3/4	Mar., May
Yellow-rumped thornbill	ants	1/1	Sep.
Rock-warbler	ants	2/3	Jan., Mar.
Scarlet robin	sugar ants	1/1	Dec.
Southern yellow robin	ants	2/3	Aug., May
Rufous whistler	ants	1/1	not known
Grey shrike-thrush	ants	1/5	Apr.
Spotted pardalote	ants	2/9	Dec. both
White-eared honeyeater	ants	2/2	Apr., Aug.
Noisy friar-bird	ants	2/6	Oct., Feb.
New Holland honeyeater	ants	2/4	Oct., 1 wir
Nosy miner	ants	5/12	Mar., Sep.
Red wattle-bird	ants	1/1	May wing
Starling	ants	1/2	Nov.
Indian myna	ants	3/6	Nov., Dec.
Magpie lark	ants	4/9	Feb., Apr.
Dusky wood-swallow	1 ant	1/1	not known
Pied currawong	ants	6/10	Mar., Nov.
Black-backed magpie	ants	3/10	Nov., Apr.
Regent bower-bird	ants	1/1	Apr.
Satin bower-bird	ants	1/1	Mar.

OF BIRDS

REMARKS	PREVIOUS GENERA RECORDED
insects in 2 others)	None
known	None
	None
	<i>Pheidole</i>
	<i>Camponotus</i>
	None
sugar ants (winged), probably taken in with bread.	Isoptera and winged ants (?) <i>Camponotus, Iridomyrmex</i>
	None
main food.	<i>Iridomyrmex</i>
	None
	None
	None
main food. June nothing else but ants.	Ants?
	None
	None
ly and eggs	None
	<i>Camponotus, Polyrhachis, Iridomyrmex.</i>
of winged ants, 1 worker	<i>Pheidole, Iridomyrmex, Amblyopone, Myrmecia.</i>
of worker, spider as other food.	
	<i>Myrmecia, Camponotus, Pheidole.</i>
	<i>Camponotus.</i>
	None
ged.	<i>Iridomyrmex</i>
ged male bull ants.	None
Nov. Workers	<i>Pheidole</i>
ct. nestling, Nov., winged bull ants	<i>Camponotus, Iridomyrmex.</i>
ull ants.	<i>Camponotus, Iridomyrmex.</i>
	None
sugar ants only feed.	None
, Sep.	<i>Camponotus, Pheidole, Iridomyrmex.</i>
	None
, Jan., 1 only in 2 birds.	None
ged, Apr. 1 bull ant.	<i>Camponotus, Iridomyrmex, Myrmecia, Pheidole,</i> <i>Rhytidoponera.</i>
	None
	None

have had insect remains, including Hymenoptera, but not positively ants, so these have been excluded. Pied Currawongs' gizzards and pellets combined showed that 24% of those examined contained one ant. Data from the remaining species examined is insufficient to determine the extent to which a species feeds on ants. 16 species have not previously been recorded feeding on ants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are extended to all those persons who bring in road killed specimens, however damaged and rotten, since some use can always be made of them; Mr. M. F. Lovell of Wahroonga N.S.W. for collecting regurgitated pellets; the staff of the Entomology Department, Australian Museum, for identifying material; Mr. H. J. de S. Disney for checking bird species, and A. K. Morris for comment and advice on the text.

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A RECORD OF THE LONG-TAILED SKUA IN NEW SOUTH WALES

TERENCE LINDSEY

In the early afternoon of 24 March 1973, a Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* joined a flock of birds being fed from our fishing boat off Sydney Heads and remained in the vicinity for about 15 minutes. The bird flew actively, allowing good views at ranges down to about 3 metres. Nine 35 mm colour photographs were obtained; these are mediocre in quality but confirm several details of the plumage description noted on the spot, particularly the pale blue-grey legs.

The boat was drifting a few hundred metres off the cliffs at North Head. Seas were slight and weather conditions good with a thin overcast and a light breeze from the southeast. Observers were: Margaret Cameron, Richard Cooper, David Sawyer, Richard Noske and the writer. A flock of seabirds was being fed small lumps of suet thrown from the stern of the small fishing boat. Besides a few gulls and terns, this flock consisted of about 6 Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus*, and at least 10 Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus*, although it was noted from the plumages of the various individuals present that the composition of the flock was not constant.

