

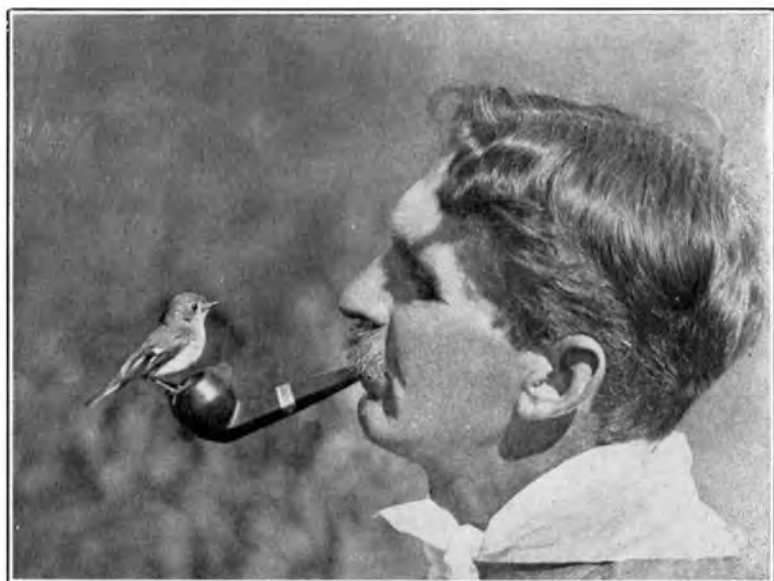


Scarlet Robin (Female).



Yellow Robin.

Photos. by H. A. C. Leach, R.A.O.U.



Red-capped Robin (Female).



Hooded Robin (Male).

Photos. by H. A. C. Leach, R.A.O.U.

Robins

By HUGH A. C. LEACH, R.A.O.U., Castlemaine, Vic.

I still remember the pleasure felt on finding my first nest of the Hooded Robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*). It was placed on the fire-blackened side of a grey stump, and was made of bark similar in colour to the stump. This is the usual nesting site for these birds, but they also build low down in the fork of a growing tree. The eggs, two or three in number, are green. When only the eggs were present in the nest described above, the mother bird took very little notice of me, but when the young ones appeared, she adopted the ruse of the White-fronted Chat or Tang (*Epthianura albifrons*) of fluttering away along the ground, but, unlike the Tang, she rolled over and over. Finding that I would not pursue her she came back, climbed up behind a fairly large rock and rolled down towards me. For amusement I followed her and she continued rolling over logs and rocks for some little distance.

The male bird is easily distinguished from his mate, as he has a black hood and a black back. The underparts are white, and white feathers show on the shoulders and wings. The female is greyish-white underneath and has a grey head and back. No difficulty is experienced in obtaining pictures of the female for she is delightfully tame. The male, on the other hand, is timid, and the observer has to visit the nest frequently before he will come and feed the young. While his mate is covering the nestlings he assiduously works the paddock for grubs and worms which he feeds to her. The young birds are grey, brown and white, and so, like their mother, are protectively coloured. Two broods are reared in a season.

The Southern Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*), easily identified by its bright yellow breast, builds its nest low, sometimes only a foot from the ground. Bark is the chief material used and the nest, with its hanging strips of bark and scraps of lichen worked into the outside, so much resembles the fork in which it is placed that it is sometimes difficult to find. This clever camouflage is apparently wasted, for an observer has only to remain stationary for a few minutes when the bird herself will betray the position of the nest.

The eggs, two to three, are green with brown specks. The young ones resemble the young of the Hooded Robin but are browner. When about two months old they begin to get the yellow breast feathers.

The adult birds are very tame, and the mother bird may sometimes be touched when she is sitting on the nest. They

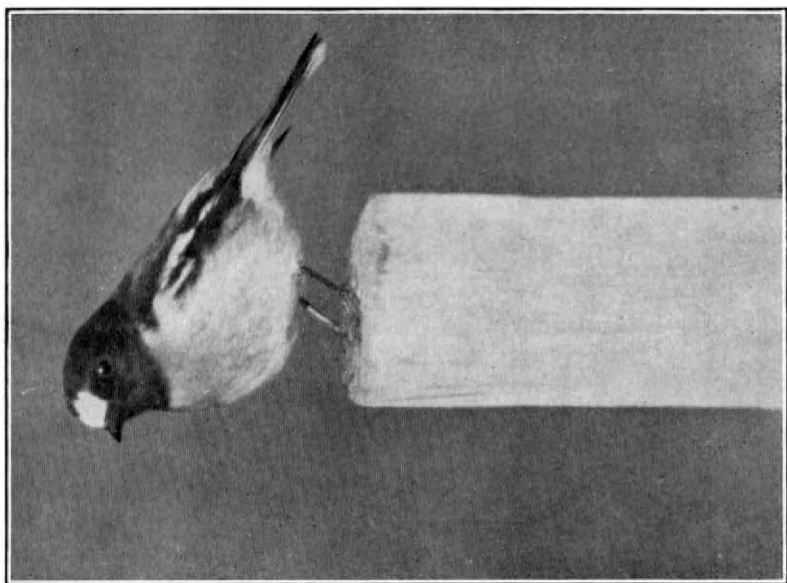
frequently cling to the side of a tree and look very beautiful when in that position.

