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# FIELD NOTES ON THE BOAT-BILLED FLYCATCHER

#### BY JOHN WARHAM

**O**NE of the smallest of the rain-forest birds, the Boat-billed Flycatcher (Machaerirhynchus flaviventer) is restricted to North Queensland where it is usually found as a member of the feeding flocks of mixed bird species common in this region. I have met it at various places from Cape York as far south as Sandy Pocket some 12 miles south of Innisfail but nowhere was the species common; usually only a single pair was noted at each sighting. In most instances the soft warblings of the males drew attention to the birds which appear to feed fairly high up—from 20 to 60 feet above ground level in the instances noted by the writer.

Boat-bills may be very easily called up with the aid of squeaking sounds. In the tiny patch of rain-forest behind the beach at Cape York I enticed a pair within two feet and the calls and pirouettings of this couple subsequently brought the rest of their company around me—several Spectacled Flycatchers, a pair of Rufous Shrike-Thrushes, a single Grey Whistler, Leaden Flycatchers and Rufous Fantails and a female Magnificent Rifle-bird. The latter was very excited by my calls and repeatedly came down to a few feet from where I stood.

On January 22, 1959, a nest of the Boat-billed Flycatcher was found in the terminal leaves of a branchlet of a bushy evergreen tree by the Barron River at Wongabel near Atherton. On this date the birds were making frequent trips to and from the nest which was about 20 feet from the ground. It seemed that one side of the structure—a deep cup underslung from the branch—had yet to be made and I concluded that building was still in progress. However, on the following day a closer inspection revealed that the adults were feeding two chicks. These were clinging to the walls of the nest on the only side that was complete and looked most insecure. They were already partly feathered and a pylon-type hide was begun the same day in order that the nesting could be observed at close range.

The Boat-bills proved quite fearless. They continued to feed the nestlings while I was still noisily driving in nails and only five feet from the nest, completely unconcealed. Both sexes fed, the female perhaps slightly more often than the male. Both tended to warble a quiet whispered song as they approached with their tails somewhat uplifted as they hopped along the branchlet supporting the nest,

Small insects were the main foods, Diptera apparently predominating and a long series of negatives taken with electronic flash will eventually enable a more accurate determination of the insect species being carried. Damsel flies, were given to the young entire and after some trouble were swallowed complete with wings. Occasionally insects were captured close to the nest and, were immediately presented to the young.

Nest sanitation was thorough. Faeces were carried off in the parents' beaks and discarded well away from the nest. Any that fell below were assiduously sought for and disposed of. The adults scratched their heads indirectly—over the wing—during preening.

indirectly—over the wing—during preening. On January 25 one chick only was present. It was clinging to the branch above the nest but was obviously too undeveloped for fledging. Later I heard a peculiar trilling and after some difficulty found the bird responsible: the missing chick had fallen into thick bladey grass. On being replaced in the nest this young bird continued to trill at regular intervals for a long time and it also shivered the whole of its body as if shocked. It received three feeds in rapid succession and seemed quite recovered when last seen. Its fellow nestling, satiated apparently by its recent monopoly of the food, made no attempt to beg, but it did voice a soft chirrup, a note common to both chicks and quite distinct from the trilling call.

Both chicks were still clinging to the branch on January 26 but on the next day the nest was empty. The female Boat-bill was feeding one of the young whose trillings from the grass about five yards from the nest tree, were directing its parent's actions.

# **COLLECTING TRIP TO NORTHERN AUSTRALIA**

BY PHILLIP H. COLMAN (N.S.W.)

**I** HAVE just returned from a wonderful trip to Queensland, which lasted not quite four months. In that time I saw quite a bit of the coast, especially north from Gladstone right through to Thursday Island. The purpose of the trip was mainly to collect marine and land shells from every locality possible for the Australian Museum in Sydney, and the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, U.S.A. (The latter had financially aided me.) However, lookout was kept for other phyla, especially certain groups of insects belonging to the orders **Hemoptera** and **Lepidoptera**.

