



NESTLING BOOBOOK OWLS, IN HOLLOW AT TOP OF DEAD-TREE.



BOOBOOK OWLS, ONE MONTH OLD.

insula: (1) That the yellow in the plumage of the northern (dry country) form known as *P. flaveolus*, owing to ecological or other influences, has been gradually transmuted into the scarlet-red of *fleurieuensis*, or . . . (2) That at some period partial hybridisation has occurred by some examples of *elegans* flying across Backstairs Passage, 11 miles in a direct line, and that the infusion of this blood has brought about the race known as *fleurieuensis*.

Whichever is the true cause, I think there can be no doubt that there is little or no justification for considering *adelaidae* to be conspecific with *elegans*. When we consider the great extent of the range of *elegans*, its adherence to type characters is most remarkable, for while melanotic mutations exist, apart from size differences, no very distinct races have been evolved.

The Boobook Owl and Tawny Frogmouth.

BY DAVID H. FLEAY, R.A.O.U., Ballarat, Victoria.

(With Photographs by the Author.)

MUCH discussion is constantly going on concerning the originator of the nocturnal calls of "mopoke"—whether Owl or Frogmouth. I noticed in the *Emu* of July, 1925, an interesting paragraph on the New Zealand Spotted Boobook by Mr. R. H. D. Stidolph, R.A.O.U., of Masterton, N.Z., which has prompted me to put forward some notes which may be of interest.

For the past four years I have kept Boobook Owls (*Ninox boobook*) in captivity, and also, for a shorter period, a pair of Tawny Frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*).

The Boobook Owls were taken at a very infantile stage and are remarkably tame. They greet me each night, just as Mr. Stidolph observes, with a rapid succession of "por-por-por-pors" uttered as many as twenty times. In fact, one frosty evening it was given by one bird in his staccato fashion more than fifty times.

From July onwards, especially in the spring of the year, Boobook Owls redouble their nocturnal calls. When I enter the cage at night during these months they greet me with the peculiar sharp cry of "Ow, ow, ow!" or "whow, whow!" or "who, who!" just as it strikes the listener's fancy. Generally this cry begins with the "who" and gradually merges into and ends in the well-defined "ow!" This cry, however, is mainly given by the large female birds; the male birds and one particularly—as he does it from my shoulder—give vent to the familiar "mopoke! mopoke!" which is so often heard at night. Sometimes on calm nights there is a regular chorus from my birds, for both male and female birds are capable of the "mopoke" call, and no two birds utter it in quite the same key. One bird particularly growls the notes, being quite a humorous contrast to

the others ; but there is no mistaking the quick and short " mopoke " call of the Boobook Owl.

Last season (1924) a pair of my captive Owls mated and began to prepare a hollow log which I had given them. From the early nights of August the two birds began to shred every particle of bark which had been deposited previously by me in the hollow, but the eggs were not laid until early in November.

It may be as well to mention here that when an Owl is unwell he will eat bark in order to bring up the usual pellets of which birds of prey are constantly ridding themselves.

The male Owl was very affectionate towards his mate, and they conversed frequently in softly uttered " por-pors." He called " mopoke " practically the whole night through from August onwards. Unfortunately, the female had contracted a chill while moulting some ten months previously, and brooding on her large, rounded eggs seemed to be a big effort for her. It is sufficient to say that one sad morning the bird was found dead on her eggs. The male never seems to have forgotten his loss, and has mourned for months, though he has several other Owls to keep him company.

If the Boobook Owl is captured, or if two of the birds happen to seize upon the same prey, they are capable of a very loud and shrill scream. The call of the fledgling Owls is a gentle trilling whistle, almost reminding one of a little cricket heard in the summer months. When they become excited I have known the Owls to start on the " por-por-por " notes, change to " ow, ow ! " and then terminate the proceedings by calling " mopoke, mopoke, mopoke ! ! " One can also fit " Boo-book " to the notes, or the aborigines' " Buc-buc."

In common with other species of Owls, the Boobook occasionally sleeps throughout the day holding a dead mouse or bird in its talons. The adult birds maintain their baby calls to me, except that the shrilling noise has now become a deeper rumble. It is exceedingly engaging to watch the Owls playing about on the ground at night. They raise their wings, move their uncanny heads round and round in a circling manner, and dance about on their curved talons, making tremendous eyes at each other from the shelter of a stump. They delight to sink their talons into the shoulder of my coat, imagining that they have struck some new type of mouse. A visiting Owl from the bush is very keen on dashing at the cages in which I keep some pretty little " flying squirrels," and bush mice, to the great terror of the little inhabitants.

