

Emu, 52, 68-69). It may be that this species occurs regularly in Australian waters during the Australian summer, but has been overlooked.

Notes on Three Tasmanian Birds

By K. B. HINSBY, Hobart, Tas.

A nest of the Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) was found under construction on December 17, 1949. It was situated in the branch of an *Olearia argyophylla* tree spreading over a small stream, which seemed promising for photography. The next visit was not until February 4, when I expected the young would have left, but I found the nest abandoned, apparently because of rainy weather. A further nest was found, however, fifty yards distant, in a *Rubus fruticosus* four feet over the water, and apparently built by the same pair. It contained three young. The female was sitting and her open bill was indicative of the day's high temperature. Both parents appeared to be in moult, because of the lateness of the season. This condition was also noticeable with a Fan-tailed Cuckoo and a male Blue Wren in the same locality.

The nests were built of fibrous eucalyptus bark and cobwebs, being thickly coated with webbing around the widest circumference. The lining was of fine bark, dry grass and moss in the first nest, but in the latter it consisted mainly of cow hair. Cattle browsing by the creek had left much hair on sticks and thorns, which had been readily gathered by the birds.

There has been much speculation on the use of the nest 'tail'. It appears to me that it is meant to give additional strength. Any strain on the nest is taken below as well as above the limb, as indicated by pressure with a finger inside and the thumb outside the nest. Apparently the tensile strength of the combined cobwebs and fibrous material exceeds the strain the structure is likely to be subjected to during incubation. In comparing the nest of the Grey Fantail with that of the Satin Flycatcher the covering of cobwebs is noticeably circular (around the circumference), whilst with the latter it is thickly woven vertically from limb to nest-rim. The Satin Flycatcher, however, unlike the Fantail, usually builds in a high, exposed position, and the vertical binding is apparently more secure to withstand capsizing during strong wind. This factor would hardly be necessary along sheltered creek-sides.

Records state that the Satin Flycatcher (*Myiagra cyano-leuca*) usually appears in Tasmania about the end of September. However, in my father's field-book there is a note for September 14, 1890, of their arriving in numbers at

Flagstaff Hill, St. Helens. That was a very wet day, clearing in the afternoon with the wind changing from west to east. On January 7, 1950, a female was seen feeding a young bird, obviously just out of the nest. The young resembled its parent in the red throat, but the reddish breast had not developed, down was on the head, feathers of the back and wings were margined with grey and the breast and abdomen were dark grey on the outer-parts and slightly paler in the centre. As the young raised the crest when being fed, a light superciliary stripe was prominent, extending around the neck.

A pair of birds was found the following season (November 20, 1950) gathering material from a profusely-flowering tree (*Eucalyptus globulus*) and the nest was located 300 yards away on a triple-forked dry limb of a *Eucalyptus obliqua*, about 45 feet high. Cobwebs were freely gathered and added to the structure. Both birds erected their crest-feathering continually when building. On November 25 the nest was so well strengthened with cobwebs that it appeared part of the limb itself. Both birds worked hard, one leaving as the other took over. The nest then appeared ready for eggs. On December 16 the female was on the nest. She erected the crest continually and often placed the bill under her breast to turn the eggs. Although the male gave relief the female did most of the incubation.

On January 1 the female was found bathing in the creek by touching the water a few times with her breast, 'swallow-fashion', before flying from limb to limb towards her nest, which now contained two young. I assume the young left the nest about January 7, as it was vacant when I again visited the place on January 10. Rain prevented any observation on the 7th, the date young were seen just out of the nest the previous year.

The eggs of the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater (*Gliciphila melanops*) are pinkish-white, with a few spots of reddish-brown at the larger end and very few on the rest of the surface. In shape they taper somewhat to a sharp point. During a long period of observation with the species I have found that after five days' incubation the pinkish lustre disappears and after ten days' sitting all spots vanish and the eggs are pure white. Also, the blood stream of the embryo causes a darkening of the shell in five days, and by ten days the chick is well developed in the egg.

A nest, built into the fork of a *Melaleuca squarrosa*, was lined with the barren capsules of *Banksia marginata* and some feathers. Of six nests noted the heights from the ground were between four inches and four feet six inches. All were lined as in the foregoing, except in one instance, when a pendent nest, suspended with cobwebs and deeper in the 'cup' than usual, was lined with fur.

Owing to the 'ruse' of the female in luring me some distance away, I did not see the young in this nest, because, through her 'ciff ciff ciff' alarm notes, they were able to get out and hide.

The male of the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater appears larger than the female and more brightly coloured. The young do not acquire the adult plumage until after the first moult.

The late Major H. M. Whittell, O.B.E. * — An Appreciation

By D. L. SERVENTY, Perth, W.A.

Hubert Massey Whittell, former President of the Union (1941-1943) and a top-ranking Australian ornithologist of the present day, died at the Nannup District Hospital, Western Australia, on February 7, 1954, at the age of 70.

The passing of a friend at the normal close of a fruitful life is to be borne as an inevitable if sad event, but Major Whittell was taken from us while he was still in the prime of his powers and in the centre of activity. Though he had already achieved in his lifetime more than the majority of gifted men, he had plans for several years' active work ahead. However, it was not to be. Towards the close of 1952 he was stricken down suddenly with a malady for which he was operated on in December that year. Though it was successful the surgical wound failed to heal as expected and he remained virtually an invalid throughout 1953. His friends watched with dismay his failing strength but hoped to the end that he would rally and recover completely. Mentally he remained alert to the last and such ornithological work as was possible was continued by him throughout, including the correction of the proofs of his major work, *The Literature of Australian Birds*, which by a melancholy fate he just failed to see in final published form, though he had the satisfaction of perusing almost all of it in paged proof, including the illustrations.

Our member was born at Forest Gate, Essex, on March 24, 1883, but his family had ancient associations with the city of Chester, of which he was made a Freeman. His father, Alfred Leighton Whittell, an engineer and member of the Institute of Naval Architects, was Lloyds' representative at Bombay for 30 years, and so his childhood alternated between Britain and India, with a year's schooling at Dusseldorf, Germany, in 1894, whilst his sister was receiving a musical education there. In 1899 he commenced a medical course at Edinburgh University, and was at Guy's Hospital in 1902. However, the following year he gave up medicine in favour of an Army career. He had, whilst at

*A portrait appeared in *The Emu*, vol. 43, 1944, pl. 12.