Red-capped Robins (*Petroica goodenovii*) returned to the St. Arnaud district in August or September. Here, in Castlemaine, we get them, as well as the Scarlet-breasted Robin (*P. multicolor*) and Flame-breasted Robin (*P. phoenicia*), as early as April. The female "Red-cap" is very tame, and the bird-lover will derive many hours of pleasure by cultivating her friendship. So great is her mother love that she will dare any danger to minister to the wants of her offspring. My boys and I spent many delightful hours with these trusting mother birds. After "shooting" our issue of plates we would settle down to the pleasant pastime of inducing the mother bird to perch on a finger of one of the party, and there feed her young. Sitting with my back to a stump I had no difficulty in coaxing this trustful little creature to fly from the ground to the toe of my boot, thence to my knee, and finally to a resting place on the bowl of my pipe.

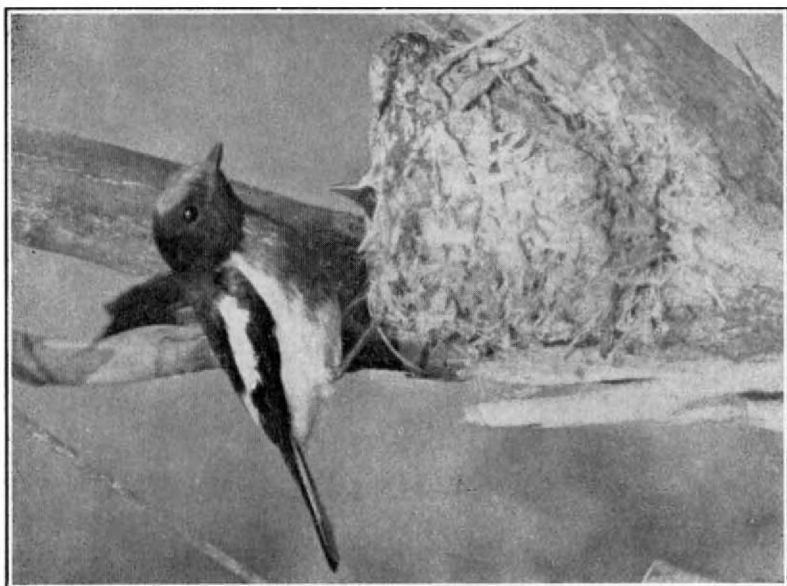
The male "Red-cap" is rather diffident in his attitude towards the observer. Sometimes he will attend to the young in the nest, at other times he will pass the food to his mate who will then carry it to the nestlings. Very often he will not put in an appearance at all.

The young are brown, and, although smaller than the young of the Yellow and Hooded species, they resemble them in general appearance. Red-caps share with the Tangs, Thornbills and Honey-eaters the burden of rearing the young of the Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*).

In the St. Arnaud district Scarlet-breasted Robins were with us during the winter months and left early in July. In Castlemaine we have them right into the nesting season and I have been informed by some of my pupils that they have found their nests, but so far I have not verified the statement. In St. Arnaud we had an interesting experience with a Scarlet-breasted male which, with its mate, frequented the school agriculture plot. The birds were so tame that we photographed them with little difficulty. While a nine-year-old lad was working the male towards the camera the bird flew to a corner post and suddenly disappeared. Investigation showed that the post had a "pipe" and on placing my ear against the wood I could distinctly hear the little bird fluttering about. Several times the little fellow managed to flutter half way up, only to fall exhausted to the bottom. The post was four feet above and about three feet below, the ground, and the "pipe," a narrow one, extended right to the bottom. A long, slender branch, with the projecting twigs cut short



Scarlet Robin.



Red-capped Robin (Male).

Photos. by H. A. C. Leach, R.A.O.U.



Who saved Cock Robin? We did!

Photo. by H. A. C. Leach, R.A.O.U.

to form a ladder, was carefully let down inside the post, but, although the Robin made numerous attempts to get up, he failed each time. Quite an hour went by and, as the bird did not emerge, we decided to dig a hole to the bottom of the post and so free the prisoner from that end. Accordingly crowbar and spade were procured and a hole about two feet deep was excavated; still the bottom was not reached. I quickly raised a couple of blisters and was more pleased than otherwise when the falling darkness gave me an excuse for "downing tools."

Next morning Red-breast could again be heard fluttering feebly at the bottom of his dark dungeon. When the schoolboys arrived they were told the facts of the case and, bird-lovers all, they decided that the Robin should be saved. After much digging they reached the pipe-clay and at last the bar went under the post; but now a fresh difficulty arose. The hole was so deep that the loose dirt could not be shovelled out. Nowise daunted the bird-lovers made the hole large enough for a boy to stand in, and then they were able to feel under the post. Alas! the clay had worked up the "pipe" and Robin was still shut off from freedom. With great difficulty this clay was gradually removed by means of a piece of wire, but the work was so laborious that the boys had frequently to stop for a rest. During one of these "spells" something dark was seen to fall from under the post. It was Red-breast; his brilliant plumage as bright as ever, but his body so weak and chilled that he could only peck feebly at the fingers holding him. How pleased everyone was! The boys laughed and talked and were quite excited. After Robin and his rescuers had been photographed he was liberated, and at once set to work hunting for the food he so sorely needed.

Flame-breasted Robins, like the Scarlet-breasted birds, were only winter visitors. They frequented open paddocks containing mostly dead trees and stumps, and each evening, at twilight, would gather in small flocks before seeking their resting places.

Death of a Cormorant.—Mr. Brennan, of Moree, N.S.W., has forwarded a cutting containing an account of a Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) which, having dropped dead after swallowing a fish taken from the Gwydir River, was found, on examination, to contain a Murray Cod well over a foot in length. The sharp spikes along the fish's back had lacerated the bird internally, causing its death. This appears typical of the gluttonous habits of the Cormorant.