

nest room and the males the flight. The cock birds would attack the hens murderously if they entered the flight, and the reverse occurred when the cocks entered the nest room. It became necessary to provide a wire separation between the sexes to prevent any loss.

(f) *Maturity and Mating*

By May 29, at sixteen weeks of age, the birds were fully grown and mature, with adult plumage. The attitude of one sex toward the other persisted until the following spring when quarrels occurred within the two separate sex groups. At this stage the birds were paired, and it is interesting to note that the birds mate for life and will not easily remate if something happens to one of the pair.

CONCLUSION

These observations have been recorded with birds in captivity; whether this behaviour occurs in the wild I could not say. Unfortunately my studies in this species have been curtailed, and Brown Quail are now my interest. However, within the next two years I hope to be able to again carry out breeding investigations with Stubble Quail—this time for propagation.

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Birds eating soldier caterpillars.—During a visit to Wyperfeld National Park, Victoria, in September 1965 a small brown caterpillar, known locally as the Soldier caterpillar, was present in plague proportions on the ground in the tourist camping area.

Numerous birds were feeding on the caterpillars, including the Emu, *Dromaius novaehollandiae*; Yellow-throated Miner, *Myzantha flavigula*; Australian Raven, *Corvus coronoides*; and Red Wattle-bird, *Anthochaera carunculata*. At one point five Pallid Cuckoos, *Cuculus pallidus*, were feeding on the ground within a radius of thirty yards, with six Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, *Coracina novaehollandiae*, in the near vicinity.

Much more unexpected was the sight of a male Mallee Ringneck Parrot, *Barnardius barnardi*, shredding a caterpillar and eating it. The bird was only thirty feet away, and as I was watching through 10 x 50 binoculars I had a good view of the whole process, and could see the caterpillar wriggling in the beak. Unfortunately I was

unable to follow up this single observation as I left the Park early the next morning.—(Mrs.) ELLEN M. McCULLOCH, 6 Bullen Avenue, Mitcham, Vic.

Whistling Kites taking a Kookaburra.—Boxing Day, 1965, found me engaged in my inevitable Christmas holiday pursuit of dragging the Murray River for a body. I was two miles downstream from Buronga, New South Wales. On the Victorian side of the river was a large stand of Red Gums adorning a well-populated caravan park. On the New South Wales side, a mixture of Black Box and lignum. Between the two, one hundred and fifty yards of river and a one hundred yards wide sandbar. During the morning it became apparent that a Laughing Kookaburra, *Dacelo gigas*, had a nestful of young, somewhere in the Red Gums but the noisy human population forced him to catch food amongst the lignum. Backwards and forwards across the river would fly the Kookaburra at a regular height above water level of about 75 feet. As usual, odd Whistling Kites, *Haliastur sphenurus*, were drifting up and down the river. Making a downstream run, I noticed the Kookaburra leaving the New South Wales bank on what must have been his twentieth trip that morning. I took little notice of him until a loud cackling caused me to look up from my draglines. By then the Kookaburra was above mid-stream and tumbling out of control towards the water. A Whistling Kite was just above it, rising vertically as if it had just pulled out of a dive. The Kookaburra was about 20 feet above water when a second Whistling Kite dived out of the sky and struck the Kookaburra with either its feet or its lower body. The impact was a collision rather than a strike. The Kookaburra dropped like a stone into the water and the Whistling Kite pulled out of its dive and rose into the sky.

At this moment, the boat driver elected to turn and by the time we had executed the turn and I had freed the draglines, the Kookaburra was drifting slowly downstream, completely still and obviously dead. The two Whistling Kites were circling at a little height above. I do not know whether the Kookaburra was dead when it hit the water or whether the Kites took any action to ensure its drowning. Neither Kite would touch the body as it drifted past the boat but they both continued to circle above it as it drifted around the bend beyond the sandbar. I have little doubt they fed upon their prey when safely out of human range.—J. N. HOBBS, Buronga, N.S.W.