



Canberra bird notes

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EDITORIAL

Winter is a rather bleak time, ornithologically speaking, for those of us unable to leave the suburbs for the wilder parts of the A.C.T. But some birds can be watched with a minimum of effort. For the past few weeks a flock of more than fifty Strawnecked Ibis has been feeding on wasteland around the Woden Town Centre during the day, then flying over Garran at dusk en route for a roost in Fyshwick. To those who love the marshes, few sights are as stirring as that of a chevron of ibis against the evening sky.

Other species also use regular flight lines to roosts. The hordes of Starlings converging on Civic are well known. Similarly, a good vantage-point near the Scrivener Dam should yield good counts of Pied Currawongs and parrots as they cross over each afternoon to roost in Stromlo Forest.

BIRDS SEEN AT SEA IN THE PACIFIC

Anthony H. D'Andria

Introduction

On January 3, 1969 I boarded the liner "Fairsea" at Sydney for a voyage across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans to Europe. Owing to a fire on board the trip was cut short at Panama. The following notes on sea-birds were made during regular watches and incidental observations from the decks.

An invaluable aid to identification was the preliminary manual issued by the Smithsonian Institution, Washington on (King, 1967). Others (Alexander, 1954, Hindwood et al., 1963) to help identify unfamiliar species from my fieldnotes. Birds too distant for recognition have been omitted.

Many a day went by on the high seas without any birds being encountered at all. This dearth reflected the barrenness of the water surface in these latitudes, where the clear ocean is poor in the nutrient salts that form the base of a pelagic food chain (King, 1967). It was only when the ship was disabled and stationary, and galley refuse had begun to accumulate around it, that birds (and fish) were seen in any numbers.

It is hoped that these notes, scanty though they be, will encourage other travelling ornithologists to keep records of birds seen at sea. Publication of these would help towards a better understanding of the distribution and movements of many pelagic species.

Observations

These are given in summarised form with other relevant data.

Date & Time	Position & Weather	Observation
3/1 1700	Sydney Heads Fine	Two Arctic and one Pomarine Skuas. The former were harrying gulls, the latter was alighting on the surface and picking at flotsam.
4/1 1000	30 19" S 153 27'E. Wind S'ly Force 5 Sea 74F.	Two Pomarine Skuas followed the ship during the morning. Both were light-phase adults, with distinct brown breast-band and strongly barred flanks.
5/1 1230	Brisbane	An adult and four immature Pomarines followed the ship down the Brisbane river and a few miles out to sea.
6/1 0915	26 52' S. 158 05' E. Air 78F Sea 79 Calm with some cumulus	Two White-tailed Tropicbirds joined the ship and began to circle within the dense smoke rising from the funnel. They appeared to be keeping intentionally within the fumes, and were possibly indulging in behaviour similar to that observed with Black Kites at Mount Isa, QLD (Liddy, 1959).

Date & Time	Position & Weather	Observation
7/1 1130	26 54' S. 166 17' E. Air 82 F. Sea 78	An adult Masked Booby overtook the ship and flew steadily eastwards about 10 feet above the surface.
14/1 0630	Papeete, Tahiti	30+ Red-footed Boobies crossed our bows in small groups, flying landwards. All were dark-phase adults, with conspicuous white tails. A few White Terns in the town.
1845	Hiau atoll, Tuamotu grp	One adult dark-phase Red-footed Booby and about 10 White Terns about the atoll.
16/1 0100	13 40' S. 138 08' W. Air 83 P. Wind N to HNW, force 7	Two Leach's Storm-petrels were on deck, having apparently been grounded by the strong northerly wind.
1020	13 00' S. 135 47' W.	About 10 Greybacked Terns cut across the ship's bows, flying steadily northwards.
17/1 1100	11 10' S. 129 34' W. Air 84-P. Sea 84 Wind BE, force 2	One Bulwer's Petrel flying eastwards alongside the ship. Pale diagonal wingbars clearly visible. Six Greybacked and two White Terns just forward of the ship, apparent diving onto a shoal of fish.

