

Bird Notes from Wilmot, Tasmania.

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PART II.

SINCE writing my last paper (see page 49) we have passed through a very severe winter, and the native birds have had a trying time. The Dusky Robins (*Petroeca vittata*) and the Long-tailed Wrens (*Malurus gouldi*) were in particular very tame, and very attentive if any digging operations were going on. I tried hard to get them to take worms and grubs from the hand. Though they would hop to within a few inches of the hand, and the worms would wriggle most invitingly, the birds were afraid. As soon as the worms were put on my boot they would snap them up at once. If the worm was an extra long one, they would fly to a post or log and with a very smart turn get it endways on and so swallow it.

Early in July I had a dead female Scarlet-breasted Robin (*Petroeca leggit*) brought to me. The tiny creature had evidently died from starvation, as her poor little body was pitifully thin. The Flame-breasted Robins (*P. phoenicea*) left our district near the end of April, and it was not until the 31st July that I noticed them about again. Evidently they left to take their winter journey to Victoria or elsewhere.

This year, though the autumn was very mild, the Cuckoos did not return to pay their usual fortnightly visit in April. Perhaps some intuition warned them that the coming winter was to be very severe.

Though I gave prominence to the Black Crow-Shrikes (*Strepera fuliginosa*) in my last paper, it may not be out of place in this one to mention that at present they are very attentive to the early sowing of peas in the gardens, and have the knack of following a row right down and not missing a pea. They also find their way into sheds where apples are stored, and as I write I can hear a noisy flock on a recently sown oat-field.

In our scrub-covered gullies the little Brown Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis humilis*) flits about. I have found its old nests two or three times. The Yellow-rumped Tits (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*)—merry little creatures—are very numerous; so also are their cousins, the Tasmanian Tits or Browntails (*Acanthiza dieffenensis*). These latter are comparatively tame, and not afraid of mankind. I found one of their nests made in a fallen leafy branch. Both birds were busily working at it on one of the last days in August. I was not able to look at the nest again till the end of September, when the bird was sitting on three eggs. Evidently they do not hurry their building operations.

The Spotted Owls (*Ninox maculata*) are very plentiful amongst these hills, and on moonlight evenings may often be seen perched on the ridges of barns or on stumps and fences. Mice, I presume, attract them to the barns. An incident of one of these Owls returning to captivity came under my notice recently. The bird

had been caught in an ordinary rabbit trap, but fortunately without having its leg broken. It was kept fastened up by a tiny chain for several weeks, and fed with rabbit flesh. It was released and flew away. A few nights afterwards a strange "tapping" was heard at the door, and when the latter was opened in flew an Owl, which went straight to its old corner and looked inquiringly round. Meat was given to it, which it ate, and when finished made no attempt to go away, but roosted in the chimney. For days it stayed about, and was eventually put on its chain again, for safety from idle shooters. The pretty little Owlet Nightjar (*Egotheles novæ-hollandiæ*) I have not seen about, but know it is to be found amongst our hills, as the cat once brought in a beautiful specimen.

At frequent times throughout the year the Black Cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus funereus*) are about in flocks of from eight to twenty. They do not appear to nest in this more open locality, but evidently in the ranges to the south and west of us. They are noisy birds, and work most vigorously at the stringybark trees after the white grubs of which they are so fond. The birds tear the bark down and leave it hanging in strips, and the trees present a most curious appearance. What powerful beaks these birds have! The grinding noise they make can be heard for a considerable distance. Occasionally a couple of White Cockatoos (*Cacatua galerita*) will spend a few days in this neighbourhood. Their coming generally causes a commotion in the Magpie (*Gymnorhina*) world, and the latter birds spend a good deal of their time chasing the white visitors. Two members of the Parrot tribe are with us all the year round—the pretty Yellow-bellied Parrakeet (*Platycercus flaviventris*) and the ordinary Rosella (*P. eximius*). The former, with its pretty whistling call, is to be seen and heard on every hillside, particularly amongst saplings. On the cultivated and grassy lands the Rosellas are plentiful. They are very fond of pulling off the young buds of the fruit trees.

On the sapling rises and in the dogwood scrubs the Bronze-wing Pigeon (*Phaps chalcoptera*) is to be both seen and heard, though in small numbers. In the afternoon, and sometimes on moonlight evenings, they may be heard calling. In the deeper gullies the shy Brush Bronze-wing (*P. elegans*) may occasionally be flushed from a bush or tree. The wild pepper berries are great favourites with these, as also with the Jays or Black Crow-Shrikes.

Amongst the grain fields the Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*) is always to be found. It is a pity such numbers of their eggs are destroyed during harvesting operations. During February there are lots of nests containing eggs to be found, and the latest date in a year I have observed their eggs was about 16th April. The bird was sitting on seven eggs, which appeared within a few days of being hatched. On the flats near the River Forth and in swampy situations near the creeks the Brown or Swamp

Quail (*Synæcus australis*) is always to be flushed; it rises suddenly, and flies quickly or strongly away. It often makes its nest under a rush clump. Its flight is rather a contrast to that of the Painted Quail (*Turnix varia*), which does not rise so easily, but runs swiftly along the ground. Its call or "coo" could easily be mistaken for that of the Bronze-wing Pigeon.

Sometimes a Pectoral Rail (*Hypotaenidia philippinensis*) is to be seen on the flats, but they are rather scarce in this hilly district. A pair of Native-Hens (*Tribonyx mortieri*) have their home along a creek. They hide their nests so well that they are rarely found. Pretty little things the young ones are, and how swiftly they run! I have had great pleasure in watching them. The little ones would stay feeding with their mother, while the male bird always remained on guard if the situation was at all open. Perhaps they would be picking and running about, when he would give a warning "grunt." Immediately the little chicks would squat, and if the warning were repeated would disappear like magic; if not, they would go on feeding. When grown they seem to move further down the creek and not remain in the same locality with their parents. One pair of old birds used to follow the furrows of a newly-ploughed field after the uncovered worms. The same pair occasionally ventured amongst the domestic fowls, but would run at top speed if a human being came too near. I have seen young ones about in the months of October and May.

For a few months of the year, from end of September to March, the Small-billed Cuckoo-Shrike (*Graucalus parvirostris*) visits us. Its local name is "Summer-Bird," but as this name is often applied to the Wood-Swallows it leads to confusion. The Cuckoo-Shrike does not appreciate the severity of our mountain winters, and generally arrives later than the Cuckoos.

The Wood-Swallow (*Artamus sordidus*) is often the first of our migratory birds to return. Its arrival makes a very welcome addition to our outdoor life, as the bird is so full of life and energy and not afraid of man. This species nests about here, having splendid places to build its homes amongst the many dead trees and hollow stumps. I have also found its nests on the top of a piece of hanging bark, and have observed both birds assisting to select the nesting site. Together they build the nest, and are quick little workers.

(To be continued.)

A LATE CLUTCH OF DOTTRELS.—Mr. Charles French, jun., received a clutch of Black-fronted Dottrels' (*Æ. melanops*) eggs taken by his friend Mr. B. Goudie, at Birchip, Victoria, on the 20th May. The eggs were found on a swampy bit of ground that had a fortnight previously been under water from the result of abundant rain succeeding a drought.