

specimens. In them the reduced continental race or races is just 'hanging on'. The factors that have reduced the species and kept it low are obscure; in our total ignorance of the mainland bird we are hardly justified in even guessing at the factors, economic or genetic, which are slowly prizing the species from its now precarious continental foothold.

I am indebted to Mr. W. D. Francis, of the Botanic Museum, Brisbane, for plant identifications.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. The weaver-finch, *Erythrura trichroa*, breeds on the mainland of Australia; its nest and eggs are now described from the Atherton Tableland.

2. It is suggested that Australian specimens are not 'stragglers' from Pacific islands but are remnants of a once-common stock which colonized the continent from the north.

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Stray Feathers

Young Duck Mystery.—Most bird observers have, on some occasion or another, come across the feeding 'table' of a hawk. That is what I at first thought I had found when I discovered two young dead Black Ducks on a thick clump of grass, about two feet high, in a swamp near Melbourne. The most likely hawk was the Swamp-Harrier.

A few seconds' reflection, however, showed that my assumption was probably incorrect. The ducklings were not marked in any way and, further, the clump was within ten feet of a Swan's nest at which a pair of belligerent birds were in attendance.

How had the ducklings got on to the clump? Occasionally young ducks are carried by the adults, but that is usually to convey them safely from tree nests to the water. These ducklings had doubtless been hatched in nearby reeds and there were no trees in the vicinity. Moreover, one of the young was wet and must have been recently in the water. They had not 'climbed' on to the tussock themselves and an adult duck could not have scrambled up the sides, though

it could have flown. Human agency was most unlikely.—
C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 10/12/47.

Another Record of the Eastern Bristle-bird, and Other Notes.—An example of this bird (*Dasyornis brachypterus*) was observed by me on the Dorrigo Tableland on March 24, 1947. The observation occurred upon an isolated, gently-sloping upland or ridge, several hundred yards in width and about a quarter of a mile in length. It is situate picturesquely on the very brink of the tableland, at an altitude of 4,000 feet above sea-level and bounded on the opposite aspect by a gully clothed with niggerhead beech (*Fagus Moorei*). A splendid panoramic view of the jungle-clad spurs and gullies of the ranges in the Bellenger River valley is obtained from the edge of the area.

The upland is well timbered, and a dense undergrowth of a scrubby nature made progress very difficult. A narrow strip of swampy soak is densely overgrown with a species of matted fern and sword grass tussocks and was more easily traversed. This tract constituted the habitat of the Bristle-bird. It was evident that fire had ravaged portion of the upland some months previously, but had not penetrated the vital swampy haunt of the bird.

As I wandered through the bush, I was attracted by several notes, which impressed themselves upon my ears, at the time, as the 'shriek' of the Eastern Swamphephen (*Porphyrio melanotus*) in miniature. I moved forward in the direction whence the sounds had come, and was halted by a bird voice entirely new to me. The call consisted of a note 'sweet' (like the Yellow-winged Honeyeater), followed by three rather harsh notes, and terminated with another 'sweet.' I could hear a bird as it moved stealthily amongst the matted fern just ahead, so emitted the 'fledgeling distress squeak.' The bird answered with a low clicking sound, which I immediately imitated by placing the tip of the tongue upon the roof of the mouth and withdrawing it suddenly. The bird wriggled forward and emerged in full view, fifteen feet distant, upon a fallen dry sapling. It remained under observation for about ten seconds before it returned to the cover of the fern.

For a short period I listened intently to the elusive bird as it called from its retreat. Then it became silent and was neither heard nor glimpsed during the next hour. During the brief observation, which I was fortunate to have of the bird, I particularly noticed the greyish wash on the throat. The tail was carried horizontally. I identified it as the Eastern Bristle-bird. The incident occurred at 9.30 a.m. under conditions of perfect sunny weather.

Close to the spot, I noted an Olive Whistler (*Pachycephala olivacea*), which flew from the cover of a vine-enveloped shrub and alighted upon the seed-head of a sword grass tussock, before it vanished into the scrub. Later, during the

morning, another Whistler was heard calling from the cover of impenetrable scrub farther removed along the upland. The call consisted of a melodious 'ee-chong-go-itchee.'

Other birds plentifully dispersed in the area were the Red Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*), Yellow-winged Honeyeater (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*), Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) and White-browed Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis frontalis*).

Upon two subsequent visits to the locality no further glimpse of the elusive Bristle-bird was obtained. It did call, however, upon each visit, but no amount of imitation or 'fledgeling squeak' would persuade it to approach or break cover for a flash. The call consisted of a low, harsh, double note resembling 'tare-tare.' Upon the second visit the bird emitted this call from four different points, as it apparently moved in a semi-circular route under the dense cover of the matted fern. One could not be conclusive that two birds were not present on this occasion.

