

## Stray Feathers.

**Great Flight of Swifts.**—In February, 1906, when I was at Port Keats, Northern Territory, I observed an enormous number of Spine-tailed Swifts (*Chaetura caudacuta*) migrating. They came from the south-east and were heading north-west. The flock appeared to be about 200 yards in width, and maintained an almost continuous column for about six hours. I had never seen these birds there previously, nor did there seem to be any stragglers, as none was to be seen next day. Inquiry from the aborigines elicited the information that these flights had often been seen before, but they could not tell which way the birds returned.—F. L. GODFREY. Darwin.

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**Do Variations in Seasons Affect the Size of Eggs?**—Although my collection of eggs contains many thousand specimens, all of which have been carefully measured, I have only lately noticed a case of variation in size occasioned, I presume, by a change in season. I refer to eggs of *Chlamydera maculata*. In 1911, a season of drought, I secured with difficulty a few sets from a certain locality, my collector's observations, however, pointing to the fact that at times the birds bred very freely there. In 1912, a season of plenty, I obtained a large number of clutches from the same locality, some of them apparently laid by the same birds that were robbed during 1911. All the eggs collected in 1912 show a *marked increase in size* compared with those of 1911, the averages in inches being 1.45 x 1.03 for 1911 and 1.55 x 1.05 for 1912. It is well known that in favourable seasons many birds lay more eggs to the clutch than they do in bad seasons, but the question as to whether the size of the egg also varies has, I believe, not been previously raised. As an illustration of the effects of a good season upon the number of eggs to the clutch, I note the following:—Up to 1912 I considered three or four eggs a full clutch for *Gymnorhina dorsalis*, of south-western Australia; in the remarkably favourable spring of 1912 I received particulars of no less than six clutches of five eggs each. While on the subject of the eggs of *G. dorsalis*, my observation of a very large number of eggs goes to prove the correctness of Mr. A. J. Campbell's statement ("Nests and Eggs," page 296) that they vary less than others of the family. Can it be that the Western bird is the older and purer species, and therefore produces eggs more true to type?—H. L. WHITE. Bell-trees, N.S.W., 1/6/13.

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**Descriptions of New Eggs.**—*Mirafr rufescens*, Ingram.—Clutch, four eggs; surface of shell smooth and glossy, minutely pitted all over; roundish or swollen oval in shape. Ground colour dull greyish or creamy white, well marked all over with minute splashes of pale brown and lilac, those of the latter being somewhat indistinct, and appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell.

Out of nine clutches the set described appears to be the most typical, both as regards colour and shape. The eggs of the series vary in shape and ground colour, as well as the general disposition of the markings. Some are pointed ovals, with a pale bluish-white ground; others are very heavily blotched with umber and pale lilac. The type clutch measures:—(a)  $0.75 \times 0.61$ , (b)  $0.75 \times 0.61$ , (c)  $0.73 \times 0.61$ , (d)  $0.73 \times 0.61$ . They were collected by Mr. H. G. Barnard, at Brunette Downs, Northern Territory, 3rd April, 1913.

*Ptilotis forresti* (Ingram).—Clutch, two eggs; surface of shell fine and slightly glossy; oval in shape. Ground colour pale pinkish-buff, becoming very much darker on the apex, where a cap is formed, and here are scattered a few indistinct markings of very pale brown and lilac, the latter appearing as if beneath the shell. The eggs closely resemble those of *Ptilotis sonora*, except that they are smaller. They measure in inches:—(a)  $0.78 \times 0.57$ ; (b)  $0.80 \times 0.58$ ; against an average of nine eggs of *P. sonora*— $0.89 \times 0.66$ . The eggs belong to a Cuckoo combination clutch, having been found with one egg of *Cuculus pallidus*, and were collected by Mr. H. G. Barnard, at Brunette Downs, Northern Territory, 5th March, 1913.

*Myzantha melanocephala crassirostris* (North Queensland Miner).—For years past collectors in North Queensland informed me of a Miner which differed from our southern species, but they were unable to obtain specimens. The eggs described were obtained in 1909, but were placed aside pending identification of the bird. Mr. G. M. Mathews has since named the sub-species as above. Clutch, three eggs; oval in shape; surface of shell smooth and slightly glossy; texture fine. Ground colour very pale salmon, marked with small spots and specks, particularly at the larger end, of reddish-chestnut and purplish-grey, the markings forming a cap at the larger end. The clutch measures in inches:—(a)  $1.12 \times 0.77$ , (b)  $1.12 \times 0.76$ , (c)  $1.15 \times 0.77$ . Collected by Mr. Geo. Sharp, on the Herberton Range, North Queensland, 23rd November, 1909. Two other clutches from the same locality measure:—(1) (a)  $0.98 \times 0.69$ , (b)  $0.93 \times 0.72$ ; (2) (a)  $0.97 \times 0.73$ , (b)  $0.93 \times 0.71$ .—H. L. WHITE. Belltrees, N.S.W., 1/6/13.

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**Springfield (Tasmania) Notes.**—Gang-Gang Cockatoo (*Callocephalon galeatum*).—A flock of these birds visited this district several times this year. They appear to have their home in mountain ranges to the south-east. One bird was either attacked by some bird or shot at, as some of its feathers were lying on the road. They were soft, downy, red feathers, blood-stained at the base.

