

Description of Australian Birds' Eggs Hitherto Unrecorded.

By H. L. WHITE, R.A.O.U., BELLTREES (N.S.W.)

Platycercus splendidus, Gould.

Clutch four to seven; eggs pure white, shell without gloss and thickly pitted all over with minute holes, many nodules being in evidence in some cases.

Measurements, in inches, of a clutch of four taken by me at Belltrees, N.S.W., 20/9/15:—(a) 1.02 x .86, (b) 1.01 x .84, (c) 1.04 x .87, (d) 1.08 x .85.

Eggs placed 12 inches down in the hollow of a stump standing about 10 feet high.

The eggs of different clutches vary considerably in size and shape, but are generally not distinguishable from those of *Platycercus eximius*.

Ethelornis (Pseudogerygone) magnirostris whitlocki, Mathews.

I am not an advocate for the splitting of species unless there are some marked differences. In the case of the bird in question, my specimens vary considerably from those of eastern Australia, the eggs are different from any others of the genus I have seen, while I know of no previous record of the Large-billed Fly-eater from Western Australia.

The nest, a very neat dome-shaped structure composed of shreds of bark and spider-web, was placed in a mangrove tree at a height of 8 feet above the mud on the tide line. Time occupied in building, 16 days.

Clutch of two eggs, ground colour white, with reddish-brown dots and splashes, rather plentifully distributed over the larger end, but sparingly elsewhere. Shape long oval; texture of shell fine and without gloss.

Measurements in inches:—(a) .72 x .47, (b) .73 x .47.

Except in size, the eggs are almost identical with those of *Glycyphila fasciata*, Gould.

Locality.—Port Hedland, W.A.

Collected by F. Lawson Whitlock, 28/10/14.

Reminiscences of a Field Collector.*

By A. J. CAMPBELL, C.M.B.O.U., MELBOURNE (VIC.)

ONCE, when I was going afield, I met an enthusiastic friend, who was proceeding to a land sale. Patting me on the shoulder, he said—"Sell your bird-eggs, old man, and put the money into land." The big boom broke. He lost his land; my egg

* These notes were read at a meeting of ornithologists, held in Melbourne, on the occasion when Mr. Campbell presented his collection of Australian birds' eggs to the National Museum, Victoria.

collection is still intact. That is history. It is difficult to state what is the intrinsic or scientific value of a natural history collection. To accomplish any great object in life, there must be a passion. You cannot materialize one's passion—be it music, painting, or nature-study—any more than you can value one's artistic temperament in terms of £ s. d.

One likes to study birds because they are the most happy and healthy of creatures. Whoever saw a sick bird, except in caged confinement? Birds in the open are always joyous. Listen to their lively lays at break o' day—never ill. Besides the beauty of birds, the colour and markings of some eggs are most attractive. Their graceful shapes, whether globular, oval, or elliptical, are all emblems of true infinity. In my book, "Nests and Eggs," maybe I have said sufficient descriptive of the eggs and the domestic economy of our Commonwealth birds. Perhaps I may here recite a few incidents in travel that occurred while procuring my specimens.

I have been twice shot at. In the early days of Ferntree Gully (Vic.), we (four of us) were on the road, at night, to the Dandenongs, walking every yard of the way. Near what is now known as Wheeler's Hill a drunken fellow wanted to know "Who the — are you?" We replied, "Look out, our guns are loaded." "Oh, is it shooting you mean? I'll meet you with a gun." So the rascal said, rushing into a shanty near. In the meantime we took to our heels and turned sharply aside into the bush. When the drunkard reappeared, he, supposing we had continued our way up the road, fired in that direction. We could distinctly hear the "ping" of the bullet. Being about midnight, we camped in the scrub where we were, and continued our journey at day-dawn. By the way, I recollect that on this trip we saw the lovely little Chestnut-shouldered Grass-Parrot. It used to frequent the fertile flats of Ferntree Gully. We believe that this beautiful bird is now extinct. On another occasion we were shot at in broad daylight by a land-owner, somewhere in the locality of what is now known as Murrumbeena (Vic.) It is true the landlord warned us off his grounds, but we had found a Bronze-winged Pigeon's nest in a knot of mistletoe, with the bird sitting, and we were loth to leave. Presently we espied the owner sneaking down upon us along an acacia hedge. One of us shouted, "Look out, he's got a gun," and away we sped. There was a "bang," and buckshot scattered about us. We have not been in that paddock since. Another shooting incident was connected with a bullock. In an open paddock near Oakleigh (Vic.) we were charged by a wild Gippsland bullock. The beast would have certainly horned us had not one shot it in the face, and temporarily stayed its progress. We were sorry, but there was no other means of escape.