When spring and the breeding season arrives, the Bristle-bird may call more readily and will probably be less elusive than it has been to date.—M. T. GODDARD, Dorriggo, N.S.W., 18/5/47.

The Ways of Falcons.—A passage in A. H. Chisholm's book, *Bird Wonders of Australia* (1934), entitled 'Death From the Air,' earlier gave me a degree of admiration, tempered with regret, for 'these feathered bandits.' The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) possesses a near-cosmopolitan distribution, being widespread in Australia, though fortunately not common. On May 14, 1947, whilst on a visit to the Manning River district, New South Wales, I was investigating the bird life of a small swamp close to the roadside, and, whilst moving quietly around it, close to the water's edge, disturbed a Little Pied Cormorant (*Microcarbo melanoleucus*) from the bank. It had gone, in typical leisurely flight, only about ten yards, and was about ten feet above the surface of the water, when, almost too quick for the eye to follow, a Peregrine Falcon struck, seemingly coming from nowhere, passed close to me, and was back on its perch on the top of a nearby tall dead tree. The Cormorant hit the water like a log of wood and was lost to sight in the ensuing splash, but soon arose, looking very dishevelled, but apparently still very much alive. It quickly swam to the comparative shelter of some reeds. I could not state definitely whether the Falcon missed in its swift strike, whether the Cormorant eluded it, or whether the Falcon actually struck a fatal blow from which the Cormorant eventually succumbed.

The Little Falcon (*F. longipennis*) can well be termed "the boldest and swiftest, for its size, of all birds of prey." It may have come in the nature of a surprise (albeit a welcome one) to many, as it did to me, to read Mr. Angus

Robinson's statement (*The Emu*, vol. 47, p. 22), referring to the powers of flight of the Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyano-leuca*), of "the agility with which a Magpie-Lark evades a Little Falcon." Certainly in my one experience with the meeting of these two birds, I feel reasonably sure that the Falcon could have given the Magpie-Lark 80 yards start in a 100 and then beaten it home. The fact that the Magpie-Lark got safely there was solely due, to my belief, to bad calculation in the strike of the predator, or (and I am more inclined to this view) a decision by the Falcon to intimidate the Magpie-Lark rather than actually kill. On the other hand, it may have suddenly detected my near presence, causing it to alter its original plan. On one occasion a Little Falcon passed low over my residence on the tail of a Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*), giving it 'an awful scare' before it reached the shelter of some tall trees. On another occasion, at the same place, I saw one strike at a small green parrot (? *Neophema* sp.), and that remains the only time, to my belief, a bird eluded a falcon by its own agility alone.—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 13/8/47.

Notes on the Ground Parrot.—This bird (*Pezoporus wallicus*) is rare in east and central Tasmania, but on the west coast it is common, ranging from the Pieman River southwards to Port Davey wherever there are fairly extensive button-grass plains. This plant occupies only a small percentage of these areas and is of very low fibre and nutrition value and I know of no animal that eats it. The plains where it grows are clothed, however, with other grasses and plants that afford ample seeds and fruit to supply the Ground Parrots and the birds are always in good condition.

This species lives entirely on the ground. When flushed it can be heard striking with its wings the herbage in which it is concealed, which is usually about eighteen inches high. On reaching the height of about eight feet it gives some very rapid beats of the wings, then soars to, say, the left, indulges in more rapid wing beats and soars to the right. On alighting it strikes the herbage with its wings, which eases it down to the ground. It must then run to concealment very fast as one may run quietly to where a bird alighted and look all around but fail to see any trace of the bird. It is very rarely that one will flush a Ground Parrot a second time. I have never seen the species alight on a tree.

In making observations at Point Hibbs I nearly put my foot on a Ground Parrot. It rose with a 'whirr' and gave me a start. On looking down I saw six white eggs in a shallow indentation in the ground with only a few straws of dry grass. As the eggs were dark, I assumed they would hatch in two or three days. They were in the ordinary herbage and not concealed in any way. This observation was made on November 21, 1923. These birds can be picked

up on the plains in February undergoing a severe moult, having no primaries, no tail feathers, very few body feathers, and only pin feathers on the neck. They are pitiful-looking objects, indeed. On being put down they run off at a great rate to concealment.

The feathers of this bird may often be seen in prospectors' hats, having been picked up on the plains. Other places near Macquarie Harbour where I have found the eggs of this bird are Farm Cove, Pine Cove, Old Strahan and Macquarie Heads, each nest containing six eggs.—K. B. HINSBY, Hobart, Tas., 7/3/47.

