

The Little Wattle-Bird (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*).

BY H. WOLSTENHOLME, M.B.O.U., Wahroonga, Sydney.

THE Little Wattle-Bird (before the new Checklist the Brush Wattle-Bird) is one of the larger species of the big Meliphagidae family of Australia—a slim bird with a rather long tail, suggesting the Cuckoo in figure; of sombre but showy appearance, with its brown plumage plentifully overspread with light markings. In distribution it ranges from South Australia (including Kangaroo Island) through Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales to southern Queensland.

As a rule it keeps to the bush and rarely visits gardens. In various parts of New South Wales I have come across the species in considerable numbers—not flocks, but scattered birds—notably at Sussex Inlet (near Jervis Bay) where I found the birds nesting; along the North Coast, where at one place (Nambucca Heads) I found myself among such a large and noisy company of them that for the time being no other bird note could be heard and I was glad to hurry on to quieter surroundings; and in the *Banksia* tracts of the National Park and Kuring-gai Chase, Sydney—always away from the habitations of man. But about the North Shore suburbs of Sydney it has now joined the large class of Honeyeaters that visit gardens. In these parts two ornamental trees are widely grown whose flowers are sought by honey-loving birds. The gorgeous red blossoms of the so-called coral trees (*Erythrina*) from earliest spring, and later on the brilliant flowers (also red) of the indigenous bottle-brush (*Callistemon lanceolatus*) attract a varied collection of honey-bird visitors, and among them the Little Wattle-Bird is now seen every year.

Perhaps it was in order to be near a supply of this kind of food that a pair of these birds forsook their favourite *Banksias* and *Callistemons* of the neighbouring bush and made their abode in my garden. Presently they began to build a nest in a large shrub (*Photinia ser-rulata*), sometimes called Chinese hawthorn, not far from an *Erythrina* tree, then covered with blossom. I realised that nesting had begun by seeing the two birds flying eagerly across the garden bill to tail—that is, one bird's bill apparently touching the front bird's tail. This particular habit I have noted in other Honeyeaters, e.g., the Regent Honeyeater (*Zanthoniza phrygia*) (see *Emu*, XXIV., 118), though the practice of the male bird attending his mate when she is nest-making is a common one with many birds besides Honeyeaters. The first bird, the female, carried a thin twig to the nest just begun. The male would sit a little way off, frequently in the same spot, while she arranged the twigs in the growing structure, and proclaimed his joy in raucous tones until she left for more material, when he would go with her. Such were mostly the proceedings until the nest was

finished. She alone appeared to do the building. His assistance seemed to be merely the encouragement that might be given by his presence and his vocal powers. On short flights they would spread the tail (which the Regent Honeyeater also does) and show its conspicuous white tips. They would also glide little distances on motionless wings, extended and revealing the beautiful orange colouring, unseen except during flight—whence comes the specific name (*chrysoptera*) of this species, as well as of the Orange-winged Sittella (*Neositta chrysoptera*).

The calls of these birds are among the least agreeable of Australian bird notes, being loud and harsh, jerky and discordant. They resemble at times the squawk or cackle of a domestic fowl, and are often accompanied with a peculiar clattering of the mandibles and raising of head and tail. The male is the noisier, and throughout the nesting period he keeps up his noise with little cessation from day-break until dusk. John Gould says the natives gave the name "Goo-gwar-ruck" to the bird in imitation of its note. He adds: "It frequently jerks up its tail, throws back its head, and distends its throat as if great exertion was required to throw out these harsh and guttural sounds." Perhaps it was only natural that my family used to make uncomplimentary remarks about the "singing of that bird of yours," and a neighbour said jokingly that he was going to shoot it!

The nest occupied about a week in the making—on the outside a loosely-made, untidy-looking affair, similar in size, form, and appearance to the nest of the Whip-Bird (*Psophodes olivaceus*). It rested securely in a fork of the shrub before-mentioned some 10 feet from the ground. The open, cup-shaped inside, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth, was smoothly lined, bottom and sides, with freshly shredded red eucalyptus bark, which is the lining material commonly used by this Honeyeater. This nest had, in addition, at the bottom of the cup fine threads of glossy red-brown appearance that might have come from around the young fronds in the centre of a tree-fern that grew close by.

Two eggs—the ordinary clutch—of the usual honeyeater-egg colour, salmon ground with red-brown spots and markings at the top, were laid. They hatched in about twelve days. The chicks were very downy but soon were covered with feathers showing the adult markings, which became quite clear before the young birds left the nest. They were fed by both parent birds, the male being distinctly the larger.

Always "a bold and spirited species," the birds showed these qualities in a marked degree when the nest and nestlings had to be guarded. During that time no bird, large or small, could come to the vicinity of the nest without being attacked at once and driven right away. Even the Lewin Honeyeater (*Meliphaga lewini*), the chaser-general of small birds, had to depart, and we could not help being amused at seeing him in this new role—the chaser chased!

To each other the two birds showed great affection. They reminded one of the Beaver and the Butcher in *The Hunting of the Snark* (Lewis Carroll)—"You could never meet either alone."

Whether sipping at the drinking-bath, or preening their feathers close by, or feeding in loquats or the juicy *Erythrina* flowers, maybe hanging therefrom head downwards like Lorikeets, or honey-seeking among apple-blossoms, they were always in each other's company, and when together at the nest they would engage in loving conversational chucklings.

The young birds went on growing rapidly after leaving the nest, and soon became as large and as smoothly feathered as the old birds. They remained with the parent birds for a week or two, spending much time among the ripe loquats and the *Callistemon* and other blossoms, and became hard to identify unless the old birds could be seen feeding them.

A word or two as to the name. The Red Wattle-Bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*) a larger bird, is similar in many respects, particularly in plumage. It has conspicuous red wattles. The Little Wattle-Bird has no wattles. The proposed genus *Anellobia* (Cabanis, 1851) for the "no-wattle" bird—the name means having no wattle—expressed this. Surely a bird called a Wattle-Bird should possess wattles! Is it right to apply the name Wattle-Bird to one that has no wattles, even though it resembles another bird that does possess them? It has been called the Mock Wattle-Bird, and there is something to be said in favour of this name, if it means that the word "wattle" is incorrectly applied.

Family Life of Black-breasted Quail.

BY C. H. H. JERRARD, R.A.O.U., Gayndah, Queensland.

THE accompanying photograph of a very young brood of Black-breasted Quail (*Turnix melanogaster*) was obtained by me last November, and at the same time I gained some interesting knowledge of the parental habits of the male of this rare and secluded species.

I discovered Black-breasted Quail in July, 1924, in "scrub" (jungle) near my home, and observed several of them about the same spot many times afterwards; but I saw no signs of their breeding till I made the lucky find represented in the photo. The manner in which the tiny jungle-babies were secured for a picture is, I think, worth describing to readers of *The Emu*.

On 8th November I was exploring the scrub, with Black-breasted Quail as my chief objective, when I suddenly noticed one of these birds run quietly from a spot just ahead of me. It was the same spot, fifty yards or so in from the edge of the scrub, where I first saw the birds in 1924. As this one moved away and I followed for a few steps, I noticed that it was not seeking cover, and thereby quickly eluding me as usual, but kept itself well in view as if inviting pursuit. This unwonted boldness suggested that the well-known ruse of ground dwelling birds when an enemy approaches their nest or helpless young was being employed, and I looked for a nest at the spot the bird had left.

Though I found none, I could see that my search was causing anxiety to the bird. It wandered restlessly round, allowing me to