

Short Notes—

Nesting of the Fairy Tern along the South Coast of Western Australia

The Fairy Tern *Sterna nereis* regularly nests along the west coast of Western Australia, both on islands and on sandy beaches of the mainland. However, Seal Island off Cape Leeuwin is the only location listed by Serventy & Whittell (*Birds of Western Australia*, Fifth Edition 1976) as a breeding station for this species on the south coast of that state.

Two other locations have been recorded on the south coast in the RAOU Nest Record Scheme. Near Denmark, G. Rogerson found about 50 nests on 29 November 1977, on low sand dunes and sandy beach, and on a small rocky island about 200 metres offshore. At Bremmer Bay, R. Garstone saw about 20 pairs with young on Glasse Island on 21 December 1972.

In addition to these records, A. K. Daw (pers. comm.) of Esperance told me that he had recorded nesting depressions and aggressive display by a few adults at Stokes Inlet in November 1982, indicating that nesting was about to commence. He also saw a pair feeding two small young, barely able to fly, near Observatory Point about ten kilometres south-west of Esperance. Subsequently, on 11 February 1984 at Stokes Inlet, he found about six deserted nests and four young birds barely able to flutter off the ground.

On 9 November 1982, my wife and I made a second visit to Sandy Island off Windy Harbour. As we approached the island some 200 small terns were seen



Fairy Tern nest and eggs among *Arctotheca populifolia*, Sandy Island, W.A.
9 November 1982.

flying over the beach area. After landing, a brief inspection of this area revealed 91 nests with eggs and numerous fresh scrapes. One nest contained three eggs while one or two eggs were about equally spread among the others.

The nests were situated on 'mini' sand dunes or ridges about 0.5 m in height. These dunes covered most of the beach area above the normal high water level. The dunes were covered with clumps of *Arctotheca populifolia*, an introduced plant now widely distributed on beaches, particularly along the south coast of Western Australia. The nests were situated among the clumps.

During the previous visit to the island in October 1981, very few of these small dunes were present and no Fairy Terns were seen. There is no previous record of their breeding on this island.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my wife who assisted me with the survey, Derrick and Barry Beale for our boat transport, Ian Abbott for the plant identification, Mike Clarke (Organiser, RAOU Nest Record Scheme) for details of nest records, and Austin Daw for his observations.

By S. G. LANE, Lot 6 Fairview Road, Moonee, via Coffs Harbour, N.S.W.
2450 ■

On the Diagnostic Characters of Some Australian Corvids

Despite a major milestone in corvid field identification provided by Rowley (1970), there is still some incorrect information reaching the ordinary bird-watcher via some of the popular literature. This can only compound the problem of separating a bird group which many observers find difficult; it can also lead to serious errors of identification. This is unfortunate because accurate identification is an important consideration in the very interesting subject of the comparative ecology of these birds. It is a topic which requires further work, especially on the Torresian Crow *Corvus orru* and the Little Crow *C. bennetti* where they occur together, and on the Forest Raven *C. tasmanicus* and its sympatric congeners. It is also one to which ordinary bird-watchers can contribute much valuable data, but the value of locality records and other notes is lessened when there is the possibility of birds incorrectly identified. The misinformation in recent books is doubly unfortunate, because the books concerned have appeared since Rowley's definitive papers on the corvids.

Pizzey (1980) stated that one of the characters of the Little Raven *C. mellori* is the 'extensive loose bare skin on chin between bases of lower mandible'. However, it is the Australian Raven *C. coronoides* which shows this character and not the Little Raven; the latter has a well-feathered inter-ramal area (Rowley 1970) and this is the very character by which these two ravens may be separated in the hand. Pizzey did state that the Australian Raven has bare inter-ramal skin; it may be useful to point out that this feature is sometimes visible in the field, especially in the case of juveniles which have pink inter-ramal skin. The only other corvid which shows this feature in the field, but to a lesser extent, is the Forest Raven—juveniles can show narrow pink edges to