Have the White-backed Swallows their 'Territories'?—During July and August I have had the opportunity of closely watching five White-backed Swallows (*Cheramæca leucosterna*) hawking insects over my vineyard. In good weather they are always to be found in an area of about one square mile. They operate in complete unity with the few Welcome Swallows that remain over winter.

One morning my attention was drawn to considerable twittering overhead where I was surprised to see a general disturbance among the White-backed Swallows. There were nine birds and the five locals were in dispute with four new arrivals. The dispute was mainly vocal with little feather pulling. The new arrivals did not show much opposition and quickly retired. So far as I can ascertain the four visitors are normally operating in an area to the south, and they had possibly overrun their usual territory.—E. O. EDWARDS, Menangle Park, N.S.W., 19/8/47.

Concerning Vocal Mimicry.—The following interesting letter has been received from Sir Charles Belcher, of Kinangop, Kenya (Africa), who in his book of 1914, *The Birds of the District of Geelong, Australia* (the district of his birth), gave some interesting notes on vocal mimicry—

Thank you for sending me your booklet, *Nature's Linguists*. I have just spent a pleasant (if rather homesick) hour reading it through. One thing I did not know before doing so was that the Pipit was a mimic. I have known, I suppose, a dozen or more species of that genus in the field, in several countries, but never heard one copy anything else. Here in Central Africa, where field ornithology is only beginning, I have noted four species as regular mimics, and curiously enough one is a *Mirafra* (but it sang from the ground), the others being two Thrushes and a Wheatear. Doubtless, as we learn more, mimicry will be found to be wider spread. We have a very vigorous Natural History Society in Nairobi and the young Europeans are generally interested in birds. So, too, is Jerogi wa Kamau—but only from the culinary standpoint. P.S.: While in South Africa recently I heard an excellent mimic in the Bush Robin (*Sigelus silens*), which is actually a Flycatcher, and thought I had made a discovery, but on looking up the books found that the habit in that bird is well known.

Members of the R.A.O.U. will no doubt be glad to know that Sir Charles Belcher is continuing his studies in ornithology, and will hope that he will be able ere long to repeat

the visit which he made to his homeland a few years ago.—
A. H. CHISHOLM, Melbourne, Vic., 13/8/47.

Parrot-like Feeding of Wood-Swallow.—As parrot-like feeding of birds has been under notice quite a lot of late, I am recording another entrant to that list. At Tully, north Queensland, on September 19, 1947, I was watching a pair of White-breasted Wood-Swallows (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) flying from the telegraph wires and catching large insects and returning to the wires to eat them. On numerous occasions, these birds stood on one leg and ate the remainder of their food in parrot fashion. At Ayr, north Queensland, on October 10, I watched precisely the same method of feeding by similar birds. Whilst travelling through north Queensland I noted dozens of these birds at nests at the intersection of telephone posts and the arms, and on numerous occasions noted large numbers 'cuddled' together for the night on these arms, always avoiding the top arm.—HAROLD E. TARR, Middle Park, Vic., 12/11/47.

A Communal Roost of the Indian Myna.—Some sixty to eighty years ago the introduction and liberation of exotic birds was practised with considerable assiduity both in Sydney and Melbourne. The legacy of such misguided enthusiasm is seen to-day in the presence of numerous Starlings, Sparrows, Goldfinches, and other birds that inhabit, for the most part, the settled areas of Australia. Fortunately many of the species liberated did not succeed in establishing themselves. Others, like the Greenfinch, the Indian Turtle-Dove and the Skylark, have increased in numbers but, as yet, seem to have had but little effect on human economy, or on the indigenous avifauna.

In the latter category may be placed the Common Indian Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), a species that lives in fairly close association with man—a bird of the towns, suburbs and industrial areas—a bird whose haunts are old buildings, rubbish dumps, and the more or less restricted open spaces of populated localities. Insofar as Sydney is concerned, Mynas have not spread to any extent: it would be safe to say that most of them are to be found within a radius of from five to ten miles from the centre of the city, and then mostly to the south, principally in the area lying between Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay.

I have no data as to when Mynas were first liberated in Sydney. Several introductions were made in Victoria between 1863 and 1872 (*vide The Emu*, vol. 5, 1906, p. 116). During that period there was an active Acclimatization Society in Sydney, so it is possible our birds were first released about that time. In the annual report of the New South Wales Zoological Society for the year ending February 28, 1880, there appear the following pertinent remarks—"In view of the great want of bird protection for the game and song-birds imported by the Society your

committee requested . . . to prepare a bill to secure their protection. . . ." Included in the song-bird section of the draft are such birds as the Nightingale and the Indian Miner (*sic*). Is it any wonder that the Nightingales effaced themselves?