On two occasions horses bolted with the coach I was on, each time from the same cause—namely, a thoughtless tramp basking in the sun alongside of the road—his head on his swag and his

knees drawn up before him—a scarecrow sufficient to frighten the meekest of horses. Returning from Ferntree Gully with a Lyre-Bird's nest sewed in some sacking—which, by the way, together with a pair of birds, I donated to the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh—we had just crossed Dandenong Creek, and, turning a sharp curve, the pair of horses suddenly caught sight of the recumbent figure. However, we did not break a buckle. The other occasion was in Riverina. This time the team consisted of four-in-hand. Being on the box seat, I noticed the figure of a man ahead upon the ground (I thought the driver saw it too, but he evidently did not). I immediately thought of the Dandenong Creek episode, and called to those inside to "look out for some fun." No sooner had I uttered the words than the team left the track and tore through the timber, a great bushy tree nearly sweeping the driver off his seat. However, courage and good horsemanship steadied the team before any damage was done. It was a very narrow escape, and we were miles from anywhere. But you should have heard the poetry heaped upon the head of the unfortunate "sundowner." I never before knew that a coach-driver's vocabulary was so inexhaustible.

Incidentally, through collecting trips I have enjoyed some sport fishing—seine fishing by the sea (notably on island excursions), and hooking, with rod and line, cod and plump perch out of the broad-bosomed Murray. And members who went with the R.A.O.U. to Kangaroo Island will remember the creeks there alive with bream, which were sometimes hooked two at one cast of the line. But I never took to shooting birds for sport. "Virtue has its own reward." On that strip, once sand and scrub, between St. Kilda and Sandridge (Vic.), which is now a forest of houses, known as the Beaconsfield-parade, I used to kill snakes and pick up Dottrels' eggs in doublets. There were swamps contiguous, teeming with wild fowl. At a wheeling feathered flock one day a man fired. Out of the destruction two Wood-Ducks fell near me. As the man was not legally entitled to them, I bagged both birds and bolted home.

Numerous Ducks used to fly overhead in small flocks up and down the River Yarra. At evening they usually flew up stream, offering tempting shots for long-ranged guns. One evening, when "mooning" near Como Swamp, Toorak, I heard a distant shot round the bend, and some considerable time afterwards a fine, fat Black Duck fell at my feet, stone dead. There being nobody about, I quietly picked up the bird and took it home.

Once I was in a slight railway accident. The carriage in which we were travelling left the rails, and bumped considerably when off the right track—indeed, nearly capsized before the train was pulled up. What concerned me most was a bright and beautiful clutch of Kestrel's eggs which I had, unblown, in a "billy" beneath the seat. I took the eggs that day from a crevice of a cliff overhanging the Werribee River.

Someone has asked me what I consider my greatest finds. I can hardly say. But those of most lasting memories to me are probably the finding of my first Lyre-Bird's nest—the excitement of flushing the sitting bird, with its loud, whistling shriek of alarm as it flew down gully. Then, when your excitement subsides, there is the admiration for the picturesque nest, with its virgin forest and fern surroundings. Or, perhaps, it would be the first finding of an Emu's nest. You notice the noble bird tear away through the belt of box timber, and on going to the starting point there you behold, upon a bed amidst the cane-grass, the clutch of eight or ten large and beautiful greenish eggs. Or it may be when you land on an out-of-the-way islet, at a sea-bird rookery. Then your nerves tingle from head to foot in an ecstasy of extreme delight while hundreds of wild birds, on shivering wings, are screeching overhead, and you see mottled and curiously marked eggs amongst grass, succulent ice-plant, or on the bare sand, as the case may be, in numbers dotting the landscape.

Another indelible memory was a scene I witnessed only last year, when, with a genial companion, I visited a Swiftlet cave on a verdure-clad islet—a secluded spot set in a blue sheet of coral sea. It was the most splendid of serene summer days, and the place the most picturesque that one could imagine. Bean-trees wreathed with rosy flowers, and umbrella-trees and palms, reared their graceful forms above luxuriant scrub. Underneath were rich, rocky galleries of native gardens where grew great patches of an ornamental polypodium, bearing brownish, flat, embroidered fronds. Here and there, on tree or stone, were orchids conspicuous with bowing heads of bottle-brush-like flowers—*i.e.*, composed of clusters of tubular flowerets of waxy appearance, variegated crimson, green, and white (*Dendrobium Smilliae*, von Mueller). From the dazzling sunlight we entered the deep shade of a canopy scrub, then a gloomy cavern, where between 50 and 60 Swiftlets' nests could just be discerned attached to the roof. A score of nests contained each a single pure white egg. Closer examination by the aid of a pocket electric lantern showed the nests in groups, distant from the floor from 4 feet up to about 7 feet. Some nests were adjoining, so that tails of the tiny brooding birds overlapped. The nests were spoon-shaped, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, with a short, handle-like appendage cemented to the rock, and were composed of shreds of grass, moss, &c., intermixed with a kind of gluten. The little birds, on being disturbed, flew quietly, save for a few feeble notes, like fairy forms about the cave, or in and out, there being more than a single entrance.

In concluding this brief sketch of some of my reminiscences, I must say that "the lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places." I have often thanked the Almighty for my being and for the wonder of His works.