

Notes on the Gascoyne Cuckoo Shrike— and Others

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In *The Emu* for January, 1930, Vol. XXIX., page 190, Mr. Edwin Ashby describes a bird of the Cuckoo-Shrike family (*Coracina*) from the Gascoyne River, North-west Australia. From the description of the bird I was of the opinion that it was identical with a bird I have seen in Queensland on several occasions in the past. Now I have to hand the July issue of *The Emu*, containing a coloured plate of the bird, and I at once recognised it as the bird I have seen, and which I at first took to be immature birds of *C. novæ-hollandiæ*.

In November of 1909 I came across a large flock of these birds, feeding in some freshly-burnt country on the lower Dawson River, Central Queensland. Many were feeding among the scorched bushes, others in the taller timber, while one pair was busy constructing a nest on a horizontal fork of a projecting limb of a tall, narrow-leaved Ironbark Eucalypt. Having no gun with me I was unable to secure specimens. A week later I returned to the locality, hoping to obtain the nest and eggs, also specimens of the birds for identification. In this I was disappointed, the birds having left the locality. The only evidence of their having been there was the partly-built nest. At the time of seeing the flock, I estimated their number at between sixty and seventy birds. In writing to the late Mr. H. L. White, of Belltrees, I mentioned having seen this flock, and that I was of the opinion they were a migratory bird. He was naturally very interested, and wrote asking me to try and obtain a few skins if I came across them again.

In November, 1925, when collecting at Cardwell, in the Rockingham Bay district, North Queensland, a large flock passed overhead travelling south. A few rested for a while in some tall timber, but were very shy, and I was again unable to obtain specimens. Whence came these birds, and where were they migrating? They are certainly not stationary in Queensland, and from the fact that Mr. Ashby obtained his specimen from a flock, I should say they were not stationary in West Australia.

During a twelve months' trip through the Northern Territory in 1913 and 1914, I saw no sign of this bird, though *C. novæ-hollandiæ* was a common bird in those parts, both on the tableland and coastal districts. I quite agree with Mr. Ashby, when he says this bird is related to *C. novæ-hollandiæ*, and not to the smaller Cuckoo-Shrikes.

The call also is somewhat similar to that of the Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, but rather louder and shriller.

Another "*Graucalus*" or *Coracina* was described by Mr. N. B. Kinnear on March 12, 1924, at the annual dinner of the British Ornithologists' Union as follows:—

"*Graucalus papuensis wilkinsi*, sub-sp. nov.—Similar to *Graucalus hypoleucus*, Gould (type loc., Port Essington), from Cape York and Cairns District, but larger and darker grey above. On the underside the lower throat, breast, and upper abdomen are pearl-grey, as opposed to white, washed with grey, and the flight feathers are black instead of blackish-brown. Type in the British Museum, No. 63 ♂, May, 1923. Mount Driven, South Central Queensland, collected by Capt. (now Sir) G. H. Wilkins."

No form of this Cuckoo-Shrike appears to have been recorded south of the Cairns district, and its occurrence in the interior of South Queensland is therefore of considerable interest. For a copy of the description of this bird I am indebted to the Hon. Secretary of the Union, Mr. D. J. Dickison. In addition to the two specimens collected by Wilkins, there is a third, collected by Mr. T. V. Sherrin at Eidsvold in 1922.

The description of the bird obtained by Wilkins is very meagre, and certainly does not apply to the bird obtained by Mr. Ashby. The bird taken by Wilkins is, in my opinion, the common Central Queensland form. Many years ago skins of the bird from the Dawson River, Central Queensland, were described by the late Dr. E. P. Ramsay as *C. hypoleucus*, and later as *C. mentalis*. They are now known in the Official Checklist as *C. robusta*. The Central Queensland bird is not *C. hypoleucus*, of Cape York, and I very much doubt if it is *C. robusta*, of southern parts. Only comparison of authentic skins from the different localities would prove this.

Unusual Nesting Sites.—It is not uncommon during the breeding season to find birds which have, through no apparent reason, selected unusual positions on which to build their nests, although at times the paucity of suitable trees will often compel them to build in strange places. In many cases the spread of settlement has had an important effect upon the nest-building habits of some birds, especially those which have readily adapted themselves to the changed conditions. For instance, the Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) has become so accustomed to building its nest under bridges and verandahs that it has now almost entirely disdained the sites where it had probably nested for centuries before the advent of the white man. In some country districts, where