The Long-tailed Skua suddenly appeared in the midst of the other skuas and was immediately picked out by members of the party as being conspicuously different in general appearance and flight style. The bird was smaller and lighter in build than the other skuas and had a much more dashing and impetuous flight style (which factor was chiefly responsible for the poor quality of the photographs obtained). Various members of the party described the flight as "tern-like" or "kestrel-like"; the bird was slim and graceful enough almost to suggest a Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*. Typical behaviour over the period of observation was to hang as though suspended just astern, then dash through the flock to snatch a food item, then wheel overhead to take station over the stern again.

The following description was summarised from notes taken on the spot: the back was smooth uniform greyish-brown, paler than that of any of the other skuas present; rump uniform with the back. Tail darker towards the tip of the outer retrices, longer in comparison with other skuas and less broad; shafts of retrices white. Underparts dusky white with diffuse greyish pectoral band. Dorsal surface of wings uniform with back, flight feathers darker, undersurface dark grey. No white flashes in the wings, only the shafts of the first four or five primaries white. Head pale, cheeks yellowish, cap not as dark nor as distinct as that of other skuas and less extensive, well separated by a pale nape. Dark smudge near eye. Bill mid grey, legs pale bluish-grey, webs black.

This appears to be the first definite record of the Long-tailed Skua in New South Wales, although Iredale (1940 *Emu* 40: 180) mentions a possible sighting in Sydney Harbour in the

1930's. There are several records elsewhere in the Australian region (Carter 1966 *Emu* 66: 69–70, Sibson 1967 *Notornis* 14: 79–81, Cox 1973 *S. A. Ornith.* 26:85, and Corben 1973 *Sunbird* 4: 54–55). Both Carter (in litt. 17 October 1973) and Corben have already pointed out that all Australasian records so far are in the period March–April and the present record continues the trend. However, with the exception of the New Zealand record (Sibson, *loc. cit.*) all have been adults. Our bird appears to have been immature, perhaps in its second winter, and in fact conforms closely with the description of the New Zealand bird given by Sibson.

I am grateful to Michael J. Carter, John B. Cox, Chris Corben and Alan E. F. Rogers for their comments on copies of our field notes of this bird and to Margaret Cameron for the loan of photographs.

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THE STATUS OF THE BLUE PETREL IN AUSTRALIAN WATERS

BRIAN W. FINCH AND MURRAY D. BRUCE

INTRODUCTION

The Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea* is generally considered to be a rare visitor to Australian waters with few records from most States. In New South Wales the appearance of three specimens during the winter of 1973 (July), two at Palm Beach and one at Wanda Beach near Cronulla (Rogers 1974), is of particular interest as these are apparently the only records for the State since 1954 when nine specimens were collected, including the first record (Hindwood & McGill 1955).

The 1973 specimens were not preserved but the two from Palm Beach (PB) were verified at the Australian Museum and the Wanda Beach (WB) bird was photographed. These were identified as follows:

PB: Upperparts bluish-grey, crown darker than back, forehead mottled, lores and underparts white, tail squared, black with a white terminal band (diagnostic of this species), bill black, laterally compressed. The back and upper wings had the "W" pattern similar to that of prions *Pachyptila*; D. Sawyer (*in litt.*).

WB: Specimen in very poor condition, lacking head and feet but readily identified by the diagnostic white tail band.

ADDITIONAL RECORDS

A review of the records from other States indicated that the status of this species is rare to very rare. Most records have apparently been from Western Australia where it is considered a "rare winter visitor as far north as the Fremantle area" (Serventy & Whittell 1967). In spite of only two records in South Australia, in 1914 and 1954, Condon (1969) considered it to be a "casual" visitor, Learmonth (1955) recorded the first specimen for Victoria (Portland) since the one previous record of 1890 (Mordialloc) when one was collected in 1953 and six in 1954. There have been subsequent records for western Victoria (Wheeler 1967) and Cooper (1970) has since obtained the first two records for eastern Victoria. Sharland (1958) indicated that there were "few records" for Tasmania and Green (1962) considered records to be "almost non-existent", when specifying one for Evandale on the Tamar River (2 July). Dell (1952) listed only one record for Tasmania, a questionable specimen collected on 20 March by Fletcher (1928) at Eaglehawk Neck (McGill *pers. comm.*). Subsequent Tasmanian records have apparently all been from King Island (Green & McGarvie 1971; McGarvie & Templeton 1974; D. R. Milledge *in litt.*).

