

countries. Its occurrence in New Zealand thus extends its range by more than 3000 miles, which must be the excuse for the amount of tedious description given above. Field notes have been deposited with the O.S.N.Z. The American Whimbrel and Hudsonian Godwit are two other waders with entirely American breeding range, normally migrating to South America but occasionally reaching New Zealand on the west side of the Pacific.

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## THE SATIN FLYCATCHER: A NEW RECORD FOR NEW ZEALAND

By A. BLACKBURN

On 12/6/63 I received a telephone call from Mr. Raeburn Hansen, of Hexton, which is six miles out on the flats from Gisborne, to say that he had noted a strange bird feeding on insects in his orchard. I went out immediately, but on arrival the bird was not to be seen. However, after half an hour of waiting, it appeared, busily feeding on flying insects, and at first closely attended by a pair of Fantails (*Rhipidura fuliginosa placabilis*), one of which briefly attacked it. My immediate reaction was to identify the bird as a female Leaden Flycatcher (*Myiagra rubecula*), a species with which I am fairly familiar, having observed it in various parts of Eastern Australia, the Northern Territory, and New Guinea. The latest occasions on which I had the species under close observation were at Fog's Dam on 2/10/62, and at Borroloolua on 8/10/62, both in the Northern Territory. Subsequent events have proved that I was in error, and have shown beyond any doubt that the bird was a female Satin Flycatcher (*M. cyanoleuca*).

The following is a description of the bird according to my field notes at the time of the observation: Throat and breast, bright rust red, the colour sharply defined from the dark head in a straight line from either side of the bill. The colour somewhat intensified on the lower part of the throat, or the upper breast. Head and nape, dark bluish grey, merging to dark brown on the lower back, and on the primary and secondary wing feathers. Underparts, including under tail coverts, dull white, and sharply defined from the colour of the breast. Tail, dark brown with very narrow white outer edges. Eyes black. Legs and feet, black or very dark. Bill, broad and short, barely half an inch long, with typical flycatcher hairs round the base. The feathers at the rear of the crown slightly raised, but not forming a crest. On the Fantail's brief attack, however, these feathers were raised to form a distinct crest. Size, slightly longer than a Fantail (i.e. six inches plus) and noticeably larger in the body.

The bird was under observation for about fifteen minutes, much

of the time too close for 7 x 50 binoculars. It was in perfect plumage and extremely active. When the bird was not in flight there was a constant tremulous movement of the tail, an up-and-down motion through perhaps a quarter of an inch, individual feathers at the same time moving slightly sideways, disclosing light colouring on their edges. At the time I regarded this tail movement as diagnostic of the Leaden Flycatcher, having noted it in that, but not in other species of the *Myiagra* genus. This led to my error in identification. Strangely enough, some authorities available to me (Lucas and LeSouef, and Leach) quote this tail movement as a characteristic of *M. rubecula* and do not mention it as being given by any other members of the *Muscicapidae*.

One book (Hindwood and McGill) states that the females of the Satin and Leaden Flycatchers are scarcely to be distinguished in the field.

Both species are migrants, moving down the east coast of Australia in the spring, the Satin reaching Tasmania in some numbers, but the Leaden occurring there only as a rare straggler. The Satin follows the mountain range, while the Leaden keeps to the lower areas. In "Emu" there is a Lord Howe Island record for the Leaden Flycatcher which is quoted, as it indicates that the species wanders, and, by analogy, the Satin may also wander. The Lord Howe Island record is as follows: "*Submyiagra rubecula* — Leaden Flycatcher. The evidence for the inclusion of this species in the avifauna of Lord Howe Island was considered unsatisfactory as no specimen was available, and it was placed among the doubtful records (1940, p. 79). However, it can now be re-instated as I find the following note in a manuscript diary written by Dr. E. P. Ramsay, and now in the possession of his son, J. S. P. Ramsay. Under date 'October 1887,' is a list of the bird specimens brought back from Lord Howe Island by Etheridge and party, followed by the entry — 'In 1883(?) I received from Lord Howe Island a specimen in spirits, in a bad state, of *Myiagra plumbea rubecula*. I am not sure I have recorded it before.'"

No published descriptions of either species were available to me in New Zealand, so complete details of the Leaden, as given by Mathews and by North, and of the Satin, as given by North, were kindly supplied by Mr. W. R. Wheeler of the R.A.O.U. For the purposes of comparison with my field notes, North's description of the female Satin Flycatcher is as follows: General colour above, dull slaty-grey, the feathers of the head darker and tipped with glossy greenish-black; lesser and median upper wing coverts like the back, quills and greater wing coverts brown; secondaries narrowly edged externally with ashy-brown; tail brown, the four central feathers having a blackish wash; lores blackish brown; chin, sides of neck, throat and fore-neck orange rufous; remainder of the under surface and tail coverts, white. Total length 6.3 inches.

