

Judging from the action of the birds that a nest was being built close at hand, I began a thorough search in the long grass. This search soon revealed the wonderful domed, cradle-like nest, low down amongst the green herbage. It was placed about four inches from the ground, and was composed of fairly coarse grasses felted together and lined with fine white thistledown and seeds. From a short distance this nest had the appearance of being quite white, studded with dark spots, which were the seeds, the surrounding grasses and leaves of the plants being drawn down over the nest and fastened with cobweb threads. The opening in the side was large for the size of the bird, and faced the east. So frail was the whole structure that it appeared quite incapable of supporting the weight even of the tiny owner, much less withstanding the heavy summer rains or breezes. The nest contained four eggs of a blue ground colour, spotted towards the larger end with brown markings, and quite oval in shape. By the actions of the birds it would appear that, although the eggs were far incubated at that time, the nest was being added to by the birds, in the evenings chiefly.

A Bush Walk.

BY H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U., WEST DEVONPORT (TAS.)

AT the beginning of the fourth week of September I took a day out in the bush near Devonport in order to see what spring migrants had arrived and which were still to come. The growth hereabouts consists mainly of stringybarks and white gums, under which is a scrub of prickly and varnish wattles, *Pultenæas* of various species, tea-trees of several kinds, *Cassinias*, and an occasional honeysuckle bush. The prickly wattles were a beautiful sight on that sunny morning, being loaded with "spikes" of pale yellow blossom. The notes of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) rippled pleasingly from various trees, the sound seeming to be permeated with the very soul of spring. The somewhat plaintive series of notes (usually eight in succession, then a pause) uttered by the pretty Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx plagosus*) was also frequently heard, although this bird does not thrust itself upon our notice as does the larger Fan-tailed Cuckoo. The Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo (*C. basalis*) is also plentiful here, but whether its call is exactly similar to that of *C. plagosus* is a moot point. I think not, but there is a great likeness in the notes of all the *Chalcococcyx* genus. For instance, the cry of the Shining Bronze (*C. lucidus*), which visits New Zealand each year, is well described by Sir Walter Buller, and his description would apply equally well to those of our Tasmanian visitors:—"The cry is a remarkable one, the bird appearing to be endowed with a peculiar kind of ventriloquism. It consists of eight or ten long silvery notes quickly repeated.

The first of these appears to come from a considerable distance; each successive one brings the voice nearer, till it issues from the spot where the performer is actually perched, perhaps only a few yards away." This ventriloquial quality I have frequently noticed in the call of the Bronze-Cuckoo on our coast, and it is also very perceptible in individual songs of our sweet little lyrist, the Striated Field-Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*).

To resume our bush walk. Besides the three species of Cuckoos already mentioned, there is another, the largest of the family which comes to our island, and that is the well-known Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*), with its scale of rapid crescendo notes so often repeated as to be positively wearisome on a warm day. This kind has a great affection for the telegraph and electric-light wires which border our roads, and it is difficult to take a walk from September to April without passing several members of this "shrieking sisterhood" (or brotherhood) seated thus, and vociferating for all they are worth.

The Summer-Bird (*Graucalus parvirostris*) is another of our September arrivals, and lends grace to the landscape with its pretty soft-grey plumage and undulating flight. This bird has two peculiarities—one is the call, which is quite unlike that of any other genus with which I am acquainted, and may truly be described as *sui generis*. The best approach I have seen to description is that calling it "a soft rolling or purring note." The other distinction of the *Graucalus* is its invariable habit, after alighting on a tree or stump, of flicking up first one wing, then the other, before finally folding them down upon each other. This little action, the object of which is a mystery, is performed with a grace which goes well with its elegant contour and colouring.

At noon the blue sky became overcast, and a cold wind from the north sprang up, bringing with it a heavy and prolonged shower. For a time I stood under the trees; then the rain cleared away and the sun appeared, but the fresh northerly breeze continued. While watching the splendid aerial circling of a pair of Harriers (*Circus gouldi*) at a great height, I became conscious of a couple of smaller birds below them, but still at a considerable altitude; these latter were also circling, but were gradually passing away to the south, or inland. Presently others were noticed going south in the same fashion, and I saw that they were Wood-Swallows (*Artamus sordidus*), which were arriving from the mainland with a fair wind. Many kept at a considerable height, others came down into the tree-tops, and presently a pair alighted on a dry branch not far from me. The male, after resting a little, took a skimming flight, and returned with an insect in his bill, alighting near his mate, who opened her beak and fluttered her wings like a fledgeling, when he popped the delicacy into her mouth. The attention was evidently appreciated by his travel-wearied lady. By-and-by the Harriers who had been circling in "the high blue dome" came lower, and one of them made a beautiful gliding flight towards the beach, in the

teeth of the wind, as if propelled by invisible power, for the wings were practically motionless. Perhaps the "flight-men" can explain how it is done, for to an onlooker it is difficult to see whence comes the motive power against a high wind.

The delicate "Pick-it-up" call of the Tree Diamond-Bird or Pardalote (*Pardalotus punctatus*) was another sound which greeted the ear on this spring day. One of the smallest of our migrants, its voice is usually first heard during the last week of August or the first few days of September. The Pipit (*Anthus australis*), too, is an early September arrival, and this year a party of these brown "Ground-Larks" was actually seen to arrive from over the water at 7 o'clock on the morning of 8th September. They were evidently much wearied, as the breeze was southerly, and against them, and they flew as closely as possible to the surface of the sea. It is interesting to have this piece of confirmatory evidence as to the migration of the little Pipit, which appears so averse, when here, to any but the very shortest flights.

Forgotten Feathers.

BY H. STUART DOVE, WEST DEVONPORT (TAS.)

IN looking through some old cuttings recently, I came across extracts from a letter by Capt. Baudin, of the French expedition sent out by Napoleon in 1800, with reference to his explorations of Bruni Island, Frederick Henry Bay, Maria Island, and the Schoutens. In this letter occur many notes on Tasmanian birds. The Black Swan, Pelican, Albatross, and Cormorant were seen in numbers; the Sandpiper ("*la Becassine*") was noted on the seashore, also the Pied Oyster-catcher ("*la pie de mer a pieds et bec rouge*"). We are in doubt as to what was meant by "*goneland gris*," but probably the large Pacific Gull in immature (grey) plumage, one of the most frequent birds on our beaches. The sailors thought highly of the Black Swan for the cooking pot, and took unfair advantage of that noble bird in the moulting season, "when it can only fly with difficulty, and when it can be captured while swimming, notwithstanding that it can acquit itself well even then. The Duck and Teal are, after the Swan, the birds whose flesh makes the best eating. The Cormorant and the Albatross, although less good, are not for that reason to be disregarded." (The French cooks must have exercised their art to some purpose in making these two species palatable!) "The Oyster-catcher, Boobie, and Gulls are scarcely worth catching."

Capt. Baudin also refers to some of the land-birds which he saw on the islands of D'Entrecasteaux Channel and upon the mainland of our island. "The commonest species are the Parrots, blue-breasted and yellow-breasted, and another kind with red wings and green plumage. The latter is much smaller than the former, which is as large as a Dove, and very beautiful." The voyagers