Following is a brief account of the material collected, in which mention will be made of interesting or rare specimens found. I take this opportunity to thank Dr. J. Evans, Australian Museum Director, who kindly gave the information on the Leaf-hoppers collected; the late Mr. Anthony Musgrave, formerly Curator of Entomology at the Australian Museum, who likewise forwarded information on the Leaf-bugs; and Miss Margaret and Master Bill Dowling, of Dungog, N.S.W., who helped with the Lepidoptera. The trip commenced on New Years Day with a two weeks' cruise round the Capricorn Group of Islands off Gladstone. In this already well-studied area little material was collected which would warrant mentioning in an article of this nature. However, mention should be made of several shells which were found in the stomachs of two fish caught in this area. The

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After a week at Rockhampton I went on to Bowen where, unfortunately, bad tides did not allow much marine collecting to be done. One shell worth noting was a rather good specimen of the uncommon **Tudicula armigera** A. Adams, brought in by hermit crabs from deeper water. Lepidoptera collected included the interesting Clear-wing Hawk moths, of which one species, **Cephonodes hylas**, was caught. Later, at Port Douglas, I found the eggs and larvae of this same species on the Gardenia food-plant. Some of the many species of butterflies taken included the beautiful **Danaida affinis affinis** Fabr., **Cupha prosope prosope** Fabr., the lovely little fast-flying **Precis orithya albicincta** Butl., and the equally beautiful **Amblypodia amytis amphis** Hewitson. Altogether, 32 species of Lenidoutera were taken here.

Lepidoptera were taken here. Next stop was Magnetic Island, where many Leaf-hoppers, including some new species, were collected, mainly on Eucalypts and Acacias growing

plentifully there. They included the small **Eurymelids**, all species of which are attended by ants, exuding a sweet syrup which is very attractive to the ants. Some members of this group are black with brightly colored markings, while others are correspondingly drab.

This island is a butterfly collector's paradise, especially if he is from the south. The number of species found here was astounding, and I met many northern types I had hitherto not seen out of collections. The beautiful, rather rare and fast flying **Papilio agamemnon ligatus** Rothschild I caught several times. The commoner Blue Triangle, **P. sarpedon choredon** Felder, was there in literally thousands, and also very common was the Blue Tiger, Danaida melissa hamata Macleay. An interesting fact I noted here was that, while the small dry season form of the male Common Eggfly, Hypolimnas bolina nerina Fabr., was very common all over the island, the female was extremely rare. I cannot account for this, as wherever else I went in Queensland the females were nearly as common as their mates. One notable exception in the butterfly world everywhere I went in Queensland was the large Red Wanderer, Danaida plexipus Linne. On the whole of my travels I saw only three of these insects.

In the coral rocks of the reef on this island were found large colonies of that interesting marine aquatic spider, Desis crosslandi Pocock. Every rock harboured a whole colony of them, an interesting fact, as usually members of the Desis family do not like their own company, solitude being their wish. In a hole made by boring shells of the Genus Lithophagus I found commonly up to a dozen spiders, usually two or three adults, a few more medium size, and many small ones—and there might be a dozen Lithophagus holes in the one rock, all with a spidery compliment. This spider, described by Pocock in 1903 from specimens found under rocks in Zanzibar, has been well written up in the North Queensland Naturalist (Vol. 20: 100, March, 1952) by the present president, Mr. A. Read. There is not much that I can add to his article.

A shell was found on the beach at Horseshoe Bay, Magnetic Island, which is new to the Queensland marine shell check list. It is the rare **Akera soluta Gmelin**, which has a wide range, having been found so far from Zanzibar (type locality), Ceylon, Mauritius, Phillippines, Torres Straits and New South Wales to Western Australia. (Colman, Phillip, 1958. Proc. Roy. Zool. Soc., N.S.W., 88-9. fig.)

Some time was spent in Cairns, but very little collecting was done there. Various leaf-bugs were collected, including the shield-bug, Bromocoris souefi (Distant) and the very common Physopelta famelica Stal. Various Lepidoptera were taken including the beautiful male Papilio ulyssis joesi Butl., but nothing rare was taken.

I stayed at Port Douglas for three weeks, but again tides were bad, and so much rain fell I did not do very well at all. Some catches are worth mentioning. Six specimens of the recently described cone shell Virroconus imperator Woolacott were found in the rocks along the shore east of the wharf, and two very interesting small shells were taken from Four Mile Beach. One, a so-far unidentified Leiostraca was found parasiting the common sand dollar Arachnoides placenta, with sometimes up to six on the one Echinoderm, and the other, also unidentified, but a bivalve belonging to the Scintillas, which was found always, and only, in the holes inhabited by the large Mantis Shrimp, Squilla mantis. It lived about a foot or more down the holes, crawling (yes, a bivalve that crawls!) around the sides of the hole, completely unmolested by the larger and more ferocious host.

