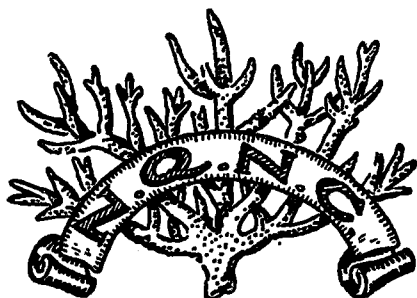


THE NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST



CAIRNS

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"Each author is responsible for the opinions and facts expressed in his or her article".

NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS' CLUB

Founder Presd. the late Dr. HUGO FLECKER.

OBJECTS — The Furtherance of the Study of the various branches of Natural History and the Preservation of Our Heritage of Indigenous Fauna and Flora.

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MALAXIS XANTHOCHILA (Schltr.) Ames et Schweinf. (Orchidaceae).

The following description and illustration of this orchid, which is little known in Australia, was prepared from material from the Atherton Tableland.

Malaxis Xanthochila (Schltr.) Ames et Schweinf, Ames' Orchidacea 5 : 67 (1915 Syn :— *Microstylis Xanthochila* Schltr, Schrum and Laut. Nachtr. Fl. Deutsch Schutzgeb, 102 (1905).

Microstylis Sordida J.J. Sm., Bull. Dep. Agr. Ind. Neeri. N. 19 : 30 (1908).

Plant terrestrial stems 8—12 x 1.0—1.8 cm, each succeeding growth usually commencing from about half way along preceeding stem; bracts usually 2, 1.5—4.0 x 1.0—1.5 cm, obtusely acute, sheathing, drying before inflorescence matures. Roots up to 20 x 0.15—0.25 cm, glabrous. Leaves 3—10, 8—25 x 2—5 cm, petiolate; lamina ovate or elliptical, somewhat falcate, acute or acuminate, spread more or less in a horizontal plane. Inflorescence terminal, 15—30 x 0.3—0.4 cm, fluted; bracts around the base usually 8—10, 20—50 x 1.5—4.0 mm, obtusely acute; cauline bracts about 20, 5—15 x 1.0—1.5 mm, obtusely acute. Pedicels plus ovaries 5—7 x about 1 mm; bracts similar to cauline ones but shorter. Flowers numerous, about 5 mm diam., pale green, "reversed", widely expanding. The following measurements are those of an average flower, if variations were given they would be in fractions of a mm. and somewhat pointless. Dorsal sepal 5 x 1 mm, lanceolate, obtuse. Lateral sepals 3.25 x 2.0 mm, oblong or obovate, obtuse or mucronate. Petals 5.0 x 0.5 mm, linear, truncate. Labellum dominating the flower, 7 x 5 mm, horse-shoe shaped, attached at centre of inside to centre of column so that lateral extremities extend well behind column; apex fringed with about 6—8 teeth about 1 mm long; basal section a small broad slipper-like pouch about 2.0 x 1.75 mm. Column 2.0 x 1.5 mm; wings extending just higher than anther, ovate truncate. Stigma very difficult to discern, transverse narrow-oblong, prominent directly below clinandrium. Rostellum in 2 parts, very short, little more than rounded protuberances. Anther 0.5 x 1.0 mm, shallow, truncate, ridged towards base. Pollinia 4 in 2 pairs, translucent yellow, waxy; stipes extremely filiform and elastic; viscidium, if such it be, minute.

Flowering usually occurs after the summer monsoons.

