

## The "Button-grass" Parrot.

By CLIVE LORD, F.L.S., R.A.O.U., Hobart.

THE beautiful Ground-Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*) has become rare within the settled districts, but recently I had an opportunity of seeing numbers of this species in the rugged south-western portion of Tasmania.

As far as Tasmania is concerned the first detailed description is that of Labillardiere, the naturalist of the D'Entrecasteaux Expedition. Whilst the ships were anchored in Recherche Bay, southern Tasmania, the French explored the surrounding country, and on February 11, 1792, Labillardiere writes as follows (*Voyage in Search of La Perouse*):

"As I advanced toward the south-west, I crossed some open spots where I killed a beautiful species of paroquet, which I distinguish by the name of the black-spotted paroquet of Diemen's Cape. I had already met with it in several other places, but always such as were low, and destitute of covert. Very different from the known species of the same genus, it does not perch, for I uniformly observed it rise from among the grass, on which it almost immediately settled again. The shape of the feet, which are furnished with very long claws but little curved, sufficiently indicate the manners of the bird. Its plumage is green, spotted with black; some of the spots being surrounded with little yellowish bands. The under part of the wings is ashen-grey, with a broad band of pale yellow. Under the belly the black and yellow predominate. The under feathers of the tail are remarkable for transverse bands, alternately black and pale yellow. A few small reddish feathers are observable at the base of the beak at the upper part of the superior mandible."

With the advance of settlement and settlers' cats, this species is becoming rare in most districts. The extensive south-west yet remains to be invaded, and it is here that one finds this bird in its true native state. Present indications point to the fact that the primitive quiet of this southern section will be interrupted in the near future, and if such is the case one of the first species to feel the effects will be *Pezoporus*. This fact cannot but be a matter of regret to all lovers of nature; but it is difficult to see how the species is to be preserved in any numbers.

The south-western portion of Tasmania consists to a large extent of rugged mountainous country, the predominating formations being conglomerate, quartzite and mica schist. Between the wind-swept hills run long valleys, the floors of which are covered with button-grass (*Mesomelana*), broken here and there by patches of thick scrub. It is out of these



GILBERT WHISTLER (♀) AT NEST.



GILBERT WHISTLER (♂) AT NEST (NOTE DULL RED ON THROAT).

Photos. by Marc Cohn.

button-grass valleys or along the open coastal foothills that one meets with the Ground-Parrot in moderate abundance. In such localities as the coastal flats at Cox Bight or the long seven-mile plain running from Freney Lagoon to New Harbour Creek, *Pezoporus* is to be flushed in numbers, just as are the so-called "Button-grass Moths"—the bushmen's name for that dainty little midget the Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*).

The local name for *P. wallicus*, "Button-grass Parrot,"\* is fully justified, for it is amidst the button-grass that the species appears to spend most of its time and to make its home. It nests often at the foot of button-grass tussocks, and is therefore one of the first species to be exterminated when cats are introduced.

Bush fires have also to be considered, for the first act of prospectors and others when exploring the country is to fire the button-grass in order to give open going. Trappers also burn off with the object of enticing the game when the young shoots spring up after the burn. Immense areas are burnt out in this way, and if settlement spreads west not many years may be left during which the Grass-Parrot, Emu-Wrens and Grass-Birds (*Megalurus*) will flit across the tops of the tussocks in the numbers that they do at present.

Our trip to the south-west was filled with incident, but in spite of the charm and grandeur of the mountain scenery, the thousands of Ducks and Swans on the waterways of Port Davey, and the many other attractions of a like nature, ever among one's foremost thoughts will be the sight of the Grass-Parrots and their allies as they rose before us on the moors, tipped the tops of the buttons, and sank again within the deep piles of Nature's wonder-carpet of these western moors. Just as the general green colouration of the Button-grass Parrot is broken by gold and a rare touch of red, so are the moors, for every here and there rise the golden and red flowers of *Blandfordia* or the star-like blossoms of *Hewardia*.

Truly, this south-western region of Tasmania is a wonderland in many ways, and the avian gems of the button-grass plains seem but as gems to further gild a section of Nature's grandeur which so far has escaped defilement.

## Stray Feathers.

**Rare Bird Visitors to Bendigo.**—A pair of Painted Honeyeaters (*Grantiella picta*) visited Bendigo (Victoria), on October 10, 1926. These were only noticed on the one day and apparently did not remain. One of this same species was also seen in the previous year on November 29, 1925.

\* In Queensland, *Pezoporus* was once known as the Swamp Parrot.—EDITOR.