

This Robin frequents forest country of the Atherton and Herberton districts. It seldom goes into a scrub, therefore the above discovery on the edge of the scrub appears an exception to the rule. In the open forest country I found five nests in November (1908); in each case the nest was built in a forest tree several miles from any scrub. Three nests contained each two young birds, while two were apparently nearly ready for eggs.

NOTE.—The foregoing five types of new eggs are in the collection of Mr. H. L. White, Belltrees, Scone, New South Wales.

OBSERVATION.—In my article, "The Barron River Valley," I omitted to mention the common Miner (*Myzantha garrula*), which I observed frequently in the forest tracts. I do not think this bird has been previously recorded for North Queensland.

Review.

[“The Confessions of a Beachcomber: Scenes and Incidents in the Career of an Unprofessional Beachcomber in Tropical Queensland.” By E. J. Banfield. With a map and 53 illustrations. T. Fisher Unwin, Adelphi-terrace, London. 1908.]

MR. E. J. Banfield is a member of the A.O.U., and has contributed valuable field observations on birds to this journal,* therefore his “Confessions” will, no doubt, be read with special interest.

“The Confessions of a Beachcomber” comprises a charming book written in a unique style, partly poetic and partly descriptive of the sights, sounds, and moods of Nature as she discovered herself to the author during his residence of eight years or so on a romantic islet on the border of the coral sea, North-Eastern Queensland. The name of Mr. Banfield’s island-home is Dunk.† It has an area slightly over 3 square miles, is verdure clad from the coral strand to the summit of the highest hill, and is situated $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the mainland, in Rockingham Bay—a district celebrated for its ornithological as well as its botanical wealth.

The book contains chapters on all branches of nature-study from ethnology downwards, but this review naturally will deal only with the ornithology of Mr. Banfield’s “Confessions,” which are written in popular and pleasing phraseology. The chapter on birds is divided into various suggestive sub-heads, such as “Birds and Their Rights,” “The Daybreak Fugue,” “The Nestful Tree,” “White Nutmeg-Pigeon,” “The Flame-Trees’ Visitors,” &c.

Here is a bit of the life of the beautiful and lively Varied Honey-eater (*Ptilotis versicolor*):—

“Once aroused, the Varied Honey-eater is wide awake. His restlessness is equalled only by his impertinent exclamations. He shouts his own aboriginal title, ‘Go-bidger-oo!’ ‘Put on your boots!’ ‘Which—which—

* One of his more important finds was the discovery of a colony of Swiftlets (*Collocalia francica*) nesting in a cavern on Dunk Island. *Vide Emu*, viii., pp. 146-148.—EDS.

† Discovered and named by Capt. Cook after George Montagu Dunk, First Earl of Sandwich, Second Baron and First Earl of Halifax, who was First Lord of the Admiralty at the time of its discovery.

which way—which way—which way you go!’ ‘Get your whip!’ ‘Get your whip!’ ‘You go!’ ‘You go!’ ‘None of your cheek!’ ‘None of your cheek!’ ‘Here—here!’ And darts out with a fluster from among the hibiscus bushes on the beach away up to the top of the melaleuca-tree; pauses to sample the honey from the yellow flowers of the gin-gee, and down to the scarlet blooms of the flame-tree, across the pandanus palms and to the shady creek for his morning bath and drink, shouting without ceasing his orders and observations. He is always with us, though not always as noisy as in the prime of the year—a cheerful, prying, frisky creature, always going somewhere or doing something in a red-hot hurry, and always making a song of it—a veritable babbler. His love-making is passionate and impulsive, joyous almost to rowdyism.”

Under the title of “The Nestful Tree” we read:—

“Here in the Moreton Bay ash, taken advantage of by the Shining Calornis (*C. metallica*), a white-headed, rufous-backed Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus girrenera*) nests, and the graceful, fierce-looking pair comes and goes among the glittering, noisy throng without exciting any special comment. Of course, it would be impossible to detect any certain note of remonstrance, for the smaller birds are generally commenting on something or other in acidulous tones.

“Another occupant of this nestful tree is the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) whose eggs are laid deep down in a hollow. Two or three hundred of the Shining Starlings, a brood of Sea-Eagles, white-headed, snowy-breasted, and red-backed, and a couple, perhaps three, screeching White Cockatoos, represent the annual output of this single tree, in addition, of course, to its own crop of sweet-savoured flowers (on which birds, bees, beetles and butterflies, and flying-foxes feast) and seeds in thousands in cunning cups.”

