


Notes upon the Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (*Pteropodocys phasianella*).

By C. F. COLE, R.A.O.U., WANGARATTA.

BEING conversant with this bird only as a cabinet specimen, it was my good fortune to come across it in the flesh about sundown on 5th June, 1914, at Londrigan, some 6 miles from Wangaratta, in the north-east of Victoria. Whilst harnessing a pony to the gig, my attention was attracted by hearing a strange muffled sound like *Woof, woof*, which seemed to arise from the ground close to the butt of a eucalypt sapling some 45 feet high standing close to the gig. I listened intently and searched the ground, to find the cause of this now oft-repeated muffled *Woof, woof*, unfamiliar to me in the hush, but failed to find anything about or above ground close to the sapling butt to account for these strange sounds. Standing close to the bole of the sapling, I began to search the leafy houghs above in the hope of elucidating the mystery. My suspicion being aroused that the sounds might be ventriloquial in nature, and daylight fast disappearing, my son and self made a close scrutiny of the tree-top, with the result that we saw, perched right at the top of the sapling, upon a small horizontal hough, three greyish-coloured birds, touching one another and facing all one way, a habit characteristic of birds of the *Artamus* and *Sitta* genera. When I threw up a stick they took flight, and uttered sharp and rather sweet notes whilst upon the wing. The first portion of their flight was somewhat quick and rollicking, broken every now and again with a little volplaning. While volplaning the wings were kept in a downward position, somewhat like the letter V reversed, only extended thus—. This part of their flight resembled that of the Ground-Parrot (*Pezoporus terrestris*) or Stubble-Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*) when about to alight. The volplaning, besides giving a peculiar effect to their flight, was most interesting to watch. On throwing another stick, similar notes and flights were repeated. The birds returned and took up their previous attitude upon the same branch in the same spot. A third time they were put to flight, with the same result. Finding that the birds intended camping for the night upon this particular branch, I returned at midnight, and, having a suitable moon for "mooning them," secured two of the birds for scientific purposes. Upon handling them I found that they were the Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (*Pteropodocys phasianella*), male and female—rare visitors, and splendid specimens of their kind. As in other species belonging to this family, the feathers readily leave the body.

Some weeks later I heard the same sound, *Woof, woof*, at Stanley, a mountainous district of Victoria, some 2,500 feet above sea-level, and located a pair of birds perched high up in a tall eucalypt tree. Upon 17th August of this year (1915) I met the bird much further south, close to Euroa, on the Mansfield road. Two of

them were perched close together in the top of a low sapling, my attention being again attracted by the sound *Woof, woof*, whilst I was cycling along. The bird, when found sitting as described, does not take fright easily, and, although the pair of birds seen at Euroa was flushed from the trees several times, no attempt was made to return to the tree flushed from, to settle upon the ground, or to volplane as they did after the first time of taking flight.

Undoubtedly, the peculiar and circular flights of *P. phasianella* at dusk on the evening of 5th June, 1914, were controlled by an impulse to return each time to the tree and branch they had selected as a roosting-place for the night. Possibly it is a characteristic of this bird to return, if disturbed after having settled down for the night, to the tree selected for roosting in.

Morning Song of the Noisy Miner (*Myzantha garrula*).

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THAT very common bird, the Noisy Miner, is without credit for its morning song—a psalm of dawn. Rather, we incline to ridicule it for the poverty of music in its notes. They are mostly calls or alarms. That is true with regard to its life between sunrise and sunset. To my great surprise, an agreeable phase of this bird's life-history has shown itself. Before sunrise, and as the day breaks, a solitary bird, judging by the general quiet, will pour forth for twenty minutes a most agreeable song in its nesting area. It is a song of short phrases, and not as continuous as that of the Skylark (*Alda*) in the day-time or of the Bush-Lark (*Mirafra*) in the moonlight, or by the Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus*) within its bed of reeds. The song of the Black-and-White Fantail (*Rhipidura motacilloides*), made up of five notes, is very simple when compared, and is practically at the opposite pole to that of *Alda* or *Mirafra*. So even and so sweet is the calm of the song that it certainly is not one of rivalry. There is no flight in song as with *Mirafra*, and it is too much in the dark for display of plumage. The phrases have intervals of a few seconds, and they are very simple. The two liquid notes rendered as *Ko-tek* remind me of the contralto notes of the Magpie-Lark (*Grallina picata*).

The rendering given of this song of dawn is to be taken as correct with latitude. The bird itself on different mornings will make its variations, both in pitch and in the order of the phrases, and our musical notation does not yet seem possible for bird song.

On 1st October, just when the first of the daylight came along, and when birds and animals in general were asleep, in a perfectly calm air a voice broke the stillness, clearly and crisply, with *Ko-tek, ko-tek, ko-tek*. With an interval of three seconds