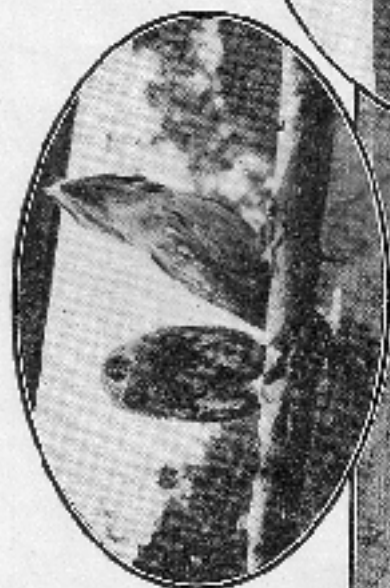
The Tawny Frogmouth is one of our bush comedians ; you only know his humorous ways when he is trusting and tame. After swallowing some palatable morsel his beak comes together with a satisfied clap, and he is extremely dexterous at beating mice, etc., into a pulp before swallowing them at a gulp. These birds—also adult—still simulate infancy with me, using their baby calls which are really a succession of groaning, rasping noises hard to describe. The



Female—Left

Great Horned Owl.

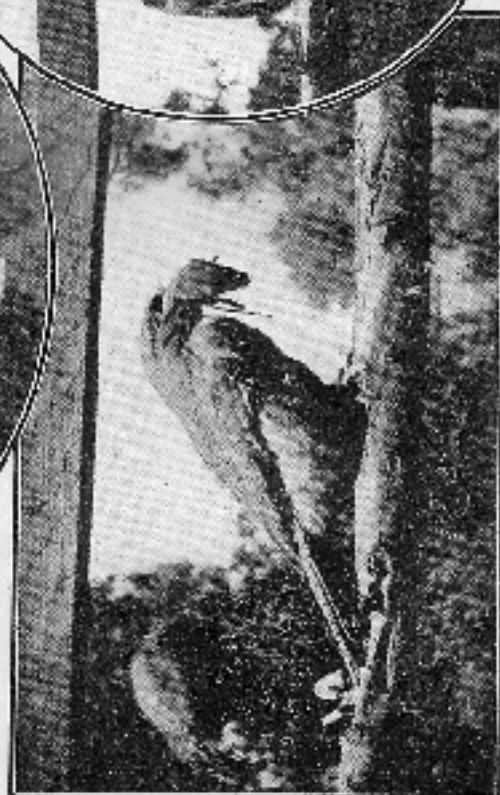
Male—Right



REDBOCK OWL,
"PILGRIM'S CORN,"
TURNING HIS HEAD ROUND
STEEPS, AND FROM
MOON, FORWARD
STUBBLE, AND FROM
"CROOKED BRANCH"
ATTITUDE.



REDBOCK OWL AND
"PILGRIM'S CORN."



REDMOUTH BEATING HALF-GROWN
TAT AGAINST BRANCH BEFORE.

Frogmouth is also capable of a tremendous scream when captured in his wild state.

These birds greet me each night with a succession of "oom-oom-oom-ooms," uttered from twelve to nineteen times. It is quite a common sound, as I heard it coming mysteriously across the Murray River lagoons by night.

During daylight my birds use their protective "broken-branch-like" attitude only on the overhead appearance of Hawks. Directly the male sees the Hawk he "freezes" immediately, at the same time uttering "oo, oo!" quickly—at which sound the mate, even if she has not perceived the Hawk, "freezes" also. On several occasions by mimicking this danger signal I have caused the birds to "stiffen out" on the instant.

The male bird, who is the talkative one, sometimes calls to his mate in a succession of notes which are too rapid and too low to distinguish from one another. Always when calling, the birds shift from one leg to the other, at the same time swaying to and fro in a comical manner.

The Tawny Frogmouth has another call, and this is where confusion may arise. It is two deep-sounding, loud "ooms," uttered in two distinct syllables, and which I define as "morepork." This "oom-oom!" to which I was listening intently several nights ago when camped in thick forest—where the Boobook Owls were calling also—is far louder and even farther sounding than the "mopoke" of the Owl. It is a slower and more deliberate call, and is repeated at much slower intervals than the call of the Boobook. I hold—and have had the satisfaction of being confirmed in my belief by observation of both species in captivity—that both birds thus call somewhat similarly, though the Frogmouth usually calls in a succession of "ooms" and on rather rare occasions gives forth his "morepork" note.

Both these rarely-seen birds have vanished when daylight comes again, and if the bush people see the slow-moving Frogmouth asleep in a tree from which "morepork" issued the previous night, then of course that bird to them is responsible for the "mopoke" calls they hear so often—and they have a certain amount of truth on their side.

Spread of the Goldfinch.—A correspondent in the July issue of *The Emu* remarks on the presence of European Goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*) at Armidale (northern N.S.W.) and the editor supplements the note by stating that he has seen the species at Tamworth (a few miles further north), but no further north. These pretty birds, however, have for several years been fairly abundant in the south of Queensland; a few pairs may be seen at almost any time about Stanthorpe orchards. Doubtless they have reached Warwick ere this and are spreading over the Darling Downs. In 1919 I saw a pair flying about Stradbroke Island, Moreton Bay, but judged them to be escapees from confinement. The Goldfinch may do a little harm as a seed-eater, but it is certainly more desirable than most other introduced birds.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney.