

## The Turquoise Parrot.

By G. A. HEUMAN, R.A.Q.U., Sydney.

(See Coloured Plate.)

THE Turquoise Parrot is undoubtedly one of the prettiest and one of the sweetest birds of its kind in Australia. Alas, though, the species is, one might say, on its death-bed. Indeed, some time ago it was believed to be extinct absolutely, until odd birds made their appearance again. At one time they were considered to be distributed almost all over New South Wales. Now the few still in existence seem to inhabit the mountainous districts of the South Coast and the ridges a few miles out of Campbelltown. Probably they are partially migratory—that is, whilst their general habitat is rugged country, they come to breed in the plains.

A few years ago several pairs, to my knowledge, bred in the neighbourhood of Campbelltown, but I heard afterwards that the nests or the young had been destroyed through catapults, pea-rifles and children throwing stones at them. They are exceptionally trustful and fearless birds, and even in the open an observer can go quite close to them before they make a move. In collecting information about this species, an old trapper told me that 30 or 40 years ago the Turquoise was the commonest Parrot in his district, and often when he and his mates had an order for two or three dozen of them they could catch them before breakfast.

The price paid then by the bird-dealers was from 2s. to 2s. 6d. pair. Compare this with the £30 I paid recently for one cock bird which had accidentally been caught in a net set for "Diamond Sparrows." About 20 years ago, the trapper told me, the birds disappeared. Whether they died out or migrated no one knows. It is quite possible that a disease befell them similar to what happened to the Red-rumped Parrots in South Australia, and that only a few managed to survive.

As an aviary bird, the Turquoise is undoubtedly one of the most desirable. With other smaller birds it lives in peace, and even with other Parrakeets it is never aggressive and breeds quite readily in their company.

I have caged Turquoise Parrots for many years now and seldom missed a year in their breeding. My aviaries are very large "flights," but a friend who has a pair of my young birds bred them in a packing-case. They use a small box with a round opening and lay generally four eggs, all four being hatched as a rule. I have never been able to get more than one brood during the season, but my friend, Mr. Harvey, junr., of Adelaide, to whom I sent a pair, obtained two broods of

two pairs each, making four pairs for the season. These achievements in captivity show that if the breeding of these rare Parrakeets in private aviaries were encouraged, instead of being looked upon as vandalism, probably a strong strain of reproducing birds would be obtained and the sad day of extinction postponed. I liberated some of my young birds in the hope that they would remain and eventually breed in the district. One was returned to me a few days later—shot with a pea-rifle. The others I never saw again.

The Turquoise Parrot may be described as follows:—General colour green; face and wing-coverts blue; chest and abdomen in old cock birds almost orange, in young birds yellow; a chestnut spot on the shoulders; some of the tail-feathers edged with yellow. The female has not the blue on the face or wings or the chestnut shoulders, and the chest and abdomen are very pale yellow. I have, however, noticed some hens (even young ones) show a small chestnut patch on the shoulder, so that they might easily be mistaken for young cock birds. The sexes of the young birds are distinguishable the moment they leave the nest.

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## A Bird-Lover in the Mallee of North-western Victoria.

By CHARLES SULLIVAN, M.B., B.S., Elsternwick, Victoria.\*

To see Mallee birds at home, one must wander somewhat off the beaten track. The older-settled portions of Victoria's north-west have been in most cases denuded of their timber, and so have lost their main attraction for the bird-lover. With the "rolling" of the Mallee scrub have gone many of the rarer species of our feathered friends. Before the ruthless advance of man they have retreated farther into country which is still their stronghold, and which is for the most part denoted on the map by blank spaces with an occasional tank or well as the prominent geographical feature.

During the latter half of 1923 I spent a few months on what one might call the fringe of this "No Man's Land." Turriff railway station, situated on the Mildura railway line, is some 260 miles from Melbourne. Thence the settled area extends about seven miles to the westward. Then there is a gap of five or six miles of scrub before one reaches Yallum, a small centre near the Hopetoun-Patchewollock railway. West of Yallum lie blank spaces as far as the South Australian border. My field of observation lay between Yallum and Turriff.

It was delightful to find there such rarities as the Scrub-Robin and the Ground-Wren. There they are by no means

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\* Communicated by Dr. J. A. Leach.