

### MOVEMENT OF A MALLARD FROM NEW ZEALAND TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Amongst the earlier records of free-flying Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos* mentioned by Parker *et al.* (1985. **An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of South Australia** 2A: 9) is one from "Narrung (?1963)". I believe it refers to a Mallard shot at Narrung Narrows in February 1963 by K. A. Heddle, the details for which are published here for the first time. This bird was banded as a *ca* five month old juvenile female on 22 February 1961 at Lake Tuakito-to, about 60 km W of Dunedin, South Island, New Zealand. It

had a white breast-band, an aberrant plumage found amongst some Mallards around the banding site. This aberration was noted both when the bird was banded and when it was shot. I know of no other record of a Mallard banded in New Zealand and recovered in Australia.

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**ELEGANT PARROTS BREEDING IN THE GAWLER RANGERS.** During the afternoon of 26 September 1990, whilst camping at Scrubby Peak (39°31'S, 135°19'E) in the Gawler Ranges, South Australia, we heard the sound of young birds demanding food. We traced the sound and saw a pair of Elegant Parrots *Neophema elegans* feeding three young in a dead, broken, upward-pointing hollow spout of a *Eucalyptus* tree. As each parent bird approached the nest the young rose up out of the hollow and we could see that they were well-fledged with very obvious blue wing-markings. We observed them for approximately an hour and had very good views of the birds.

We noted that the blue frontal-band extended a little past the eye on the parent birds. They had two distinct shades of blue on the wing; the blue being smaller in area than that which is on the Blue-winged Parrot *N. chrysostoma*. Their upperparts were olive-yellow and they had yellow on the underparts and outer tail feathers. These points convinced us that they were Elegant Parrots.

The next morning we returned to the nesting-site, but there was no sign of activity by either parents or young. A Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* was calling nearby and we believed it accounted for the silence of the young and the

absence of the adult Elegant Parrots near the nest-site. Once the Butcherbird had moved on, both parents almost immediately alighted on a live branch of the tree containing the nest. They took turns in feeding the young, one parent waiting until the other had finished before approaching to take its turn. We again watched them for about an hour and had excellent views of them during that time.

A sighting by A. Black' (*S.A. Orn. Ass. Newsletter*, September 1990, 135: 13) of one Elegant Parrot on 21 August 1990 at Scrubby Peak was reported with the added footnote: "One also recorded near this locality in June 1985 . . . , although few records from Eyre Peninsula." Pizzey (1980. **A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia**. Collins: Sydney) stated in reference to the range and status of Elegant Parrots: "Recorded w. to Quorn-Port Augusta, and near Whyalla (suspected sightings elsewhere on Eyre Pen.)." Our record is exciting because we believe it to be the first breeding record of Elegant Parrots from the Gawler Ranges.

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**MIMICRY BY MISTLETOEBIRD.** The following is a case of mimicry of six species of bird by a Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*. While walking past a False Acacia *Robinia pseudoacacia* among buildings of Flinders University, South Australia, on 27 February 1990, I heard coming from the tree a subdued song, which within one minute included notes of the Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*, Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*, Weebill *Smicronis brevirostris*, Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*, Silveryeye *Zosterops lateralis*, New Holland Honeyeater *Philidonyris novaehollandiae*, and Mistletoebird. I then found the source of the song, an adult male Mistletoebird,

at a height of about four metres in the tree, and watched it while it uttered notes of Weebill and New Holland Honeyeater. Then it flew away, leaving no other bird in the tree. The song which it had given was quieter, and more varied and protracted, than the calls normally given by this species; and can presumably be characterised as a whisper-song.

The only published reference to this phenomenon of which I know is Pizzey (1980, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Collins: Melbourne), who wrote that the Mistletoebird gives a "soft warbling song that includes mimicry". *David H. Close, 30 Diosma Drive, Coromandel Valley, South Australia 5051.*

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**AN ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE AT THE DRY CREEK SALTFIELDS.** The Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* is rare in South Australia. Badman & May (1983, *S. Aust Orn.* 29: 38) listed five records of single birds from widely-scattered localities: Meningie or Milang (Lower Murray Lakes); Mosquito Point (Lake Alexandrina); Nullarbor Station (North-West); near Burra (Lower North); Billa Kalina (North-West).

On 27 February 1988 we visited the Dry Creek Saltfields (ca 23 km N of Adelaide), Adelaide Plains, South Australia. It was a cool, overcast day with strong SE to SW winds. At 14.45 we were on the central east-west track between two salt lagoons when we saw an Oriental Pratincole on a small islet about 50 metres off the southern side of the track. We observed it for

approximately 20 minutes through 10×50 binoculars and a 45× telescope.

The bird had the general appearance of a short-legged brown tern. The head was dark brown, the back lighter and the tail very dark brown to black. The underside was a lighter buff at the chest to almost white on the abdomen. The most noticeable plumage feature was a yellow throat patch surrounded by a distinct black line, not quite complete on the underside. The bird occasionally flitted its tail, showing it to be deeply forked.

We returned to the same area at 16.30, but the bird was absent. We believe this is the first record of an Oriental Pratincole from the Adelaide Plains.

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**MAMMAL DUNG IN BIRD'S NESTS.** Some birds of different families are known to either line their nests with dung of mammals or place pellets or fragments of mammal dung in their nests. In Central Europe P. Bernhardt (1935, *Mitteilungen des Vereines Sächsischer Ornithologen* 4: 291-293) recorded the Black Kite *Milvus migrans* using horse dung as nest lining. Many years ago, on the Mount Mary Plains, South Australia, I saw a similar lining of horse dung in an occupied nest of a crow, possibly the Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*, situated in a tall, lone tree.

J. B. Paton (1975, *S. Aust. Orn.* 26: 187) reported kangaroo dung pellets from a nest of the White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus*, and I have seen kangaroo and sheep dung pellets in nests of the Chestnut-crowned Babbler *P. ruficeps* on the Mount Mary Plains.

The purpose of mammal dung in nests is not clear. It could be a source of additional warmth.

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