

Order Coccoyges, Family Cuculidae,
Genus Heteroscenes.

Heteroscenes pallidus.—Pallid Cuckoo,

Description.—Adult male, general colour above greyish-brown, a white spot on the nape. Forehead, throat, sides of body and under surface ashy grey. Centre of abdomen and under tail coverts white, the latter with narrow brown cross bars.

Wing.—Primaries and secondaries brown, with white cross bars on their inner webs. The inner webs of the basal portion of the secondaries, and the upper edge of the wing, white.

Tail.—Blackish brown, notched or barred with white on both webs of the feathers.

Legs and feet olive.

Bill.—Black base of lower mandible olive.

Iris.—Brown.

Orbital ring.—Bright yellow.

Inside of mouth.—Orange.

Measurement.—Total length in flesh, 310 m.m.; wing, 196 m.m.; tail, 163 m.m.; bill, 19 m.m.; tarsus, 20 m.m.

Adult female.—All under surface brownish grey, lighter on the flanks and vent, the feathers of the former being faintly barred with dark grey; sides of neck and throat mottled with black and rufous; wing coverts strongly mottled with pale grey and rufous; tail feathers barred on both sides with rufous and white; upper tail grey and elongated like those of male, and often mottled with white; under tail coverts white with a few dark markings. Bill.—Olive brown, becoming yellow at the gape; inside of mouth, deep orange.

Feet.—Yellowish brown.

Orbital ring.—Yellow.

Iris.—Brown.

In some cases the female has the white spot on the nape.

Young.—Both sexes are much lighter in plumage than the adults. Both are mottled; but this is less marked in the male in which sex the rufous tint is very faint. The female takes on a deep rufous mottling from the nest, and retains most of it throughout life. In Captain S.A. White's collection are specimens from the eastern states, showing very little rufous on the throat, and the black marking on that part of the body are very faint, and show a greyish tint.

The difference between male and female was first pointed out in these pages by Captain White. Previous to that time the mottled bird was considered to be the immature form.

Distribution.—The whole of Australia including Tasmania. Birds from the Northern Territory and Western Australia have been described as subspecifically distinct.

Habits.—They are strictly migrating, arriving on the Adelaide plains from the north about the middle of July, though Mr. J. W. Mellor has noted them at the Reedbeds as early as the middle of June. In the hills they are not usually seen until the end of July or early in August. They do not congregate in flocks. The birds very usually single, or at most in twos when one is generally chasing the other. They perch always on an exposed branch of a tree, or upon a fence post, and prefer open plains or thickly timbered country to the thick scrub. Much of their time is spent upon the ground, where they get most of their food. They leave the Adelaide district probably about the beginning of December, and go northward, but how far is not known, but they have not so far been observed outside of Australia. The greater number of the birds seen on the Adelaide plains are on passage, probably for the Eastern States, for eggs and young birds are very rare in this district.

Song.—When on the wing they utter a harsh discordant scream; but when perched the note is very different. It is thus described by Mr. E. Ashby, who, with a musical friend, took careful notes of it. "The melancholy whistle commences with a note uttered several times; then rising in a series of five to eight semi-tones and completing the effort by repeating the final note several times. As far as my observations go the series of half tones, with a rising inflexion is usually limited to five or six, but there is a considerable variation in the number of times the bird repeats the first or the final notes." It is said that the whistling note is sometimes uttered when on the wing. In the Adelaide district the birds are silent or almost so on their first arrival, and also for some time before their departure. When uttering the whistling note, the male sits with the head up and the wing drooped, this note is not made by the female, but both sexes have the harsh flight call. The whistling call is uttered at night, more commonly on moonlight nights; but also when quite dark.

Flight.—Rapid, straight, and undulating.

Food.—Consist entirely of insects and their larvae; a favourite food is hairy caterpillars, the stomachs of all the birds being found lined with their sharp hairs. This circumstance formerly gave rise to the statement that cuckoos had hairy stomachs.

Nest.—They build no nest, being purely parasitic in their nidification. In this State the egg is invariably laid in the nest of some species of honey-eater. The commonest being the Greenie. (*Ptilotula pennicillata*); the Minah (*Myzantha melanocephala*); the black-capped Honey-eater (*Melithreptus lunatus*); the Wattle-bird (*Coelia carunculata*); and the singing Honey-eater (*Meliphaga sonora*.)

Eggs.—As only one egg is laid in each nest, the number laid by one female is unknown. The egg is oval in shape, but slightly smaller at one end. The ground colour is a light yellowish pink sometimes quite uniform, and sometimes with faint indications of spots of a somewhat darker hue and occasionally with one or two sharply defined small dark brown spots; there is seldom any indication of a zone. Two eggs measured A. 2.35 c.m. x 1.70 c.m.; B. 2.45 c.m. x 1.80 c.m.