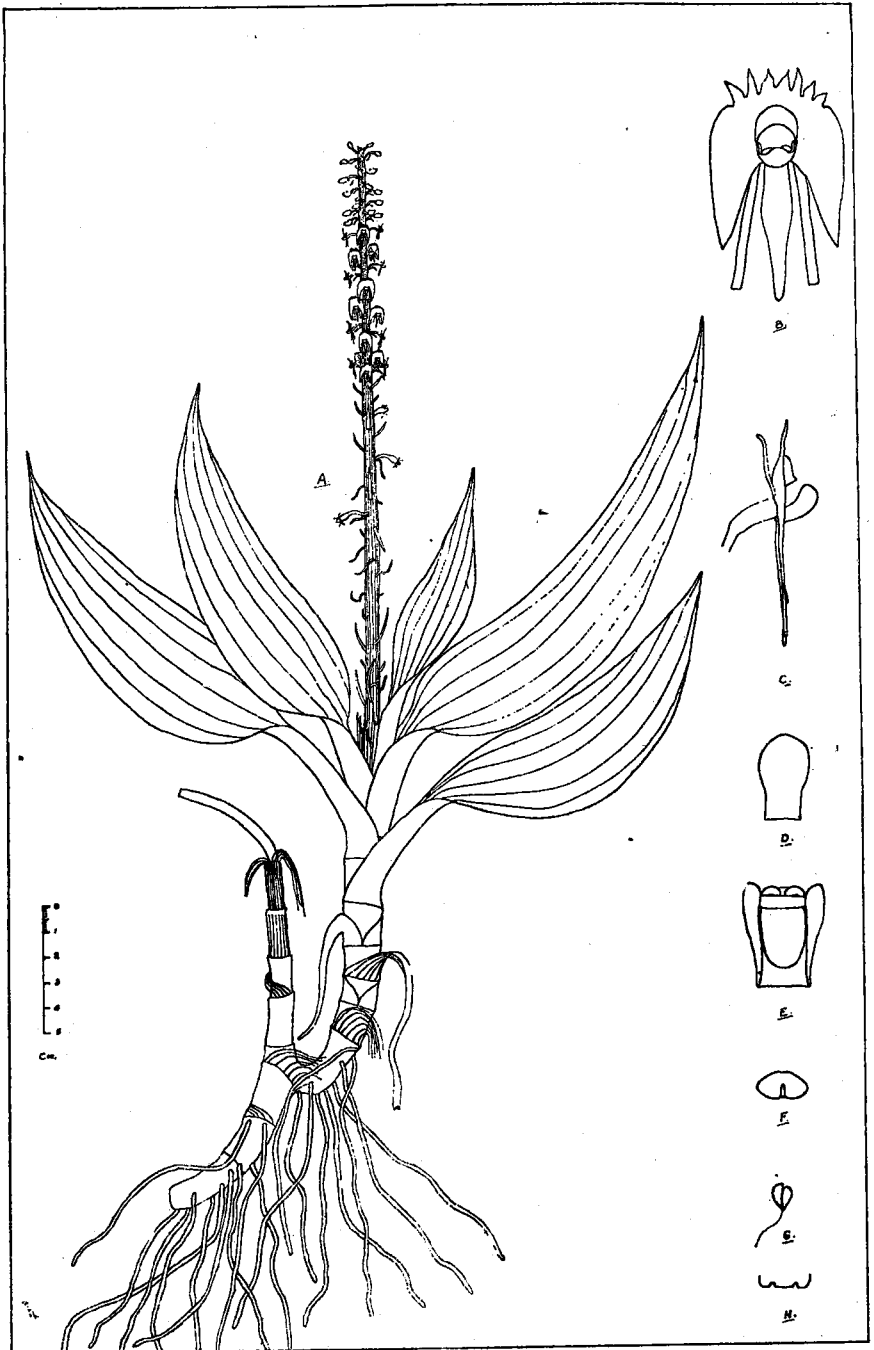
This species is very sparingly distributed on the tablelands and in coastal gorges of Far Northern Queensland, extending to New Guinea and possibly Indonesia. It grows on the floor of rain forests or on moss and debris covered rocks therein.

It is readily distinguished from the only other Australian species of the genus, *M. Latifolia* Sm. by its horizontal subfalcate leaves, which are more or less upright and not at all falcate in the latter species, and 6—8 on the apex of the horse-shoe shaped labellum, there being only a small central lobe and 2 upturned lateral lobes on the lobellum of the latter.

A. W. DOCKRILL.

LEGEND FOR ILLUSTRATION :— (On Page 4)

- (a) Plant natural size to indicated scale. (b) Flower from front..... x 10.
 (c) Flower from side..... x 10. (d) Lateral Sepal..... x 10.
 (e) Column from front..... x 20. (f) Anther from above..... x 20
 (g) Pair of Pollinia (stipe stretched)..... greatly magnified.
 (h) Front view of bottom of Clinandrium showing the 2 parts of Rostellum..... x 20.



