

ELEVENTH INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS

By E. G. TURBOTT

I attended the Congress at Basle, in Switzerland, from 29 May to 5 June 1954 as the Society's delegate. In addition to the ornithologists whom I had met in Britain since my arrival, I was glad to find that Mr J. M. Cunningham, and Dr L. E. Richdale, who is still working at Oxford, were to be members of the Congress.

The programme had been arranged to allow the maximum of time — two days and a half out of seven — for the extremely interesting Congress excursions to Mt Pilatus and to Berne and the Jura, while the meetings and discussions maintained a strenuous pace throughout. An afternoon was left free for a visit to the exceptionally fine Zoological Garden, which is noted for its ornithological collection and rare mammals. More extensive tours to various areas in Switzerland were available before and after the Congress; and several exhibitions relating to ornithology had been arranged — in the Museum of Natural History and Museum of Ethnology, a gallery display of bird paintings and designs by a group of artists, and bookshop displays of ornithological literature.

In spite of the full programme, a number of members spent the period between 5 a.m. — or even 4 a.m. — and breakfast in early morning excursions in the neighbourhood of the city, where about a hundred species of birds could be seen. These excursionists often arrived at the University hall — evidently breakfastless — just in time for the first paper of a full day's programme.

After a memorable opening by the President of the Congress, Sir A. Landsborough Thomson, who spoke on 'The Place of Ornithology in Biological Science', the Congress settled down to a programme consisting in the main of sections, dealing with various topics, which proceeded simultaneously. However, several 'full sessions' were included, and these were welcome as they enabled the tempo of the programme to be varied. Full sessions were held in 'Hearing and Voice' and on 'Biology of Penguins', and there were in addition three evening film sessions. Among a number of films were two by Mr Peter Scott and Dr R. T. Peterson respectively. My contribution on *Notornis* was included, Dr R. A. Falla's colour film being shown as well as my own. I might add that the session on penguin biology was especially remarkable for the fine films taken by Dr W. J. L. Sladen (Falkland Islands Dependency Survey) and by several members of the French Antarctic Expedition to Adelie Land.

Apart from the general sessions mentioned above, the greater number of papers were given under the following five section headings: (1) Evolution and Systematics; (2) Migration; (3) Biology and Behaviour; (4) Ecology and Faunistics; (5) Anatomy and Palaeontology. A joint session of the Ecology and Systematics sections was also held. As two or more of these sessions were always in progress, it was necessary to map out a programme. Sessions which I attended included most of those on evolution and systematics, and ecology. A session of particular interest in the ecology section was one including Professor J. B. S. Haldane's outline of the mathematical background for the calculation of death rates from bird-ringing data, and an address by Professor V. C. Wynne-Edwards on the regulation of population size in sea birds. There was also an interesting paper in this section by Dr J. C. Smyth (Edinburgh) on 'The Study of Wading Birds in Relation to the Ecology of the Sea Shore'.

The sessions on evolution and systematics included a paper by Professor C. G. Sibley, of Cornell University, on the significance of hybridization in birds; and a paper by Dr C. Vaurie on 'pseudo-subspecies', i.e. separate species, differentiated both ecologically and morphologically, revealed when certain continental polytypic species are re-examined.

Included in the section on biology and behaviour was Mr J. M. Cuning-

ham's interesting discussion of a method of showing diagrammatically seasonal variation in bird song. In the session on Hearing and Voice, a demonstration was given by Dr W. H. Thorpe of bird song as recorded by the sound spectrograph.

The volume of Proceedings of the Congress, containing the text of all contributions to the above sessions, is awaited with keen interest.

On my return through Paris, I was pleased to visit the reading room of the Société Ornithologique de France in the Natural History Museum, at the invitation of M. Chr. Jouanin and M. R. D. Etchécopar. The journal of the French Society is received in exchange for *Notornis*, and much interest was expressed in the progress being made in our work in New Zealand.

A NEW BIRD FOR NEW ZEALAND

GULL-BILLED TERNS (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) NEAR INVERCARGILL

By H. R. McKENZIE

The first record of this species for this country was made at the Invercargill aerodrome on 26/5/55. A party consisting of Mrs Olga Sansom, Mrs McKenzie, Mr Brian A. Ellis and the writer was studying a group of godwit, South Island pied oystercatcher, and Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls, resting and feeding on the short-turfed airfield, when a strange tern flew in. It was soon joined by another of its kind. The two cruised about in low undulating flight above the other birds. They settled occasionally for short periods, enabling the party to get splendid views at twenty-five yards with telescope and binoculars. All birds are zealously protected here by the airfield staff and are consequently very tame. Those mentioned above were almost under the eaves of the buildings and were just through a fence from our vantage point in a car.

Adopting the recognised method of dealing with a bird new to the watchers, one of the party took down notes while the others worked together, describing each prominent feature from the bill to the end of the tail. Bill totally black; cap black and defined, the black including the eye and coming down on to the bill and nape, but not low on hind-neck as in the white-fronted tern; one of the two had tiny white flecks in the black of its crown; upper wings pale pearl grey; ends of wings or primaries darker; tail, rump and back all white; under surface white, the dark of the primaries showing through; fork in tail shallow, about one inch deep, in flight spreading nearly square at times; feet totally black; size, larger and more solidly bodied than White-fronted tern (*S. striata*), considerably smaller than Caspian Tern (*H. caspia*). The wings appeared long in proportion, but this may have been due to their being more or less parallel-sided in comparison with other species. The unusually long legs of this tern were not noted at the time, but this feature was remembered later. The writer was surprised that the bill was in proportion and did not look unduly heavy.

Dipping down among the other birds, the two terns fed from the short-grassed field, sometimes jostling gulls when they appeared to have found food. One was seen to pick up a worm and to swallow it as it lifted again. In feeding they touched the ground only with the tip of the bill. The habit in this species of commonly feeding over pasture, marsh and still water helps to separate it from the sea-feeding terns, the manner of inland feeding being somewhat similar to that of the White-winged Black Tern (*C. leucopterus*), which occurs rarely in New Zealand. The next day the two terns were seen again and Mr Ellis has lately reported them as present on 22/7/55. It is earnestly hoped that they are a pair and will breed in one of the many marshy areas nearby.

This species is widely distributed in the temperate zones, to some extent in the tropics, but not in the colder regions. It breeds according to the conventional seasons north or south of the equator. Several subspecies are described. The Australian one is named *Gelochelidon nilotica macrotarsa* and