

Pigeon, which I saw twice, but unfortunately was not able to get a specimen ; the other was one of the small Doves, and I feel sure it is the bird Woodward describes as *Chalcopelia afra*, and as having met it down the coast to the south. I found them very sparsely distributed over the Archipelago in pairs, and I not only procured specimens, but took their eggs, which are deposited on a few twigs, like all the Dove family, and are of a dirty-white colour. The nest is generally placed in an acacia tree, about 6 feet from the ground. The birds seem to keep to the thick undergrowth.—(CAPT.) S. A. WHITE. Zanzibar, East Africa, 24/9/03.

From Magazines, &c.

The Victorian Naturalist, vol. xx., pp. 133-139 (February, 1904) contains some "Ornithological Notes on the Grass-Wrens (*Amytis*)" by Mr. G. A. Keartland. His personal field observations on *A. textilis*, *A. striatus*, and *A. modesta* (of which he was the discoverer) are very interesting and valuable.

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MAGPIES AS WEATHER PROPHETS.—It is noted as a remarkable fact that these birds are this year building their nests on the ground instead of on the limbs of trees as formerly. The statement is vouched for by several old residents, who add that there used to be a tradition among the blacks that when Magpies built in this manner it was a sure sign of a phenomenal visitation of wind in the spring.—*Hamilton Spectator*, 5/9/03.

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PROTECTION TO BIRDS OF PARADISE.—Sportsmen in British New Guinea, whenever they see a Bird of Paradise, shoot at it. The Lieutenant-Governor of the territory has issued a notice prohibiting the destruction of these birds in most portions of the possession, so that they may not become extinct. Very few feathers taken from the Bird of Paradise are imported into Australia from New Guinea. It is stated that they are sent to Paris, treated there, and then forwarded to the Commonwealth if required.—*Argus*, 1/10/03.

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BIRD "CHARMED" BY SNAKE.—Mirboo North.—A miner at the Iron Syndicate's mine was standing outside his hut, when he noticed a bird on the roof whose actions he thought rather peculiar. The bird dropped almost at his feet. On looking down he saw a big snake making all manner of contortions with its body, and its movements seemed to hold the bird spell-bound. When in the act of seizing the bird the snake reared itself up, and, seeing the man, made towards him. The snake seemed to charm the bird by its contortions and movements, and not, as is generally supposed, by its eyes. On being killed it proved to be a 4-foot tiger snake.—*Age*, 29/1/04.

The Avicultural Magazine.—The December number contains a plate delineated in colours by Mr. Norman B. Roberts of the White-throated Thickhead (*Pachycephala gutturalis*). This is accompanied by notes from Mr. D. Seth-Smith, who considers that "there is no reason why the handsome Thickheads should not be kept" in captivity. Mrs. Johnstone contributes an article on the breeding of the Rock Pebbler Parrakeet (*Polytelis melanura*) in which, after noting that the birds set about nesting in a very quiet way, and that the young remained a good deal longer in the nest than the Barnards or Rosellas, she says that "the hen, though a good nester and sitter, was not an energetic mother; the cock totally ignored the entire family."

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ACCORDING to the *Avicultural Magazine* (January, 1904), at the December Show-Bird at the Crystal Palace, amongst the Parrakeets a fine pair of Varied Lorikeets (*Ptilosclera versicolor*) obtained first place, the second prize going to a good pair of "Kings" (*Aprosmictus cyanopygius*). A Red-collared Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus rubritorquis*) and a Black-tailed Parrakeet (*Polytelis melanura*) were also exhibited; while in the "Hybrids Class" the only birds worthy of note were a beautiful pair of crossbreds between the Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*) and the Red-backed Parrakeet (*Psephotus hæmatonotus*). These interesting birds, it is stated, showed more of the characteristics of the latter parent. In Grass-Finches, &c., Class, the following Australian species were exhibited, viz.:—Black-ringed Finch (*Stictoptera annulosa*), Red-tailed or Red-faced Finch (*Bathilda ruficauda*), Long-tailed Finch (*Poephila acuticauda*), Masked Finch (*P. personata*), Gouldian Finch (*P. gouldiæ*), and Crimson Finch (*Neaehmia phaeton*).