FAREWELL TO A FRIEND

ERIC SOUTH FIELDER.

When the Great Pilot, in His wisdom, gave pratique for Eric Fielder to enter the Safe Harbour for which all our courses are set, his wide circle of friends in Cairns felt a deep sense of personal loss. For ten years Eric had been with us in the North, enjoying a well earned retirement after a lifetime devoted to the service of his country, and during that time, in his unobtrusive way, he had endeared himself to all with whom he had come in contact.

An essentially humble man, his humility could be termed of that sterling quality which is one of the essentials of greatness, and without ever appearing to do so, he left a mark, — and an essentially beneficial mark, on the Club's activities which will never be eradicated.

Few people knew of his remarkable record of service with the Fleet Auxiliary, of his world-wide travels, or of his exceptional knowledge of world affairs, and it was not until his untimely death that these became known.

Born in Sydney in 1891, he became an engineer and at the beginning of the First World War joined the British Merchant Navy, seeing active service in the Atlantic and Pacific theatres. His ship, the "Clan Davidson" was sunk in the Indian Ocean in June 1917, but in August of that year he was signing articles for service with the "Marathon" in London as 3rd Engineer, and remained with the Merchant Navy until 1921, when he transferred to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. This service took him to the China stations where his progress was steady, — on St. Patrick's Day, 1930 he received the coveted "red ticket",—the certificate of a Chief Marine Engineer. In 1939, at the outbreak of hostilities, he was Chief of the "Olcades" and from Trincomalee was assigned to station duties with the East Indies squadron, continuing in the service until 1951, when he officially 'swallowed the anchor', and retired from a seafaring life.

In Cairns he found what every tropical-service seaman seeks, a climate to which they are accustomed, a proximity to the sea they love, and an informality of living which is inseparable from the seaman's way of life. Shortly after retiring to Cairns Eric became interested in the North Queensland Naturalists' Club, and formed a sincere friendship with the Club's founder, the late Dr. Flecker. He applied himself to the Club's interests with the same assiduity which had characterised his progress through the Service, giving liberally of his time and talents to the furtherance of the Club's interests. On Dr. Flecker's death he was appointed Librarian and Curator of the Flecker Herbarium, and set up an office in the building. Two years ago he took over the Club Secretaryship, and under his administration the organisation prospered mightily.

Meticulously careful in attention to detail,—a habit formed by over three decades of responsibility at sea, he conducted all the Club's correspondence and catalogued the extensive library, and at the same time trained a junior member in the intricacies of the work.

He was at all Club field-days, placing his car at the disposal of the Junior members, and one feels that perhaps it is the youngsters who will miss him most. Whether the trip was a local one to Machan's Beach, or an overnight stay at Chillagoe or Mt. Mulligan, parents felt that their children were in safe hands if they were in "Mr. Fielder's car". It was an irony of fate that his end should have come by way of a car accident.

Many people outside his immediate circle knew him and loved him. The boilermen at the Base Hospital appreciated his brief visits, — he often dropped in to cast a professional eye over the big Babcocks there, and never failed to compliment the men on the way they were maintained. The waitress at his favourite cafe, who knew him only from his casual visits for his con-

stitutional cup of tea, was always sure of a courteous 'Thank You' as she completed her service.

He had that unobtrusive charm of manner which is remembered long after the giver has passed on. Slow to anger, he would express himself in the mildest of terms on the rare occasions when expletives appeared to be called for. I remember well, after he had accompanied me on an inspection of a very decrepit steam-plant, remarking, (after noting the unlagged pipes, the leaky joints, the inefficient feedwater system, the general air of uncared-for-ness which characterised the plant): "Dear me! what would the Captain say?"

Quick to appreciate and express his appreciation, slow to anger, and then loth to express anger, he gave freely of his remarkable talent and ability to the Club which had become his life's work.

