

Stray Feathers

A Note on the White-backed Magpie.—I have been much interested in the calls of the White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*) recently. There is a call of three notes, which the bird seems to use to call its mate, which is used frequently, and which it makes often before and during flight. There is another very harsh note which the bird utters when it is annoyed for any reason or when it attacks either a human (who ventures unwittingly near its domain) in nesting time or when it attacks one of its own kind. I have often heard the Lyrebird give this call, and caged Parrots often use it. Then there is its beautiful liquid song made up of some of the most glorious notes of any bird, which just come rushing and burbling forth for very joy. They are most difficult to imitate and describe, but when once heard live on for ever in joyous memory. This delightful carol may not only be listened to in the early morning (when I think it is at its best), or any time in the day, but also at night. In the warm late spring moonlight nights it is very beautiful; in fact, I have heard it all night, at different times, right throughout the year. Generally it is of short duration and much subdued in tone, but delightfully sweet and restful.

There is still another call which I am most interested in. It is one that I constantly heard during the months of July, August, September and October—then intermittently in November and December one year. It was used at night, most frequently just before dawn, and consisted of two calls; one was rather low, round and bell-like in tone, and sounded like "Call Bobbie, call Bobbie, call Bobbie," uttered nearly always three times in succession. The second call came as the answer almost always immediately after the first call in a high, shrill whistle, and sounded like "Rob-bee-ee." This puzzled me considerably, so I got up very early two or three mornings, and was fortunate enough to locate the birds, which were in a big pine tree, where they had their nest and reared a family of two fine young birds. I think the parent birds are the finest specimens of the White-backed Magpie I have ever seen. I was fortunate enough to get another observer to verify the calls. The second call I have since heard several times in the daytime, but never have I heard "Call Bobbie" after daylight. The answering call I heard for the first time this year was early in July. I will be on the alert now to see if I can pick up the same calls again from other birds of the same species. I am inclined to think they are an imitation of sounds the bird has heard, and are used chiefly in the mating season.—
M. L. WIGAN, R.A.O.U.

Notes on the Banded Plover.—On July 15, 1930, after viewing a Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*) from the cover of a tree for an hour, I happened to locate the nest of a pair of those birds, and, as I desired to obtain a photograph of the bird, I placed a dummy camera and tripod near the nest to allow the birds to become familiar with the sight of it. In three days' time, with two companions, I arrived at the nest with camera and a long piece of thread which was attached to the shutter. One of my companions sat behind a tree stump sixty yards from the nest while two walked away, but the bird, presumably to ascertain if everything was "clear," walked to a position from where it could view the hiding place, and, after uttering a warning call, strolled away, not going within fifty yards of the nest.

I visited the nest four days later only to catch three small boys in the act of breaking the eggs. I reluctantly borrowed four eggs of another Plover which I had found a few days previously, after telling one of the boys to remain at the nest while I was away, so that the bird would not return to find the eggs destroyed. In a few days I again visited the nest to find four young, standing and ready to leave. I wondered what the birds thought when the eggs hatched so suddenly, as the original eggs would not have hatched for another week, at least.

Having found another nest near at hand, I placed three chaff bags four yards from it. The same day, accompanied by my brother, I again arrived with a camera, which I placed on a tripod 2 feet 6 inches from the nest, and, after placing a string in position, I was covered with the bags, having a piece of cardboard in which was a small opening through which I could view the bird. After I had instructed him to return in an hour and a half to change the film, my brother walked away. In ten minutes I heard a faint twittering noise and by peeping through the opening, I could see the bird ten yards away. Again the faint twittering which one hears only from this distance, and she quickly ran to the nest, and, ruffling her feathers with a to and fro motion, settled down.

I now had over an hour to wait until my brother's return, and wondered, if I whistled, would he be near enough to hear me. But the Plover—what effect would it have on her? I was only four yards away. However, I whistled loudly. She raised her head, immediately alert. Where was the foreign noise coming from? After it was repeated a few times, she took no notice. I whistled a tune and commenced to sing. Her head again darted cautiously. Another peculiar sound! But again she soon became resigned. I then moved the bags a little, but, although always alert, with eyes peering, she was otherwise calm.

