

## Description of New Honey-eater of the Genus *Ptilotis*, from North Australia.

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

***Ptilotis albilineata***, sp. nov. White-stripe Honey-eater. Collected by William M'Lennan.

*Adult*.—Whole of upper surface fuscous, darkest on the head; primaries and tail feathers edged with olive-yellow. Conspicuous white stripe extending below the eye from the gape to behind the ear coverts; under surface dull white, whitest on the throat, and mottled with fuscous about the breast; under wing coverts yellowish-buff, and the inner edges of the wing feathers also buffy.

Bill brownish-black; gape yellow; feet brownish-grey; eyes light or bluish-grey. Sexes are alike in coloration.

Dimensions in millimetres:—

♂, (1) Length 192, wing 90, tarsus 22, culmen 20; (2) length 185, wing 89, tarsus 21, culmen 21.

♀, (1) Length 183, wing 83, tarsus 19, culmen 19; (2) length 171, wing 82, tarsus 20, culmen 20; (3) length 170, wing 79, tarsus 19, culmen 19.

Stomach contents, seeds and skins of fruit.

*Type Locality*.—King River,\* Northern Territory.

*Observations*.—The bird appears to be confined exclusively to the rocky gorges of the sandstone hills, and was seen only in the deepest and narrowest ravines. Its call is a loud, clear whistle—"Tu-u-u-heer, tu-u-u-in," uttered occasionally. When the call is imitated the birds will come within a few feet of the observer, peer all round, and try to locate the sound. On one occasion a pair of birds was called up and became very excited, flitting through the bushes, and even examining the crevices in the sandstone.

## Description of Nest and Eggs of the Desert Chat (*Ashbyia lovensis*, Ashby).

(*Ephthianura lovensis*, Ashby, *Emu*, vol. x., 1911, p. 251;  
*Ashbyia lovei*, North, *Agric. Gaz. N.S.W.*, vol. xxii., p. 211.)

By S. A. WHITE, M.B.O.U.

THE Board of Governors of the South Australian Museum organized a collecting expedition to the north-eastern limits of this State in September and October, 1916, under the leadership of Mr. Edgar R. Waite, F.L.S., Director of the Museum, the writer being attached to the party as ornithologist. Upon the return journey by way of Cooper's Creek, and when traversing a wide belt of table-land, the eggs of the Desert Chat (*Ashbyia*

\* About 90 miles east of Port Essington.

*lovensis*) were taken. Through the courtesy of the Board and of the Director I am able to describe these eggs.

Although the Desert Chat was described by Mr. E. Ashby as long ago as 1911 (*Emu*, vol. x., p. 251) as *Ephthianura lovensis*, and subsequently placed in a new genus by Mr. A. J. North, no knowledge of the eggs or nest of this bird could be gleaned. Upon two occasions supposed eggs were taken of this bird, but I deprecated describing them as such. Now I can positively say they were not the eggs of the bird in question, and that the following is a description of the first authenticated eggs of *Ashbyia lovensis* ever taken.

I met with these birds west of Oodnadatta during June, 1914 (see *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, vol. xxxix., p. 752), and, although in my opinion they had then paired off for breeding, nests were not met with. The type clutch now in the South Australian Museum comprises three eggs, of which the following is a description:—

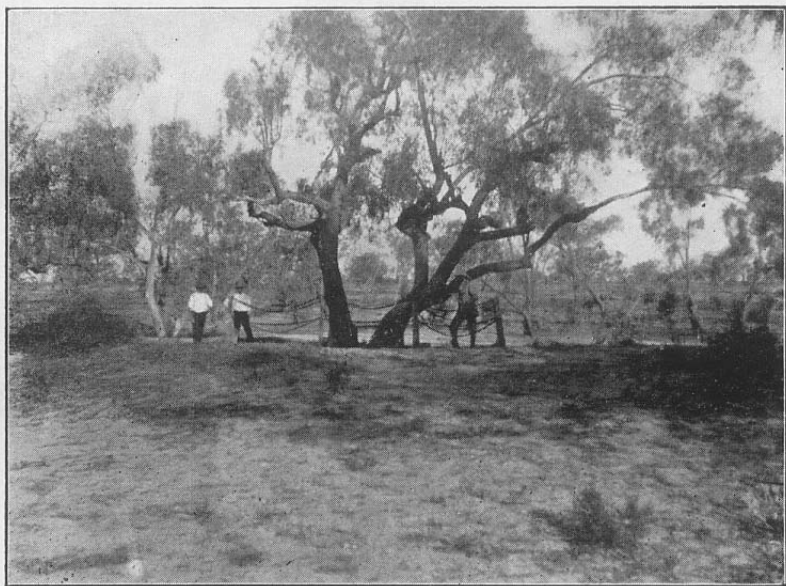
Ground colour before blowing pale pink or light flesh colour; after blowing, yellowish-white; reddish-brown spots are clustered round the larger ends, and in two eggs (*a* and *b*) very small spots are scattered over them; the third (*c*) has the spots at the larger end much more strongly pronounced in comparison to the other two. Eggs pointed, measuring as follows:—(*a*) 10.93 x 10.45, (*b*) 10.97 x 10.47, (*c*) 10.94 x 10.45 mm. respectively.

