

## Stray Feathers

**Spine-tailed Swifts.**—At 7.45 p.m. on February 1, 1938, a flock of seven Spine-tailed Swifts (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) flew over my house from the north-west towards the south-east. A few minutes later eleven more flew over in the same direction. I watched until dark, but saw no more. Most of the birds were flying at about the height that aeroplanes fly on cloudy days, but some came lower and I was able to obtain a good view of them. Although some of the first seven may have been in the flock of eleven, I am inclined to think, from the way they were flying, that there were two flocks, making eighteen in all. The day had been sultry, as many have been this summer. Dark clouds kept banking up, on first one horizon and then another, all day. Early in the afternoon there were flashes of lightning in the east, but when the Swifts flew over the flashes were in the west. No rain fell.

On February 24, thirteen Spine-tailed Swifts flying high and swiftly passed over Bendigo from the north to the south at 5.30 p.m. The clouds were black and a few light showers had fallen during the day.—MARC COHN, Bendigo, Vic., 24/2/38.

**A Note from Far North-west New South Wales.**—Since October, 1937, I have been on Moombidary station, Queensland, just west of Hungerford. All wild life depends largely on the weather out here. Not one per cent. of birds have shown any sign of nesting this summer (1937-38) and many of them are so much affected by heat and hunger that they can be caught by hand quite easily. I was surprised and pleased to find the Wedgebill plentiful in the mulga country and have seen at least forty pairs. They are mostly extremely shy, but have a very melodious song, which carries for a quarter of a mile or more.

Another "find" was *Cinclosoma castaneothorax*. I saw three or four females at first. They were very wary and hard to follow. A couple of days ago I saw a beautiful male, which, strangely enough, seemed to invite inspection. As birds go he could hardly be considered brightly coloured, but against a background of grey-green mulga his red breast and black throat were really dazzling. There appears to be little known of this bird, so I will do my best to become acquainted with it.

I was displeased to see in *The Emu* that *Merops ornatus* has been declared "noxious" in Queensland—it should be declared "unprotected." Then in places like this where grasshoppers are bad it would be left alone.

Now, from what I can gather, there is a large breeding colony of water-birds near Bourke, about sixty miles south from us. I have seen numerous small flocks of Glossy Ibis,

Avocets, Stilts, Swans, etc., so am hoping to find them breeding when we get some rain—if ever.—A. C. CAMERON, Moombidary, Qld., 16/2/38.

**Australian Pipit and Pallid Cuckoo.**—On September 10, 1937, I flushed a Ground-Lark (*Anthus australis*) from a nest which was of the usual type, placed under a well-grown dandelion bush, the leaves almost hiding the nest. On September 13 the nest contained two eggs of the Pipit and one of the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*). The nest was situated on the edge of a clearing just near a fence-post, so possibly the Cuckoo saw the nest while sitting on the fence-post, a favourite place for them to perch.

Campbell, in his "Nests and Eggs," does not mention any record of the Pallid Cuckoo using the nest of a Pipit, nor does North in his work on the same subject. Mathews, in his *Birds of Australia*, however, gives the Pipit as a foster-parent of the Pallid Cuckoo, and in *The Emu*, vol. XXI, is published a photograph of a nest of the Pipit, taken in Tasmania by M. S. R. Sharland, containing an egg of the Cuckoo and two eggs of the Pipit.—ROLAND BENN, Boscabel, W.A., 6/1/38.

**Breeding Great-winged Petrel.**—When fishing in King George's Sound on June 18, 1937, my curiosity led me to a small rocky island known as Gull Rock. This island, situated about six miles east of Albany, is scarcely an acre in extent, and rises to the height of forty-five feet. It is partly covered with pigface weed, whilst stunted scrub grows on one side. On landing, my first impression was that the island was uninhabited by birds at that time of the year, but after a brief search that proved to be quite wrong, for it happened to be the home of a small colony of Great-winged Petrels (*Pterodroma macroptera albanii*). They occupied the part of the island that consisted of large boulders and slabs of rock lying on the surface, well covered with pigface.

A complete survey of the island revealed seven nests, each containing a bird sitting on a single egg, and four nests only partly made, with the two birds in attendance. The nests were chiefly in cavities under slabs of rocks, while two were in large crevices well covered with pigface. The material used for building consisted of coarse dry grass and dry vines of pigface scattered carelessly about on the dry soil and along the tunnel leading to the nesting chamber.

The birds were quite fearless, making little or no attempt to escape and no attempt to defend the egg, which could be taken for inspection and replaced without the slightest fuss. It was quite evident that this small band of Petrels had not been previously disturbed.—C. ALLEN, Cuthbert, via Albany, W.A., 12/2/38.

