

Winter Notes for 1937

By E. A. R. LORD, Murphy's Creek, Queensland

The Murphy's Creek district, Queensland, experienced most unusual conditions during the 1937 winter. Rainfalls were extremely low and temperatures unseasonably high. April yielded only 29 points of rain and May was little better, 43 points being the total registration for the month. June and July were better with 111 points and 110 points, but even those falls were very much below normal. The first three months were warm and at times even hot. The first frost was recorded on July 1. Until July 8 normal winter conditions prevailed, but the remainder of the month was very mild, with a decided spring atmosphere. Such abnormal conditions had a great influence on the behaviour of the birds, with the result that much nesting had, by the second week in August, already taken place.

Several species of migratory birds remained in fair numbers and Pallid Cuckoos, which left on January 12, returned in April and were noisy and showed signs of mating during the winter months. A little group of ten White-winged Trillers worked a small portion of country during the winter; five were in the grey plumage of females, the others in grey and white, evidently males that had lost their black and white colouring as winter approached. Grey Fantails and Rose Robins arrived at their usual time—the first week of April. The former were in their usual numbers, but the latter were represented by odd birds only. Pardalotes commenced a general nesting in April and bred freely throughout the winter. I am rather puzzled about the identity of this species—all have the red patch on the wing and in general colouring are alike, but the head varies from glossy black to very heavy striations. In one case a black-headed and a striated-headed specimen were caught at the one nest, where they were feeding young.*

Several Quarriors (Cockatiels) commenced nesting operations in April and had their young out of the nests by the end of May. A second nesting commenced at the end of July. Welcome Swallows and the White-backed species were in evidence during the winter months and had started nesting at the end of July. Fairy Martins were represented by odd birds only and Tree-Martins were totally absent. A late nesting of "Peewees" (Magpie-Larks) took place in May, the young hatching out on May 29, seventeen days from the time that the third egg was laid.

* Juveniles of *Pardalotus melanocephalus*, especially females, are brown on the crown, with fleckings of lighter brown suggesting striations. Possibly some of these particular birds were immature.—ED.

Banded Plover were seen several times throughout the winter but only stayed to feed for an hour or so, then passed on to the west. These birds rarely stay in this district, our common species being the Spur-winged Plover, which is stationary and commences breeding in July. A few Dusky Wood-Swallows were seen about through April-May, but on June 2 a very large flock arrived and fed for several days on grasshoppers, which were in large numbers. The birds disappeared as suddenly as they had arrived and since their departure no Wood-Swallows have been observed.

A general nesting of Yellow-tailed Thornbills began at the end of June and still continues at time of writing (August 10). Miners have bred freely through the winter and wherever one goes the calls of nestlings, or young that have vacated the nest, can be heard. On July 25, I saw a pair of Blue-faced Honeyeaters feeding well-grown young in an old nest of a Babbler.

On July 2 a Squatter Pigeon was seen. I had thought that the Squatter was now not to be found in this district, as none had been recorded for several years. White-throated Warblers may be heard in limited numbers in both open and heavy forest country at the time of writing. Rainbow-birds are about in fair numbers and small flocks may be seen at sunset about their "camp" trees.

Eastern Spinebills returned in full force in May when the mistletoe came out in bloom—another source of attraction was the red tea-tree, which has flowered freely throughout the winter months. The tea-tree was responsible also for bringing Scarlet Honeyeaters in fair numbers and in keeping the Brown Honeyeaters up to normal summer numbers.

A few Crested Hawks are to be found about their favoured haunts, but other raptorial birds are seldom seen, which is surprising as Parrakeets are plentiful about the blossoming blue gums and usually Falcons and Goshawks follow the flocks of those birds. Fan-tailed and Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoos remained throughout the winter.

Eagle Attacking Lambs.—For the second time in my experience—the first was in 1892—I found a Wedge-tailed Eagle facing a ewe with a new-born lamb beneath her. I saw this from some distance and returned home for my brother and the gun. When we both returned, through a patch of tall timber, the Eagle flew to a dead tree, chased by Magpies, and then flew slowly right across the paddock and away.

There had been some damage done to the lamb, and it was three days before it was normal. It seemed hurt about its body, perhaps beaten with wings or held in the talons, although there were no special marks. It was very difficult to get the ewe and the lamb to walk home, even with the rest of the sheep.—C. C. CURRIE, Lardner, Vic., 30/8/37.