

Nesting of the Bell-Miner.

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THE Bell-Miner (*Manorhina melanophrys*), while not one of the most brightly plumaged of the large family of *Meliphagidae* (Honeyeaters), is nevertheless one of the most interesting of these birds. Though well known in name, for it has been immortalized by Australian poets, who hear in its notes "silver bells from a distant shrine," the habits of the Bell-Miner seem to have been observed and recorded by few.*

The general appearance of the bird is olive-green, with a bright yellow patch between the eye and bill, an orange-red bare spot below and behind the eye, a few blackish feathers about the eye and bill, and the bill and feet bright yellow.

This species must not be confused with the Crested Bell-Bird (*Oreoica*), which is a solitary bird, inhabiting the inland open timber, and is not found near the south-eastern coast-line. A Victorian railway poster, exhibited on most railway stations in the State, has a picture of the Crested Bell-Bird as inhabiting Gippsland, a place where it is never found.

The Bell-Miner is a habitant of the south-eastern coast-line of Australia,† which is well watered and thickly timbered. It loves the stream-side scrubs and lives in colonies and the nests are usually built close together. The Bell-Miners live chiefly among the tops of the eucalyptus trees, where they obtain their food, and though hard to observe, because of their coloration, which harmonizes so well with the green foliage, their notes are easily recognized.

The twinkling notes resemble the beating of a distant anvil. All the notes are not of the same tone, and as each bird of a colony utters its single note you get a variety of tones. The bird also has an alarm note which is of a scolding, harsh, churring character. On one occasion I had a splendid demonstration of this alarm note, at Belgrave. Seeing a young bird just out of the nest, I had no difficulty in catching it, and immediately it emitted a screech its parents came to the rescue, and very soon there were about thirty adult birds around me, all uttering their alarm notes. These calls subsided only when the young one was liberated.

A number of colonies of this species are to be found in the Dandenong Ranges in close proximity to Melbourne, and our observations have been confined to these parts. In company with Mr. A. G. Campbell, of Kilsyth (Vic.), on August 3, 1927, I visited Olinda Creek, where he had located a small

* For last, see F. E. Wilson, *The Emu*, IX, pp. 234-6, H. Wolstenholme and J. Sutton, *ibid.*, XXIII, p. 67, and A. H. Chisholm, *ibid.*, XXVI, p. 83.

† It is also found in Queensland coastal areas, at least 100 miles north of Brisbane.—EDITOR.



NEST AND EGGS OF BELL-MINER.



BELL-MINER AT NEST.

Photos. by C. L. Lang.

colony of birds the previous year. A number of old nests were seen, and also one half completed, that looked new. This we decided to keep under observation. Visiting the locality a few days later we noted that the nest had been added to. On August 20 the nest was completed and contained two eggs, which is the usual clutch, but the bird had not yet commenced to sit.

The nest was situated about 9 feet from the ground in a clump of fairly thick scrub, and was built of grasses woven together and attached to the slender twigs with spider-web and also partly supported by a fork of the shrub. The outside of the nest was decorated with spider-cocoons. One of the eggs was of a flesh-pink colour with reddish-brown spots, which is the usual coloration, but the other was almost pure white, with just the slightest trace of spots on it.

The nest was visited again a week later in the hope of obtaining photographs of the birds, but they were very shy and would not face the camera. The young were hatched out on September 4, sixteen days after the eggs were first observed. At this stage a remarkable change came over the parent birds. Though they had been so shy previously, now that the young were in the nest they did not show the least trace of fear. A rough bush ladder had been constructed, and the camera was set up on this, the lens being about two feet from the nest, and we were able to take as many pictures of the birds as we desired.

For the first day or two the parents protected their young very closely, one of the birds sitting on the nest until the other came with food, when they would exchange places. By the time the young were a week old the parents were exceptionally tame, and would sit on the edge of the nest for a considerable time or on the pole of the ladder just a few inches above my head. I was thus enabled to focus, make exposures and change the plates without the bird moving. Both birds assisted in the feeding of the young and the food consisted of grubs and insects which they gathered from adjacent trees. One interesting feature about these birds was the way the parent would sit motionless on the edge of the nest for periods extending over five minutes, looking at its young. The young left the nest on September 18.

Two other nests were found, each containing two eggs, within a few yards of the earlier nest. One contained eggs on September 10 and the other on September 15. These nests were much closer to the ground.

The breeding season for this species seems to be an extensive one, lasting from the end of July until the end of February. The birds appear to have two broods in the season, one about September and the other in January.