

Notes on a Trip to the Omeo District and Mt. Hotham, North-Eastern Victoria

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Communicated by N. Favaloro, R.A.O.U.

Late in July, 1928, I spent three weeks at Omeo and Mt. Hotham in north-eastern Victoria.

The first morning in Omeo I was awakened by the fresh full notes of the Grey Butcher Bird (*Cracticus destructor*), and was surprised to see five of them perched on various trees in the garden in company with from twenty to twenty-five Pied and Grey Currawongs (*Strepera graculina* and *S. versicolor*). The Butcher Birds were holding a song competition: they were all excellent and I could not award a prize.

Two Olive-backed Orioles (*Oriolus sagittatus*) became constant visitors morning and evening for four days, then they disappeared. The Grey Currawongs were particularly cheeky about midday and came within five or six feet of where I stood, taking no apparent notice of a big tabby cat dozing close by. They kept a wary golden eye on me as they picked up scraps of meat and cake that I had scattered round, and every time I unmasked a camera they were off like a shot.

Shortly afterwards two harmonious Grey Thrushes (*Coluricincla harmonica*) introduced themselves, and became very friendly after a couple of days, but they were camera-shy also, and seemed very nervous when the Butcher-Birds came about, although they made no attempt to molest the Thrushes. In the late evening a Mopoke or Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*) used to sit in the top of a big pear-tree near an old stable and call to some mate that answered from the distance. We bluffed him several times and got an answer.

Parrots were very plentiful, particularly Crimson Rosellas (*Platycercus elegans*), some all green, and King Parrots (*Aprosmictus scapularis*), with all red head, shoulders and breast, near McMillan's Lookout, about half-way between Omeo and Benambra. While climbing several small ridges behind Mt. Misery at Omeo, we heard the matchless mimicry of the Lyrebird and had a good view of a splendid male dancing and preening himself on a mound 5½ feet in diameter.

Four Lyrebirds were seen that afternoon in fairly open country, which is seldom visited by Omeo people, who were surprised when told there was something worth seeing and hearing on those mountains. Flowering shrubs and wild flowers abounded and the bunches taken back to the house were an eye-opener to the local residents. They reckoned we must have climbed and walked miles to get them, an opinion strengthened when they noted our appetites at dinner that evening.

When visiting Glen Wills and Sunnyside we were informed quite casually that Lyrebirds "are often caught in traps" at Glen Wills, "and make quite good eating." Doubtless my comments caused the decided coolness shown us when we said goodbye to our Glen Wills hostess.

In a reservation by the Livingstone Creek, a few miles from Omeo, I saw two birds playing round each other; one of them was a Rainbow Bird or Australian Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*) with lovely plumage and a spine-feathered tail. The other was not quite so brightly coloured, though in general shape it was the same, but without the distinctive tail. A Blue Wren with only about half its usual issue of blue was also noted.

We started from Omeo for Hotham Heights on 5th August after a heavy snow-storm the previous night, which covered the trees and shrubs with a glistening mantle of white, and flashed back the rays of bright sunshine on a clear, still morning. *En route* we saw several kangaroos, a fox, and flock after flock of red and green "lowries," or Crimson Rosellas: the vivid colours made a fine contrast to the snow-covered foliage of the trees. After a strenuous 11 miles on skis we reached Hotham Heights, over 5000 feet above sea-level, about 6.15 p.m. very tired and ready for dinner.

The bracing purity of the air can hardly be imagined, and the wild exhilaration of a half-mile run on skis (at anything up to 40 miles per hour) sets the blood coursing madly even now as one thinks back. Of course, we spent considerable time and energy practising "turns" and "stops." My surest way of stopping was to fall sideways or backways: the disadvantage of that method was that you generally finished with your head pointing downhill, with snow driven up your sleeves and down your neck. The shade temperature was seldom above 30 deg. Fahr. even in the middle of the day, and at night would go down to 15 deg., yet, if there was no wind, the sunshine was warm enough for sun-bathing; but if a gentle breeze stirred we dived into extra clothes.

After seeing some Black Cockatoos (*Calyptrorhynchus funereus*) and a couple of Robins about four miles before we reached "Hotham Heights," we did not see a bird until we were on our way back to Omeo. The sunsets on Hotham were riots of colour of indescribable splendour, enhanced by the delicate tinting on the snow-covered heights of the surrounding mountains, which reflected the red, gold, and purple shades of the clouds above them. The view from Mt. Loch will always be a cherished memory of the artistry of the Great Creator.

It is hard to realise amid the dust and noise of Melbourne that away on the slopes of Hotham there is a great white mantle of snow where one can enjoy the rare atmosphere and strenuous health-giving snow-sports of ski-ing.

Arrival of Migrant.—The first migrant of the season was noticed on the morning of August 18—a Pipit (*Anthus australis*). The bird was at the edge of a grass paddock near the beach. The morning was beautifully calm and sunny, although a high westerly wind developed later. It is seldom that the Pipit antedates the Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) in coming over the Straits, but he has done so this season. None of the species had been seen since the end of March, when the whole lot left, seeming to have an inkling of the long, severe winter which followed. The one noted above was in very spruce light-tinted plumage, as if just arrived from a genial summer clime.—H. STUART DOVE.

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Range of White-backed Magpie.—I have seen an occasional specimen of *Gymnorhina hypoleuca* in this district, but they are few and far between. These bear out the footnote in *The Emu*, Vol. XXVIII., p. 176, unless indeed they have been pets brought from other districts and liberated here, of which I am doubtful. I recollect a fine bird living in the paddocks close around our house, because he was first brought prominently under my notice by being fiercely attacked by four or five Black-backed Magpies (*G. tibicen*), but after the scrimmage all seemed to live in harmony. I was surprised recently to see some Black-backed Magpies eating corn from the cobs of maize standing in the fields.—(MISS) F. M. IRBY, Casino, N.S.W., June, 1929.