

ASIATIC WHIMBREL CATCHING CRABS

On a visit to the Maketu estuary, Bay of Plenty, on 21 January 1978, B. D. Heather, C. de Lange and I spent half an hour watching an Asiatic Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*) feeding on the Tunnelling Mud Crab (*Helice crassa*). Each tunnel was probed gently and slowly after the bird had assumed some awkward-looking positions as it eased its bill down. When an occupant was found at home, it was secured with a quick downward lunge, followed by a screwing motion of the head and bill. On being withdrawn from its burrow, the crab was dropped and the bird took a fresh grip in order to batter its prey on the ground with a few hard sideways and downward swipes. The crab was then swallowed whole with a quick backward toss of the head. During the time, the bird moved about very quietly, feeding within about 1 m². By contrast, nearby Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) kept moving ahead conspicuously, covering many metres, probing frequently, vigorously and apparently at random.

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FERAL BARBARY DOVES SHEDDING RAIN DROPS

A small group of feral Barbary Doves which spend much time in my garden, content to perch in a tree and preen freely, adopt a different posture during periods of steady or heavy rain. Normally they perch in a more or less horizontal position but in rain they assume an almost vertical posture, thereby shedding the rain drops, and occasionally give themselves a good shake. In this way they keep their feathers remarkably dry.

R. STIDOLPH, *Masterton*



LETTERS

The Editor,
Sir,

THE UNSEXING OF THE CAPE PIGEON

Mr Sibson (Nictornis 25: 149) appears not to have done his homework on the correct gender of *Daption* Stephens 1826, for as recently as 1974 G. E. Watson reviewed the matter (Auk 91 (2): 419-421). Apparently the name appears as *Daption capenses*, *Daption capensis* and *Daption capense* in Stephens' work. Dr Watson's argument that Stephens intended the neuter form to be used seems to have been accepted by procellariiformists. He concluded by quoting the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1961, Article 30 (b) (ii)),