

Another bird seen in great numbers was the Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Graucalus melanops*), locally known as the Cherry-Hawk—a vernacular name probably new to most of us. The photographer was able also to provide a picture of this bird, with her shallow and well-hidden nest.

Several attempts were made to get a snap-shot of a Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*), which spent the daytime in some willows close to the house, but for once the photographer was unsuccessful—it could hardly have been otherwise when the trees were so dense and the bird so shy. He was more successful with a pair of young Magpie-Larks (*Grallina picata*), and good pictures were obtained.

One of the conclusions forced upon me as a result of this trip is that those interested in the preservation of our native birds would do well to impress upon our legislators not only the necessity of keeping our game laws up to their present standard, or making them more inclusive and more stringent, but of taking such action as will, as far as possible, keep in check that wily pest, the fox. Four Black Ducks had last season built their nests in the home paddock, and all four birds were taken by foxes.

The White-eye (*Zosterops coerulescens*, Lath.)

BY H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., W. Devonport, Tasmania.

THIS familiar little bird has been very numerous this autumn and winter; perhaps the exceptionally rough, wet weather has caused them to band together more than usual for warmth and protection, but certain it is that their shrill calls have been heard on all sides in our gardens or among the scrub.

They have also been very numerous this winter at Table Cape, 42 miles west of this, and Mr. H. C. Thompson tells me that a large party of *Zosterops* have been attacking the berries hanging upon a verandah-climber in Launceston, and were attracting much attention from the passers-by from their numbers and shrill cries, causing much speculation also as to their identity; they were variously christened "Honey-eaters," "Cherry-pickers," and "Goldfinches"! Having devoured all the berries upon that particular climber (which was bare of leaves, but was probably Virginian creeper), of which they were very fond, they next turned their attention to the honeysuckle, the bitter fruit of which disappeared also under their vigorous attacks.

Several vernacular names have been bestowed upon our little friend. Besides "White-eye," the appellation usually in vogue, there are "Silver-eye" and "Girdle-eye." These have all arisen from the fact that a ring of very short white feathers surrounds each orb, and forms a very conspicuous

feature in an otherwise protectively coloured creature. Why these startling white rings should have developed in an otherwise quiet plumage, consisting almost entirely of greenish tints and browns, is a conundrum.

Still another, but less pleasant, nickname for our subject is "Cherry-picker," bestowed by the bush-folk on account of its fondness for that small fruit; half a dozen birds will get into a tree, and, stabbing away at the ripest cherries with their almost needle-sharp bills, will soon spoil the crop. We do not object to what is eaten, but so much is stabbed and left hanging damaged and useless on the tree. Cherries are not the only toll levied; one summer a regular army of "Pickers" invaded my bush garden, and hollowed out nearly all the ripe gooseberries as they hung on the bushes; in many cases just a small hole was pierced and the contents of the berry extracted through that, leaving the shell hanging apparently intact; grapes were treated in the same way.

However, we do not bear little Girdle-eye (which is a literal translation of the generic name *Zosterops*) any ill-will on this account, for he is such a splendid insect-destroyer during a great part of the year, and may be seen hunting the apple trees for woolly-blight, peering into bark crevices, and pecking away at knobby protuberances where this insect foe lurks. He will also search gum saplings and other young trees for the scale-insects, which cause much damage, and when he hunts in large parties, as is the case this autumn, an immense quantity of our insect enemies must be destroyed.

Several species of White-eye are found in Australia, but only one in Victoria and Tasmania. As to classification, some naturalists place it among the *Meliphagidæ*, or Honey-eaters—a very conspicuous family among our birds. Colonel Legge separates it from the Honey-eaters, and places it in a family, *Zosteropidæ*, of the Swallow-like *Passeres*, possessed of nine primaries.

A frail little nest of this species was found about 4 feet from the ground in a swamp tea-tree (*Melaleuca ericifolia*), supported only by one slender twig, although partially tied to two upright stems by means of bark fibres. The structure was very slight, so much so that one could see through it, and was formed of fine stringybark fibres (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) and mosses, with a few small circular white spider cocoons stuck on the outside; the lining was of horsehair, and the nest contained two blue eggs and a young bird. It is strange that the White-eye nearly always has some of the spider cocoons placed on the nest as if for adornment; I think it probable that they are carried when full of eggs to the young in the home, and the eggs being disposed of, the empty cocoons are wiped off the beak of the parent bird on the outside of the nest.

In November, at Table Cape, a White-eye sang sweetly in an apple tree close to my cottage; the song, though sweet, is somewhat inward, a kind of meditation in solitude, so that one must be fairly close to the bird in order to hear it. The same singer was heard in a hazel bush close to the house on the evening of 24th December, a little before sunset. Some of the notes had the wild liquid sweetness of those of the Song-Thrush (on a very reduced scale, of course); others appeared like an imitation of the crescendo series uttered by the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*). This was altogether a very remarkable performance, and appeared to indicate hitherto unsuspected powers of vocal mimicry in this interesting little bird.

It is a moot point whether or not *Zosterops* is a true native of New Zealand. Sir Walter Buller contended that it was an inhabitant of the South Island until 1856, when it crossed Cook Strait and spread over the North Island also; other ornithologists believe that it crossed the Tasman Sea from Australia shortly before that time, and had not previously been found in either island. If so, this was an extraordinary flight for such a tiny bird, but perhaps not much more remarkable than that of the Shining Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx lucidus*, Gm.), which crosses every year that great stretch of troubled water in order to deposit its eggs in the snug canopied nest of the Grey Warbler.

The Origin and Development of Parasitical Habits in the Cuculidæ.

BY C. L. BARRETT, MELBOURNE.

FOR nearly two thousand years certain remarkable habits of the family *Cuculidæ* have exercised the minds of naturalists and philosophers. The origin of these habits has remained hidden behind an impenetrable veil of mystery, which is only now being slowly and patiently lifted by means of the observations and researches of a number of ornithologists in different parts of the world. The first actual record which has come to us out of the past of the unusual ways of these strange birds is contained in a scientific treatise written by one Aelian, a Latin author, who flourished during the second century. In this ancient monograph it is stated that the Cuckoo always lays her eggs in the nests of other birds, being too indolent to undertake the care of her own offspring.

We do not find many other important references to the Cuckoo until the time of Gilbert White, the famous old naturalist-parson of Selborne, whose charming series of letters on the wild life of his Hampshire home, known to us as "The Natural