The Club has lost a mighty worker and a superbly capable secretary, many of us have lost a sincere and loyal friend, casual acquaintances have lost someone to whom they looked with respect, but I think that in the final analysis, the passing of Eric Fielder took something even more,—a thorough gentleman of the old school.



Further to Mr. Elliotts article mentioning the Crested Grebe (Crested Duck) in Vol. 29 No. 126, here are further notes from a Tableland Member.

NOTES ON THE GREAT CRESTED GREBE.

The Great Crested Grebe, (*Podiceps cristatus*) is the largest of the genus found in Australia. Frequenting mainly lakes and large swamps it prefers localities which have reedy foreshores. In 1958 I observed a few of this interesting species on Tinaroo Dam after the first ponding of water and each Spring and Summer Crested Grebes have been noticed there. Several were noticed frequenting sheltered bays in company of the Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*) in late Spring and early Summer in 1960. Occasional birds were also observed in local swamps where they keep well-out from the shoreline. Many Crested Grebes were seen in April 1959 by John Warham and myself in the lakes and swamps of the Herbert and Burdekin Rivers, South of Mt. Garnet. In breeding plumage they have a ruff or collar and ear tufts (ears), the ruff disappearing in the non breeding (eclipse) period, but the ears are retained all the year. Crested Grebes if disturbed when feeding close to the shore will dive and swim under water and do not surface until they are well out in the deep water. Food is obtained on the bottom, the birds diving and staying under approximately 20 seconds before surfacing. Similar in size to the Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*), the Crested Grebe has a range covering the Eastern Hemisphere to Australia and New Zealand. Also it is known as Tippet Grebe. Usually it is observed in pairs or single birds.

Plumage. Upper parts brown, under white, crown black, ruff chestnut in summer. In winter face and neck pale to white and a crest or ears. The toes are lobed.

Display. Crested Grebes have a remarkable display and for those who are interested a full description is given by H. E. Tarr, Victoria, in the 1959 (Dec.) Australian Bird Watcher.

Nest. A floating platform of aquatic plants and reeds anchored to some submerged objects such as reeds or floating trees.

Eggs. 4 to 9 greenish to white, often soiled by the decaying vegetation of the nest.

Breeding Season. November to February.

Reference. Observations of the Great Crested Grebe. H. E. Tarr, Victoria. Australian Bird Watcher, Dec., 1959.

J. H. BRAVERY, Atherton.

THE WHIPSTICK

North of Huntly, and extending to the fringes of Eaglehawk, is an area of dwarf mallee and other native shrubs, etc, popularly known as the Bendigo Whipstick. The name "Whipstick" probably came from early miners, who cut the slender mallee sticks to urge on their horses. This undulating country consists of Ordovician shales, sandstones, and schists, with very little sub-soil, and is probably the vestiges of a much larger area of mallee country of bygone days. Approximately 10 miles from E to W, and 6 miles from N to S. the Whipstick was shunned by the early miners owing to the thickness of the scrub, making progress very difficult. However, when the Bendigo field started to decline, miners forced their way into the Whipstick, where some fairly large nuggets were found. Reef mining gradually extended to the Whipstick with good results in some places. The reefs of the Whipstick do not follow the typical "Saddle" formation of the Bendigo field, but many were worked to considerable depth.

Today nature is gradually covering up the scars of the miners, and restoring an area which holds many interesting features for the naturalist.

Owing to the poor class of the soil, the Whipstick has never been taken over for farming pursuits to any great extent; neither is the small type of timber of much use. However a thriving industry of Eucalyptus Oil manufacture is carried on over a large area. The leaves of the 4 species of mallee, native to the area, are sought for this purpose, particularly those of the Blue Mallee (*Eucalyptus fruticetorum*).

The flowering mallees are also sought after by apiarists who transfer their bees to the Whipstick corresponding to the flowering periods of the different species. The Black Mallee (*Euc. froggartii*) and the summer flowering Ironbark (*Euc. sideroxylon*) are the favourites with the Apiarasts.

