

Stray Feathers.

Notes from Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania.—During March, 1925, we had a visit from a flock of eight Double-banded Dotterels (*Charadrius bicinctus*) which ranged the beach for ten days, then disappeared.

Another visitor was a large Penguin, standing almost two feet high. I measured his height against myself. He allowed me to come close up to him, but was very uneasy whenever I tried to view him from the rear, turning round the whole time and facing me with his beautiful white front. My attention was first attracted to him from the verandah of our home on the hillside above the bay. I noticed this unusual figure on the beach below and watched it standing upright, preening its feathers, stroking its breast with its bill. Then it settled on the sand in a hunched position, so I went down to view the stranger. It stood up at my approach and made a protesting, hissing kind of noise. Its bill was red and the feet dark. A conspicuous semicircle of white ran part way round the neck on the upper surface just below the nape. The wings were only flappers and it had no crests. The exact measurement of its height was 22 inches. It stayed asleep on the beach until night fell and when the next morning came I was relieved to see that it had gone away. The "creature" who shoots at everything moving has scared most of the birds away from these sands.

After a big storm in July a beautiful specimen of the Crested Penguin was washed ashore dead in the Kelp.

On Sept. 1, 1925, many male Flame-breasted Robins (*Petroica phœnicea*) arrived and congregated on this beach which extends for three miles from Clyde Island to Fossil Island off the Blowhole Point. No female birds had arrived up to Sept. 6.

The migratory birds left us very suddenly last season in the early days of March. The past winter was extraordinarily severe for this part of Tasmania, which, as a rule, possesses a mild climate. Up to Sept. 6 I had only seen the Robins mentioned and the Goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*). At that date in 1924 all the migrants had arrived.—(MISS) J. A. FLETCHER, R.A.O.U., "Lyeltya," Eaglehawk Neck, Tas.

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An Early Note on Black Swans.—James Backhouse in his "Narrative" records that when at Moulting Bay (on the east coast of Tasmania) in mid-September, 1834, "we counted fifty-six Black Swans, in pairs: their nests had been carried away by floods. This is often the case, and at other times they are extensively robbed of their eggs. One family, at whose house we lodged, had sometimes taken as many as five hundred eggs at a time. Formerly a tribe of Aborigines resorted regularly to this neighbourhood, at this season of the year, to collect swans' eggs."—W. STUART DOVE, W. Devonport, Tas.

How Tasmania Lost the Emu.—James Fenton, an early settler in the island, in his "Bush Life in Tasmania," commenting on the fact that Surveyor Hellyer sighted some Emus not far from Valentine's Peak, says "it is a singular fact that those Emus have all disappeared from some unknown cause." James Backhouse, who visited all the Australian colonies in the thirties of last century, published a very interesting narrative of his tour, with many remarks upon the fauna and flora. To anyone perusing this narrative, the complete extinction of the Tasmanian Emu is no longer a mystery, as will be seen by what follows.

Backhouse paid a visit to Hugh Germain, in the south of the island, and says "Germain came to Van Diemen's Land with Colonel Collins at the first settlement of the colony; he was a private in the marines, and was for many years employed in hunting Kangaroos and Emus for provisions, which the officer, whose servant he was, received from him, and sold to the Government at 1s. 6d. per pound. Germain, assisted by two prisoners, returned 1000 pounds per month, on an average. Though Emus are now rarely seen in the island (1834) at that time they were frequently met with about New Norfolk, Salt Pan Plains, Coal River and Kangaroo Point."

It will thus be seen that the extermination of the Tasmanian Emu lies at the door of the Government of that day, and that the flesh was used to support the troops, and (perhaps) the prisoners. Some of the skins would be turned into mats, the remainder, with the bones, would probably be burnt, and so hardly a vestige of this interesting bird has remained to us.—H. STUART DOVE, W. Devonport, Tas.

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When did the Tasmanian Emu Become Extinct?—Mr. Stuart Dove in his search through old books for records of the Tasmanian Emu* has been unsuccessful in establishing conclusive evidence of the existence of this bird after 1845. Mr. G. M. Mathews has given no records of these birds being seen in their native state after that year, although he gives several notes on various birds in captivity supposed to be native. Doubt must be expressed as to whether many of these birds were stock from the original Tasmanian form, since even at that early period the Australian Emu had been introduced into Tasmania in a state of captivity.

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An interesting note on the existence of the mainland birds in Tasmania as early as 1845 appears in William Westgarth's *Australia Felix*, published in 1848. Westgarth states: "A pair of Emus from Port Phillip, which had been domesticated in the park at Circular Head, Van Diemen's Land, reared six young ones during the spring of 1845. The female made her nest early in October, and laid eight eggs. The period of incubation was exactly six weeks." The pair of Emus, recorded by Mr. Dove, kept by the Van Diemen's Land Co. at Circular Head, was probably the identical pair referred to by Westgarth as cited above.—D. DICKISON, R.A.O.U., Melbourne.

