

Occurrence of *Cisticola* in Tasmania.

BY (MISS) J. A. FLETCHER, R.A.O.U., SPRINGFIELD, TASMANIA.

SINCE September, 1911, observations have pointed to the existence of *Cisticola exilis* in the Springfield district, Tasmania.

A few days prior to 25th September a schoolboy informed me that he had found, in a tussock, a nest containing three blue-coloured eggs. I asked him whether he could find it again. He said that he did not think so, as he had come upon it suddenly while hunting for cows, and had not taken notice of the surroundings. This reminded me that, on 1st March, 1911, I had flushed a small bird on the grassy flats of the Brid River. When the bird flew I had said to myself, "A *Cisticola*!" then "Rubbish! these birds are not found in Tasmania." Some little distance away I saw some Emu-Wrens (*Stipiturus malachurus*), and thought that I might have mistaken one for a *Cisticola*, though their actions were so different from what I remembered of the *Cisticola* in Queensland.

A few days afterwards a young lady asked me whether I did not think that the "Marsh-Bird" laid pretty eggs. I replied, "Yes, a purplish-brown," thinking it was the *Calamanthus* she was referring to. "Oh, no!" she said, "I mean the other 'Marsh-Bird.' It builds a small nest, low down, and lays three or four blue eggs, with reddish spots towards one end." Further questioning revealed the fact that she had found, some years ago, two nests. Her family always called the birds "Hedge-Sparrows" or "Marsh-Birds" with the drooping tail, to distinguish them from the *Calamanthus*, locally called the "Cocktail." I determined to hunt for the bird; but it was 19th November before my sister and I flushed one and followed it across a grassy, dry swamp. This year (1912) both my sister and I have seen the bird several times; but I have not yet been able to obtain a specimen. The bird appears to be slightly larger than the specimen in the Hobart Museum, and the plumage a deeper brown; but it resembles the figure in Dr. J. A. Leach's "Australian Bird Book." The bird is not very common; but the grassy flats in this district are of no great extent.

In October, 1911, the schoolboys at South Springfield were asked whether they had ever found a bird's nest something like a Wren's, but containing eggs of a blue colour. Three boys answered "Yes," and one boy said, "But, teacher, the eggs have reddish-brown spots upon them at one end." This confirmed previous statements. On 2nd November, 1912, I was told that a "Marsh-Bird" had reared a brood in a small clump of blackberries. The nest was found when new; it contained three blue eggs with reddish spots. The young were reared. I took the old nest; it did not contain any fragments of egg-shell, but on the ground beneath a few pieces of blue shell were discovered. The nest was composed of shreds of bark, feathers, and some grass. On 25th November a schoolboy reported the finding of

a nest situated in the centre of a tussock on the edge of a potato-field. "A brownish-coloured bird flew out of the nest, which contained two blue eggs with blackish spots." The lad was asked to bring me the nest and contents, but when he went for them the eggs had been taken.

I hope soon to be able to forward a specimen of the strange bird for identification. These birds have a peculiar habit of throwing leaves over their shoulders when busily hunting for food.

Notes on the Cassowary (*Casuarius australis*, Wall).

BY H. L. WHITE, R.A.O.U., SCONE, N.S.W.

FOR years, prior to 1911, I offered as much as £10 each for full clutches of Cassowary eggs, had upwards of a dozen men on the look-out for me, and obtained one clutch only. The reports were usually, "Birds often seen, but eggs impossible to find." The aborigines even appeared able to secure only odd eggs.

Since 1911 I have obtained five clutches and several odd eggs, all of which show variations in size and colour. Following are the measurements of average-sized specimens from my six sets:—(1) 5.03 x 3.57; (2) 5.15 x 3.68; (3) 4.87 x 3.67; (4) 5.27 x 3.67; (5) 5.58 x 3.78; (6) 5.52 x 3.92. No. 6 is the largest egg of any Australian species in my collection. The colour ranges from pale to very dark green, and is much darker in fresh than in incubated specimens. Cassowary eggs, like those of the Emu, lose their colour completely when exposed to the weather for a length of time. I have an almost white specimen, found in what was supposed to be an old nest. The surface of the shell varies from comparatively smooth to extremely rough and shagreen-like. I have not obtained more than four eggs to the clutch.

Early in May, 1911, I engaged Mr. E. D. Frizelle, who had previously collected for me, to spend a few months in the Rockingham Bay district observing the habits of these most interesting birds. Mr. Frizelle fixed his camp at Clump Point, at the northern end of the bay, and spent five months in the locality, making a close study of the birds during the whole time. He was fortunate in obtaining two clutches of eggs, and confirmed the theory I have always held, that the finding of these rare eggs is almost entirely a matter of chance. Mr. Frizelle is observant, energetic, and a bushman with an extensive knowledge of North Queensland scrubs. He had been well coached, and placed in a locality where the birds were plentiful. If he, therefore, experienced such difficulty (as his notes show) in obtaining eggs, it tends to uphold my argument.

In addition to the difficulty in finding eggs provided with perfect protective colouring, concealed in almost impenetrable scrub, there is the fact that the female bird, when disturbed from her nest, invariably deserts the eggs, and in some instances