

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 On being withdrawn from its burrow, the crab was dropped and the bird took a fresh grip in order to batter its prey on the ground with a few hard sideways and downward swipes.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.

P. C. M. LATHAM, *c/o Papamoa Beach P.O., via Te Puke, Bay of Plenty*



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)),

that the gender of an anagram is that "expressly attributed to it by its author, or implied by an originally associated species group name." Furthermore *Daption* is actually cited in the Code as an example of a neuter anagram!

JOHN WARHAM

Zoology Dept., University of Canterbury, Christchurch 1. 20 July 1978

The Editor,
Sir,

In his wide-ranging study of the Reef Heron (*Ardea sacra*), A. T. Edgar (Notornis 25 (1): 25-58, 1978) states that this species "is dimorphic, having a white and a dark phase." This is inaccurate; through parts of the species' range there are three colour morphs — grey, white and mottled (Mayr & Amadon, 1941, Wodzicki & Laird, 1970), but only the grey phase is resident in New Zealand. A single New Zealand record of a white phase bird which remained on the Wairau Bar for at least 18 months (Wodzicki & Eyles, 1945, a and b), was probably a straggler from the north (Fiji?).

KAZIMIERZ WODZICKI

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19 July 1978

- MAYR, E.; AMADON, D. 1941. Geographical variations in *Demigretta sacra*. Amer. Mus. Nov. No. 1144, October 13, 1941.
WODZICKI, K. A.; EYLES, J. R. 1945a. White phase of the Reef Heron (*Demigretta sacra*) in New Zealand. The Emu, 54 (3): 181-182.
WODZICKI, K. A.; EYLES, J. R. 1945b. White phase of the Reef Heron or Matuku-Moana *Demigretta sacra* (Gmelin) at Wairau Bar. N.Z. Bird Notes 1 (10): 115-117.
WODZICKI, K.; LAIRD, M. 1970. Birds and bird lore in the Tokelau Islands. Notornis 17 (4): 247-276.

The Editor,
Sir,

Mr R. B. Sibson's difficulty in accepting the neuter gender of *Daption* will, I am sure, vanish when he reads the Note on this subject published over four years ago by Dr G. E. Watson 1974 (Auk 91: 419-421). The error perpetrated over the last 100 years or so by the use of *capensis* instead of *capense* as the specific epithet associated with *Daption* for the Cape Petrel or Pigeon has now been thoroughly exposed and there is nothing more to be added.

As Mr Sibson rightly points out (though for the wrong reason), the recent Australian checklist (Condon, H. T. 1975. Checklist of the Birds of Australia, I. Non-passerines. Melbourne: RAOU) is in error in listing *Daption capense australis*; it should, of course, be *australe*. This has already been noted in a review by G. M. Storr 1976 (Australian Wildlife Research 3: 91-92) and will no doubt be corrected in any future edition.

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