

Order Charadriiformes, Family Charadriidae,
Genus *Peltohyas*.

Peltohyas australis (Australian Dotterel).

—By J. Neil McGilp.—

Description.—Upper Surface—General colour above buff, with dark-brown centres to the feathers; rump buff, with pale-brown centres to the feathers; upper tail coverts pale brown, with faint fulvous margins to the feathers. Under Surface—Chest and breast sandy buff, with a broad rufous-chestnut streak down the centre of the breast, terminating in a fork which widens out on the lower side of the flanks; thighs, under tail coverts, vent, and abdomen, white. Head and Neck—Nape and crown of the head bright buff, with very dark centres to the feathers, a broad band on the sinciput; back, lores, forehead, throat, and sides of head pale buff; a broad black streak vertically under each eye. A black collar encircles the hind neck and meets in a triangular-shaped patch (black) on the fore-neck. The feathers immediately above and on each side of the frontal collar dull white. Tail—All the feathers dark brown, edged with buff. The outer feathers have wider margins of buff, with an edging of dull white. Wing—Upper coverts like the back, quills blackish-brown, the outer webbing of inner primaries with a narrow edging of cinnamon-brown, with the exception of the tips of the feathers. The secondary feathers broadly edged with cinnamon-brown. Iris—Black. Legs—Yellowish. Nails—Black. Bill—Yellowish brown, black at the tip. Length in flesh, 8 inches; wing, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches; tail, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches; tarsus, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches; bill, barely $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. Female—Plumage similar to the male bird.

Juvenile—Young birds on leaving the nest are clothed in pale-brown down, the bases of the down having almost a black colour; this gives the effect of a mottled appearance resembling the ground. The head and throat are much lighter in colour.

Distribution.—Inferior regions throughout Australia, migrating to coastal regions when the food supply is insufficient in the interior.

Habitat.—Bare, open plains, being never seen in well-timbered localities.

Flight.—Rapid, flying close to the ground with a dodging, side-slipping action.

Call.—Almost silent, except when in flight, when it gives rather a plaintive piping call. When calling young it has a peculiar single call something like “chuff.”

Food.—Grubs, grasshoppers, and other insects.

Nesting Season.—Extends throughout the year according to rainfall.

Nest.—A slight depression in the ground, the excavated material being left round the hole. Sometimes small twigs and pieces of grass and herbage are found round the edge of the nest. The sitting bird, when leaving the nest, covers the eggs with the loose earth and rubbish round the depression.

Eggs.—Three in a clutch; pointed oval in form, some tapering gently, others abruptly. Clutch very uniform in colour and size. When freshly laid the ground colour of the egg is greenish, but this quickly changes to a light-brown or light-stone colour. The egg is dotted, spotted, or blotched with almost black markings; frequently dashes of lighter colour are seen, and various marks appear as if beneath the surface of the shell. The pointed end of the egg is usually devoid of markings, which are otherwise fairly evenly distributed, and do not tend to form a zone. Surface of egg smooth and slightly glossy. The eggs are laid on consecutive days. Average size of eggs, 1.46 inches x 1.04 inches; smallest egg, 1.40 inches x 1.01 inches; largest egg, 1.53 inches x 1.08 inches.

Habits.—Seen in large flocks in good seasons when not breeding. Has the usual Dotterel-like habit of jerking the neck upwards when standing. Feeds by night as well as in the day-time. Pretends injury when disturbed suddenly from the eggs or young.

For further remarks on this inland form see page 49, Vol. V, Part 2 of “The S.A. Ornithologist.”