

stabilised as *Anthochaera*; and there it abides. The meaning seems to be something like 'Joyful greeter of flowers'.

When we examine Laishley's painting closely, we notice not only the shape and the feathering, but also how carefully he reproduced the small red wattles and the pale yellow wash on the belly. The identity of Laishley's so-called Northern Thrush is beyond question. We would like to know the truth behind its arrival in New Zealand.

A painting dated August 1865 depicts a Kingfisher (*Halcyon sancta*) and a heron which is clearly not a Reef Heron (*Egretta sacra*) but a White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*), which rather revealingly Laishley calls *Ardea leucops*, using the name given by Wagler in his *Systema Avium* of 1827. As was his wont, Laishley was quick off the mark. He was also aware that the White-faced Heron was at that time a very rare bird in New Zealand; and he adds a note "Shot in Manukau. Regarded by the person who forwarded it to me and who had been long a resident, as uncommon." This seems to be by far the earliest record of this species as far north in New Zealand as Auckland; and indeed, there are few, if any, earlier recorded occurrences elsewhere in the whole country. Buller does not mention White-faced Heron in his 1865 Essay.

Formerly the typical heron of the rocky bays and basaltic reefs of the cone-ringed Mangere Inlet was *sacra*. Then in the late 1940s a few White-faced Heron began to appear. Their subsequent increase was dramatic. In 1960, when winter and summer censuses of shore birds covered most of Manukau Harbour, the counts of White-faced Heron were respectively 42 and 40. Ten years later in 1970, the respective figures were 362 and 418. Meanwhile Reef Herons had virtually disappeared from the upper reaches of the harbour, although a few persisted on the Awhitu Peninsula and towards the seaward end.

Laishley's painting of a White-faced Heron must predate by several years that of J. G. Keulemans which appeared in Buller's first edition of 1873.

I thank the British Museum (Natural History) and the Alexander Turnbull Library for letting me have 35 mm colour slides of the bird paintings which I have here discussed.

#### REFERENCE

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#### An Arctic Skua taking passerines at sea

On 27 April 1986, about 3 km to sea east of Wollongong, Australia (34°25'S, 150°57'E), I watched an adult dark phase Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) pursue a Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*). The two birds passed about 10 m above the boat, heading west. After about 5 min I saw the same skua chasing another passerine, about 1-2 m above the water. The skua forced the passerine, possibly a *Petroica* sp. (M. Carter, pers. comm.) into the water, and itself landed, but I could not see whether it ate the bird.

During the day I saw two more groups of small passerines, one being a group of pardalotes (*Pardalotus* sp.) over 5 km out to sea. These birds may have been driven out by the high westerly winds of the previous day. Land birds swept to sea are undoubtedly left vulnerable, while fatigued, to opportunistic predators such as the Arctic Skua.

The behaviour of Arctic Skuas in pursuing other seabirds, forcing them to drop food, is well known. Predation, although less studied, can also be an important way for Arctic Skuas to feed. Martin & Barry (1978) found that, of 173 food pellets examined, 81.4% contained remains of passerines. Thus, birds may be important in the Arctic Skua diet, especially during the breeding season, when Martin & Barry did their study. My observation, to the best of my knowledge, is the first of such behaviour by Arctic Skuas while they are in Australian seas and perhaps elsewhere in the non-breeding period.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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#### Unexpected reaction of Bar-tailed Godwits to a rain squall

On 6 February 1986, L. Paterson, J. Engebretsen, S. M. Widgery and I were at Access Bay, on the Miranda coast of the Firth of Thames. The weather was overcast with a light northerly wind. A fairly heavy rain squall came through at about 11.15 a.m., but otherwise the day was dry. The temperature was about 24 °C.

With a 3.1 metre high tide due at 5.57 p.m., a large number of birds had gathered by 5.20. On the shellbank were 2 Pied Shags, 3 Black-backed Gulls, 20 + Red-billed Gulls, 20 + White-fronted Terns and perhaps 1500 South Island Pied Oystercatchers. On the mudflat nearby were a flock of 500 + Wrybills and a group of dotterels with a few Knot. Much nearer on the mudflat was a close-packed group of 1000 + Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*).

At about 5.30, a very narrow-fronted band of rain was seen moving in from the north-northwest. When this squall suddenly reached the mudflat, 90% of the godwits turned their bills skywards, standing rather like alarmed bitterns. This presumably reduced their exposure to the heavy rain. During the 10 minutes or so that the downpour lasted the godwits held their bittern-like pose, but the Wrybills ran about their roosting area in an apparently aimless agitated way. The dotterels, knots and the birds on the shellbank just sat it out.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had started, and the godwits simply shook themselves and began feeding. Although the tide had not yet been over the feeding area, the rain had so thoroughly wetted the mudflat that the birds did not bother to await the arrival and passage of the tidal peak.

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