

In Defence of the Raven

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In view of Mr. Barker's notes concerning the Crow and the blowfly pest (*The Emu*, Vol. XXX, part 3), this paper, which was prepared early in December, 1930, might be of interest.

The Australian Raven (*Corvus coronoides*), incidentally misnamed the Crow in this and other districts, has a bad reputation among farmers in general, and sheep owners in particular. True, an occasional weakling lamb or sheep is killed by the Raven, but that does not merit the wholesale slaughter of the birds that is at present going on. In a large flock of lambing ewes, two per cent., and very often more, of the lambs are still-born, and what can be more natural, when the stockman sees a Raven making a meal off a new-born lamb, to jump to the conclusion that murder has been committed. Alas! nothing is more natural, and the presumed murderer is often executed. On some sheep runs, where heavy mortality has occurred at some time or other, a small percentage of the *Corvus* tribe has developed a habit of picking the eyes out of sheep that "get down," and are unable to rise again without assistance. This habit has undoubtedly arisen through the birds alighting on the diseased sheep before life was extinct, and so have become accustomed to the struggles of the unfortunate animal. It may be mentioned that the eye is evidently considered a tit-bit, and much squabbling goes on between the birds as to which bird shall have it. But all Ravens are not eye pickers; those that are should certainly be destroyed.

It is the practice of farmers all over the State to trap the birds by means of large cages baited with offal, and as many as a dozen or more birds have been caught in one trap in a day, and probably not a single one of them merited death. The old Ravens—the confirmed rogues—are much too cunning to be trapped; the rifle bullet is needed for them.

Sheep owners all over Australia have the blowfly pest to combat, and in spite of precautionary measures, it has considerably increased during the last ten years. Both the sheep blowfly and the common blowfly attack living sheep, and both species breed in incredible numbers in dead carcasses. Mr. C. French, the Government biologist, informs me that the loss to Australia caused by the blowfly pest is £4,000,000, whilst Victoria's share amounts to about £500,000. It is obvious that by destroying the carrion-eating birds the pest, left to breed unchecked, will cause still greater loss in the near future. While it would be a big thing to say that by encouraging the Raven the blowfly



Yellow-tailed Thornbill at nest.

Photo. by A. J. Gwynne, R.A.O.U.

would be exterminated, yet I have no hesitation in saying that if the bird got the protection it well merits the loss caused by the blowfly would decrease year by year. Ravens also take toll of young rabbits, and during the summer months countless numbers of grasshoppers are greedily devoured, yet should a stray chicken or an egg be picked up by the bird his life is taken.

To sum up, although the Raven takes an odd lamb or two, visits the poultry yard or orchard occasionally (which visitations are easily checked), the balance in his favour warrants practically total protection, and if farmers and graziers would but realise that the much-despised bird is not so black as it is painted (or feathered), both bird and farmer would benefit thereby.

Double Nesting of the Yellow-tailed Thornbill.—While walking along a stretch of heath at Long Bay, some seven miles south of Sydney, on August 9, 1930, I found a nest of the common Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorhoa*) containing three newly-hatched young. The nest was four feet from the ground, under an overhanging branch of a Needle Bush (*Hakea acicularis*), and was difficult to see from the outside of the bush, so well was it hidden. The nest was of the usual type, dome-shaped, with a thickly-lined compartment below and an open cup-like receptacle above it. The top portion of the nest was roughly finished and the upper cavity scantily lined with feathers and fine grass.

On September 20 I made another visit to the locality, finding the nest empty. A pair of Thornbills was perched near by, and before many minutes had passed I noticed three young. The young birds were fed on the ground by their parents, and after feeding they all flew off together. Making a third visit to the nest on October 6, I was greatly surprised at seeing a Thornbill fly out. On examination, I found three dull-white eggs, faintly spotted with reddish-brown towards the apex. The only alteration to the nest since the rearing of the first brood was the addition of a number of feathers to the upper cavity. Using the nest a second time seemed unusual to me, for another pair of birds I had under observation during the past season reared a second brood in the same Banksia tree, after building a new nest close by the first. The first nest seemed serviceable enough, but apparently did not suit the taste of the "Yellow-tails."—A. J. GWYNNE, R.A.O.U., Carrington, N.S.W.