

NOTES ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHIMING AND CHIRRUPING WEDGEBILLS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

S. A. PARKER

Received June, 1976, accepted January, 1977

INTRODUCTION

Ford & Parker (1973) drew attention to the fact that the Wedgebill actually consists of two largely allopatric forms, similar in appearance but having quite different calls. On the basis of this difference, and the results of preliminary playback experiments, they suggested that the two forms should provisionally be regarded as separate species, the Chiming Wedgebill *Psophodes occidentalis* (Mathews, 1912) and the Chirruping Wedgebill *P. cristatus* (Gould, 1838). They gave the range of the Chiming Wedgebill in South Australia (*op. cit.*: 115,

map) as east to Mount Dare Station, Oodnadatta, Coober Pedy and Brumby Creek, and south to Tarcoola, and the range of the Chirruping as west to Oodnadatta, Mulgaria and Bookaloo and south to Nectar Brook and Calperum. The apparent sympatry at Oodnadatta was based on skins of both forms labelled 'Oodnadatta', two of *P. occidentalis* in the South Australian Museum collected by A. Chenery in July, 1906, and one of *P. cristatus* in the S. A. White Collection collected by Captain S. A. White on June 23, 1914. The present note discusses further information concerning

the provenance of these three skins, and gives some new locality records for both wedgebills in South Australia.

THE 'OODNADATTA' SKINS

It is clear from White's (1951: 707-708) remarks that his party arrived at Oodnadatta on June 20 and left on June 27 or 28. He wrote: 'We were delayed for a short time at the railhead owing to the non-arrival of our camel train, but the time was utilised in collecting around Oodnadatta.' We may assume, therefore, that his wedgebill was taken in the vicinity of Oodnadatta.

The two specimens collected by Chenery, however, are apparently not from Oodnadatta, in spite of their being so labelled. All bird skins in the South Australian Museum are listed on a card index, under species. John Sutton (who curated the bird collection from 1923 to 1938) entered Chenery's specimens on the relevant card as from 'Oodnadatta', but subsequently altered this to 'Todmorden, near Oodnadatta', presumably on the advice of Chenery. Todmorden is a cattle station on the Alberga Creek about 82 km WNW of Oodnadatta. Thus, no sympatry is yet known between *P. occidentalis* and *P. cristatus*.

FURTHER RECORDS OF *P. CRISTATUS*

Recent records have extended the known range of the Chirruping Wedgebill in South Australia. On April 5, 1973, Mrs. J. B. Paton (pers. comm.) encountered this form 32 km NW of Anna Creek HS, and collected a specimen (SAM B28122). On April 12-13, 1973, she observed and heard it at the Peake crossing. Both localities are immediately to the west of Lake Eyre, and the habitat in both cases was *Muehlenbeckia cunninghamii*, *Eragrostis australasica* and *Acacia victoriae* along a watercourse. Mr. J. B. Cox (pers. comm.) noted the Chirruping Wedgebill on the eastern edge of Port Augusta during 1972 (*the occurrence of this species near Port Augusta has for long been well known in South Australia but not hitherto published* — Ed.) Mr. P. Langdon (pers. comm.) recorded it at Sandy Creek a few km south of Port Augusta West on March 13 and April 11, 1965, in boxthorn *Lycium australe*, and also on Pandurra Station about 35 km WSW of Port Augusta on May 29 and June 24, 1974, in *Acacia victoriae* on the edge of a watercourse.

Eggs of the Chirruping Wedgebill were stated by Condon (1968) to have been taken in the Wilmington district between 1953 and 1957. Some of these eggs are now in the South Aus-

tralian Museum: they are not from Wilmington itself (which is on the Willochra Plain, from where wedgebills have never been reported) but from the Nectar Brook area and Winninowie on the western side of the Flinders Ranges. An additional locality from this area is Redcliff Point settlement, 9.5 km W of Nectar Brook RS, where three birds were recently seen in Umbrella Bush *Acacia ligulata* (Matheson 1976).

Ford & Parker (1973) wrote 'Wedgebills probably do not occur in the Simpson Desert . . .' Subsequent records have happily proved us wrong. Wilson (1974 and *in litt.*) recorded the Chirruping Wedgebill at several points in the Northern Territory and Queensland sectors of the Simpson in 1969; and in September, 1976 I heard this species several times in the South Australian sector between Poeppel's Corner and Eyre Creek.

FURTHER RECORDS OF *P. OCCIDENTALIS*

On an expedition to the South Australian sector of the Great Victoria Desert in October, 1976, I recorded the Chiming Wedgebill at the following additional localities: Birthday Rocks, 44 km N of Tarcoola, in dense thickets of *Acacia tarculensis*; 29 and 77 km WNW of Tallaringa Well, at the former spot in *Acacia linophylla* among sandhills; 10 km NW of Emu in *A. linophylla* among sandhills; Observatory Hill. Almost certainly the southern limits of this form in the Great Victoria Desert have yet to be determined.

I take this opportunity to correct a point of identification. Slater (1974: pl. 8) depicted *P. cristatus* and *P. occidentalis* as identical in appearance. As mentioned by Ford & Parker (*op. cit.*), they differ slightly: *P. cristatus* is faintly streaked on the breast and upper abdomen, whereas *P. occidentalis* is unstreaked below. Specimens in fresh plumage can be identified by this character, but worn specimens can be difficult to assign.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Mrs. J. B. Paton, Mr. J. B. Cox and Mr. P. Langdon for allowing me to use their unpublished records.

REFERENCES

- Condon, H. T. 1968-1969. A Handlist of the Birds of South Australia (2nd & 3rd eds.) Adelaide: S. Aust. Orn. Assoc.
 Ford, J. R. & S. A. Parker. 1973. A second species of wedgebill? *Emu* 73: 113-118.
 Matheson, W. E. 1976. The birds of the Redcliff Point development area. *S.A. Orn.* 27: 125-130.
 Slater, P. 1974. A Field Guide to Australian Birds. Passerines. Rigby.
 White, S. A. 1915. Narrative in Scientific notes on an expedition into the north-western regions of South Australia. *Trans. Roy. Soc. S. Aust.* 39: 707-723.
 Wilson, M. 1974. Birds of the Simpson Desert. *Emu*: 74: 169-176.

South Australian Museum, Adelaide, S.A. 5000