**The Emu*, XXIII., p. 221, and XXIV., p. 300.

A Robin Tragedy.—On Sept., 29, 1925, Mr. Cannam and I visited Beaconsfield to try and locate some Helmeted Honeyeaters. Although we were disappointed in this we had a most enjoyable day among our feathered friends. About 11 a.m. my attention was attracted to a Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*) which appeared to be sitting on her nest in a peculiar position. We approached her stealthily and thought we had achieved something when we caught the bird, but to our surprise we found that she was dead. Death was due to suffocation.

The nest was situated in a three-pronged fork about 4ft. 6ins. high. The central branch of the fork protruded above the nest in a perpendicular manner and was forked near the rim of the nest. Unfortunately the poor bird's head had been caught in this fork with the abovementioned result. On examination the Robin proved to be a female but she was just too far advanced to allow a skin to be made. The eggs were about one-third incubated. The nest itself was beautifully built as usual, the dimensions being: internal depth, 1.8 ins., external depth 3.75 ins., internal diameter 2.5 ins., external diameter 3.5 ins.—N. J. FAVALORO, R.A.O.U., Melbourne.

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The Skylark in Tasmania.—It may be interesting to record that the British Skylark (*Alanda arvensis*) has this spring (1925) made its appearance on Tasmania's north-west coast, and seems likely to become established. For many years this bird has been nesting in the Launceston district, 62 miles south-east from Devonport, and the grassy flats about the show-ground and in the vicinity of the North Esk River have been enlivened by its song. It is not, however, a pushing colonist, unlike the Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) which made its way into most parts of the island soon after its introduction.

About half a dozen years ago I noticed the Lark at Westbury, which is about half-way between here and Launceston, since when it has, no doubt, been gradually making its way along towards the coast. As this species is, unlike the Starling and Sparrow, a "desirable immigrant," we hope that it will soon become firmly established, and cheer with its song the dwellers beside the Mersey.—H. STUART DOVE, W. Devonport, Tas.

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Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*), with Two Mates.
—Last year a male and two female Magpies came and built two nests—one in a pepper tree just outside the garden and another in a pepper tree in the garden, about 30 yards away. One of the hen birds had rather dull plumage so I thought she might have been a young bird, but as there is one here again this year with dull plumage it could not have been so. This year the Magpie has returned with his two wives and they built two nests in another pepper tree in the garden. They chose one under which our dog is chained at night, but whether they chose it for protection, or by accident, would be

interesting to know. My notes are incomplete as I was away both last year and this year during part of the nesting season. Last December there were quantities of red beetles about after the rain and the Magpies soon discovered them and came and ate them wholesale. They even ventured on to the bowling green in Warwick where the beetles were in dozens. So far this year I've not seen more than two young Magpies in one family. Perhaps the dry season accounts for the fact. Detailed notes follow:—

1924, July 13th. Magpies building in pepper tree outside garden.

August 12th. Magpies building in pepper tree in garden. There appear to be three birds.

Aug. 24th. The birds appear to have finished 2nd nest in first tree (they started two nests, but abandoned one).

Sept. 8th. Still three birds here. A hen on each nest now. The one in the second tree began to sit about 1st Sept. The male bird feeds both the hens and also takes a turn sitting on No. 2 nest, so I suppose he sits on No. 1 as well, to give his other mate a rest.

Oct. 11th. Large brown hawk here frightening the magpies; it is very persistent. Only one young bird in each nest now so it must have eaten one.

After the young birds left the nests an old bird seemed to disappear, but occasionally there would be five here. Whether it was here all the time or only came back some times I cannot be sure.

1925, July 17th. Magpies have started to build nest in pepper tree in garden. Old bird punishing the young one which has been with them since last year. But it didn't go away far—merely took itself off to the front garden, looking very sad!

July 19th. Another nest about same stage as first one in same tree, just a little lower down. Three birds here again this year. Evidently the same three, as one has dullish plumage.

The young one is chased furiously if it ventures near the others.

July 28th. Birds lining nests.

Sept. 10th. Both hens sitting since about 1st. They come off to feed about twice a day. The male bird feeds both his mates on the nest. There were three eggs in each nest; all except one were blue with brown spots, the sixth was blue with reddish speckles—darker than the others.

Nov. There were two young birds in one nest and one in the other. They left the nest about 2nd Nov. They appear to have separated, the two being fed by two old birds and the other by one old bird, but it is difficult to be sure unless one watches closely for a long while, so the old bird may help his second mate to feed the other young one. While his mates were sitting the old bird was always on the alert and would usually fly up on to the telephone post near the tree containing the nests if you ventured near. When the young ones hatched he sometimes tried to chase the men folk away, but only on

one occasion bothered me. It is usually when they are disturbed that they become savage I think.