Having introduced the Myna we now reach the main purpose of these notes. Large numbers of these birds were known to roost in a shed, some 350 feet in length and about 60 feet high, on the premises of the Australian Iron & Steel Company, Ralph and Doody Streets, Alexandria, an industrial suburb a little to the south of Sydney. The shed has a ventilation roof above the main roof, and most of the birds, when going to roost, fly in between the two roofs and perch on the steel girders and beams supporting the main structure. A few fly in the partly open southern end of the building. The northern end is entirely closed. A count of the birds coming in to roost was made on June 21, 1947, by T. A. Everitt, G. R. Gannon, J. Waterhouse, and K. A. Hindwood. The following report is based on the happenings of that afternoon.

The first birds to arrive appeared at 4.12 p.m.; they did not immediately go into the shed but perched on the ridge, or on the main sloping roof. They commenced to enter the shed at 4.20 p.m. with numbers increasing from that time until 4.45 p.m. and then decreasing until 5 p.m. None seen to go in after 5 p.m. (dusk). They arrived in singles, pairs (approximately one-third of the total number), or small parties, with a few larger flocks of from 10 to 25 birds. The total number of birds counted flying into the shed was within a few of 900: 20% arrived between 4.12 p.m. and 4.30 p.m., 50% between 4.30 p.m. and 4.45 p.m., and 30% between 4.45 p.m. and 5 p.m. The greatest number arrived between half and a quarter of an hour before dusk. Approximately 160 of the birds arrived from the south and south-west, whilst about 740 came in from the east and south-east. No birds were seen to arrive from north of the shed (i.e. in the direction of Sydney), though a few may have done so as that section was partly obscured from where the count was made. The northern end of the shed is entirely closed and any birds approaching from that direction would have to fly on to the main roof where they would have been seen.

The floor of the building was splashed with excreta; also on the floor were numbers of hard seeds and wads of vegetable fibre. Both these substances had, from their appearance, been regurgitated by the birds and not passed through the body. The seeds (on later comparison) appeared to be identical with those of the Canary Island date palm (*Phoenix canariensis*), which is extensively planted in streets and gardens of Sydney and its suburbs. From the observed distribution of the birds during the

daytime, the lay of the land east, south and west of the roosting place, and from birds seen flying towards the shed, it seems that they come in from areas up to two miles or more from the roost. The loud, discordant chattering of the birds could be heard some distance from the shed; this noise, somewhat abated and not so continuous, can be heard throughout the night according to Mr. Thomson who resides nearby.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 22/7/47.

Courtship Display of the Rifle-bird.—Hearing the harsh call of the Paradise Rifle-bird (*Ptiloris paradiseus*) at Binna Burra, Queensland, at 5.15 a.m. on October 24, 1947, I spent half an hour locating the bird on a horizontal bough of a tall tree in the scrub. I had no sooner found my bird than he 'sprang to attention' and ran the length of the level part of this branch—a distance of about three feet—with wings arched over the head but not quite touching. The female had by this time flown to the same bough. As if to make the stage perfect, the sun filtered through the trees and played its part in the next act by shining on the branch while the female put her head at 45 degrees to the male's but not quite touching and the male bird held his head and beak vertical. From my position on the path about fifty feet below I could note the male bird's wings forming a collar behind the female's head. The female bird then advanced slowly and the male retreated, all the time half closing and then 'clapping' his wings together in the arch, a sound plainly audible from below. As they reached the end of the level part of the branch the tempo of the 'claps' nearly doubled, then stopped.

On this occasion the female bird flew away immediately although at the same place on October 31 the mating took place. On this second occasion I counted seventeen slow wing 'claps' followed by twenty double-time 'claps.'

On October 25 I escorted Miss M. Leggett (Tasmania) and Mrs. C. Green (Victoria) to this spot and at 6.15 a.m. we had the pleasure of seeing the male bird adopt the display attitude as the female alighted on the limb, but she immediately flew away. Unlike the accepted idea of the display branch being in a conspicuous position, this tree was in the thick scrub, with the limb having no look-out value whatever.

On some occasion or another I noted this particular male at this branch at nearly every daylight hour. He would sit in the one position for half an hour at a time and occasionally fly to a nearby tree and demonstrate his ability to procure food by hanging upside down and tearing off the under bark of a limb looking for insects or, at another favourite position, by tearing pieces out of the elk-horn ferns which were very numerous in these trees. Nearly all our R.A.O.U. members at the Camp-out were able to view this particular male bird on this particular branch.—HAROLD E. TARR, Middle Park, Vic., 12/11/47.