FLORA :—

Apart from the Eucalyptus mentioned above, the Whipstick has a typical flora of it's own, differing greatly from the flora to the South of Bendigo. In spite of the poor soil and dry climate the abundance and variety of plants is amazing. Nowhere else would you be able to find up to a dozen species of native plants covering one square yard.

One of the features of the Whipstick is the flowering in early September of the Hakea Wattle (*Acacia hakeaoides*). To look over acres of rounded golden yellow shrubs is a glorious sight. In May and June another Wattle (*Acacia flexifolia*) brightens up the beginning of Winter. This species is only found in the central Whipstick.

Vestiges of a northern mallee flora can be found near the northern fringe. Plants such as Murray Pine (*Calitris glauca*), Berrigan (*Eremophila longifolia*); Weeping Pittosporum (*Pittosporum phillyraeoides*) and Sweet Quandong (*Fusanus acuminata*) come as a surprise and are comparatively rare in the area.

Four species of Melaleuca add their blooms from September to early January, and of these the Crimson Melaleuca is the most attractive.

Two species of Westringia can be found and one of these Westringia crassifolia, the Whipstick can claim entirely as it's own; being found nowhere else in the world.

The dainty little small leafed Wax-flower is quite common over a large area as also is the Micromyrtus (very closely related to the Thryptomene of the Gramplains).

Contrasts in colour are added by the red flowering shrubs of Grevillea, and the Scarlet Mint-bush, and the beautiful blue of the Dampiera, named after William Dampier, the explorer. The Golden pennants (*Loudonia behrii*) also adds it's mantle of yellow in the late Spring.

Quite a number of Orchids can be found and of these the Ruddy Hood (*Pterostylis rufa*) and the yellow sun-orchid (*Thelymitra antennifera*) are typical Whipstick species.

FAUNA :—

Like the Flora, the Whipstick also has a distinctive fauna. Many species

of Birds, Insects and Mammals, are not at all, or seldom found outside the Whipstick area.

Typical birds of the Whipstick include the Shy Heath Wren (*Hylacola cauta*) which although fairly plentiful is not often seen, owing to its habit of frequenting the lower branches of the thick scrub. The Red-tailed Thornbill also has this habit. Several species of Honeyeaters, confined almost entirely to the area are the Tawny-crowned, Purple-gaped and Yellow plumed. The mournful whistle of the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater is a sound that belongs to the Whipstick.

Although the Mallee Fowl has not been seen in the Whipstick for more than 20 years, the nesting mounds still to be seen and show that considerable numbers of this species used the Whipstick as their home. The introduction of the fox and robbing of the mounds by the early settlers has brought this truly unique bird to near extinction in Victoria.

The Spotted Night Jar is another very interesting bird of this area. Laying only one egg at a time on the bare ground with no semblance of a nest, the bird when brooding the egg is so well camouflaged that it cannot be detected, unless it is flushed. The chick is also well camouflaged, and resembles a reddish brown piece of rock, keeping quite still under all circumstances during the day, with the parent birds looking like two pieces of old mallee root, squatting near by.

One of the best ways to study the wild life of the Whipstick is to select one of the none too frequent dams on a warm afternoon and just keep quiet and watch. Finches, Parrots, Wrens, etc, will soon be seen seeking a drink. Several black Scrub Wallabys will almost certainly come for a drink, and towards evening the large Grey Kangaroos in mobs of six or more will probably be seen, especially if the dam you select is near the fringe of the open grass land.

The Bronze Wing Pidgeon will be almost a sure visitor as also will one of the many lizards, that abound in the Whipstick. If you are lucky you may see some of the small marsupials such as the Long-tailed Mouse, the Brush-tailed Phascogale or more likely a Ring-tailed or Silver grey Possum.

CONCLUSION :—

In this short article it is not possible to mention more than a few of the 330 indigenous plants of the area, and many interesting plants have of necessity been left out.

To the Naturalist the Whipstick has much to offer at all times of the year, but in the spring it is a place of beauty and joy to all.

J. KELLAM, Bendigo.

11/2/61



POT POURRI

Usually a birds nest is used purely for breeding purposes but the Spice Finch, an introduced bird, uses its nest for sleeping. An Observer at Innisfail counted 17 Finches leaving the nest one morning.

