

bottom of the Honeyeater's nest. Five days later both nests contained eggs, but the Scrub-Wren had apparently deserted as its eggs were cold and the bird was not seen.

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The Naming of the Pilot-Bird

By D. J. DICKISON, Melbourne

The range of the Pilot-Bird extends from the Ferntree Gully National Park, 22 miles east of Melbourne, through the humid areas of eastern Victoria and northwards through the coastal areas of New South Wales to the Royal National Park, on the southern shores of Port Hacking. It also occurs on the Blue Mountains as far as Mount Wilson and as far west as Lidsdale, about seven miles north-west of Lithgow. Although large areas of this country had been taken up by selectors prior to 1850, this bird remained undiscovered.

John Gould failed to collect a specimen when he was in the scrubs of the Illawarra district early in 1840, where the birds are still plentiful. It was not until May 14, 1850, that he was able to describe the species, which he named *Pycnoptilus floccosus*, at a meeting of the Zoological Society of London. It had been

received from a collection made on the upper part of the river Morumbidgee (Murrumbidgee), a locality where it is unlikely that the bird could have been found even at that early period. Gould did not bestow any vernacular name on the bird at the time, but when the first part of the Supplement of the *Birds of Australia* appeared in 1851 he had named it the Downy Pycnoptilus, a name which remained in use until the nineties.

In later years Dr. E. P. Ramsay of Sydney, published several short notes on this bird in scientific publications both in New South Wales and England, and in 1887 he gave the first description of the eggs in the Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales.

The only reference to the Pilot-Bird in E. E. Morris' "Austral-English Dictionary of Australian Words", published in 1898, was taken from an article in the Melbourne *Argus*, March 25, 1893, where Donald McDonald described the collection of Australian birds' eggs formed by A. J. Campbell. He stated that the eggs of the Pilot-bird were rare and the set in the collection had been taken quite recently in the Dandenong ranges. After this date the name of Pilot-bird was used by birdmen both in Victoria and New South Wales.

In later years Frank Howe, an authority on the habits of the Pilot-Bird, endeavoured to trace the origin of the name and the date in which it first came into use, but his efforts were unsuccessful. Even A. J. Campbell, who had been closely associated with ornithology in Victoria for a long period, was unable to give any information on the subject. Records now indicate that the name Pilot-bird had been in use many years prior to the reference given by Morris, though it does not appear to have been used by ornithologists until the early nineties. In the Melbourne weekly newspaper, *The Australasian*, November 5, 1870, there is an article, one of a series, with the title of "Our Colonial Birds" by "Microzoon", in which the name is used, probably for the first time in print, in the following paragraph:—

"*Pycnoptilus floccosus* (Pilot Bird or Downy Pycnoptilus). This interesting little bird is found, not seen, uncommonly in all the Victorian localities in which the *Menura* occurs and seems to run about, and in front of the lyre birds so much that it has received the name of Pilot-bird from the bushmen from some notion that it leads the bigger bird."

It is possible that the title of Pilot-bird was used for some years before it appeared in print. The name had probably been supplied to the National Museum in Melbourne by one of the early collectors. Such well known collectors as F. J. Williams, C. J. Stafford and others did a great deal of collecting for the museum in the nineties in localities where these birds were not uncommon.

When Pilot-birds are found in the company of Lyre-birds they are usually behind the larger birds, working over the debris that they have scratched about, and at no time do they give any indication of acting as pilots.

The name of the author of the articles which ran through *The Australasian* for several years, and dealt with all branches of the

natural history of Victoria, has never been disclosed. However, there is strong evidence to suggest that the writer was Professor Frederick McCoy, who was the Director of the National Museum at that time, as there is a reference in one of the old letterbooks at the museum of a proposal made by McCoy to the Editor of *The Australasian*, that he be given permission to contribute articles, at intervals, on the subjects of interest in the National Museum. It was also apparent that the articles had been written by a naturalist of some ability and who had a good general knowledge of the fauna of Victoria.

Nesting of the Caspian Tern

By H. E. TARR, Nunawading, Vic.

The Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*), the largest species of the Australian Terns, has a pale grey back, white underparts and tail, grey wings darker towards the tips and a very heavy, coral-red, black-tipped bill. The tail is only slightly forked. The legs are black and appear rather long for a tern. Although the crown and sides of the head to below the eyes are black during the warmer months, in winter they have a streaky white appearance with a dark mark extending back over the eyes. It has a powerful flight, similar to that of the Silver Gull, and at times it can be observed flying at a considerable height. Although mainly a maritime species, it will be seen occasionally on inland rivers and lakes, often in considerable numbers.

This Tern has practically a world-wide distribution, being also found in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America.

It may be observed flying over the water, at a height of about 30 feet, with the head pointed downwards at right angles to the body. On sighting its prey, which appears to be mainly surface-feeding fish, it will close its wings, dive into the water and reappear almost immediately with a fish in its bill. Occasionally it can be seen swimming in the water or resting, with other water-birds, on sandspits or beaches. The call is a harsh, grating note uttered at intervals while flying, even when it has a fish in its beak.

The courtship display is similar to that of other terns. A pair will dive at terrific speed from great heights and, without losing formation, will twist and turn in a series of aerial evolutions before finally alighting on a strip of sandy beach. Here they will preen one another for some time and, finally, mating will take place.

The following notes are based on observations that I have made at 20 nests, in the various States of Australia, during the last ten years. The general impression that I have formed is that this species nests singly or in small parties, mainly on offshore islands, and that they are not as sociable as our other terns. Of these 20