From Port Douglas I went inland to Atherton for two weeks, where, in various places, some interesting land and freshwater snails were collected. On Mr. Jim Bravery's property I obtained several species of snails buried deep under boulders. Among them were Subulina octona Bruguiere which I found in all stages of growth from the minute embryo to the full adult quarter-inch specimen, and several other species. In the Barron River headwaters near Hypipamee Crater several specimens of Jardinella thaanumi Pilsbry, were taken, with some of the peculiar limpet-like Pettancylus sp. In the State pine forests at Wongabell, countless hundreds of the large **Xanthomelon pachystylum** Pfeiffer were found dead, together with lesser amounts of the large **Hadra webbi incalida** Ired. In the rain-forest at Kairi two specimens of the **Parmacochlea fischeri** Sm. were taken crawling on the wet plants of the forest floor. In this same forest several interesting leaf-hoppers were caught.

The final trip was by boat to Thursday Island, but bad weather and lack of time did not allow for much collecting. On Raine Island, on the outer Barrier Reef off Cape York Peninsula, a beautiful specimen of **Conus aulicus** Linne was taken, with several good specimens of Lambis lambis Linne. In the same spot I collected what may well prove to be a new species of **Epitonium**. This island, with many others along this part of the Barrier Reef, plays host every year to many bird rookeries. On Raine Island alone there were about eight species nesting at the time I visited it, including a small rookery (10 nests) of the graceful but bullying Frigate Bird, Fregata eriel Gould. Sooty and White-capped Noddies (Sterna fuscata Linne and Anous minutus Bole) and Brown Gannets, Sula leucogaster Boddaert, were the most common of the feathered inhabitants. Returning to Cairns I watched from the boat while about 200 Pelicans (Pelecanus conspicillatus Temminck) carried on the job of rearing young on their "own" island, Pelican Island.

There is still a quantity of material that I have not had time to work yet, but in this article I have attempted to mention most, if not all, of the more interesting species met.

# CHECK-LIST OF BIRDS OF THE ATHERTON TABLELAND

(Continued)

By James Bravery, R.A.O.U., and John Orrell, F.R.G.S.A., R.A.O.U.

Column One: The local name of the bird.

**Column Two:** The Scientific name of the bird followed by names by which it is known in other parts of Australia.

Column Three: Numbers in this column indicate the page on which reference may be made in Cayley's "What Bird is That?"

	FLYCATCHER,	Seisura inquieta.	
۰.	Restless.	Scissors-grinder, Grinder, Dishwasher Crested Wagtail. (68)	1
62.	FLYCATCHER, Pied.	Arses Kaupi. Kaup's Flycatcher, Black-Breasted	
	 · ,	Flycatcher. (24)	)
	FLYCATCHER, Black-Faced.	Monarcha melanopsis. 31 ague (25) Carinated, Flycatcher. 3 and and (25)	ł
64.	FLYCATCHER, Spectacled.	Monarchan trivlagata Black-fronted Flycatcher (25)	)
65.	FLYCATCHER	Carterornis leucotis	,
66.	White-eared. FLYCATCHER Satin.	Myiagra cyanoleuca. (26) Shining Flycatcher, Satin Sparrow, (74)	;
67.	GRASS BIRD,	Megalurus galactotes. White-throated Fly-Eater, White-throated Bush Warbler.	,
68.	GOOSE, Maned.	Chenonetta jubata. Wood-duck. (243)	

