

## Stray Feathers

**Historic Bird-protection Order.**—General and Garrison Orders issued by Colonel David Collins in 1803-4, when he was in command of Victoria's first settlement (at Sullivan Bay near the present Sorrento), were published by the Victorian Government in 1878 as portion of a special Parliamentary Paper touching the early history of the colony. Reading through this document recently, I came upon what must rank as Victoria's (if not Australia's) first official instruction relating to the protection of birds.

Under date November 30, 1803, the General Orders state: "It having been mentioned to the Lt.-Governor that many of the people, not advertng to the consequences, are daily bringing into the encampment birds' nests containing either eggs or young unfledged birds, he thinks it necessary to prohibit a practice at once so cruel and destructive; any person offending against this order will be punished."

Salute to David Collins! In the light of that pronouncement of 1803, and bearing in mind that, arising from his earlier experience in Sydney, Collins was the first man to publish (though on information received) a description of the song and display of the Superb Lyrebird, it would appear that he merits a place of honour in the annals of Australian ornithology.

Collins, however, was not the first man to manifest interest in the birds of Victoria. That distinction belongs to Matthew Flinders and George Bass, who were among the sea-birds of Bass Strait in 1798. Three years later James Grant and Francis Barrallier, of the pioneering vessel *Lady Nelson*, made observations at Western Port on land-birds, "many of them having beautiful plumage and some melodious".

Moreover, it may be noted that one of Collin's officers at the Sullivan Bay settlement, Lieut. J. H. Tuckey, published, in 1805, a book in which he recorded observations made on emus, cockatoos, parrots, pigeons, and certain other species. Possibly it was Tuckey who "mentioned to the Lt.-Governor" the fact that some of his company were following the "cruel and destructive" practice of robbing birds' nests, so causing Collins to issue his historic protective order of November 30, 1803. Whether anyone offended against that order is not known. If so, the punishment was doubtless in accord with the custom of the time—either 50 or 100 lashes on the bare back!

For further references to Flinders and Bass, Grant and Barrallier, Tuckey, and other pioneers of the Victorian coast see 'History and Early Records of Ornithology in Victoria', by D. J. Dickison, in *The Emu* for January 1932. There are also references to the work of the voyagers (though, curiously, not to the Sullivan Bay settlement) in H. M.

Whittell's monumental *Literature of Australian Birds*, published in 1954.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, N.S.W., 26/3/55.

**Display of Bronze-Cuckoos.**—In 1950 accounts of communal displays of the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*) appeared in *Notornis*, vol. 3, p. 226, and vol. 4, p. 14. These recalled an observation of my own on the Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*), and I contributed a brief note which appeared in *Notornis*, vol. 4, p. 48, describing the behaviour of a party of birds, probably five in number.

During 1954, I was able to make somewhat similar observations at Williams, W.A., on the Golden Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites plagosus*). The following are abstracts from my field notes:

August 8, 1954. 9.30 a.m. Three birds were seen displaying in a tree top. The display comprised a slow pursuit through the crown of the tree and a rather slow raising and lowering of the wings, often not in perfect synchronization, giving an impression of alternation or suggesting an attempt to balance. The display was accompanied by an unusual call 'wit-wit-here-er' and an occasional 'pee-pee-pee'—a variant of the usual call. Sunshine on the bronze plumage produced a spectacular effect. The birds appeared to ignore my presence completely.

September 7, 1954. Five birds observed in two adjacent acacias. These were calling and indulging in the wing-raising display described on August 8.

September 26, 1954. Calling, heard at a distance, suggested a party congregated.

November 7, 1954. A normal call was heard, then a plaintive 'cheer' call suggesting a party of cuckoos. Investigating, I found at least four calling and moving together, through low acacias, with some wing-raising.

November 14, 1954. 'Cheer' call heard in the distance. This call, as heard on this occasion, could be mistaken for the normal call of the Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*).

In the foregoing notes, the numbers given are observed numbers, and represent the minimum number of birds present.

The species appeared in the district on August 1, and some birds were present at least until mid-December.—ERIC H. SEDGWICK, Williams, W.A., 2/5/55.

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