

In my paper on the Painted Snipe (1963) I appealed for information from any person that had seen the species during the period stated. Claude Austin, Coleraine, Victoria, recorded a small group of Painted Snipe in the south-west corner of Western Victoria, thus establishing, at least, two separate groups of this little known bird in Victoria at that time.

REFERENCES

- D'Ombraïn, A. F., 1944. "Behaviour of the Painted Snipe in Captivity", *Emu*, 43 : 247-248.
 Hindwood, K. A., 1960. "The Painted Snipe and its Nestlings", *Australian Bird Watcher*, 1 : 66-69.
 Lowe, V. T., 1963. "Observations on the Painted Snipe", *Emu*, 62 : 221-237.

The Sighting of a Painted Snipe

By H. BESTE, Forest Hill, Victoria.

The Painted Snipe, *Rostratula benghalensis*, is a rare species in Victoria, and the following notes on a female, seen at the Bendigo Sewerage Farm, are of interest. This species occurs sporadically, especially in flood years, but it is by no means common and it is seldom recorded.

The writer and a friend visited the farm on January 1, 1969, and, as there were large numbers of birds present, including many Australian Snipe, *Gallinago hardwickii*, we decided to return the following day.

The temperature was almost 90°f. and this influenced us against setting up a photographic hide at the nest of a Rainbow-bird, *Merops ornatus*. However, January 2 was no cooler. Upon arrival at the farm a hide was erected at the nest and then left for several hours. In the meantime we decided to try and photograph some Australian Snipe in flight.

A small pan of water, near the road leading to the aerodrome, had held several species of waders the previous day. As we again approached it we scanned the area thoroughly through our binoculars. It was then that the dark chestnut coloured head, with a very noticeable white orbital ring, extending well behind the eye like a pair of white spectacles, was first noted peering from behind a clump of reeds. The chestnut patch came to an abrupt finish half way down the chest, followed by white feathering, as far as could be seen at this stage. A very distinct creamy collar extended from the lower chest, where it was almost pure white, around the neck of the bird, and, it was seen subsequently, to finish in the form of a "V" on the lower back.

Our next move was to try and flush the bird out into the open, so that we could see the remainder of its plumage, which was still hidden behind the reeds at this stage. As we moved closer to the bird, examining it through binoculars every now and then, we also

] noted the prominently coloured bill, which appeared dark greenish-brown at the base, merging to bright crimson towards the tip. Eventually, the bird moved from behind the clump of reeds into bright sunlight, out in the open. A photograph was eventually obtained using a 400 mm lens, with the bird about 20 feet away.

The flanks of the bird were dark brownish-green with no spotting, which, together with the dark chestnut hood, identified it as a female. The bird suddenly flew, and its light collar was very distinctive as it rose in flight; the dark chestnut head and chest being also clearly seen. After a flight of only 100 yards the bird dropped down again on to a small island, in one of the treatment pans.

The flight, when compared with that of the Australian Snipe, appears much slower when the bird flies from cover to cover. It is unlike that of a snipe, being more of a buoyant flapping, somewhat like that of the Magpie-Lark, *Grallina cyanoleuca*. As the Painted Snipe was flushed again and again, this type of flight was seen to be consistent whenever the bird flew to another patch of vegetation near-by. During these flights it never rose high into the air, but usually travelled no more than ten feet above the ground. However, on two occasions the bird flew for considerable distances, and then its flight was much higher and stronger, and more snipe-like; also much faster than when it was flying from cover to cover.

Whenever the bird had resettled, after being flushed, it was visible above the surrounding short vegetation, and appeared to be watching us. This behaviour was in marked contrast to that of, at least, 30 different Australian Snipe which we flushed, and which could not be seen after they had resettled. It was also rather difficult to locate any of the latter birds before flushing them. Only once was a bird seen as it hurried across a small open patch, otherwise they appeared always to squat down as we approached them.

Australian Snipe were heard calling usually before they were seen, and the call is what drew our attention mainly to the fact that another bird had risen. By contrast, the Painted Snipe was never heard to call, even when it was in flight.

The Painted Snipe was disturbed once near an irrigation channel and, following it along, landed some 200 yards farther on, in some very short grass. At first it remained upright, watching us from a distance, but as we crept slowly closer it began to squat down behind a small piece of wood. This squatting down was not accomplished in one quick movement, which might have attracted the attention of any predator, but was very gradual with the bird never ceasing to watch us. Instant squatting behind the piece of wood would have put us out of the view of the bird.

The Snipe reached a full squatting position, lying horizontally behind the wood, and it appeared to be almost part of it, so well was it camouflaged, when we had reached within 50 feet of it. Its sudden "exploding" into the air would have given it a two to three second advantage over any unsuspecting predator, and, as with other snipes, seems a good defence mechanism for its kind.