

I lay in bed watching the passing birds, a stream of Shearwaters, many yards in height and breadth, was making north, and for over half an hour this stream passed by unbroken. It would not be any exaggeration to estimate the numbers in millions.

As to the Wedge-tailed Shearwater's tastes in the matter of food, I had an interesting experience. While we were out fishing, about a mile from the island, one of these birds came along, and settled on the water about 30 yards away. Mr. Glover threw some bits of boiled crayfish in its direction, and it came scuttling along the surface, and, reaching the spot where the bait had sunk, it dived under, presently reappearing with the crayfish in its beak. A few gulps, and that piece disappeared, to be followed by others flung to it by us. Bits of barracouta were next thrown to the bird, and greedily swallowed. Several others then arrived on the scene, and some Gulls joined them. I had just hooked a medium-sized shark, which Mr. Glover despatched with a harpoon. Taking its liver out, he broke it up and flung pieces to the birds. It was most amusing to see two Shearwaters catch hold of one piece, too large for either to negotiate, and go under with it, fighting and struggling, until they again rose to the surface gulping down what they had torn from the portion. I am quite sure that the bird we first attracted swallowed its own weight in various kinds of food that afternoon. It was unable to fly, and sat contentedly cleaning up after the feast.

I saw a somewhat mummified *Puffinus assimilis*, which had been picked up dead on the island; and on the way home we saw two small white-breasted Shearwaters flying by. These were doubtless *P. assimilis*.

Hypotaenidia philippinensis breeds on the island, but we did not see any birds. Mr. Bailey sent me a set of eggs taken in 1908. *Cisticola exilis*, *Anthus australis*, *Rhipidura tricolor*, *R. albiscapa*, and a *Ptilotis* were also noted on the island.

Bird-Life in the Riverina.

BY (CAPT.) S. A. WHITE, R.A.O.U., ADELAIDE.

MOST Australians are aware that a rich tract of country, known as the Riverina, lies between the main branches of the great waterway of Australia. This country was once the home of countless thousands of Emus, Bustards, and other birds and mammals. To-day only a few Emus and kangaroos remain on some of the stations, to the praise of the owners and the managers, who are trying to save them. The part of the Riverina which my wife and I visited on our way back from attending the R.A.O.U. session of 1910 was then, unfortunately, undergoing a dry spell, and we did not see the aquatic birds at their best. On leaving a little wayside railway station we drove out on to an undulating plain, dotted here and there with clumps of box. Deep wheel-

marks and cattle-tracks, then hard and baked, showed how soft the ground must be in a wet season. The country did not change until we approached the river, when we passed through a thick belt of red-gum trees. Not a bird had been seen before, but now the Noisy Miner (*Myzantha garrula*) made itself heard, the clear note of a Parrot (*Platycercus flaveolus*) was heard in the timber; a graceful Pied Grallina was busy feeding two fluffy young ones on a bough overhead. Driving on to the punt at the ferry, we were hauled slowly over the Murrumbidgee. The gate of the punt was opened, and we were soon dashing through the gums on the other side, and on to the plain beyond, passing through clumps of box, and, later on, native pine on the sandy ridges. We passed by large depressions, which in the wet season are lakes hundreds of acres in extent, with a grand fringe of stately gums. We reached a well-kept, comfortable homestead on the bank of the river, and were heartily welcomed.

In the early morn many bird-notes floated through the open window of our room. Above all others could be heard the melodious note of the Shrike-Thrush (*Collyriocichla harmonica*). Thanks to the great kindness of the manager, who placed his traps, horses, &c., at our disposal, we were enabled to work the country for miles around. The first things to attract our attention were the large flocks of Rose-breasted Cockatoos which we flushed from the ground. They flapped off with noisy screeching, to again alight in search of their breakfast. Although these birds were flocking, odd pairs were found nesting in hollow limbs. Grass-Parrots (*Psephotus hæmatonotus*) were numerous, but still in pairs, showing that they had not yet congregated after nesting. Cockatoo-Parrots (*Calopsittacus novæ-hollandiæ*) were met with in companies of 6 or 8, and they were also found nesting. Choughs (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) were to be found in small colonies in nearly every clump of pine or box, but only stray nests were observed, where birds had laid for the second time that season. In close association with the last-named species we found the Grey Struthidea (*Struthidea cinerea*). These birds had nearly all begun to nest for the second time, although they had the first brood with them. The Struthidea uses the same nest in successive seasons, only replacing the lining, which consists of dry grass, and seems to prefer the pine clumps in which to nest—in fact, each of the many nests which came under our notice was placed in a pine-tree. Immense flocks of *Artamus superciliosus* were seen, and *A. tenebrosus* were in numbers. Among the more thickly timbered country a pair of *Lalage humeralis* was seen occasionally. The fine Crested-Pigeons (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) were found in pairs feeding on the ground. The Brown Song-Lark (*C. cantillans*) was found breeding, as also was *C. rufescens*. All the nests of the latter species contained young. The Australian Pipit was also breeding.

All along the river, where the timber was thick, we found the Yellow-rumped Parrakeet (*Platycercus flaveolus*), which seemed to

be very fond of the Scotch thistle seeds. We noticed small parties of 4 or 5, and often a single pair, of those beautiful Parrakeets known to the settlers as Green Leeks (*Polytelis barrabandi*) nearly always on the wing, and travelling very swiftly from the river outback. We came to the conclusion that they were returning to some feeding-ground after watering at the river. This surmise proved correct, for we drove out into the back country, and, calling at a settler's home, we were informed that some very pretty birds were destroying his crops. Sure enough, a flock of between 20 and 30 Green Leeks was busy amongst the standing wheat, which at this time was ripening. I believe that these birds are becoming very scarce in districts where they once were numerous. A few specimens of the Red-vented Parrakeet (*P. hæmatorrhous*) were noted, and I was told that they nest in the district. I was shown a young bird in captivity which had been taken from the nest by an aborigine. The Sulphur-crested Cockatoo was met with all along the river, and we saw the Spur-winged Plover. Large flocks of Maned Geese were also seen on the river. Black Duck, Grey Teal, Chestnut-breasted Teal, Marsh Terns, White-faced Herons, Pacific Herons, Cranes, and Emus were all observed in the marshy country. Crows were everywhere. White-backed Magpies were fairly plentiful, and Noisy Miners were seen in almost every tree. The Friar-Bird (*Tropidorhynchus corniculatus*) was noticed on the tops of some of the high gum-trees. Out on the plains we saw the White-fronted Ephthianura, and we were told that *E. tricolor* was often seen there. The Pied Fantail (*Rhipidura tricolor*) and the Welcome Swallow were observed round the homestead. We were only in this fertile country for three days, and every hour of that time was well occupied.

Stray Feathers.

The Dottrel (*Peltohyas australis*) in Riverina.—I have observed many Dottrel nests here since 1909, and have taken particular notice of them all. I have never seen any with five eggs. All except one nest contained three eggs, and one nest contained four. The Dottrel seems to have no particular breeding season here. I occasionally drop on their nests all through the year. Their principal enemy here is the fox, owing to the birds making their nests on the ground.—L. K. TURNER. Booligal, 14/2/11.

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Stilts Breeding near Melbourne.—I saw some nests and eggs lately of the White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) in a swamp 6 miles from Melbourne, and obtained a fine clutch of five eggs, two nests, and four young birds (about a week old) for the National Museum. The Curator, Mr. J. A. Kershaw, intends having a life-group made of these. The birds, I learn, have been