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69.	GOOSE, Pygmy.	Nettapus pulchellus. Green Goose-Teal, Green Pygmy Goose.	(243)
70.	GREBE, Little.	Podiceps ruficollis. Black-throated Grebe, Red-necked Grebe	
71.	GREBE,	Babchick, White-bellied Diver. Fodiceps poliocephalus.	(224)
	Hoary-Headed. HARRIER,	Dabchick, Tom Pudding. Circus assimilis.	(225)
	Spotted.	Spotted Swamp-Hawk, Jardine's Harrier.	(210)
43.	HERON, Nankeen Night.	Nycticorax caledonicus. Nankeen Crane.	(248)
74.	HERON, White Faced.	Notophoyx novae hollandae. White-fronted Heron, Blue Crane.	(237)
75.	HERON, White Necked.	Notophoyx pacifica. Pacific Heron, White-necked Crane.	(238)
76.	HERON, Pied.	Notophoyx aruensis.	(238)
	HONEYEATER,	Gliciphilia indistincta.	
	Brown. HONEYEATER,	Least Honeyeater. Meliphaga Lewini.	(169)
	Lewin.	Yellow-eared Honeyeater, Banana Bird.	(9)
79.	HONEYEATER, Lesser Lewin.	Meliphaga analoga. Yellow-spotted Honeyeater.	(82)
80.	HONEYEATER, Scarlet.	Myzomela sanguinolenta. Sanguinous Honeyeater, Blood-Bird.	(101)
81	HONEYEATER,	Myzomela pectoralis.	
	Banded. HONEYEATER,	Conopophilia, rufogularis.	(102)
•	Rufous Throated.	Red-throated Honeyeaster.	(103)
	HONEYEATER, Macleay.	Meliphaga albilineata. White-striped Honeyeater.	(93)
.84	- HONEYEATER, White-cheeked.	Meliornis niger. Moustached Honeyeater.	(171)
85.	HONEYEATER, Blue-faced.	Entomyzon cyanotis. Banana-bird, Blue-eye.	(87)
86.	HONEYEATER,	Melithreptus albogularis. White-chinned Honeyeater.	(105)
87.	White-throated. HAWK,	Accipiter cirrocephalus.	(100)
	Collared Sparrow.	Sparrow-hawk, Chicken-hawk.	(206)
88	HAWK, Crested.	Baza subcristata.	(212)
89.	HAWK, Brown.	Falco berigora. Cackling Hawk.	(208)
÷ 90.	HARRIER,	Circus approximans.	
1.	Swamp.	Gould's Harrier, Allied Harrier, Swamp Hawk, Wheat Hawk, Kahu.	(210)
91.	IBIS,	Threskiornis spinicollis.	
	Straw-necked.	Farmer's Friend, Dryweather Bird, Letter-bird.	(234)
	IBIS, White.	Threskiornis molucca. Black-necked Ibis, Sickle-bird.	(234)
	IBIS, Glossy.	Pelgadis falcinellus.	(223)
	JABIRU.	Black Curlew. Xenorhyncus asiaticus.	•
	IMESTREL,	Black-necked Stork. Falco cenchrioides.	(5)
	Nankeen.	Windhover, Mosquito Hawk, Sparrow	•
533	e välletas	Hawk.	(206)
, <b>9</b> .14	Azure.	Blue Kingfisher, Water Kingfisher,	
	,	River Kingfisher.	(219)

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98.	KINGFISHER, Sacred.	Halcyon sanctus. Wood Kingfisher, Forest Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher.	(75)
99.	KINGFISHER,	Halcyon macleayi.	
	Forest.	Macleay's Kingfisher, Bush Kingfisher,	
		Blue Kingfisher.	(77)
100.	KINGFISHER,	Alcyone pusilla	
	Little.	• -	(219)
101.	KINGFISHER.	Halcyon pyrropygius.	
	Red Backed.	Golden Kingfisher.	(76)

#### 1st January, 1959, to 21st June, 1959 ADDITIONS TO ATHERTON DISTRICT BIRD LIST

Chlidonias hybrida. Whiskered Tern (Marsh Tern). (1)

Tringa hypoleucos. Common Sandpiper. Hydroprogne caspia. Caspian Tern. (2)

(3)

Leptolophus hollandicus. Cockatiel. (4)

Haliastur sphenvrus. Whistling Eagle. (5)

Meliphaga Flava. Yellow Honeyeater. (6)

(7) Meliphaga frenata. Bridled Honeycater (Mountain).
(8) Oriolus flavocinctus. Yellow Oriole.
(9) Eopsaltria australis. Little Yellow Robin.

Turnix varia. Painted Quail. (10)

(11) Pardalotus mclanocephalus. Black-Headed Pardalote.

-J. V. BRAVERY.

### **RAINBOW BIRD**

T THIS time of the year the Rainbow Bird (Metrops ornatus) is digging A nesting burrow. This bird is one of the most beautiful in Australia, and a close examination will reveal the wonderful array of colors it displays.

This handsome bird prefers the open spaces to the thick forest country and procures its food and drink on the wing. It is usually seen sitting on a dead limb or fence post, from which it darts to catch some insect or other and often returns to the same perch to await the passing of another tasty morsel. If the insect caught is large and active the bird will kill it by hitting it against the perch. A thirsty Rainbow Bird will obtain its drink of water by skimming the surface and scooping it up with its beak. Its erratic flight and graceful, swooping glides, showing the vivid bronze of the wings, is a delight to watch.

In the breeding season, October to February, the bird is often sitting near the mouth of the burrow, which is a slanting tunnel, usually, in sandy soil, from one to three feet long. At the end is a rounded cavity lined with the wings and castings of insects. The eggs are glossy white, possibly nature's reason being that they are easier for the bird to see in the dark burrow.

One peculiarity of this bird is that the young can fly as soon as they leave the nest. When they are ready to leave the mother calls them out and they come to the mouth of the burrow to take wing and quickly learn to catch insects for themselves.

Although the bird builds an excellent burrow, it does not make much attempt to conceal the entrance which is usually in a shallow depression in the ground near a tuft of grass, and is easily seen because of the mound of sub-sand taken from the burrow is of a lighter color than the surrounding surface. Even though the young fly so soon, the mortality rate is high and the remains of birds are often seen near the nesting place,

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possibly due to cats waiting to pounce on the unsuspecting adult bird as it emerges.