Last year there were quite a number of Magpie's nests in the mistletoe about here. Very likely they thought their nests were more protected there than in the usual place.—(MISS) D. M. TILLEY, Rose Hill, Queensland.

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Birds Check Grasshoppers.—The following informative article, written by the Wybong (N.S.W.) correspondent of Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, appeared in that journal on October 19, 1925 :—

What at first looked like being one of the worst grasshopper plagues ever experienced in the Upper Hunter commenced to hatch about a month ago. From reports, it was found infestation had occurred at Singleton, Jerry's Plains, Wybong, Muswellbrook, Aberdeen, Scone, Dartbrook, Owen's Gap, Sparkes' Creek, and Warrah. These districts embrace from Singleton on the Lower Hunter to the Liverpool Plains. If some control had not checked the pest it would have assumed unheard-of proportions by the early summer. Spraying is being carried out in many centres. At Warrah a meeting of land-holders was held, and each was asked to subscribe £2. A total of £78 was subscribed at once, and it was considered that at the present stage the pest could be easily controlled. The committee had all necessary appliances at hand, and spraying was commenced immediately. Under these conditions the Warrah district should soon be clean. At Wybong landholders were becoming apprehensive that the pest would assume large proportions, so many were hatching, but last week great flocks of wood swallows came to the rescue. The result is that in a few days the whole district has been cleared. This district has been besieged with birds. Flights of 3000 and 4000 wood swallows in the air at once has been a common sight for several days. Old residents say they have seldom seen so many birds before. Starlings and ibis have also helped. Farmers speak highly of all these birds and would as soon shoot a cow as one of these feathered friends. Thousands of 'hoppers lay in black masses, and in two days these birds had the patches annihilated. Never before were the birds more welcome, as droughty conditions prevailed and grass was very scarce. While spraying is satisfactory, farmers realise that the birds can control the pest far better, as they never miss one patch, while with spraying one district may carry it out, and another not, whereas the birds, if in sufficient numbers, will visit all districts. The opinion is held that birds are the only things that will ultimately control the pest.

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Nesting Habits of the Hill Crow-Shrike (*Strepera arguta*). A pair of Black Magpies (*Strepera arguta*) comes each season to nest and rear their young on the slopes of the hillside. The female appears to do most of the nest building, but in return is constantly fed by her partner. When she is sitting she comes off twice a day as a rule, about eleven and then again about five in the evening.

She gives a call when coming and he answers and flies to meet her. Then she follows him about making the same sound for food as a young one does. She gives him no peace, for as fast as one beakful disappears down her throat she again raises her petulant cries. When swallowing she also makes gurgling notes as the fledglings do. Indeed, last year I felt quite sorry for her partner, and I am sure he must have rejoiced when she returned to her brooding cares. He generally "saw her home." As soon as they were big enough to leave the nest the young Mags were brought to the adjacent timber for a few weeks, after which the family moved away. Early in September the male bird restarted to feed his partner so, from previous experience, I concluded she was building.—(MISS) J. A. FLETCHER, R.A.O.U., "Lyeltya," Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania.

From Magazines, Etc.

Aspects of Bird Study.—"This paper deals with the aesthetic appeal of birds, but the author is not blind to the fact that, to many, the scientific aspect of ornithology appeals as much as, or more than, the aesthetic . . . The contest between collectors and protectors splits every natural history society. There are fanatics on both sides. A purely scientific interest in birds may lead to the selfish acquisition of a series of skins and clutches, and to the extinction of rare and interesting species. On the other hand, indiscriminate protection upsets the balance of Nature, and defeats its own ends by increasing the enemies of the very birds it desires to protect.

"For my own part, I do not collect, because to me it is horrible to destroy or remove from its ideal surroundings a beautiful thing, be it a bird, or its nest, or eggs. A pair of Goldcrests flitting to and fro to their young in the fragile cradle rocking quietly beneath a spray of yew, are a delight and a joy. Take them away from their natural environment, and however cunning the taxidermist's skill, they are nothing. You cannot re-create the scene in a museum or a collection, any more than you can breathe life into their stuffed skins. A leading ornithologist wrote to me the other day: 'The older I get the more rabid a protector I become.' The gifted author of *Ianto the Fisherman*, in later life, came to the same conclusion: 'The great difference is that whereas once I thought more of the hidden nest and of a probable addition to my cabinet of eggs than of the sweet woodland music, I have gradually lost my passion for collecting, and now desire only that I might note each habit of the free, joyous creatures among their shady retreats in the garden copse.' It is better to watch and listen, and thus to store up memories in the mind; such collections destroy no beauty, and they are more lasting than faded egg-shells and moth-eaten skins."—E. W. HENDY in the *Contemporary Review* (England), April, 1925.