GENERAL DISTRIBUTION

The Blue Petrel has been recorded on a number of subantarctic islands including Crozet, Falkland, Heard, Kerguelen, Macquarie, Prince Edward, South Georgia and South Orkney Islands and small islands near Cape Horn, during the summer where it is known to breed or probably breed. Non-breeding distribution is circumpolar in the cooler subantarctic as well as Antarctic waters between the latitudes of 70°S. and 40°S., wandering further north (cf. Johnson 1965; Murphy 1936:723; Serventy et. al. 1971:106; Szijj 1967). It apparently winters in the Tasman Sea (May to October) and is regularly picked up on New Zealand coasts but usually only in very small numbers (Falla et. al. 1966; Rogers *pers. comm.*). The species has been recorded up to 30°S. off South Africa (Voous 1970) and 33°S. off the coast of Chile (Johnson *loc. cit.*) but its movements are probably correlated with water temperature preferences (Jehl 1973; cf. Murphy *op. cit.*). It has apparently straggled north to New Caledonia (Warner 1947) and Fiji (Alexander 1963).

DISCUSSION

Although there have been few documented records of the Blue Petrel in Australian waters, the non-breeding distribution suggests that it is most probably a regular visitor, though perhaps normally in small numbers, generally following the subantarctic zone of surface water, largely south of 40°S., with a surface temperature range of between -2°C. and 11°C. (Jehl 1973; Szijj 1967). As it seems with some other sea-birds rarely recorded in the Australian area, the Blue Petrel records may coincide with periods of cyclonic conditions e.g. New South Wales in

1954 and 1973 (the only years in which the species has apparently been recorded). The year 1954 was also significant for records in other States e.g. Victoria. New Zealand parallels New South Wales in that 1954 and 1973 produced records of a relatively large number of Blue Petrels (Falla et. al. 1966; Edgar 1973). It is also interesting to note that 1973 saw the occurrence of unusually large numbers of the Dove Prion *pachyptila desolata* on New South Wales coasts, 194+ (Rogers 1974), compared to one and nil in 1972 and 1971 respectively (Morris *in litt.*).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to Messrs. H. J. deS. Disney, A. R. McGill, D. R. Milledge, A. K. Morris, A. E. F. Rogers and D. Sawyer for their kind assistance with enquiries during the preparation of this paper.

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SUPPLEMENTARY RECORDS OF THE RED-BACKED QUAIL FROM NORTH-EASTERN NEW SOUTH WALES

D. G. GOSPER

Bruce (1974 Aust. Birds 9:17), summarising recent occurrences of the Red-backed Quail *Turnix maculosa* in south-eastern Australia, lists four sightings from coastal northern N.S.W.* Two further records from this region, including one of breeding, are now described. Both observations were made in cultivations on adjoining dairy farms at Southgate, 9 km north-east of Grafton during the late 1950's and early 1960's whilst I was resident in the district.

Between 1957 and 1960 (no date was recorded) a breeding record of the Red-backed Quail was obtained when a deserted nest containing two eggs was found in a lucerne bed following mowing. At the time I was unable to identify the eggs with certainty from the description in the available literature. Some years then elapsed before I was prompted to forward the eggs to Mr. K. A. Hindwood for positive identification. In reply (25.9.62) Mr. Hindwood stated "They agree quite well with those of the Red-backed Quail *T. maculosa*, also called Black-backed, Black-spotted and Orange-breasted Quail. The glossy surface of the eggs separate them from the rather similar eggs of the Red-chested Quail, the eggs of which species have a dull surface and, in the Museum series at least, are slightly larger and more pointed".

A further occurrence of the species was recorded in December 1962 when a female was captured in an oats crop by a neighbour, Mr. G. Tarrant. The bird was placed in an aviary where I viewed it on a number of occasions, the first being 21 December. These were the only occasions on which evidence of the presence of the Red-backed Quail was detected although cultivation paddocks, particularly lucerne, were frequented by Brown Quail *Synoicus ysilophorus*, Stubble Quail *Coturnix pectoralis* and King Quail *Excalfactoria chinensis*, all of which bred as indicated by nests found after mowing in most years.

* (Note: Bruce (*op. cit.*) gives the record by Hobbs and Kaveney (1962 Emu 61:296) as Diamond Head near Woolgoolga. However, the location given by the original authors in their paper is Diamond Head, north of Taree).

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