

Notes upon the Food of the Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*).

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TRULY it has rightly been said that there is too much supposition regarding the food of our native birds, this beautiful little Parrot, so appropriately named vernacularly the Swift Parrot, an annual visitor of my boyhood days to the Hawthorn district, Melbourne, in quest of the nectar secreted by the flowers of the eucalypt trees, being the cause of my falling into error, and thinking that this bird was purely a honey-eater. But since those early days I have, from observation and by dissection, proved that this species, originally known as *Nanodes discolor*, is not purely a honey-eater, but a seed and insect eater. The scale-like insect attacking the leaves of the eucalypt trees, and known as a lerp (*Lasiopsylla rotundipennis*), is much relished by this bird.

During the month of July, 1917, whilst skinning a few of this species for scientific purposes, the specimens being secured in the Wangandary district, near Wangaratta, in the north-east of Victoria, my attention was drawn to the contents of their crops, resembling moistened oatmeal or the kernels of small grass seeds.

One July evening, coming across a flock of fully 100 of this species about to roost for the night in a dense clump of yellow box eucalypt trees, I managed to secure a male bird by injuring the tip of its right wing. Amputating the injured portion upon my arrival home, I placed this bird in a cage vacated by a Canary. Next morning, to my surprise, this bird was shelling and eating the Canary seed left in the cage more swiftly and adeptly than any seed-eating Parrot that I am acquainted with. Next day this bird secured its liberty, and probably became food for the house cat. A few weeks later, securing another bird, I placed Canary seeds along with other seeds in the cage. The bird immediately selected the Canary seed, and showed its expertness by swiftly shelling the same.

This species, like the small Lorikeets of the *Glossopsittacus* genus, are, when placed in captivity, very cheeky, and not at all timid as regards food-eating. This bird lived solely upon Canary seed for over twelve months, preferring it to honey diluted in water. Owing to the want of flight exercise this bird became very fat, and died; upon dissection the organs were found to be fat-lined.

This clearly shows, from the way that these two wild birds, direct from the bush, so readily attacked Canary seed, that they were in the habit of eating some seed having a strong resemblance to Canary seed; also, by their expertness in shelling same, that this species is a seed-eater.

The many varied notes of this bird are, since its decease, oft repeated during the day by a Yellow Parrot (*Platycercus flaveolus*) that I have in captivity. The two birds shared the same cage, and at night it was amusing to see the little fellow cuddle up close to its big cage friend, as if for protection.