Date & Time	Position & Weather	Observation
23/1 1445	02 24'N. 93 30'W. Air 82F Sea 82 Wind SE, force 3, 5/8 cumulus	Ship disabled by explosion in engine-room. First bird on the scene was a Wilson's Storm-petrel fluttering over the refuse collecting astern. One adult and seven immature Masked Boobies were seen at various times during the afternoon.
24/1 1000	The "Fairsea" was stationary, though drifting slightly westward, all day. Her position about 200 miles northwest of the Galapagos Islands. One adult and one immature Masked Boobies flew past. Two Greater Frigatebirds were noted soaring in narrow circles at about 200 feet. One was completely dark, the other had a white head and underparts.	
1915	Three immature Laughing Gulls appeared, wheeling and dipping above the floating refuse. By nightfall about 12 storm-petrels were around the ship. Individuals of both Wilson and a Leach's were present, but the species ratio could not be determined.	
25/1	The ship's position shifted slightly northwestwards - the result of a sea-going tug's shortlived efforts to tow us to Panama. Two Laughing Gulls, two Masked Boobies, an immature frigatebird and the storm-petrels were noted during the day.	
26/1 1600	Ship's position ditto. Storm-petrels gone. An immature Frigatebird and immature Laughing Gull appeared briefly around the stern.	

Date & Time	Position & Weather	Observation
28/1 1500	4 30'N 92 00'W. Air 85 F. Sea 80. Clear and calm.	The ship under tow by an American freighter. Seven Greater Frigatebirds, of which three appeared to be females, glided past us, then began to dive down to the surface, looking very much like giant terns.
2/2 1200	6 52'N. 80 49'W.	At noon, the ship was 21 miles from the Peninsula de Azuero on the American mainland. As it sailed on parallel to the coast, the number of Laughing Gulls increased to about 50, ten of which were immature.
3/2 1145	8 30'N. 79 68'W. Sea 60F. wind NNE, force 7 Choppy seas	17 miles out of Balboa. Three adult Brown Boobies and a Pintado Petrel appeared near the ship, flying low; above the surface. At 1600 hrs, the commonest species in Balboa harbour were Brown Pelicans, Black Vultures and laughing Gulls.

Acknowledgments

The observations would have been much more limited without the assistance and interest of officers of the watch aboard the "Fairsea". Thanks are due to Dr G.F. van Tets the loan of field guides. Dr P. Fullagar and Mr P. Slater read and commented on the manuscript.

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Appendix I

The following is a systematic list of all species mentioned in the text.

<u>Daption capense</u>	Pintado Petrel
<u>Bulweria bulweri</u>	Bulwer's Petrel
<u>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</u>	Leach's Storm-petrel
<u>Oceanites oceanicus</u>	Wilson's Storm-petrel
<u>Phaethon lepturus</u>	White-tailed Tropicbird
<u>Pelecanus occidentalis</u>	Brown Pelican
<u>Sula dactylatra</u>	Masked Booby
<u>Sula leucogaster</u>	Brown Booby
<u>Sula sula</u>	Red-footed Booby
<u>Fregata minor</u>	Greater Frigatebird
<u>Coragyps atratus</u>	Black Vulture
<u>Milvus Migrans</u>	<u>Black Kite</u>
<u>Stercorarius pomarinus</u>	<u>Pomarine Skua</u>
<u>Stercorarius parasiticus</u>	<u>Arctic Skua</u>
<u>Larus atricilla</u>	<u>Laughing Gull</u>
<u>Sterna lunata</u>	Greybacked Terns
<u>Gygis alba</u>	White Tern

THE STATUS OF BIRDS IN CANBERRA AND DISTRICTPart 2WHITE-NECKED HERON Ardea pacifica

Status uncertain - probably an occasional visitor. It frequents lake and river margins (no records for lake Bathurst), creeks, dams and swamps. There are several records each year, all in the period November to April (post-breeding dispersal?) except for one in June 1965. Breeding was recorded at Tumut in February 1964 (cf C.B.N. 11, p.10) and there has been one unsuccessful attempt near Canberra in 1968. Nesting may take place in spring and summer rather than only in spring as stated in Frith (1969).