Suddenly, with a loud screech, she flew off the nest and a few inches over me. After a few minutes I peeped through the opening. She was again on the nest. I presume she flew off to attack a Crow or Magpie which had suddenly come too near. In another ten minutes she placed her head in her feathers and slept. Alert, even when asleep (as I heard no warning call) she awoke and uttered a faint, sorrowful twittering noise, which she continued for perhaps fifteen seconds, then, reluctantly, it seemed, rose slowly from the nest, crouched, and ran swiftly for fifty yards, then arose, simultaneously uttering that well-known warning call. She now appeared as a completely different bird. I knew, by these antics, my brother was returning. By peering from under the bags I could see him three hundred yards distant.

After securing more photographs, I left, but visited it later to find only shells near the nest—the young, no doubt, were hiding near at hand. Many marks of horses' hoofs were near the nest, caused by the galloping animals' stopping suddenly when confronted with the furious bird.—J. BRIGHT, R.A.O.U., Rochester, Victoria.

Habits of Young Native Ducks.—A very interesting observation on the instinctive behaviour of a newly-hatched Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*) is contained in a letter to the Curator of the Western Australian Museum (Mr. L. Glauert) from Miss R. Sandilands, schoolmistress at the Government School, Aurora, near Cranbrook. Miss Sandilands obtained the information from a bushman of the district, a keen observer of water-birds. Her note reads as follows:—"What he has to say of Musk Duck may interest you. He is familiar with the nests of these Duck and once his curiosity made him take an egg home to put under a clucky hen. The young duck came out, and the hen made a great commotion and flapped about. She appeared to be trying to beat something off her breast. My friend went up to investigate and saw the duckling hanging from under the hen's throat. As soon as all was quiet it dropped off and opened its mouth to be fed. My friend tried to rear it but failed to do so—not finding out soon enough that it might feed on shellfish. Every time the duckling was disturbed it clung to the hen's throat, much to the hen's concern. Eventually the hen bolted and could not be persuaded to come near it. My friend has watched the Musk Duck with its one young one swimming just in front darting crossways, "like a pilot." Immediately on being disturbed the Duck would dive, and there would be no sign of the young. On reappearing, the Duck would apparently make sure of safety, and then again would be seen the young one swimming

ahead. My friend's conclusion is that the young clings to the mother's neck, which would pass over it as she dived."

Miss Sandilands also sent the following note on the transference of young *Casarca tadornoides* from their nest in a lofty tree down to the ground. "As he was ploughing one day his attention was attracted by the movements of a pair of Australian Sheldrake. They had some young with them on the ground. The duck flew up to a high tree, circling round to perch near a hole about 40 feet from the ground. When she emerged from the hole she had a duckling in her bill caught by the back of its neck as a cat carries kittens. She flew down to the ground with it, left it in charge of the drake and then flew up for yet another duckling. My friend adds that undoubtedly many young ones do fall out of the trees."—D. L. SERVENTY, R.A.O.U., Subiaco, W.A.

An Unusual Nest of the Black and White Fantail.—On September 1, 1930, whilst working in a disused, slab-constructed barn, my attention was directed to a pair of Black and White Fantails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) that were in a very excited frame of mind, swooping down near my face and scolding incessantly. The cause of their excitement soon became apparent. On a piece of wire slung between two rafters was a nest nearly completed. It was built a few inches from the rafter, where the wire had been looped and twisted, forming a V-shaped crutch. Several strands of twine that were hanging on the wire had been drawn up for the foundation of the nest, otherwise the nest was as usual.

In due course three eggs were laid and hatched, but as I was unable to visit the nest again for some time, the date the young left is unrecorded. However, on October 29 my surprise was great when I saw that the nest had been heightened and again contained three eggs. On my next visit, on December 9, the birds were again making the sides of the nest higher, and young birds were duly hatched. Towards the end of January, 1931, the nest had again been raised, but was subsequently deserted, no addition having been made for several days.

Surely, it is rather unique for the Willie Wagtail firstly to enter, through a small crack between two slabs, a dark barn; secondly, to choose a wire for the nesting site inside the barn; and thirdly, to build four nests, one on top of the other, in one season.—A. E. BRIDGEWATER, R.A.O.U., Mansfield, Vic.