

Notices on the migration of birds in Australia

given by letter of **E. P. Ramsay.**

Sept. 30th 1885.

I had the honour to receive your letters and papers in due time. Extracts from my note books shall from time to time be sent for your acceptance.

I have communicated your wishes to several of my correspondents in various parts of Australia, and I have no doubt but, that in due time I shall receive notices from them worth recording.

I have had for many years quite a network of observers in Australia with a view of writing the natural history of our birds. My various note books contain observations from Tasmania and S. E. to North Australia, S. East coast of New Guinea, and I have recently sent a collector to North West Australia.

One thing with respect to our Australian fauna must be carefully born in mind, strictly speaking we have no migration among our birds, many observers in Australia fancy that because certain species appear in their districts in the spring of the year or for breeding purposes, or for want of food, that these species are migratory. This is not the case, our birds breed in certain districts spreading themselves over that particular part of the country in great numbers and remaining perhaps one or two years there, at other times they congregate together after the breeding season is over, and their young are able to travel (fly) well and go to another part, sometimes only a few miles (10^m to 20^m) off and remain there the winter.

When the Eucalypti are in flower, they are frequented by many species of honey-eating Parrots (*Trichoglossi*) and other birds. »Honey Eaters« (*Meliphagidae*), these may remain to breed near the coast or leave as soon as the flowers on the trees fade — and proceed to other parts for food. They resemble nomadic tribes wandering about the country and setting down for the season where there is most food to breed, for instance the *Trichoglossi* visit the coast during the winter months during some years, in the spring at others, or in the summer should they find that in the district in which they spent the winter there was not likely to be sufficient food — if they come to us on the coast in the winter time (from May to June) and leave us, it is quite probable they may be found only 20 miles distant spread all over the country breeding. Some species of Parrots, (*Lathamus discolor*) for instance, only visits N. S. Wales once in 5 to 10 years while in South Australia they may be found almost all the year round — there are usually a large percentage of young birds among the flocks visiting N. S. W., but I have never found them breeding here. I am now republishing my distribution list of Australian Birds and in it I will notify such birds as are nomadic and those two or three species which arrive to us from other countries, such as *Acanthytes caudacuta*, *Glariola orientales*. Another section of our birds never leave the coast line and are to be found in our fields, and gardens and shrubs all the year round. A 3^d group only visit us during very long droughts, the want of water and food in the interior drive them towards the coast.

These at such times arrive in countless numbers and over-run the whole country, doing great damage to the crops and may be taken by the hand; these are usually water birds, waders, ducks, water hens, &c. The term »migratory« as understood by European naturalists, does not apply to any Australian species, the term I propose for these is »nomadic«, for they seldom remain more than four months in any district although they often return year after year to the same breeding grounds re-

gularly for several years, then not again perhaps a 5 to 10 years. I have lately seen a list of »migratory« birds given in the Philosophical Society Papers of Brisbane Queensland in which the author Mr. Broadbent gives the names of birds he found migrating to or from Cape York, N. A., the whole is erroneous, the mistake occurs by birds leaving the neighbourhood or district only; if looked for they may be found dispersed or scattered over the country singly or in pairs—often only a few miles distant. Towards the breeding season such species congregate together and are found more easily by their voice (note) which is readily heard at such times but seldom heard in the wintermonths. *Tanysiptera sylvia*, is said to migrate from New Guinea to Cape York, but the New Guinea species, until recently supposed to be *T. sylvia*, is quite distinct and named by me *T. salvadoriana*. *T. sylvia* is very rarely if at all found in New Guinea — *T. galatea*, found only a few miles on Islands in of Torres straits, from Cape York — is never found at Cape York itself — but is plentiful with *T. salvadoriana* on the S. coast of New Guinea. Hereafter I hope to be able to send you some notes for publication; at present the alterations and additions to the Museum and my unfortunate ill health has precluded me from many duties which have been of late neglected partly through indisposition, partly through excess of work in this department.

I have also received from His Excellency our Governor of N. S. W. your letters and papers, I shall not delay in making out registration forms for the Australian Colonies and New Zealand. Our great draw back is the identification of our birds especially sea birds; very few birds of any kind are attracted by the lighthouses and lightships or beacons — if we had migratory species of course this would be different. — However I will not fail to report to you from time to time such observations as I may deem of interest.

The *Hirundinidae*; our species of *Gallinago*, *Rhynchaea*, *Merops*, *Artamus* and some *Ballidae*, make the

closest approach to a migration here as they sometimes wander from the north to the south of Australia. The *Chelidon*, *Ariel*, *Atticora leucosternon*, *Hirund. neoxena*, *H. nigricans*, *Artamus superciliosus* and *Artamus personatus*, etc. assemble themselves together in great numbers and roost together on the trees for several nights before finally leaving us at the end of the summer — but seldom travel more than a few hundred miles before settling down again, one species only *Hylochelidon arborea* (*H. nigricans*) is found on the south coast of New Guinea.

Chalcites lundres is one of the most puzzling; one form *C. plagosus* may be found sparingly distributed all over N. S. W., all through the year but appear to be more plentiful during the spring and summer, when they call loudly, three species breed with us — I have a sp^m agreeing exactly with the New Zealand birds which was taken at sea between New Zealand and Lord Howe Island, while the L. H. I. birds are said to be *C. plagosus*, *C. basalis* I have never found out of Australia.

Believe me my esteemed Sir
yours very truly

Ed. V. Ramsay.
