

Field Notes for 1960

By Miss G. M. BOWKER, Port Fairy, Victoria

Flooded nest of Spur-winged Plover. On June 19, 1960, there was an extremely high tide and the sea pushed the waters of the Moyne River about 100 yards over its banks and flooded the flats nearby. A Spur-winged Plover was seen standing in one place with only its back and head out of the water. It was calling excitedly so we waded out to see what was happening. It flew off as we neared the spot and we found that it had been standing over a nest which was covered by nearly four inches of water. The tide was running out and we located two eggs that were lodged in a glasswort bush and two others were seen bobbing about in the water and floating towards the river.

We rebuilt the nest with branches of glasswort and placed the collected eggs inside the new dry nest. The eggs felt heavy and were cold. That evening I returned to the nesting site, only to find that our nest had been thrown away and the four mud-coated eggs were lying in a puddle on the old nest site, which the birds had started to reline with dry rushes.

The next day the area was again visited. The nest was dry and cosy and the eggs were clean and warm.

On June 24 when we walked over the hillock towards the river flat we were greeted with a great clatter from the parent plovers. On a small islet near the old nest were two young birds a few days old. The two remaining eggs were still in the flattened out nest. We examined them a few days later and each contained fully formed dead chicks. Each season a number of plovers' nests go under flood waters and when this happens the birds usually leave the flooded eggs without a fuss. This pair persevered and were finally rewarded.

Injured Wandering Albatross. August 6, 1960. Today I found a live adult Wandering Albatross on the beach near the town. It had a sore leg which possibly prevented it taking off from the water. It must have had a tremendous battle with foxes the previous night for there was a great circle of pads at a radius of 6 yards around the bird.

August 7: We took the Albatross out to sea in "Bunty" Gallagher's boat. When released the bird sprang into the air, vigorously flapping its wings, but it was unable to become airborne and it landed on the water near the boat. Hoping that it would be able to fly later, we left it and returned to the wharf.

The following day the Albatross was back on the beach again. For the next 16 days I went out on alternate days to feed the bird. The local fishermen gave me shark, mullet and cuttle-fish. It liked the cuttle-fish and mullet but it would not eat the shark. The foxes did not return after that first night. One day a Whistling Eagle picked at the bird but its great beak kept the Eagle away. In the meanwhile I had grown attached to this noble bird with its beautifully marked feathers and huge pinkish beak.

On August 24 the Albatross only ate one and a half mullet and it appeared to be sick. The following day the great bird was dead.

Little Penguin banding recovery. On September 12, 1960, one of the school children brought in to me a band taken from a dead Fairy Penguin that had been washed up on the South Beach. The number on the band was "NA 12" and the inscription read "Write University, Hobart, Tasmania". I sent a letter off and a few days later received this reply from Miss Ann Phillips, Tasmanian Museum, Hobart:

"An ecological study of the Fairy Penguin, *Eudyptula minor novae-hollandiae*, has been in progress in southern Tasmania, since January, 1959. At three different breeding grounds, which have been selected for detailed investigations, 56 fledglings and over 350 adults have already been banded. So far, however, only three recoveries have been obtained. All three birds were dead when picked up. Two were found locally, each within a radius of 25 miles from the point at which it had been banded. The third has recently been recovered in Victoria more than 500 miles away.

"On September 12, 1960, Miss G. M. Bowker, a C.S.I.R.O. Bird-Bander in Victoria, forwarded to the Zoology Department of the University of Tasmania, a bird-band carrying the serial number 'NA 12' and the inscription 'Write University, Hobart, Tasmania'. She reported the recovery of the band by a school child, from a dead bird found on the south beach at Port Fairy, western Victoria. The band was brought to her on the above date, but unfortunately, the bird was disposed of before she was able to retrieve it.

"Although the actual specimen could not be recovered, this report is still of considerable interest. The Penguin in question was banded by me, as a fledgling, in its burrow on the Neck rookery on Bruni Island on December 28, 1959. It left its nest between January 2 and 8, 1960. This bird may have reached Victoria either through efforts of its own or through those of some outside agency. Only further recoveries will indicate the manner in which such a journey is made. These are eagerly awaited."

The Little Bittern. It is possible that the Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*) is more plentiful and extends over a greater range in Victoria than is generally suspected, as this bird has the strange habit of appearing in most unexpected places at times where it had not previously been seen. During the twenty-seven years that I was honorary secretary of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, it was rarely that I was asked by members to identify birds of any species for them; probably not more than six specimens altogether. Yet, in 1937, by a strange coincidence, I received two specimens of Little Bitterns from different parts of Victoria.

During the month of October of that year the whole State had been flooded by torrential rains. On October 16, Mr. L. A. Fell, The Bluff, Metung, Gippsland Lakes, forwarded a specimen that had been caught in a wire netting fence and on October 21, Mr. W. J. T. Armstrong, Hexham Park, Hexham, sent a specimen which had been found lying dead beside a flooded creek. Although a resident of Hexham all his life, Mr. Armstrong had not previously seen a Little Bittern in the district.

—D. J. Dickison, Melbourne, September 19, 1960.