

### Interesting Conduct of the Southern Stone-Plover (*Burhinus magnirostris*)

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A station owner and his wife living in Central New South Wales had tamed a Stone Plover, or Bush Curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*) which, given the name of "Fraser," proved to be an extremely intelligent bird, and appeared to be strangely sensitive to certain things and people. One man who used to visit the station had evidently attracted Fraser's attention to a pair of

new leggings that creaked when he walked, as new leather sometimes does.

Whether Fraser took this to be an unknown bird hidden away one cannot say, but whenever this man came to the house Fraser exhibited every sign of frantic rage, and would follow him about screaming and trying to peck his boots.

This bird, after a residence of many years, fell a victim to a marauding fox. Two more Bush Curlews took up their abode in the station garden, a sweet old-fashioned one, full of lovely old trees, hedges, and shrubs. It seemed an idyllic sanctuary for the following little bird romance.

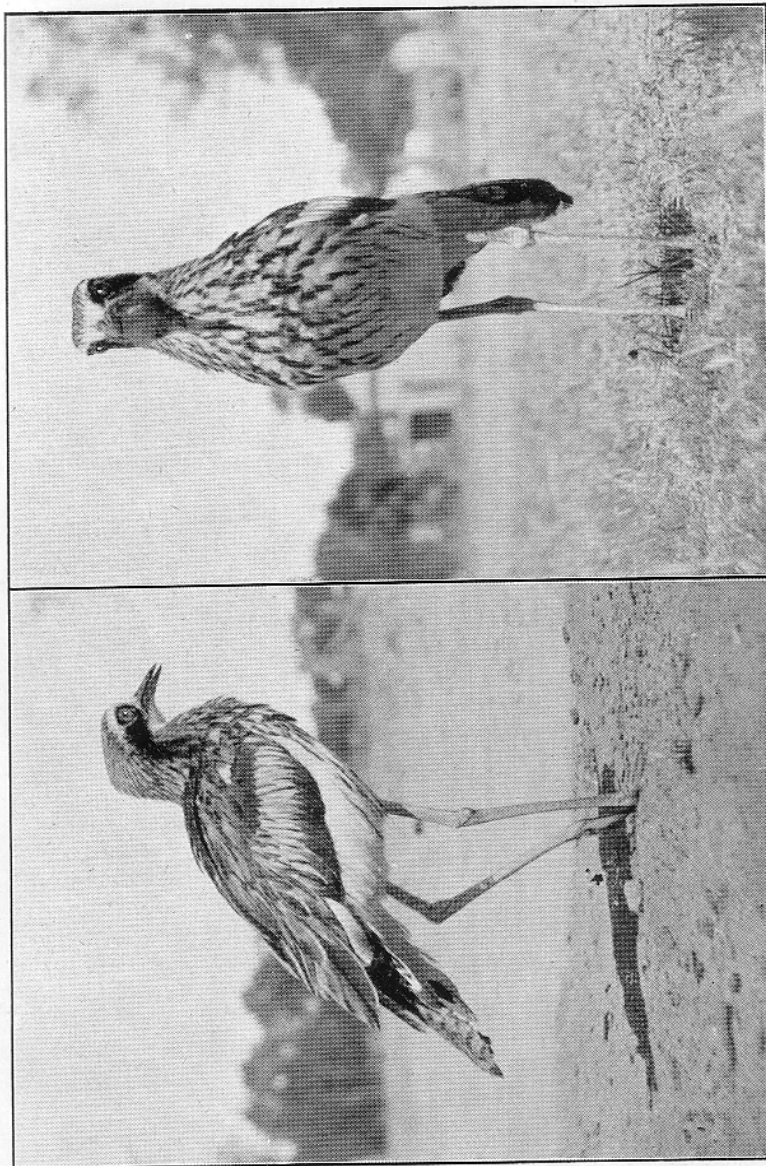
The two birds, "Lady Douglas" and "Fraser"—so called after the earlier one—were particular mates. One day there came in from the wilds a strange Curlew, of a very aggressive type, and he usurped the position of Lady Douglas's mate, and straightway they hunted Fraser to a solitary existence under the orange trees, while they assumed the lordship of the tennis court, and took up their abode under an olive tree.

Fraser dared not approach the tennis court, and he was literally hunted off their territory. One day, much to everyone's interest, an egg was laid in quite an exposed position on a patch of grass under the olive tree, and the fiercest guardianship was displayed over that egg by both parents. If you approached the egg as though to take it, the father ran about uttering harsh cries of anger, dragging his wings along the ground like a "gobbler" does in the poultry yard, while the mother bird would attack you, pecking savagely.

In due time, when the baby Curlew hatched out, the pride of the parent birds was a charming and touching sight. They ran up and down the court with the little one between them, and one of the prettiest episodes was one day when they had apparently decided that "baby" was old enough to be taken to view the outside world in the big garden. With little cries of encouragement, baby being very timid, and trying continually to flatten himself out on the paths, as they do when they hide, the parents, one on either side of the young one, edged him along the garden paths, and after much wandering returned him in safety to the tennis court.