**A World Bird Day.**—The Society of World Bird Watchers which inaugurated a successful world bird day last year that

was observed in many parts of Europe and Canada, but only casually mentioned in the press of Australia, has fixed October 2, 1938, for the next function. The R.A.O.U. requests its members to note this date and to endeavour to organize or take part in some event in their own town or district, which will mark the occasion, a gesture which would be particularly appropriate to Australia this year because it is the centenary of the arrival of John Gould here.

The objects of the world bird day are for bird-lovers and friends to go out into the open by sea or stream, forest or plain, make acquaintance of at least one new species of bird, learn some new call or song, and witness some new habit not before known to the observer, thus enriching one's own experience and taking part in a widespread co-operative movement to raise the general standard of bird consciousness and protection. The Secretary is Mr. Noble Rollin, Glanton, Northumberland, England.—A. G. CAMPBELL, Kilsyth, Vic.

**A Note on the Black Honeyeater.**—The species is chiefly a bird of passage so far as this district of far Western Queensland is concerned. My records, extending over eighteen or nineteen years, on this property, point to its nesting farther south and wintering in north Queensland. Generally, the visits of the species here are short; I see most of them during the months of April and May and August and September. I have no records of them for December and January, and only a single instance of their being seen in each of the months June and July. As stated, they are not a nesting species with us generally, but I have evidence that they do nest here on rare occasions in the record of seeing a youngster, only a few days out of the nest, with its parents. That was on October 24, 1930. On April 9, 1931, the house-cat brought in a very juvenile specimen, having a soft pale yellow angle to the rictus. Both these dates had been preceded by good rains a few weeks earlier. These are my only "nesting" records.

The bloodwood trees (*Eucalyptus terminalis*), when in flower, are a great attraction to these interesting Honeyeaters. At times when looking for nectar they hover before a flower like the Sunbirds (*Cyrtostomus frenatus*). Their note is a long-drawn, rather sad, "che-e, che-e, che-e-g," broken now and again with an impatient "Chirrup" very like that of a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). Generally I see them alone, but at times four or five may be found together at a flowering tree. When heard calling they will almost invariably be found perched on the topmost part of a low dead tree.

This place, "Barcarolle," is situated on the Thomson River, 135 miles below the township of Longreach.—F. L. BERNEY, Barcarolle, Qld., 8/2/38.

**Fight Between a Magpie and a Currawong.**—While staying at Binna Burra in the Macpherson Ranges, Queensland, last October, I was one day watching a Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) as it walked about on the grass feeding. A Currawong (*Strepera graculina*) came on the scene and made a swoop at the Magpie, which merely hopped aside. The Currawong came back again and continued to tease the Magpie, keeping it from feeding. At last, it presumably lost patience, and next time the Currawong came near it made a dash at that bird and caught it by the wing. There was a wild mix-up of black and white feathers and a terrified "squawking"; then the Currawong was on its back with its legs in the air, its bill wide open screeching, while the Magpie stood on its long tail and jabbed at its black breast with its powerful bill. The Currawong appeared quite helpless. After a moment the Magpie stepped aside, allowing the Currawong to fly to a nearby bush, where it began to preen and shake its feathers, which occupied it for a long time. Meanwhile the Magpie quietly resumed its feeding.—E. COMRIE-SMITH, Clayfield, Qld., 20/10/37.

**Magpies and Others.**—During a recent motor-trip with friends to the south of Tasmania, going by the main road through the midlands and returning by New Norfolk, Bothwell, and the Great Lake to Deloraine, I was rejoiced to see once more the White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*) in fair numbers, when we got south of Ross. It was quite refreshing to hear once more the musical "gurgle" of this fine species, which was plentiful twenty years ago about Devonport, Forth, and Ulverstone. Rabbit-poisoning has done its deadly work, however, and we have not seen or heard a Magpie in those districts for years.

We were struck by the numbers of Spur-winged Plover seen throughout our trip; in many localities it was, indeed, the only species in evidence. Whether the land was dry or swampy, grassy or otherwise, there was usually a party of these handsome birds standing about, or walking in their deliberate way. It is very fortunate that this species does not vary its diet of insects and grubs with an occasional "tuck-in" of grain or pollard, otherwise it would probably have been annihilated on this coast in the same way as Magpies have been.