Scrub-Tit (*Acanthornis magna*).—Last season I discovered that this bird is an inhabitant of the dense scrubs on our mountain slopes. Three nests were given to me. One had been blown down in a gale. The second was found when the bird was sitting on three eggs. When I asked for these the nest had been robbed. The bird rebuilt, but the two eggs laid were poorly coloured.

Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*).—The Emu-Wrens mentioned in my article, page 169, vol. xii., of *The Emu*, safely reared their young. As soon as the little ones were able to take care of themselves the parents, or rather female bird, built another nest, and was sitting by 27th November on three eggs. The nest was not far from the former one. This seems to show that these birds rear more than one brood in the year. It puzzles me where the young ones afterwards go. They appear to stay with their parents until March and then to be driven off. I also noticed that the Emu-Wren sometimes lays two eggs only, having on 30th November and 3rd December respectively found a bird sitting on that number. On latter date three young were found as well. They were about five days old, and had little room in their tiny home. I tried an experiment to see if the Emu-Wrens would rear Tits (*Acanthiza*), and on 17th December took the eggs from the former and placed a clutch of the latter in their place. The Wren continued sitting until the 19th, when the eggs disappeared. At the beginning of February last the same pair was seen with fledgelings following them, so, late as the season was, they must have rebuilt.

Long-tailed Wren (*Malurus gouldi*).—In this district Wrens moult very early, commencing in January, the earliest I have noted so far for any district. This has occurred for three years in succession, so must be a general rule. By May the birds are nearly fully feathered, and a few examples are quite so, and are very merry.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*), Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*).—Several of these birds are still with us (10th May), in spite of the last fortnight being a succession of heavy frosts in the morning. Last winter a few remained right through the cold season. The want of knowledge among country folk is astonishing. In March a parcel was sent to me by a local resident with a message to the effect that the bird inside was a very rare Hawk, one seldom seen. It was shot because it had been trying to get the pet canaries. The parcel contained a young Pallid Cuckoo in its whitish stage of feathering. No wonder the Hawk was rarely seen! Last week I saw a Ground-Lark (*Anthus*), and heard a Graucalus. They, too, have lingered late, and are generally gone by May.

Wattle-Birds (*Anthochaera inauris*).—A flock of 30 Wattle-Birds came up from the banksian coastal district, and spent a month here, when the blackberries and apples were ripe. They have apparently now returned to the warmer coastal district.

The Hill Bell-Magpie (*Strepera arguta*) likewise descended on the orchards, destroying many apples. The birds suffered severely from the guns of the orchard-owners.

Brown Quail (*Synoicus diemenensis*).—Early in March a farmer found eight young Brown Quail weak from starvation. They were in the grain paddock, but had evidently lost their parents. He took them home and tried to feed them, but they died that evening. A pair of Quail nested in the school swamp, and have

reared nine young. The whole family come into the school garden, and the other morning were round the house door-step feeding in the grass and amongst the young cabbages.—(Miss) J. A. FLETCHER. Springfield, Tasmania, 10/5/13.

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### From Magazines, &c.

**Early History of the Australian Cassowary.**—*Records of the Australian Museum*, vol. x., No. 4, 19th April, 1913, consists of Notes on the Early History of the Australian Cassowary (*Casuarius australis*), by Alfred J. North, C.M.Z.S., C.M.B.O.U., ornithologist. He states that the existence of a Cassowary inhabiting Australia was first made known in 1849 by the late Mr. Wm. Carron, botanist to the Kennedy Expedition from Rockingham Bay to Cape York. Carron, in his "Narrative," 4th November, 1848, writes:—"This morning Jackey went to examine a scrub through which we wanted to pass, and while out shot a fine Cassowary; it was very dark and heavy, not so long in the leg as the common Emu, and had a larger body, shorter neck, with a large, red, stiff, horny comb on its head. Mr. Wall skinned it; but, from the many difficulties with which he had to contend, the skin was spoiled before it could be properly preserved." The subsequent history of knowledge of the species is dealt with in an interesting manner.

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**The Passenger Pigeon.**—*Bird-Lore* for March-April, 1913, contains several interesting articles dealing with the Passenger Pigeon of North America, and a series of unique photographic illustrations showing the adult birds, young, and so forth. The photographs were obtained by Mr. J. G. Hubbard at Woods Hall, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1898, and represent birds in the aviary of Dr. C. O. Whitman. The Passenger Pigeon is doomed to extinction, as only one living specimen, in the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens, is known to exist. The Passenger Pigeon is a lengthened and elegant species, about 15 or 16 inches in total length. The general colour of the upper surface is greyish-blue, the region of the hind neck being iridescent with gold, emerald-green, and crimson. Throat, breast, and sides are light brown, the rest of the under parts being pure white. Eyes bright red, bill black, and feet pinkish-purple complete an exquisite figure.

Under the caption, "A Vanished Race," Mr. Moritz Fischer gives an account of the Passenger Pigeon. Writing of what has long passed away, he says:—"About 1840, professional catchers began to operate on the flocks. By degrees they bettered the older methods of luring and taking. The chief contrivance universally employed consisted of a capacious net, which could be quickly dropped over a bed baited with salt, mud, or grain, and