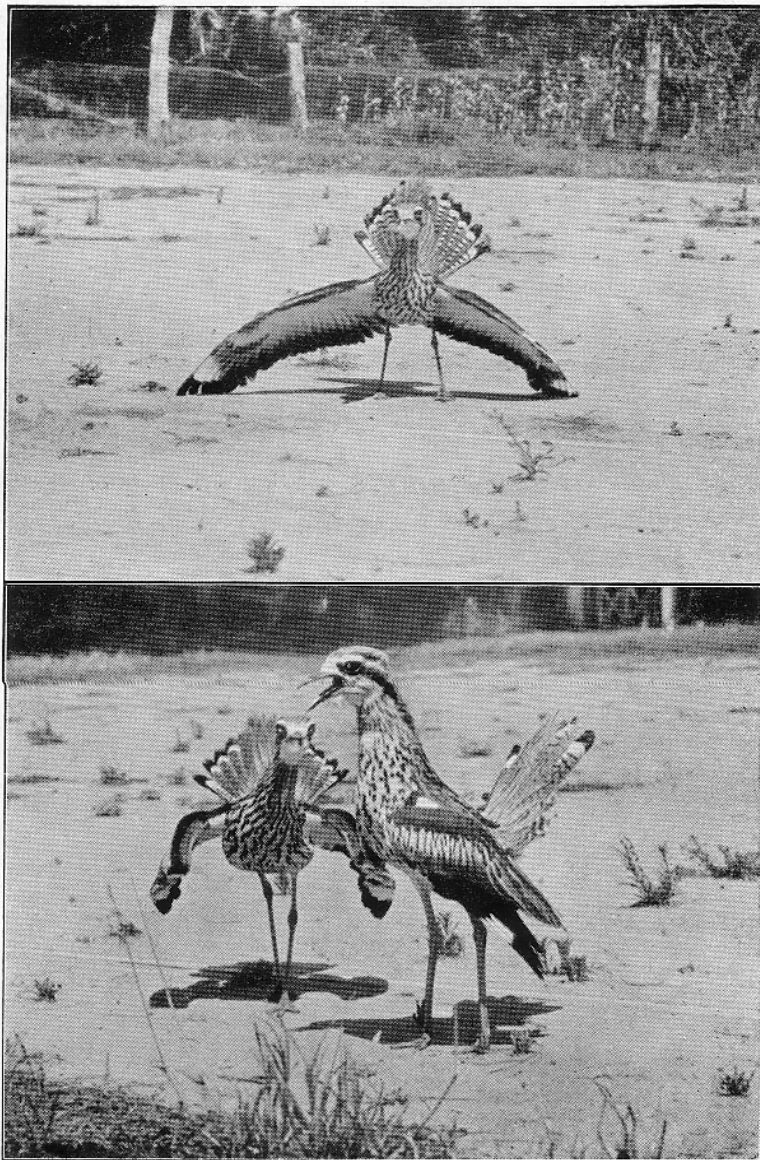
This experiment was never repeated, so it was concluded that it was not regarded as a success by the old birds.

Another strange incident was this. My friends one day chased the young Curlew into a corner as though to capture it, to the frantic rage of the birds; and their cries of distress brought Fraser, the poor discarded mate, quickly to the scene, and he rushed away with the young bird to a far corner, whilst the parents endeavoured together to divert the attention of the would-be captors by pecking angrily and fluttering their wings. When my friends retired the parent birds hunted poor Fraser



Southern Stone-Plovers (*Burhinus magirostris*) in normal attitudes

Photos. communicated by Dr. W. MacGillivray, R.A.O.U.



Southern Stone-Plover (*Burhinus magnirostris*) demonstrating in defence of their young one

Photos. communicated by Dr. W. MacGillivray, C.F.A.O.U.

mercilessly off, and assumed once more sole proprietorship of their offspring.

The strange feature of this incident was the celerity with which Fraser came to their call and went at their dismissal. At no other time would Fraser dare to approach the young one without being hunted, and yet in answer to their peculiar cries of alarm when the young one seemed to be in danger he came immediately. When the parents had charge of the little one, they never appeared to leave it alone for a moment, and "Lady Douglas" would come more than a dozen times a day to the kitchen door, screaming incessantly until given a scrap of meat, with which she rushed off to the baby bird. The cook did not always appreciate the clamorous appeal, as the cries would never cease till the meat was handed over.

Sometimes the owner and the ladies of the station would tease Lady Douglas by stalking the young one, and she would get so angry that when they left the court she would follow for the length of the garden, flapping her wings and pecking and holding on to the owner's leggings as if in punishment for the intrusion.

The ending of the story came, alas! in the shape of a wretched fox. The owner rushed out one night in answer to their cries, only to find the mother and young bird dead. The father bird, after uttering his wailing call all that night, flew away and never returned.

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