I was in hopes that we should have seen numbers of our useful allies, the Hawks, in the southern portion of the island, but they were just as scarce as they have become latterly in this district, mainly owing to the activities of the "Pigeon Clubs." Even that handsome and useful species, Gould's Harrier or Swamp-Hawk, is being so reduced in numbers that we scarcely ever see one in this

locality; farther to the north-west there are still some to be seen, but, as one man down there recently confessed, in print, that he had caught eight of them in rabbit-traps set for the purpose, it is only a question of a little time before we shall see them no more. As the Swamp-Hawk is far too deliberate in flight to capture a homing Pigeon, and is, moreover, a ground-feeder, and has been on the protected list for years, is it not time that the executive body of the R.A.O.U. took steps to see that the Act in regard to protected species was observed?

In the dry open "she-oak" and wattle country about Bothwell we saw small parties of Noisy Miners, a species never seen about Devonport, and where there was a grove of saplings about a creek we heard the calls of that widely-distributed Honeyeater, the Yellow-throated (*Meliphaga flavicollis*). As we rose to higher ground when nearing the great Central Plateau, where is situated that immense sheet of water, the Great Lake, a good number of *Strepera* or "Black Jays" was observed among the timber.—H. STUART DOVE, Devonport, Tas., 25/2/38.

**Victorian League of Youth Report.**—In this "society of societies," the chief objective of which is the preservation of the flora and fauna of Australia, many public departments meet in Melbourne regularly in conference with nature societies and other bodies interested in public welfare. At the third annual meeting in September last, very satisfactory reports were received from member-societies. The Country Roads Board and Forests Commission have begun a scheme for most extensive planting of wind-swept main roads with Australian vegetation. The Australian Natives' Association, having organized public demonstrations on the evils of erosion and the necessity for soil conservation, now proposes to plant a tree for each of its members. A daily paper has a competition for planting among school districts. The Wattle League has planted thousands of trees in pursuance of its objectives as a member of the League of Youth.

The connection between trees and birds being so obvious, the R.A.O.U. need not hesitate to co-operate fully in all schemes to refurbish our roadsides, where, as on Ballarat Road, the natural forest has been removed within the recollection of some of our original members, and to protect rigidly our forests and national parks. Especially does our largest park, Wilson's Promontory, require a policy of conservation instead of many valuable areas being destroyed by fire for grazing purposes within recent years.

In particular, 1938 being the centenary of John Gould's visit to Australia, I recommend the Union to urge the Gould Leagues in every Statê to activity, reforming where there

is none, so that the young people may develop a love for the birds of their country, and a strong national opinion be thereby formed in favour of the protection of birds and the conservation of their haunts.—A. G. CAMPBELL, Delegate, Kilsyth, Vic., 1/10/37.

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The 1938 Congress will be held in Tasmania. It is hoped to arrange a Bass Straits islands trip, in which case the annual meeting will probably be held in Launceston. If the Straits trip is not practicable, the meeting will be held in Hobart, with a Camp-out to be arranged. Early November will be the time. Will members intending attending, please communicate as soon as possible with the Hon. General Secretary for further particulars.

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## Reviews

[*The Wilson Bulletin*, vol. XLIX, no. 3, Sept., 1937. Journal of the Wilson Ornithological Club, Sioux City, Iowa, U.S.A.]

This part of *The Wilson Bulletin* is concerned, almost entirely, with the life history of the Oven-bird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*) in southern Michigan. The methods of investigation were similar to those used by Mrs. Nice during her study of the Song Sparrow (reviewed in *The Emu*, vol. xxxvi, 1937, pp. 165-6) and the author, Harry W. Hann, merits high praise for the results he has achieved.

Bird-lovers living in other parts of the world may note a few omissions which would have added to the general interest of Mr. Hann's paper, though in no way do these omissions detract from value and thoroughness of the field notes, which have been presented in a very readable manner. "Oven-bird" as used by the author refers to the common name of the Golden-crowned Thrush, although, to many ornithologists, it brings to mind the members of the genus *Furnarius*, of Neo-tropical distribution. Sometimes the name is locally applied to a few English birds that build domed nests. The affinities of the species are not discussed; presumably it is still classed with the Water-Thrushes and grouped with the Wood-Warblers, which are found only in tropical and northern America. No colour description or measurements are given. We read that the Oven-bird is a migrant, but no mention is made of its distribution during the northern winter. These facts, whilst well-known in America, no doubt, are of interest and also helpful to those to whom the bird is but a name. Thus, Mr. Hann's only apparent sin is parochialism, in slight degree, the result of extreme concentration. Admittedly the observations relate to the species in southern Michigan only, nevertheless a broader treatment of the subject would have been appreciated outside America. Several text figures, a page of photographs and numerous