

patch of bracken. One bird would no sooner get settled in position when another bird would try to push it out of the way. Although the sun shone brightly over the area of several square yards all the birds appeared to want to lie in the same place. I watched for 20 minutes and the birds were still pushing and shoving when I left.

In the surrounding bushes there were another five to six Helmeted Honeyeaters watching the behaviour of the sun-bathers.

—Roy P. Cooper, Melbourne. 24/12/1967.

A sighting of an unusually large Ruff. On December 15, 1968, several good views of a very big Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax*, were obtained at Lake Borrie, Victoria. It was a warm, calm, overcast day, with fairly high clouds. It was an exceptionally large bird and my companion, F. T. H. Smith, and I were amazed at the size of this rare wader. A Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Calidris acuminata*, appeared to be standing *under* it, and it was considered that the Ruff was almost twenty-five percent larger than the Ruffs that we had seen previously.

The wader was first noticed when it was flying over a low bank that divided the ponds, some distance away. It was on its own, and my attention was drawn to the very light under wing colour. When it landed near a pair of Whiskered Terns, *Chlidonias hybrida*, I could see that it towered over them. The body was noticed to be about the size of a male Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica*, but the bill of the Godwit would be considerably longer.

Proceeding carefully, we approached to within 60 feet of the bird, and we were able to have several minutes in which to make a careful observation of its features. It rested on a small island, and then proceeded to preen itself, giving us a good view of various parts of its body; leg colour, and feather colouration.

It did not appear to be disturbed by our presence but it must have been wary of us, for it soon flew off. It had a strong flight but the style was somewhat haphazard. It flew high before coming down a considerable distance away, probably on the far bank of Lake Borrie, about half a mile distant. It was not a direct flight but more like that of a Snipe, *Gallinago*. No calls were heard.

In flight the darkish upper parts were noticed, with big white patches on each side of the tail. The bill was longish, stout and dark, with a slight decurve at the tip. The feathering was light coloured at the base of the bill and the eye was dark. The crown and hind-neck were greyish-brown. When on the alert the upstretched neck appeared to be very long. Chin and sides of neck whitish, and there was a light greyish wash on the front of the neck and breast, with a faint dark greyish mottling superimposed on the neck colour. Dark grey markings were on the sides of the bird, but the rest of the under parts were whitish. The upper parts were greyish-brown, with light edgings to the feathers, and the under wing-linings were white. The long legs were light green, with a faint tinge of yellow.

On December 29, 1968, a second sighting of this unusually large Ruff was had by F. T. H. Smith and me, at the same place. It was during the middle of the morning, and the weather was fairly cool, with a slight breeze and some cloud. The bird was among a flock of about 20 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. Again it was found to be wary, and soon flew off with the Sandpipers.

— R. T. Sympton, *South Yarra, Victoria, 30/12/1968.*

Whistling Eagle carrying a White-faced Heron. While walking across a large field near the Altona Saltworks, on February 12, 1967. I caused a Whistling Eagle, *Haliastur sphenurus*, to fly from the ground, where it had been plucking feathers from a White-faced Heron, *Ardea novae-hollandiae*. The eagle rose, with a laboured flapping, with the heron in its talons, and carried it for approximately 200 yards, at an altitude of about 30 feet, before dropping the victim.

In the air the heron seemed nearly as large as the eagle. I later examined the heron where it was dropped. It was a full sized but juvenile bird, from which a few of the small feathers had been removed. The Whistling Eagle remained circling the area until I left.

It was remarkable that a Whistling Eagle was able to lift such a load and carry it for such a distance. The general opinion of local observers appears to be that the Whistling Eagle is incapable of lifting so great a weight.

— F. T. H. Smith, *Kew, Victoria, 19/8/1968.*

Rainbowbirds "Dipping" for food. At noon, towards the end of September 1968, I was on the bank of the Mulgrave River, north Queensland, about two miles upstream from its exit to the sea at Russel Head.

I had been watching to see if any of the north-south migrating birds followed the course of the river during the daytime, at this time of the year.

On this particular day there was nothing travelling, and I was on the point of moving to another location when I heard a number of Rainbowbirds, *Merops ornatus*, calling in the distance. Fortunately I had just returned from a trip to the Claudie River, on Cape York, where many groups, sometimes numbering a hundred, of this species were wandering about awaiting the coming of spring to return southwards, and my ear had become quite attuned to their calling, even at a distance, otherwise I would have missed the following observation.

The calling approached steadily nearer but very slowly. When the birds, in a group of about 20, did appear, the reason for the slow approach was revealed: they were "dipping" for some sort of food out in the middle of the river, which was flowing downstream at about three miles per hour.