

## Method of Describing Birds

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To the student of botany and its branches, especially forest botany, there seems a lack of system in describing birds in most ornithological works. Mathews's and Gould's *Birds of Australia* are necessarily of little value to the worker in the field on account of their large size, and there is a complete lack of works giving a systematic description of the habits and characteristics of Australian birds. A reference work of this nature would be compiled with difficulty by a single author, and could be more conveniently prepared by a central bureau, such as the R.A.O.U.

It would seem that with such a large number of observers, little progress has been made in the collection of data, such as migration, distribution, incubation periods, food, etc., of Australian birds.

The following is a suggested system by which species might be described. Of few indeed of our birds can it be said that every matter mentioned below has been thoroughly investigated and the information available exhausted. Of course, as new fields of investigation, such as ecology, are opened new headings would be supplied.

1. Vernacular Name.

2. Scientific Name.—(a) Derivation. This may be obtained from the R.A.O.U. Checklist. (b) Discoverer and namer. (c) Type locality.

3. Synonyms and References.

4. Description.—(a) Male. (b) Female. (c) Fledgling. (d) Immature bird.

5. Distribution.—The distribution of our birds is inadequately described in the Checklist and other lists. The work will not be complete until maps can be drawn and boundaries, such as they are, clearly defined. Messrs. A. J. and A. G. Campbell and Hall have done excellent work in this direction, and their species maps are an example of what can be done.

6. Habitat.—Under this heading the type of country which the species inhabits is described.

7. Nidification.—(a) Nest—nesting site, material, size, shape, time taken in construction. (b) Eggs—number, dimensions, colour, incubation period. (c) Young—habits, fledgling period.

8. Parasitism.—The number of host species to the parasitic Cuckoos is being added to year after year, and is worthy of record.

9. Territory.—This has received little attention as yet in Australia. Nicholson's *How Birds Live* and Howard's *Territory in Bird Life* give the latest theories in this very interesting branch of bird-study.

10. Migration.—Some classification of migrants is necessary. Mrs. Perrine Moncrieff gives one in *The Emu*, Vol. XXVIII., p. 309, in connection with her paper on the "Migration of N.Z. Birds."

11. Song.—Theories constantly change as to the origin and purpose of bird-song, but disregarding these they can be classified as follows:—(a) Song. This can best be defined by example, as the morning song of the Magpies (*Gymnorhina* spp.) and the whistling of the Grey Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) in spring. (b) Sub-song. The churring notes of the Little Grassbird (*Megalurus gramineus*) are a good example of this. This is quite distinct from the mournful piping of the true song. (c) Calls. These are uttered in times of danger, etc., and are frequently a clue to identification.

12. Food.—This is a branch of bird-study of importance in agriculture and forestry, and investigation will probably be carried by departments of these.

13. Moults.

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## Stray Feathers

**Late Broods.**—This morning (May 22, 1930) I heard the shrill insistent squeaking of young "Mickys" or Noisy Miners (*Myzantha melanocephala*), and on going to investigate found two young birds, evidently not long out of the nest, sitting close together on a low branch and being fed every minute or two by both parents with caterpillars and other food. On seeing me the parent birds scolded harshly and loudly, and instantly both the young ones were silent and still. After a minute one began gently cheeping and immediately the parent called to it, evidently an adjuration to it to be quiet, which it certainly was until I went away.

May 31.—This morning I again heard the sharp notes of young birds, and found two young Honeyeaters flying about among clumps of mistletoe and feeding on the flowers. They flew considerable distances, always keeping together and cheeping continuously; and then I saw them squat beside each other fluttering their wings and squeaking loudly. Then up flew a beautiful male Scarlet Honeyeater (*Myzomela sanguinolenta*) and fed them both. He fed them three times in ten minutes, and between times they sucked honey from the flowers themselves.

On May 20, 1930, I had found a pair of Banded or Double-bar Finches (*Steganopleura bichenovii*) building a nest in