WHITE-FACED HERON Ardea novaehollandiae

A very common breeding resident. Locally it is the commonest of the Ardeidae, being found everywhere there is water. Its haunts include lakes, rivers, creeks, swamps, farm dams, wet paddocks and on occasion even suburban gardens in Canberra. The breeding season is from the beginning of October to the end of January, nests not tiding necessarily near water. Although resident in the area the bird seems to leave the Murrumbidgee River during winter (Lamm, 1965).

WHITE EGRET Egretta alba

A common but irregular visitor. It is the most frequently seen white egret around Canberra, occurring in the same habitats as the two herons. There are no breeding records. Lamm (1965) states that often only solitary birds were seen at Lake George and Frith (1969) states that the species is usually seen singly. Most records from the East End of Lake Burley Griffin, however, are of at least two (sometimes up to six) birds. Records suggest an increase in numbers in late summer and autumn followed by a decline in winter.

PLUMED EGRET Egretta intermedia

An occasional visitor to our region, occurring in the same habitats as the White Egret. No breeding records. Due to the possibility of confusion with the above species more work is needed to establish its status more definitely. It appears to occur singly.

LITTLE EGRET Egretta garzetta

A rare vagrant. There are only a few records, in the December to March period. All occurrences have been at the East End of Lake Burley Griffin, and there were no records before the Lake filled.

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CATTLE EGRET Ardeola ibis

A rare vagrant. It is found in the same habitats as Egretta spp. and also on grassland feeding among cattle. The first record for the Canberra area (at Bungendore) was on January 9, 1964. Since then there have been occasional reports, mainly of single birds. The species appears to be increasing in southeast Australia, and there may be an increase in sightings over the next few years.

NANKEEN NIGHT HERON Nycticorax caledonicus

A regular summer visitor in small numbers. It roosts in thick riparian foliage during the day and feeds in swampy areas at night. Owing to these habits it appears to be rare, but in fact numbers of up to 30 are reported in most years along the Molonglo River.

LITTLE BITTERN Ixobrychus minutus

One unconfirmed report at Jerrabomberra Creek on 6/1/68.

BROWN BITTERN Botaurus poiciloptilus

An uncommon resident? This species is very secretive, keeping to reedbeds, and its status around Canberra is not yet fully known. The only records are of a single bird at Mulwaree Ponds near Lake Bathurst on April 28, 1969 (CBN 7), and the sightings by Lamm at Lake George in 1961-1963. These were of birds in the period March to September, the only summer record of one bird in December. There were more birds present in 1961 than in 1962 and 1963.

STRAWNECKED IBIS Threskiornis spinicollis

A fairly common visitor. It appears in flocks of various numbers at all seasons. These flocks stay for varying lengths of time. As well as frequenting marshy areas such as swamps and lake margins it is also commonly found in paddocks away from water.

WHITE IBIS Threskiornis molucca

A nomadic visitor. It shows greater preference for wet habitats than the Strawnecked Ibis, and is less common. The records show that usually more birds are present during the summer.

GLOSSY IBIS Plegadis falcinellus

An occasional vagrant, occurring from October to March. It usually appears in flocks of 6-12 birds though up to 25 have been seen together. The species frequents moist areas such as swamps, lake margins and wet fields.

ROYAL SPOONBILL Platalea regia

An uncommon visitor. This is the less common of the spoonbills and is found where there is shallow water for feeding. It is normally seen in small numbers (1-4) often associated with the Yellowbilled Spoonbill. Even though the Field-list indicates their presence all the year round, the bulk of records are between October and March inclusive, with single records for April and May. Some of the birds seen were in breeding plumage.

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YELLOWBILLED SPOONBILL Platalea flavipes

A moderately common visitor. Lamm (1950) points out that they are often associated with White Ibis. This spoonbill usually occurs in small numbers (1-4) throughout the year, although numbers increase in the summer with up to 20 and more being recorded.

