

some years as many had fallen over. 1973, 1974 and 1975 have been very good years in this region and copious rains have fallen. A friend who recently traversed this same route to Alice Springs (October, 1975) tells me that there has been a profuse regeneration of Native Poplar, now from one to two metres high. It is interesting that whilst fire is the main factor triggering regeneration in the South-West Province, it does not perform this function in the Ereman Province where continuing heavy falls of rain are required.

—D. H. PERRY, Victoria Park.

**Some recent bird observations from south-western Australia.**—The following notes deal with some birds I recorded while in Western Australia in February 1976.

Blue-billed Duck, *Oxyura australis*. At least three adults and five young at Lake Seppings, Albany, on February 10.

Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatalis*. One bird at Wilson's Inlet on February 14. It was in shallow water only a few centimetres deep and at the northern end of a small island. The bird was viewed at a distance of 20-30 metres. The identification was based principally on the straight bill, light green legs and white in the forehead and foreparts of the face. The general appearance of the bird was that of a small Greenshank. In my field notes I have recorded the size of the bird as being 'slightly smaller than that of a Greenshank but hard to say positively'. The only other waders in the vicinity were a pair of Common Sandpipers *Tringa hypoleucos*, but the Marsh Sandpiper did not associate with them at all. I have previously seen the Marsh Sandpiper near Mildura, Victoria and at the I.C.I. Saltfields, Adelaide, South Australia.

Southern Emu-wren, *Malachurus stipiturus*. One adult male and at least two uncoloured birds at John Forrest National Park from where this species does not appear to have been formally recorded before. These birds were seen on February 7 in a small patch of treeless dense heath with a few bare rocks, one kilometre south of the Park Kiosk and a short distance south of the Lake. The birds' long filamentous tails and the light blue breast of the male rendered them unmistakable.

—LEO JOSEPH, 1 Angas Street, Kent Town, S.A.

**An Asian Gull-billed Tern in Western Australia.**—On October 17, 1976 I collected one of four Gull-billed Terns at the mouth of the Lawley River in north-west Kimberley. The specimen was later identified as *Sterna nilotica affinis* Horsfield of south-eastern China. Its shorter wing, less stout bill, darker rump and tail, and eclipse plumage readily separate it from Australian birds (adults of which retain their nuptial plumage throughout the year). Even a juvenile Australian bird in our collection with spotted wings has a white rump and tail.

Details of specimen (registered number A14658): exposed culmen 38 mm, wing 282 mm, tail 104 mm, tarsus 30 mm, iris dark brown, upper mandible black, lower mandible black with basal portion orange, feet and legs dark brown, mouth orange. Wings and entire upperparts including tail dull steel grey, a well-defined black stripe through the eye, head flecked black, underparts white. Judging from the plumage stages given in Witherby *et al.* (*The Handbook of British Birds*, vol. 5, p. 14). The bird was over a year old and moulting into its first summer plumage.

Several subspecies of the Gull-billed Tern are currently recognized. Australian birds (*S. n. macrotarsa*) are the largest with palest upperparts (whitish grey back and white rump and tail) and have the most massive bill. Length of wing, tail and bill in the Lawley River bird are well below the range (310-354, 111-141 and 40.0-46.4 respectively) given for Australian birds by Serventy, Serventy and Warham (*The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*, 1971, p. 206). Few measurements are available for *affinis*; however Witherby *et al.* state that it has a shorter wing and rather shorter



