

Heteroscenes pallidus—Pallid Cuckoo.

THE GREAT DISSIMILARITY BETWEEN SEXES.

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In all ornithological works which have come under my notice the plumage of the Pallid Cuckoo is stated to be the same in both sexes. For many years I have had grave doubts about this. After several years of close observation in districts where this bird is very common, and after handling over thirty birds in the flesh I can positively say that there is a vast difference between the sexes in adult plumage. Mr. G. M. Mathews put this question to me in 1911 just before we left for Eyre's Peninsula in that year, and I promised to try and prove my suppositions as to

coloration and call notes of each sex. We were lucky to meet with great numbers of these birds on their annual migration south on this trip, also the following year in the Gawler Ranges. Brief notes of these two trips have appeared in *The Emu*, Vols. XII., p. 2.; XIII., p. 16. I have supplied Mr. Mathews with my field notes on this bird, but seeing it will be some time before these notes appear in print it may be as well that I give a short account of my observations.

In August and September, 1911, while working over an extended piece of country on Eyre's Peninsula, the pallid cuckoo was met with in numbers coming from the north. They were calling all day long in their monotonous series of notes like the running of the scale, in fact, when there was the slightest moonlight or bright starlight their call was often heard in the silent watches. Each day specimens were collected, and on being dissected were found to be males. Not one female bird was procured during the trip. When passing through the Gawler Ranges in August and September of 1912 we again came upon these birds travelling south in great numbers. The first five specimens taken were all females, and there seemed to be more of that sex than males. A great deal of time was put into observations on this bird. There were no young birds, and every female handled had well-developed ovaries, in many cases within a few hours of being laid. Every one of these females had the rusty brown and grey mottled plumage. All males were in their full plumage, and there was little or no variation in their coloration, the white spot at the back of the head varied in size in some specimens. One female on being shot deposited an egg upon the ground, and many others contained eggs nearly as fully advanced.

The males were calling loudly in their long-drawn call, but the females only uttered a short harsh cry repeated once or twice, and this while on the wing at times.

The adult male has all the under surface gay under tail coverts nearly white, slightly barred with brown. Upper surface greyish brown, the primaries and tail feathers much darker. Inner webs of primaries barred with white. Tail feathers barred with white, two centre ones only showing white on the edges. On the back of the head a very conspicuous white spot. Upper tail coverts elongated, forming plum-like feathers, most pronounced at breeding time. Female.—Under surface brownish grey, becoming lighter on the abdomen. All upper surface dark brown, mottled

with light rufous. Markings of upper side of primaries and tail feathers buff instead of white. Upper tail coverts delicate plum-like feathers, but not so pronounced as in the male.
