

FIELD NOTES ON THE GREY-TAILED TATTLER.

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Habitat-preference amongst the migratory Charadriiformes is an aspect of study to which little attention has been paid in Australia. That these hardy and resolute birds, which bi-annually traverse half the world, should have reached a high stage of adaptability would appear certain. It is therefore surprising to find that some species restrict themselves in their choice of feeding grounds, a differential distribution that has led to a concept of rarity in the case of some comparatively common visitors. Such is the case as regards the Grey-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*) in New South Wales, as has been shown by observations made during recent years.

The *Official Checklist of the Birds of Australia* (1926) gives the range of the Grey-tailed Tattler in Australia as "Northern Australia, South Queensland, and Western Australia". Actually the species was known from Sydney a quarter of a century previous to this (North, 1898), but it was not until K. A. Hindwood made frequent observations at Long Reef, a rocky promontory near Collaroy, that the species was shown to be a regular summer inhabitant of coastal New South Wales. These and the observations of the writer have shown that the species feeds in small numbers on exposed coastal reefs, but rarely elsewhere, near Sydney. The extensive mud and sand flats along Cook's River and Botany Bay, areas noted for their wader populations, appear to be unsuitable to the Tattlers, and the species has been recorded only once there in one hundred trips spread over six years.* Likewise, it generally avoids sandy beaches and swampy areas. On the other hand, on certain Hunter River mudflats some ninety miles to the north the observations of A. J. Gwynne over a number of years, and of the writer during 1943-1944, have shown that the species occurs in moderately large numbers.

T. brevipes has been recorded from Mud Island, Port Phillip Bay (Bryant, 1933; Anon., 1933; Reed, 1941), and the Swan River (Serventy, 1938) and Rockingham (Sedgwick, 1942) in south-western Australia. There appears to be little doubt that before the southern coastline has been reached the species has thinned out and that it can be regarded as rare there. It is unknown from Tasmania (M. S. R. Sharland, 1945, p. iii).

Status in the Sydney Area.—K. A. Hindwood, who a few years ago (1942, p. 27) summarized his observations of the species at Long Reef between March, 1941, and February, 1942, has kindly made his full notes available for this paper. These show that the species was present on the reef on the four occasions when observations were made there during 1940, 40 of the 47 trips during 1941, 17 of the 19 trips during 1942, the single trip during 1943, four trips during 1944, two trips during 1946, and two trips during 1947. Single birds were seen on 14 occasions, two birds 21 times, three birds 21 times, four birds six times, five birds twice, six-seven birds four times, and twice "several" were recorded. Thus in the majority of instances either two or three birds were present. During the winter months of both 1941 and 1942, when observations were made, the species was present. In 1941 a single bird was present during May, two birds after June 21, three birds after July 14, and four birds after August 24.

* Strangely enough A. J. North (1898, p. 112) wrote (and referring in error to *T. incana*): "Frequents the flats near the mouth of Cook's River, and the shores of Botany Bay during October and November."