

### Monthly Conversazioni of R.A.O.U.

THE April conversazione of the R.A.O.U. was held on Wednesday, 3rd, and a good attendance of members was presided over by Dr. C. Sutton. Apologies were received from Messrs. Finlay, Anderson, and Tregellas. The subject set down for the evening's discussion was "Water-Birds," and was introduced by Mr. W. H. D. Le Souëf, with a series of most interesting lantern slides. Mr. Le Souëf spoke about the various pictures screened, and gave many interesting facts culled from numerous ornithological expeditions. He indicated the various methods employed by Ducks in getting their young from tree-spouts to the water, and from one pond to another. Mr. A. M. Sullivan stated that he once witnessed the method employed by an old Black Duck to get her young down from a tree-spout to the creek. The spout was immediately over the water, and the Duck alighted beneath it and proceeded to quack very loudly. In a short time the young ones appeared at the spout entrance and launched forth into space. All succeeded in reaching the water without serious mishap.

Mr. J. A. Ross communicated a splendid paper by Mr. C. Cole upon the feeding habits of Cormorants that was particularly acceptable in view of the recent prominence given to the subject in the daily papers. Mr. Cole gave the results of the examination of 25 specimens of three species of Cormorants collected over a wide area in the Wangaratta district. These Cormorants were procured at different hours of the day and in varying seasons. The results of his work to date convinced him that the Cormorant had his special niche to fill in the scale of nature.

Mr. Mattingley outlined the arguments for and against Cormorants which had cropped up in the recent public discussion, and deplored the fact that the Department of Game and Fisheries was distributing cartridges for the destruction of Cormorants. He stated that in times of war or stress a nation calls upon its leading experts in the various branches of activity to advise and guide it to peace and prosperity. In the same way the Government of the day should get the advice of the Empire's experts before launching on a campaign of slaughter. He quoted the opinions of the leading naturalists, ichthyologists, and other scientific men, testifying that the Cormorant had its place to fill, and far more harm than good would accrue from its destruction.

Capt. Cochrane, of the Navy Department, was heartily congratulated upon his promotion to the rank of Commander.

A fine series of eggs of aquatic birds was tabled from the Union's collection.

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The May conversazione of the R.A.O.U. was held in the Bird Room at the National Museum on the 7th of the month, and there was a good attendance of members. The evening was spent in examining and discussing the very fine series of *Maluri* contained

in the H. L. White Collection. The Museum Curator, Mr. J. A. Kershaw, was congratulated upon having arranged the specimens in such an interesting manner, enabling one to see at a glance the dominant species and the various sub-species associated with them. It was, without doubt, the finest display of *Maluri* that has ever been seen in this State.

Mr. Mathews's division of the Tasmanian Blue Wren into northern and southern sub-specific races was much criticised by members, and all agreed that from an examination of the large series of skins, from both ends of the island, such a splitting-up was certainly not warranted. It was hoped that the Check-list Committee would only recognize one bird as inhabiting the island.

Another matter that aroused a good deal of discussion was the splitting up of the genus *Malurus* into several separate genera. Most members condemned this, and considered that, perhaps with the exception of the beautiful *M. coronatus*, there was sufficient similarity between all the *Maluri* to enable them to be most conveniently grouped under the one genus.

There was also exhibited a number of recent additions to the H. L. White Collection, upon which Mr. A. J. Campbell made some interesting observations. It may not be generally known that ever since Mr. White presented his wonderful collection of Australian birds to the National Museum he has been adding to it, and Mr. Kershaw informed members that it had been necessary to provide a large new cabinet to house the recent additions. The expense connected with providing the cabinet was being generously borne by the donor of the collection.

A couple of designs for the R.A.O.U. honour board were exhibited and some discussion took place as to what was the most desirable form such a board should take.

The meeting then terminated, one and all going home feeling that their examination of the beautiful Wren-Warblers had greatly improved their knowledge of these most fascinating birds.

On 2nd July the usual monthly conversazione of the Union was held at their room in Temple Court. The subject of the evening was "Plovers." Mr. A. J. Ross read a most interesting paper on these birds. Mr. A. J. Campbell stated that foxes were largely helping to destroy these interesting and most useful birds. Mr. M'Lennan mentioned that on one occasion in the Northern Territory he saw a pair of Southern Stone-Plovers spreading their wings and dancing one round the other. He found the Masked Plover nesting in the King River district, and that its habits were similar to those of the Spur-wing. It was quieter and less vicious in defence of its young. It usually laid its eggs within a few feet of the edge of a swamp. Mr. Campbell noticed that in the eggs of this class of birds one was usually sharper and longer than the other. It was stated by poultry dealers that the longer eggs usually produced cockerels. Dr. Macgillivray stated that he often noticed that the Spur-wing Plover was more shy than

the Masked. Mr. McLennan stated that when the flocks of Grey Plovers reached Australia in their migration they were not mixed with other birds, but that when flocking up on the northern coast, on their return journey, they were mixed up with many other migratory species. He often noticed that hundreds of these birds would with one accord rise up into the air, and, after circling round for a time, settle again. Mr. F. E. Wilson stated that he had found the nest of the Spur-wing Plover close to that of a White-headed Stilt, apparently in perfect agreement. Mr. Stone mentioned that the aborigines in the Mallee district, near Boort, stated that the reason why their native name of "Whee-la" was given them was because a long time ago an Eagle took an infant away from its mother, and her cries of distress—"Whee-la"—were imitated by the Plovers, and they have uttered that note ever since. Mr. Mattingley stated how he had seen a parent Spur-wing Plover with its young chicks. A dingo had scented them, and slowly came towards them; but the parent bird kept just out of reach of the dingo. He tried again and again to catch it by springing at it, but without success. When the Plover had led the dingo far away from her treasures she flew away. Mr. J. L. Menzies had also noticed the same thing with these birds.

Mr. D. Le Souëf showed some lantern views of Southern Stone and Spur-wing Plovers, both of adult and young, as well as nests, showing how they keep their heads flat on the ground when sitting on the nest or seeking to escape observation, and also how wonderfully the young resemble the ground on which they crouch. He also stated that he had seen the Spur-wing Plover prevent a sheep and also a cow from walking over its eggs by persistently flapping its wings in the animal's face and so making it alter its course.

The chairman, Dr. MacGillivray, just returned from active service abroad, made some interesting observations regarding the habits of these birds, especially in North Queensland.

A hearty vote of thanks was passed to Surgeon-General Sir Charles S. Ryan for his gift to the Union of some well-mounted specimens of the Little Eagle, White Goshawk, Sacred Kingfisher (with nest and eggs), and the Reed-Warbler (with nest and eggs).

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A conversazione of the Union was held on the first Wednesday in August, as usual, at 2 Temple Court, Melbourne. The subject was "Herons." An interesting paper on the subject, by Mr. H. W. Ford, was read, and a discussion followed. Mr. Le Souëf showed about 30 interesting lantern slides of these birds, including the Jabiru, Native Companion, Herons, Ibis, &c., and also illustrated their nesting and young. Mr. Stone read some interesting notes on the habits of these birds from his catalogue of birds' eggs. A note was read from Mr. A. J. Campbell, asking that, should any member find any Cuckoos' eggs this season, to leave them, and by so doing identify the parents.