Courtship Display of the Little Wattle-bird.—On August 9, 1947, at Seaford, Messrs. R. Ferguson, T. O'Sullivan and I witnessed what we believe to be the courtship display of this species (*Anthochæra chrysoptera*). The birds were in large numbers and we were immediately attracted by a pair calling differently from the others, a call more in the nature of a whistle. We then noticed two of the above birds facing each other on a small branch of a banksia tree. Suddenly the presumed male (the slightly larger bird) raised his wings a little, fluffed up his feathers, elevated and spread his tail fan-wise and made an attempt to peck at the other. She fluffed her feathers and immediately swung under the branch and, suspended by one foot, kept swinging from side to side, the body being held rigid all the time. The swinging bird then commenced to 'claw' at the air and the male bird started swaying in unison whilst on one leg and began to 'claw' the air also. Occasionally their feet would meet momentarily and both birds would tremble intensely when that took place. Then they both stood on the branch again and after a few seconds repeated the performance. While the birds were on the branch together they bowed to each other a good deal. During all the five minutes' display, both birds kept up a musical high-pitched whistle.—H. E. TARR, Middle Park, Vic., 2/9/47.

Striped Honeyeaters.—On August 13, 1947, a small flock of five Striped Honeyeaters (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*) was recorded by me at Menangle Park, N.S.W. The birds were flying from the east, and settled for about one minute on a *Cotoneaster* bush in my garden, which was heavily laden with berries. They made no attempt to feed, but continued in a westerly direction (inland), giving the impression that they were passing through.

Menangle Park is at the southern borders of the County of Cumberland, Sydney. K. A. Hindwood states in an article on 'Honeyeaters of the Sydney District (County of Cumberland), N.S.W.' (*Australian Zoologist*, vol. 10, part 3), that the Striped Honeyeater is extremely rare near Sydney, the only records being Newington (July 1881), Lakemba (Sep. 12, 1942), and Ettalong, north of Sydney (April 5, 1930). A. R. McGill in *The Emu*, vol. 45, part 3, p. 232, refers to the species in coastal areas at Raymond Terrace in June 1945 and at Tuggerah Lakes in March 1942. The direction in which the birds were travelling at Menangle Park would indicate that they were moving inland from the rough and heavily-timbered country between Campbelltown and the coast.

From these records and dates, there seems to be an indication that the Striped Honeyeaters are inclined to move to the coastal area during the non-breeding season.—E. O. EDWARDS, Menangle Park, N.S.W., 19/8/47.

Spine-tailed Swifts and their Association with Rainfall and Dry Conditions.—From this year's observations I am not disposed to consider that the appearance of the Spine-tailed Swift (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) has any relation to dry or wet weather in this area.

Their principal appearance here occurs at intervals during February and March. For some years the rainfall has been exceptionally low during March and considerably below average in February. In 1945 the February rainfall was 288 points, most of which fell during one week. March of the same year yielded only 78 points, 71 of which are recorded for March 31. In February 1946 there were 198 points, following a dry January with only 52 points. March records for 1946 were 170 points, the main fall being on March 25 and 26, which was three days before I recorded the departure of the Swifts on March 29, 1946—*The Emu*, vol. 46, part 3, pp. 232-233.

This year (1947) a closer watch was kept with relation to the rainfall and appearance of the birds. The rainfall of 414 points in February was the highest for many years and March yielded 163 points. The birds appeared on February 12, just prior to 231 points of rain on February 13 to 15. Again on February 24 they were seen just prior to the commencement of rain that resulted in 74 points over four days. The last record of their appearance was made by me on March 13, immediately prior to a storm which resulted in 43 points. These records would not suggest that their appearance indicates dry weather in this district, though for some years past the low rainfall, with resultant dry and hot conditions during the normal period in which we see the Spine-tailed Swifts, was apt to lead one to consider them dry weather birds.—E. O. EDWARDS, Menangle Park, N.S.W., 19/8/47.

News and Notes

CORRECTIONS

The following corrections should be noted to the January 1948 part:

- p. 174. For '*orthorhamphus*' read '*magnirostris*.'
- p. 193. Insert 'Tui' before '*Prosthemadera novæseelandiæ*,' the type having been dropped after return of proofs.
- p. 206. In the legend under the figure read '*arundinaceus*' for '*orientalis*.'

HONOUR FOR MEMBER

Mr. L. E. Richdale has been elected a Corresponding Fellow of the American Ornithologists Union, an honour upon which he is to be congratulated.