More about the Red-backed Sea-Eagle:—

“Two days of rough weather, and the blue bay had become discoloured with mud churned up by the sea, and the Eagle found fishing poor and unremunerative sport. Even his keen eyesight could not distinguish in the murky water the coming and going of the fish. Just below the house is a small area of partly cleared flat, and there we saw the brave fellow roaming and scooping about with more than usual interest in the affairs of dry land. At this time of year green snakes are fairly plentiful. Harmless and handsome, they prey upon small birds and frogs, and the Eagle had abandoned his patrol of the sad-hued water to take toll of the snakes. After a graceful swoop down to the tips of a low-growing bush, he alighted on the dead branch of a bloodwood (eucalypt), 150 yards or so away, and, with the help of a telescope, his occupation was revealed—he was greedily tearing to pieces a wriggling snake, gulping it in three-quarter-yard lengths. Here was the reason for the trustfulness and respect of the little birds. The Eagle was destroying the chief bugbear of their existence—the sneaking greeny-yellow murderer of their kind and eater of their eggs, whose colour and form so harmonizes with leaves and thin branches that he constantly evades the sharpest-eyed of them all, and squeezes out their lives and swallows them whole. But the big red detective could see the vile thing 50 and even 100 yards away, and once seen—well, one enemy the less. Briskly stopping his beak on the branch of the tree on which he rested, and setting his breast plumage in order, much as one might shake a crumb from his waistcoat, the Eagle adjusted his search-lights and sat motionless. In five minutes a slight jerk of the neck indicated a successful observation, and he soared out, wheeled like a flash, and, half turning on his side, hustled down in the foliage of a tall wattle (*Acacia*) and back again to his perch. Another snake was crumpled up in his talons, and he devoured it in writhing, twirling pieces. The telescope gave unique advantage during this entertainment, one of the tragedies of Nature, or rather the lawful

execution of a designing and crafty criminal. Within ten minutes the performance was repeated for the third time, and then either the supply of snakes ran out or the bird was satisfied. He shrewdly glanced this way and that, craning and twisting his neck, and seeming to adjust the lenses of his eyes for near and distant observation. No movement among the leaves seemed to escape him. Two yards and a half or perhaps three yards of live snakes constituted a repast. At any rate, after twenty minutes' passive watchfulness, he sailed up over the trees and away in the direction of his home in the socialistic community of the Shining Calornis."

Many of Mr. Banfield's observations are extremely interesting. Instances—(1.) He proves that the Shining Starling (*Calornis*) is a great plant-distributor. It brings all sorts of seeds and berries from afar to its "nestful tree," and from the ground below there springs quite a nursery of strange plants. (2.) The White Nutmeg-Pigeon (*Myristicivora spilorrhoea*), too, is a plant-distributor. Besides the wild nutmeg (*Myristica insipida*), on which it chiefly lives, it carries other nuts and seeds—quandong, palm, native cabbage (*Scaevola*), Burdekin plum, &c. (3.) On one of the islets, where sea-birds were used to breeding upon the ground, goats had been introduced, which interfered much with the brooding birds. To overcome the difficulty the birds (Terns) placed their nests upon bushes or dwarf trees.

Many pretty bird homes are described. For instance:—A White Nutmeg-Pigeon brooding on her nest, at the base of an orchid (*Dendrobium*), fantastically shaded with plumes of the rich old-gold blooms. Another beautiful picture—a set of pale greenish-blue eggs of the Reef-Heron (*Demigretta*), seen sheltered by the same kind of plant dressed in golden flowers.

The only technical portion of the author's bird chapter is a census of 130 birds found frequenting his island. The census might, the author concludes, be raised to about 150 species were he to shoot birds for identification, but to destroy beautiful bird-life forms no part of Mr. Banfield's "religion," all his observations having been carried on by the aid of a good telescope and pair of field-glasses. This immunity from harm has caused many birds to come about his dwelling, and even to remain on a fence-post when he opens and shuts the gate. It perhaps should be mentioned here that Dunk Island and two adjacent islands have been proclaimed a sanctuary for birds, with Mr. Banfield as honorary protector.

No nature-lover can afford to be without this bulky, well written, and fascinating book, which can be obtained for the reasonable sum of eighteen shillings only.

Publications Received.

- Auk*, The, XXIII., No. 3; XXV., Nos. 2, 3, 4; XXVI., No. 1.
Australian Naturalist, The, I., Parts 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14.
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Bird Protection in Massachusetts, 1907.
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