My field notes were forwarded to Mr. R. P. Cooper of the R.A.O.U., who together with Mr. Alan McEvey, of the National Museum, Melbourne, checked them against a series of skins of both species. Mr. Cooper reached the conclusion (pers. comm.), confirmed by Mr. McEvey, that the bird seen was a female Satin Flycatcher. His comments and reasons are of interest: "The Satin is more reddish on the

throat and breast than the Leaden. The straight line of demarcation between the rust red and the dark head is more definite in the Satin than in the Leaden. 'Head and nape dark bluish grey' — more so in the Satin than in the Leaden. 'White underparts sharply defined from the upper breast colour' — more so in the Satin than in the Leaden. 'Tail narrow *white* outer edges' — surprisingly North does not state this marking, which would appear to be white in the field, but is actually a light brown. Tail markings the same in both species. Legs and feet, bill broad and short, hairs round the base of bill — all are the same in both species. The difference in the size of bill would not be apparent in the field. 'Feathers at rear of crown slightly raised' — conspicuous in the Satin skins but not in the Leaden. (But Mr. K. A. Hindwood states (pers. comm.) that the Leaden also has a semi-crest, raised when courting or when excited.) 'Size slightly longer than the Fantail and considerably larger in the body' — this fits the Satin fully. The Leaden is shorter, and the body size is certainly no larger — in most skins it appears to be smaller. There is a slight sheen on the head and nape of the Leaden, but it would only be seen in full sunlight with the head held at a reflecting angle."

At this stage Mr. Cooper was unable to advise regarding the tremulous movement of the tail, but felt certain that it would apply to both species. In a subsequent communication, he said that Mr. Hindwood had confirmed this opinion, and had stated that the tail tremor is a generic characteristic, and not confined to only the one species.

The distribution of the Satin Flycatcher is given by Cayley as Eastern Australia and Tasmania. As already stated, it is an interstate migrant, arriving in south-eastern Australia and Tasmania during September, and departing in February, or later. Iredale states that it is also supposed that some Australian members of the species migrate to New Guinea, but that this remains to be proved. One can only speculate on the movements of the individual which I observed in that part of New Zealand most remote from Australia. The bird showed no signs of being weather-worn or tired, and seemed to be quite at home in its surroundings. It is possible that it arrived on the west coast of the South Island, after having wandered during the southward migration last spring, perhaps after leaving the Victorian coast for Tasmania, and with the onset of colder weather, had been working its way northward and eastward; but perhaps it is more likely that it reached New Zealand in autumn after being carried across the Tasman Sea as it was setting out on its northward migration.

The day of the observation was dull, cold and misty, so that some minor details of plumage were not recorded. Nor did the bird make any sound, its usual call being a loud, piping whistle "Chee-ee, Chee-ee," and also a short rasping note is uttered.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Mr. Roy Cooper for his help in identification, and to Mr. Alan McEvey for making a series of skins available for comparison with my notes. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Roy Wheeler for supplying references, and to Messrs. Keith Hindwood and Roy Cooper for checking the draft of this paper and making a number of helpful suggestions for alterations and additions to the text.

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[The possibility of an 'aided' passage across the Tasman Sea should not be ruled out. Sharland (Tasmanian Birds p. 114) mentions that the Satin Flycatcher has been seen crossing Bass Strait at the widest part; and adds, "It occasionally comes to rest on ships at sea.—Ed.]



## SEA BIRDS FOUND DEAD IN NEW ZEALAND IN 1961

By P. C. BULL\* and B. W. BOESON

### ABSTRACT

Beach Patrols in New Zealand during 1961 covered a total distance of 857 miles and yielded 3138 birds (57 species), a record. Species are tabulated by month of occurrence and by the coastal zones in which they were found; unusual species include *Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*, *Procellaria cinerea*, *P. westlandica*, *Pterodroma pycrofti*, *P. leucoptera*, *P. longirostris* (first record), and *Garrodia nereis*. Major wrecks of *Puffinus griseus* in May and of *Pachyptila vittata* in July are described in detail and were probably associated with food shortage. The numbers of birds and the relative importance of different species varied from one part of the coast to another, probably in relation to wind direction and the distribution of birds at sea.

### INTRODUCTION

This account corrects and expands the brief interim report already published (Bull 1962). It differs from the 1960 report (Bull and Boeson 1961b) in that records of dead birds are separated into 18 geographic zones that together cover the entire coastlines of the North and South Islands (Fig. 1); this should assist in determining more accurately the ranges of the various species.

Forty-one members took part in the year's work and sent in a total of 312 fully-completed cards for patrols covering 857 miles of beach. The cards recorded the finding of 3138 birds (57 species) and a further 145 were found on small islands or by people not doing patrols. Records from islands where petrels breed, though valuable, are not strictly comparable with those from normal patrols of open beaches.

The number of cards received, the length of beach examined, the number of specimens and of species found, and the number of people who helped in the work were all substantially greater than in 1960. The year 1961 was also characterised by two major "wrecks" of sea birds, discussed in a subsequent section, and by the finding of a few species that are new or very rare in New Zealand (Falla 1962).

### RESULTS

#### *Distribution of Patrols*

The length of beach patrolled each month is shown in Table 1

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