A Junior Member saw a Black Butcher Bird in the orange tree. On closer observation it was found that the bird had pushed a mouse into the fork of the tree and was vigorously pulling out the fur. Unfortunately the bird was disturbed and flew away with the mouse in its beak.

It has been reported that Bottle Trees their usual habitat the Central West have been found growing on Mount Desailleys and Mount Elephant about 15 — 20 miles from Mount Carbine.

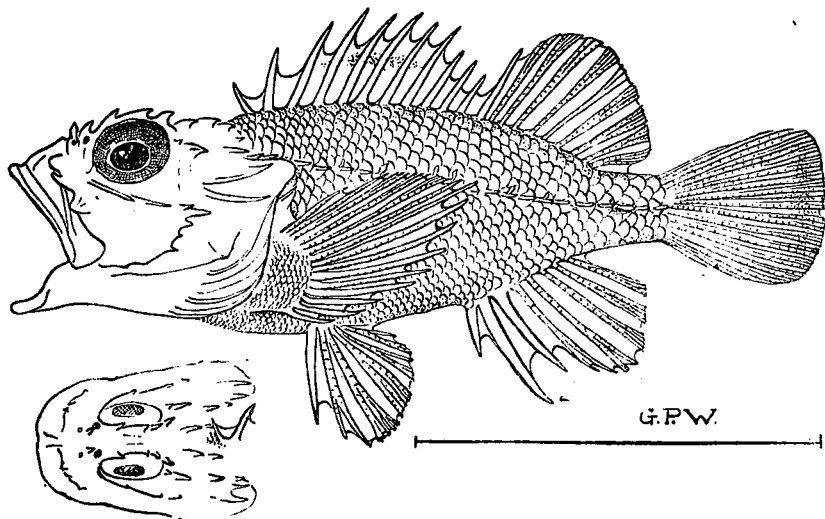
Members are invited to send unusual observations for inclusion on this page to N.Q.N.C., Publications Committee, Box 991, Cairns.

Will any Members who have changed their address please notify the Secretary so that records may be kept up to date.

A NEW SCORPION FISH FROM QUEENSLAND

BY G. P. WHITLEY.

(Contribution from the Australian Museum, Sydney).



Family SCORPAENIDAE.

Genus SCORPAENA, Linne, 1758.

SCORPAENA MOULTONI, sp. nov.

(fig 1.)

Br. 7. D. xii, 9; A. iii, 5; P. 15; V. i, 5; C. 15 et lat. brev. L. lat. 22.
Tr. 7/1/11. Pred. 2 G/R.5/6.

Head (18mm.) 2.3, depth (14) 2.9 in standard length (41). Snout slightly less than eye (5) which is 3.6 in head. Interorbital, 3mm. Length of pectoral fin, 11mm. Head naked. Maxillary reaching below front of eye, not ridged. Head and body with very few dermal flaps. No supraorbital tentacles. Interorbital concave. Villiform teeth in bands on jaws, vomer and palatines. Upper profile behind eye not deeply notched. One nasal spine each side. Also preocular, supraocular, and postocular. No spine on coronal ridges. A post-frontal spine on each side, sphenotic spines not developed. Parietal and nuchal well developed. Pterotic, 2 posttemporals and humeral spines. Post-orbitals not evident. Two long, suborbital spines form a low ridge. Two pre-orbitals, the hind lower preorbital spine points downward and forward, not retrorse. Four preopercular spines, and two rather long opercular ones.

Body covered with imbricate, adherent, cycloid scales. L. lat. complete, tubes simple, anterior ones spined. Breast scaly.

Dorsal fin originating over opercular flap. Fourth to seventh dorsal spines longest (6.5mm.), slightly shorter than longest dorsal rays. No flap on inner base of pectoral. Seventh pectoral ray longest. Only a few upper pectoral rays branched. No free pectoral rays. Ventrals rounded, reaching anal spine. Caudal truncate.

Said to have been rosy red when alive. In preservative dull greenish-yellow with faint, irregular infuscation here and there, but no definite markings or pattern. Pectoral axil light, plain. Dark smudge on spinous dorsal

and down posterior margin of caudal.