(to be continued)

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SOUTH AMERICA BIRDWATCH

Joseph M. Forshaw

(A summary of the talk by Mr Forshaw to the Canberra Ornithologists Group on April 12).

Seeing birds in South America is easy - they are everywhere, and in large numbers. Identifying them is a nightmare! Fortunately, I was accompanied on all my field trips by experienced guides who were familiar with the local species.

The first country visited was Guyana, where I saw a number of habitats, the most important being coastal rivers and the forested interior. Along the Maihcony River hoatzins were very common and many other birds were seen (e.g. toucans, hummingbirds, jacamars, birds of prey macaws, parakeets, woodpeckers). The vast forests of the interior are Amazonian in origin, and at Mabaruma in the northwest district I saw harpy eagles, kites, pigeons. Amazon parrots, trogons, kingfishers, puffbirds and jacamars. Highlights were excellent sightings of a large male Red Howler monkey and a Two-toed Sloth.

In Rio Grande do Sul, southern Brazil, I spent most of the time looking at temperate Araucaria forests, a unique habitat that is fast disappearing through logging and replacement by Eucalyptus plantations. These stands of Eucalyptus are totally devoid of resident birdlife, being visited only by hummingbirds when there is profuse flowering. Near Vacaria I was shown a roost being used by many thousands of Red-spectacled Amazons *Amazona pretrei*, a beautiful parrot now regarded as threatened because of the loss of its Araucaria habitat.

In the open southlands interspersed with swamps many waterbirds were seen, including screamers, roseate spoonbills and treeducks. The strange mud-nests of the ovenbird were on top of fenceposts and telegraph poles.

Rio de Janeiro, a truly magnificent city, is ideal for birdwatching because away from the seaboard it is surrounded by montane forest, a strip of which extends down from Corcovado into the Botanic Gardens. I noted many species in the Gardens, and hummingbirds were particularly abundant.

The purpose of my visit to South America was to gather data for the forthcoming Parrots of the World, so that most of my time was taken up with psittacids. However, it is impossible to spend time in the field in South America without being almost overwhelmed by the richness of its avifauna. The scope for ornithological research in the continent is virtually limitless.

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This was held on Wednesday, June 14 at the CSIRO lecture Theatre, Black Mountain. The Committee for 1972/73 was elected as follows: Chairman Dr G.P. van Tets; Secretary/Treasurer Mrs M. Cocks; Excursions Officer Mr M. Clayton; Sales Officer Mr T. Gourlay; Editor Mr. A.H. D'Andria; Chief Printer Dr V.A. Harris; Members Maj. H.L. Bell, Mr G.S. Clark, Dr P.J. Fullagar, Mr H.A. Nix, Mr S.J. Wilson.

Members' slides shown during the meeting included some excellent studies by M J. McNaughton of local waterbirds.

Members are reminded that subscriptions for 1972/73 are now due.

COMING MEETINGS

August 9

Mr D. Purchase will talk about the Australian Bird Banding Scheme. It is hoped to have the CSIRO banding film (in colour) available for this meeting. Birds of the month will be the small crakes, by Mr W. Vestjens.

September

Mr Brian Bell, of the New Zealand Wildlife Branch, Wellington, will be our guest speaker for this month. The topic and date have yet to be finalized.

SHORT OBSERVATIONS

WEDGETAILED EAGLE Aquila audax. A pair soaring above a hillside at Ginninderra on 3/7/72 (A.D1 Andria).

LITTLE EAGLE Hieraetus morphnoides. A pair indulging in courtship aerobatics high above Gungahlin on 21/6/72 (AD).

LITTLE FALCON Falco longipennis. One unsuccessfully attacked a Black Cormorant at the Molonglo River flats on 20/3/72 (J.McNaughton),

Whitewinged triller Lalage sueurii. One at Russell Hill from 29/11/71 to 31/1/72 (B.Laycock).

TAWNY-CROWNED HONEYEATER Gliciphila melanops. One at Narrabundah from 1 to 23/11/71. It was frequently seen in flight and at rest and heard calling daily (S.Wilson).

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