

Black Falcons (*Falco subniger*) have again appeared in the Western District, and have been seen in the last few weeks from Wingeel to Tower Hill, the first seen being on March 21. The Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus notatus*) is also sometimes seen in the coastal area, probably stragglers from last year's heavy influx. Although the Australian Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*) is reputed to inhabit forest areas, two have altered their habits on this property (Woolsthorpe) to the extent of frequenting treeless, open plains and feeding on carrion in the form of rabbits, dead of myxomatosis.

Since December, and following an unusually wet year last year when the rainfall amounted to 40 inches (annual average 26 inches) there has been an unusually dry spell with only 3.01 inches of rain in 20 weeks.

## Observations of a Bower-bird Playground

By NANCY HOPKINS, Townsville, Qld.

The playground of a Great Bower-bird (*Chlamydera nuchalis*) which I have under observation is unusual, in my experience, in its use of red decorations. The playground is under a large 'Chinee apple' tree on the outskirts of the town. It is protected by a prickly circle of drooping branches, but is easily observed through the thin foliage. In the main, the decoration follows the normal pattern, green and white predominating, as usual. Fragments of concrete take the place of the usual whitish pebbles which are not available in this area. There is the familiar collection of shells—land and sea, bleached bones, scraps of metal, broken glass, and sundry bits of paper, cardboard, tape, ribbon, rubber tubing, insulating cord and so on. The sea-shells are old and probably came from a tidal creek. The sea is half a mile away, but, oddly enough, I have never seen a Bower-bird on the open beach, even when their haunts are near.

Zoning of ornaments is pronounced. (In this connection see articles by Norman Chaffer, *Emu*, 44, p. 161, and by E. H. Sedgwick, *Emu*, 45, p. 300). One end is decorated regularly with fresh green fruits, and once with 'shallot' tops. Fruits include small terminalias, young citrus fruits, and wild passion fruit (never in the yellow stage). Purple terminalia fruits lying around were probably brought to the bower in a green state. Here, too, is a display of bright green glass, whilst at the other end of the bower is a group of pale purple fragments. I do not recall having ever seen in a bower the amber-brown glass of beer and medicine bottles, although broken glass always figures largely.

One side of the bower is against a small stump, and is undecorated. On the other side the ground is strewn with

a motley array of ornaments including most of the red materials, red wool, glass, plastic cord, scraps of cloth, plastic bottle top, and part of a narrow red leather belt. Whilst the red ornaments are relegated to a secondary place, they do not appear to be rejected, being ranged close to the side for its whole length, and sometimes rearranged. Pieces of plastic cord have been draped about the outer twigs, and sometimes a few bits of red appear in front of the bower. Since my first visit new treasures have been added. The pieces of cloth are mostly dressmaking scraps; on my last visit several snippings of a new shade of red had appeared.

Once the middle of the bowers was strewn with small silvery leaves which have since shrivelled and have not been renewed. Some hardened skins of small custard apples are among the outer decorations. An eaten-out fruit hardens to a shell, black outside and rust-coloured within. I am somewhat puzzled by the presence of several pieces of horse-dung in the space beside the bower. These unlikely ornaments must have been carried fairly recently to their present position. It is possible that they have been thrown in by humans, and placed on one side by the bird, but general appearances do not suggest any such interference.

## Notes on the Blue-billed Ducks at Lake Wendouree, Ballarat

By J. R. WHEELER, Ballarat, Vic.

This species (*Oxyura australis*) has been present on Lake Wendouree in varying numbers during the season 1952-1953. In October 1952, eighteen mature birds were present, increasing to twenty-seven (23 mature and 4 immature) in December. A recent census of bird life on the lake revealed only nine mature birds and these were all wild and difficult to approach. The breeding season extended from November 1952 until early February 1953. Three clutches were noted and kept under close observation.

*Clutch A.* This clutch comprised four young and was first observed, when only a few days old, on December 1, 1952. The locality was in the south-west corner of the lake, known as the Convent Corner, and the area comprises a small lagoon connected to the lake proper by a culvert. The young grew quickly and after six weeks were almost as large as the female parent bird. In mid-January they left the breeding area and moved out into the open water.

*Clutch B.* This clutch comprised seven young and was first observed on January 7, 1953, in the same area as clutch A, when only about two days old. The parent bird