

our geographical history. The fact, perhaps, will be generally acknowledged when his diary, written from the beginning of the Leichhardt Expedition to within a few minutes of his death, is given to the public. Meanwhile, I suggest that the part of Australia which he served best should not be content to leave recognition of the pioneering naturalist to Queensland and New South Wales. His longest and most fruitful service was given to Western Australia, and that State should make cordial and enduring recognition of the fact.

* * * * *

I acknowledge with thanks help given in the checking of Gilbert's sailing dates by Messrs. K. A. Hindwood (Sydney), H. M. Whittell (Perth), and A. S. Kenyon (Melbourne), and the authorities of the Mitchell Library, the Adelaide Public Library, and the Western Australian Historical Society. It is to be added that this paper corrects numerous errors in respect of Gilbert that appear in A. J. Campbell's *Nests and Eggs*, my own "Ornithological History of Queensland," and the Gould Centenary issue of *The Emu*. Those references should be checked against the facts and figures now given.

Notes on the Thick-billed Thornbill

By F. LAWSON WHITLOCK, Bunbury, W.A.

The validity of the various species and sub-species of the genus *Acanthiza* has for some time proved a knotty point to ornithologists in general. In *The Emu*, vol. XXXVIII, pp. 245-292, there appeared a noteworthy and very comprehensive contribution to the discussion by Dr. Ernst Mayr, of New York, and Dr. Serventy, now of New South Wales. The latter has pointed out to me that little has been written referring to *A. robustirostris* Milligan from the point of view of the field-man.

In the year 1902 I was collecting for the Perth Museum near the township of Day Dawn, which is situated at the north end of Lake Austin. Day Dawn, in a direct west-east line, is about 240 miles from the coast and is 1,400 feet above sea-level. The climate is hot for the greater part of the year and the average rainfall, which is erratic, does not exceed seven inches; it is only after good rains that the country supports a sparse growth of herbaceous plants. Eucalypts are absent except on the margins of the larger water-courses, but tree-like bushes, collectively referred to as mulga (*Acacia*), are abundant, and smaller shrubs of many species are innumerable. On the salty flats adjacent to the lake bed extensive tracts of samphire occur, and in places within the lake bed itself a few *Casuarina* trees may be found on the dividing sand ridges.

Amongst other species of birds collected was a bird then known as *A. tenuirostris* (= *iredalei*), which was confined to the samphire, where its not unmusical note attracted my attention. It was an addition to the list of birds found in this State. I also became familiar with the call of *A. uropygialis*, which I found to be the common Thornbill of the neighbourhood. It was when I heard harsh and rather grating calls, which I traced to a small, dull bird, that my curiosity was greatly stimulated. I eventually secured a pair and at once sent them to Perth, where they were examined by the honorary consulting ornithologist to the Museum—the late A. W. Milligan. He pronounced them as new and described the plumage and other features in *The Emu*, vol. III, p. 71, under the name of *Acanthiza robustirostris*—the Thick-billed Thornbill.

In 1908 I visited Lake Way, 150 miles to the east-north-east of Day Dawn, on behalf of the late H. L. White, and met with this form of *Acanthiza* in similar country. Again during my trip to the heart of the continent in 1923 I found it breeding within a few miles of the Hermannsburg Mission. It has also been met with by other collectors in the Everard ranges and near the Musgraves, so that its range is known to be very extensive and may yet prove more so, but it is obviously a bird of the dry interior. After leaving Day Dawn, I travelled to Wurarga, 115 miles east of Geraldton, where I found it nesting, but saw nothing of it in likely country near the coast at Mullewa and to the south of that place.

The most favoured haunts of this little bird are the extensive flats adjacent to ranges clothed with an abundant growth of shrubs, one of which, *Eremophila Pantoni*, is nearly always selected for a nesting site. The foliage of this shrub is of a peculiar character, the parenchyma of the leaves being suppressed, the nerves standing quite apart, and having an erect growth. In any convenient recess between the slender branches *Acanthiza robustirostris* builds its nest, which is of the domed-oval type, with a side entrance slightly overhung. Fine, dry grasses are woven into the adjacent twigs, with the aid of spider webs and cocoons. The walls are rather thin, but the cup is stronger and is evenly lined with hair, feathers, or any soft material available. The nest is by no means conspicuous, and when built in an *Eremophila* is usually about five to seven feet from the ground. Occasionally a lower situation is chosen in some smaller shrub, and the site may be within a foot of the ground. The eggs are true to type, white with rust-red spots, sometimes in the form of a zone around the larger end. They are larger than those of its neighbours, *A. uropygialis* and *A. tenuirostris*.

In a favourable season this bird is an early breeder. I found my first nest in the middle of July. It contained three half-grown young, but the actual breeding season extends to the end of September, as I found fresh eggs at Wurarga during the early part of that month. When the territory of a pair is invaded, the male bird flies to meet the intruder, and, flitting just ahead from bush to bush, tries to lead him from the vicinity of the nest. When feeding young, both birds are busily engaged, and a little patient watching will lead to the discovery of the nest. The young appear to be fed largely on small caterpillars, which are assiduously hunted by the parents in the neighbouring shrubs. I have never seen this bird on the ground. The most unusually-situated nest I found was built in the slender foliage of a cypress pine growing on the banks of a water-course at Wurarga, at a height of eleven feet. Another nest contained an egg of the Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*).

During the courting season the male has a not unpleasing song, but of only a twittering character and pitched in a very high key. These notes are quite different from the harsh "thrip-thrip" which may be interpreted as the alarm note. The species is shy without being actually timid, and is quite easily overlooked. The foregoing notes are taken from my old diaries.

I have been requested to suggest a suitable vernacular name for this inconspicuous little bird, which at present is listed as the Robust Thornbill, which suggests that the bird itself is "stocky." The specific name *robustirostris* explains itself without a knowledge of Latin. But in the case of so small a species a "strong bill" is only apparent at very close quarters in the bush, or in comparison with the beaks of cabinet specimens of the same genus. I can only suggest that some name might be chosen which expresses its love of a dry area and its nesting association with an *Eremophila* bush.

"To provide an item on the menu of the official banquet tendered the British King and Queen in Quebec more than two thousand slate-colored juncos were slaughtered. Such an act was in direct violation of decency and of the spirit, if not the letter, of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act between Canada and the United States. Protests arose even before the banquet was served, and it is understood that their Majesties did not partake of this course. More protests have followed, and it is hoped that they will be in such volume as to preclude any repetition of such a practice."—Extracted from *Nature Magazine*, U.S.A., vol. 32, no. 8, October, 1939, p. 462.