Total length 1 7/8 inches.

Loc. North of Wilson Island, Capricorn Group, Queensland; in red coral head dredged up from about 50 feet. October 19, 1960. Collected and presented by Professor James M. Moulton. Described from the unique holotype, No. IB. 5062, in the Australian Museum, Sydney.

Named after Professor James M. Moulton of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, U.S.A., who came to Queensland in 1960-61 to study underwater noises made by animals.

This Scorpion fish is not known to make any particular noise and is distinguished from its congeners by its pale coloration, naked head, short maxillary, large scales, lack of dermal flaps, few predorsal scales, etc. It is apparently nearest the Philippines species, *S. mcadamsi* Fowler (1938, Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus. 88, p. 60. fig. 24) but that has 5 predorsal scales; opercle and postocular region scaly above.

BOOK REVIEW

Field Guide to The Waders — H. T. Condon and A. E. McGill.
Guide to The Hawks of Australia — H. T. Condon.

Occasionally a reviewer receives for attention material with which it is an utmost pleasure to deal. Such are the above two works published by The Bird Observers Club, Melbourne. The subject matter is the test of any publication and on opening these booklets it immediately becomes apparent that the authors are most capable and really know their subject. There is a brief classification of the families, hints for identification, glossary of terms, illustrations of the birds in the positions most likely to be encountered in the field (from the side in flight, or standing in the former and in flight from below in the latter) and very useful if somewhat brief notes on each species which is given both its common and scientific names. The authors and publishers deserve every praise for their efforts.

Here in Cairns where waders and hawks are in such profusion, these Guides are an invaluable aid to identification and cannot be too highly recommended to anyone whether mildly or more seriously interested in avifauna. Our copies were received on an exchange basis and are available to members at the Club's library but are also available and most surely will be greatly sought after from the Hon. Sec., The Bird Observers Club, Mr. R. Wheeler, 59a Upton Rd., Windsor, S.I. Victoria for 2/6 each plus 5d. postage.

GOLDEN BOWER — BIRD

Also called Newton's Bower-Bird (*Prionodura newtoniana*.)

This species of Bower - Bird is usually found in pairs frequenting the big scrubs. The bird is very shy but if one sits in the scrub quietly, his long wait will be rewarded. These Bower - Birds are usually found in altitudes not lower than 3,000 ft. above sea-level. In the Baldy Mountains Area, Forestry Reserve 4 miles from Atherton, North Queensland, I have observed many Bowers or play grounds and many pairs of these beautiful birds. They are found in this area no lower than 3,500 ft. above sea-level.

I have observed them feeding, mainly on native fruits and berries (Figs, etc.)

The male Bird has a golden breast, nape, half-crown, and throat. The wings, back, tail and other half of crown are a golden brown; legs and bill are black.

The female bird has a greyish brown breast, throat and under-tail, brown back, wings, tail and head, with black legs and beak.

Their bower is usually built between two trees about (3) three feet apart. Twigs are stacked horizontally around the trees leaving eight (8) inches between walls through which it dances. One side of the bower being from five (5) feet high and the lower side being 18 inches to 2 feet. It is decorated with green and white moss, arodia flowers, fern and clusters of berries. This bird is a splendid mimic. At times in the scrub up the mountain, I hear

what one would think is the whole of the bush life gathered together and singing in one spot. On closer observation I find it is one bird, the Male Golden Bower - Bird.

NEST.

The nest is open cup shaped structure built of dead leaves and skeletons of leaves, lawyer cane fibres, strips of bark, twigs lined with rootlets. The nest I had observed was about 3 feet 6 inches from the ground in a deep flange of a tree, (*Ceratopetalum succirubrum*) or Satin Sycamore, in a stunted scrub palm. The position of the nest was very well sheltered and would not be noticed by any amateur bird watcher.

EGGS.

The clutch of eggs in the nest were pure to a glossy white in colour and numbered two. The month I located the nest in, was November. According to Neville W. Cayley, F.R.Z.S. their breeding season, is between October and December. This bird nested within the season.

J. BACKHOUSE



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