

A Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, in the Darwin Area, N.T.

The status of *Phalacrocorax carbo* in the Northern Territory seems to be uncertain. D. N. Crawford (1972, *Emu*, 72: 4) in an account of his observations in the Darwin area from 1967-71 does not record the species. G. M. Storr (1977, *Birds of the Northern Territory*) gives it the status 'uncertain'. C. Boekel (1978, *Aust. Bird Watcher*, 7: 209) records one individual seen near Victoria Downs, N.T., and suggests the status 'very rare'.

During regular observations in the Darwin area from 1971-74 and 1977-78 I made only one positive identification of *P. carbo*. On 10 September 1978 at 0700 hours, whilst bird-watching in the mangrove area behind Ludmilla Beach, Darwin, I noticed a heavy splashing about 50 m away down a flooded creek. A dark object, which I thought at first was a large fish, came rapidly towards me, surfacing intermittently. It turned out to be a large dark cormorant, which sprang up to a mangrove root about 10 m away from me, and swallowed a fish it had caught.

I was able to observe the bird at close quarters in good light for about two minutes, and to ascertain that it had the field characteristics of *P. carbo* as described in P. Slater (1970, *Field Guide to the Australian Birds, Non-Passerines*. Rigby, Adelaide). There was no possibility of confusion with the Little Black Cormorant, *P. sulcirostris*, which is common in the area. This bird was considerably larger, and the yellow face was a prominent feature. The plumage was somewhat dull, and appeared to be that of an immature or non-breeding bird.

The bird then dived and set off rapidly towards the main creek, again surfacing and splashing from time to time. This creek can be seen at low tide to be about 1.5 m deep, and the whole depth is a veritable maze of interlocking mangrove roots. The ability of the cormorant to hunt fast and successfully in these opaque waters is remarkable.

By MICHAEL BARTLETT, *Evangelisches Krankenhaus, 4520 Melle, W. Germany.*

ABW

Observation of One Pallid Cuckoo Feeding Another

On 18 October 1980 at 1010 hours while watching birds with Peter Klapste near Chiltern, north-eastern Victoria, I noticed a Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus* calling persistently from the dead branch of a eucalypt in a group of trees in the middle of a large paddock. The cuckoo was in typical plain grey full adult plumage. After a little while it stopped calling and disappeared into the foliage.

Shortly afterwards another Pallid Cuckoo appeared on a dead branch. This bird had some intermediate plumage, and according to the classification of Disney (1977) it appeared to be somewhere between second

year immature and third year sub-adult, perhaps closer to the former. The first Cuckoo suddenly appeared again with a caterpillar in its bill and fed the brown-plumaged Cuckoo with it. While accepting the food into its bill the body of the brown bird trembled and its partly open wings maintained a rapid shallow movement up and down. Similar feeding has also been observed by Fleming (1979). Both these occurrences were almost certainly instances of proper courtship feeding.

Smithers (1977), and Marchant & Hohn (1980) have described observations of courtship feeding by the Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus pyrrhophanus*. The brown Pallid Cuckoo, not yet being in full adult plumage, was almost certainly a female capable of breeding. The call and behaviour of the grey-plumaged bird identified it as a male.

Instances of the breeding of several species of birds in juvenile or immature plumage have been recorded in all zoogeographical regions. For example, the Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* sometimes breeds successfully while still in its very distinctive juvenile plumage. One such occurrence has been described and photographed, see Hanzak & Formanek (1976).

It should be noted that in the past Pallid Cuckoos with mottled-brown backs have always been regarded as female; however it is now thought that adult birds of both sexes have similar grey plumage, although further research is needed (Disney, 1977).

The Pallid Cuckoo, a strictly migratory bird, is absent in winter from the southern parts of its range.

The writer has only once seen the Pallid Cuckoo near Melbourne in mid-winter (Klapste, 1975). It was a grey-plumaged bird and at that time thought to be a male, but in the light of today's knowledge it could equally have been an adult female.

References

- Disney, H. J. de S., 1977. Bird in the Hand — Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus*. *Corella* 1: 13-16.
- Fleming, A. M., 1979. Do Pallid Cuckoos feed their young? *Bird Observer* (Melb) 577: 90.
- Hanzak, J., & Formanek, J., 1976. *Encyclopedie des Oiseaux*. Grund, Paris.
- Klapste, J., 1975. Winter observations of the Olive-backed Oriole *Oriolus sagittatus* and the Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus* in Victoria. *Bird Observer* (Melb.) 528: 86.
- Marchant, S., & Hohn, E. O., 1980. Field notes on the Fan-tailed Cuckoo. *Emu* 80: 77-80.
- Smithers, C. N., 1977. An instance of one adult Fan-tailed Cuckoo feeding another. *Aust. Birds* 12: 8.

By JAROSLAV KLAPSTE, 6/15 Southey Street, Elwood, Victoria 3184.