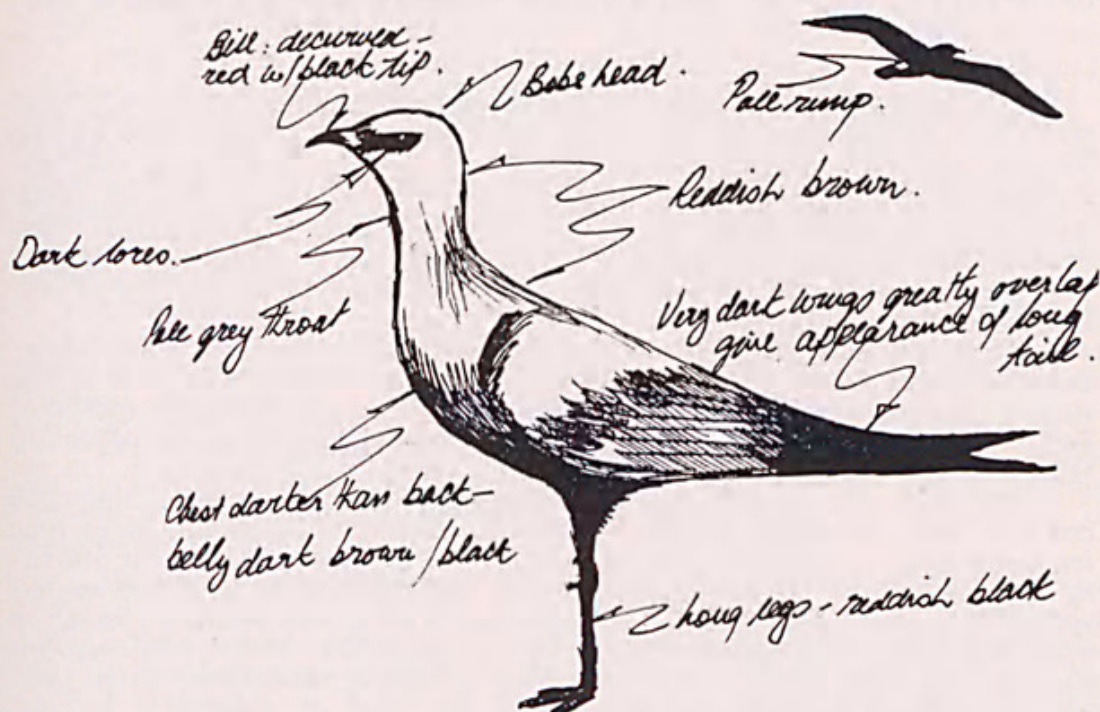
bill than the nominate race. Wing length given by Witherby *et al.* for nominate *nilotica* (300-337 mm) is considerably greater than in the Lawley River specimen.

It is possible that Asian Gull-billed Terns frequently visit the sheltered tidal waters of Kimberley and Northern Territory during the southern summer. Eastern Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo longipennis*) and White-winged Black Terns (*Sterna leucoptera*), both summer migrants from the Northern Hemisphere, were collected during the same biological survey of Admiralty Gulf and its hinterland in October 1976.

—R. E. JOHNSTONE, Western Australian Museum.

**Australian Pratincole at Lake Mason.**—On November 12, 1975, about 1620 hours, I saw two Australian Pratincoles (*Stiltia isabella*) on a bare stony wash at the eastern end of the air-strip at Lake Mason, approximately 55 km north of Sandstone. One of the birds ran for a distance of about 20 m with its head turned at an angle of 90° to its body, then braked sharply with the aid of its wings to capture a large grasshopper. The grasshopper was struck on the ground 10-12 times before being swallowed.

The birds showed no alarm but stood quietly, occasionally bobbing their heads. They took flight when an approach was made at 20 m or so.



The accompanying annotated sketch was made from my field notes.

—C. P. S. de REBEIRA, Balcatta.

#### **A Survey of Breeding Seabirds on Mistaken Island, Western Australia.**

On September 23, 1976 a survey of breeding seabirds was carried out on Mistaken (or Rabbit) Island, King George Sound, W.A. The survey occurred during a visit from 1330 to 1630 hours by Dr I. Abbott, my wife and myself and Mr. Cliff Meredith who kindly provided the dinghy and rowed the party the short distance involved.

The island is about 10 ha of which about 10 per cent is exposed rock or rock with very shallow soil covering. The remaining area has good soil depth for burrowing seabirds and is well vegetated with bushes up to some four metres. The presence of many rabbits was apparent from the scratchings, droppings and warrens; one was sighted.

Ninety-four burrows were searched. Little Penguins, *Eudyptula minor*, at various stages of breeding or preparation were found in 34 and one



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