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A SYMPATHETIC EMU.—Among the feathered pets at Cawarral station, near Tungamull, on the Emu Park railway, is an Emu. Taken there as a chick some years ago, it has grown up to be a fine big stately bird, which holds its own among the denizens of the station yards. When the drought was at its worst, the vicissitudes to which birds and beasts with all their senses were exposed were very trying, and those of an old blind horse were extreme. How the Emu came to discover its pitiable condition is a mystery, but it did so, and acted towards it in a most obliging and charitable fashion. There was only one little hole on a wide area of country where the horse could get water, and for weeks while the drought continued the Emu led it there as its necessities demanded. It also guided the steed about the bush, warning it in intelligible language of fallen trees, and other dangers in its path. The Emu kept its companion from starving by guiding it to where some feed was to be had. An informant saw the horse unwittingly approaching a bushman's tent, whereupon the Emu called out, and made such "an 'ell of a row"

that the horse took warning, turned round, and followed his feathered mate. Since rain came, filling waterholes and giving a spring to the grass, the Emu has relaxed in his attentions. Another blind horse has joined the first, and as both are fat and comfortable the feathered friend may think his attentions are no longer required.—*Rockhampton Bulletin*, 5/10/03.

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CAN AND DO BIRDS REASON?—Under this title Mr. F. M. Littler, F.E.S., has, in a recent number of *The Zoologist*, tried to throw some light on a question which, as a section of the problem as to the dividing line between instinct and intelligence in the animal world, has engaged some of the foremost minds of the century, and concerning which the results arrived at are not too definite. Possibly our Tasmanian observer is right in considering that "in any newly-settled country or colony, where environments are constantly changing, there is a wider scope for observations on the intelligence of birds than in any highly and long cultivated area." The local instances he cites (which might be very considerably added to from Australian observations) both for and against the contention that birds do reason, involve some knotty points. But the whole question is one which will probably never be completely solved until some much more intimate knowledge be possessed of mental and psychological activities throughout their whole range. The conclusion Mr. Littler arrives at is:—"The more the subject is investigated, the firmer grows my conviction that animals (such as quadrupeds and birds) which are continually associated with man . . . are possessed of an intelligence and power of reasoning, small and feeble though these may be." The problem opens up a fascinating field of study, and may with advantage be investigated much further. Every reliable observation will be a help—even though the deductions drawn therefrom be merely those of analogy.

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THE EXALTATION OF THE SUB-SPECIES.—Writing on this subject, Dr. Jonathan Dwight, jun. (*The Auk*, vol. xxi., pp. 65, 66) says that "signs are not wanting at the present time that its value . . . is impaired by the undue prominence which it has attained. . . . It seems to be forgotten that the sub-species is only a *convenient* recognition of geographical variation within the limits of the species. . . . We must beware lest we name that which exists only in our expectant mind. . . . To name every degree of incipency is pushing matters to a point when the name, by overshadowing the fact, ceases to be the convenient handle for which it is primarily intended. . . . We forget that, as names multiply, they lose in definiteness of meaning. . . . It is not inconceivable that our successors may reduce our splinters to sawdust, and bestow a name upon each and every grain. . . . True science does not receive much up-

lifting from the mere renaming of a few handfuls of skin and feathers. . . . We confuse nomenclature and ornithology, forgetful that the names, which should be the tools of the ornithologist, may easily become the playthings of the systematist. . . . There is more serious work on hand than the naming of sub-species if the advance of ornithology is to keep pace with that of kindred sciences."

Close Season for Native Game in Victoria.

REFERENCE was made in the last issue of *The Emu* (pp. 198-9) to the alteration of close seasons for Ducks and Quails in Victoria, and pointing out that an egregious blunder had been made.

The Government, having the courage of its opinion, be it said to its credit, now admits that a serious mistake was made in opening the shooting season for these birds earlier than usual. It is too late to remedy the evil this season, as far as Ducks are concerned, but in future the close season will extend until the end of January, while it will be illegal to shoot Quails in any part of Victoria before the 1st April.

Dr. T. J. Ryan, Nhill, a keen sportsman and observer of bird-life, states that it has been a most exceptional year for birds of all kinds in the Wimmera district, and, on that account, instead of opening the season earlier, from a national point of view it would have been better to have had no open season this year; thereby native game would have enjoyed a great chance of multiplication. This very excellent suggestion in favour of the birds may commend itself to the Government the next prolific season there is for bird-life in the State.

The Government of the day may always rely on the hearty co-operation of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union, and doubtless of other associations having kindred aims, in the matter of the proper protection of birds.

Correspondence.

ANOMALOUS CLOSE SEASONS.

To the Editors of The Emu.

SIRS,—Reverting to the close season for Duck in New South Wales, it will be seen in *The Emu*, vol. ii., p. 194, in the comparative table of "close seasons" for game in the different States, that Ducks are protected from 1st August to 31st January, but on my arrival in the Riverina district I was surprised to find that Duck-shooting was in full blast on the 28th December. The local Game Inspector stated that the New South Wales Act permitted shooting on that date. Who is correct? Many Ducklings a few days old were seen, particularly Black Ducklings, and large numbers of "flappers" were in evidence, as is usual at that time of year.—I am, &c.,

A. MATTINGLEY.

Melbourne, 1/2/04.