*Nest*.—A deep, neat structure built in a comparatively deep hole, the rim extending or overlapping all round, and slightly higher than the level of the ground. Constructed with small twigs (mostly parts of *Bassia*, sp.) and dry grass, neatly lined with rootlets, the rim being exceedingly well and solidly formed with rootlets intertwined with the pale yellow flower-heads of *Gnephosis eriocarpa*, Benth.

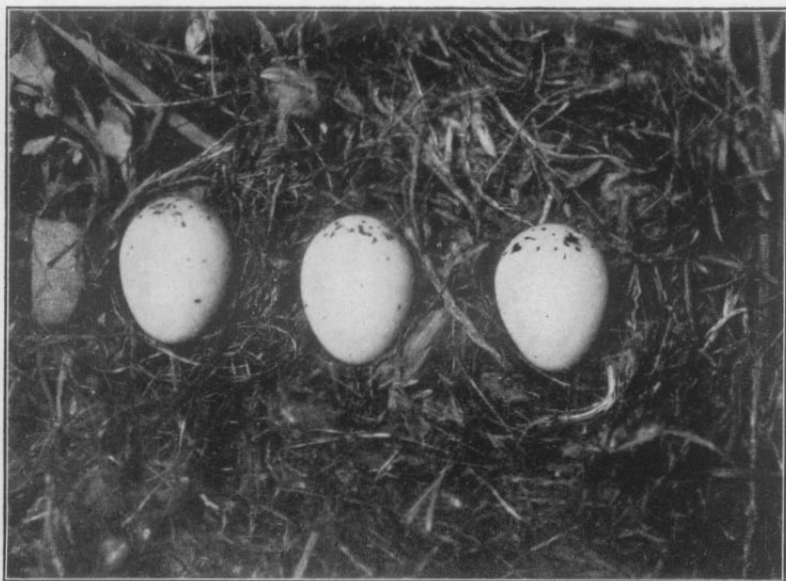
NOTE.—On 14th October, 1916, when the expedition was some 12 miles east of Mungeranie, I had taken my turn to ride a camel for a rest, and Mr. Waite had assumed duty to search for water. From my elevated position I had a good view of Mr. Waite tramping over the gibbers or table-land. I saw him partly raise his gun, and I could also plainly see a bird fluttering away. Soon afterwards the gun was fired. I then saw Mr. Waite move forward and pick up the bird. Mr. Waite signalled for me, and when I reached him he was holding an adult Desert Chat in his hand, and at his feet, within a foot or 18 inches of a small salt-bush on the edge of a shallow crab-hole, he indicated a beautifully constructed nest containing three eggs. I said, "Then this is the nest of *Ashbyia lovensis*?" and my friend, holding out the bird, replied, "Shot from the nest." He told me that when he flushed the bird it did the "broken wing" trick very well indeed, and he had to wait until it was sufficiently distant before he shot it. He also said that when he found the nest it contained but two eggs; the third was lying a few inches away, having evidently been ejected by the bird in its hurried departure. The first thing



Innamincka, Central Australia, where the Desert Chat was obtained.



"Burke's Tree," under which the explorer died.



Eggs of the Desert Chat (*Ashbyia lovensis*), natural size.



Nest and Eggs of Desert Chat (*Ashbyia lovensis*).

that struck me upon seeing the eggs was their resemblance to those of Honey-eaters, and since comparing them with the eggs of *Melithreptus* it is found that they could be easily assigned to members of that genus. The photograph of the nest and eggs, taken *in situ* by Mr. Waite, and reproduced in illustration of this paper (Plate XXXVII.), does not convey a correct idea of the position of the nest, owing to the salt-bush being between it and the camera. The nest was just beyond the bush, on the bare ground. When the nest was removed the hollow in the ground looked as if a rounded stone had been taken out. As the eggs were fresh, and as fully fledged young birds were taken a few days previously, it is evident that the breeding season was very much extended this year, most likely owing to the good season, with early and late rains. The photograph of the eggs was taken by Mr. Waite upon our return to Adelaide, the material of the nest forming the background. The photograph of the gibber country (Plate XXXVI.) was taken by myself at Innamincka, close to where we secured specimens of the Desert Chat, the foreground giving a good idea of the stony habitat of this bird.

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## Note on the Finding of the Nest and Eggs of the Desert Chat (*Ashbyia lovensis*, Ashby).

By EDGAR R. WAITE, F.L.S., DIRECTOR OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM.

MUCH of the country traversed by the expedition is in the nature of what Sturt called the "Stony Desert," locally known as "gibber country," and further differentiated as large gibber and small gibber. The latter, with which we are at present only concerned, consists of reddish-brown stones, nowhere larger than a walnut; they lie close together, and in places are so even that one might almost imagine they had been levelled by a road roller. The interstices are filled with fine sand, the constant movement of which under action of the wind has smoothed all asperities from the stones, and a mosaic appearance is produced. In other places walking is less comfortable, and in crossing the big gibber riding a camel is preferable to walking. Such a desert may extend for 20 miles or more, and it supports very little herbage indeed, low and scattered salt-bushes being the only indication of vegetation.

The Desert Chat was found only in the gibber country, and was nowhere very common. Though the breast of the bird is bright yellow, the colour is not specially noticeable, while its brown back harmonizes so well with the colour of the stones, tempered with that of the sand, that a sitting bird must be quite inconspicuous. That the bird relies on such similarity to its surroundings when sitting is evidenced by its actions, as hereafter described.