However, the large batch of eggs-five to seven-ensure the survival of the species.

Several vernacular names are given to this bird-Spinetail, Pintail, Bee-eater and Kingfisher. The first two because of the distinctive elongated feathers in the tail, the third because it does eat bees, but they are only a minor part of its diet and the harm done is far outweighed by the amount of insect pests it destroys.

-L. V. MCFARLANE

# MR. ANTHONY MUSGRAVE — OBITUARY NOTICE

#### PHILLIP H. COLMAN

T 3.00 a.m. on the 4th June, 1959, Mr. Anthony Musgrave passed on. A Those of us who were fortunate enough to know this man, both as a friend and in his official capacity as Curator of Insects at the Australian Museum; those who for many years have been guided by his writings; and those many others who for many years to come will benefit from his work, will mourn his passing.

Born at Cooktown, North Queensland, on July 9th, 1895, Mr. Musgrave joined the staff of the Australian Museum as a cadet on February 7th, 1910, and achieved the Chair of Curator ten years later on June 1st, 1920. His first article was published in April, 1911, and in the 48 years from 1910 until his death this year he had published 109 papers, of which six were written in conjunction with others. Several more are still in the hands of the printers. He spent many years working on the **Archnidae**, and is now considered one of THE world authorities on this Class of Arthropods.

A quiet, humble man, his personality and dignity endeared him to all with whom he came in contact. His sense of humor was never amiss, and many an happy hour I spent chatting with him. He was never too busy when it came to helping a novice to the entomological world.

He could not live forever, but his memory will.

## N.O.N.C. JOURNAL — CLUB PROGRESS

PRIL, May and June, representing the third quarter of this year's A activities, has experienced a prolonged spell of wet weather conditions. Nonetheless, members have been able to arrange their field days by one monthly excursion to a wild life sanctuary, one to Tinaroo Creek and one to Rocky Point, all well attended and certainly diversified in their attractions.

Large general meetings continue to prevail and enjoy screenings of interesting color slides and instructive talks, which is most gratifying to the organisers and the entertainers alike, and the Club's appreciation to those providing these attractions must be forever on record, insofar as their co-operation provides an answer to the query each month by members, "What's on?"

Council meetings also continue to be well attended, which denotes the interest and loyalty of the council's executive.

During the three months under review four more members have been approved to add to the Club's ever-growing strength and five proposed for endorsement, all with a wide range of natural history chosen for their study. Tabled exhibits at the monthly meetings, in their extensive wide range

of studious pursuits, are at times a severe test for classification by the Club's specialists, but this is concrete evidence of the members' enthusiasm and is welcomed in support to the axiom, seek and ye shall find.

Local Press weekly Nature Notes have expanded fifty per cent and has become a standard feature and as an indicator of the general public's interest. When these notes were unavoidably omitted on two occasions the cry in the land was heard: "Whaffor?" But perhaps the most heartening of the Club's activities is the increasing volume of correspondence from home and abroad received and capably attended to by our efficient librarian, all of which invariably contain favorable comment upon our journal and the wish for exchange publications from kindred societies.

In this quarter two major matters have engaged the Club's attention and consideration, one of which was the indiscriminate use of firearms in the wanton slaughter of birds and other fauna, which vandalism has been the Club's concern for quite a number of years, resulting at long last in the promised co-operation by H. A. Adair, Esq., M.L.A. for Cook, who may resort to legislation in the matter; the other being the published concern by the Townsville Natural History Society over the marketing of turtle meat, with the expressed fear of turtle extinction from north of Cairns waters. This matter had been thoroughly discussed by the N.Q.N.C. some time previously and it was decided that the Club was satisfied that the situation was very far from alarming and we were content with maintaining a watching brief since when the Hon. Minister for Fisheries, T. A. Hiley, Esq., has published concurrent similar views.

We have had as speakers Messrs Roff and Lavery who gave members some very interesting and informative data on fauna protection.

There is forever some branch of natural history that appeals to each and everyone and continued interest of members is the undoubted measure of success of any organisation, and the N.Q.N.C. is at present in the happy position of being trouble and comparatively worry free, and may this state of affairs continue as we wish well to other organisations and our many friends and well wishers; to witness which, and to bask in our cheerful bon-homie, may it be here emphasised that we maintain an old established.' welcome to visitors and representatives of other clubs to attend our general monthly meetings at the Kuranda Barracks, Esplanade, Cairns, second Tuesday, 8 p.m.

-S. DEAN

C.c.

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