

button-grass valleys or along the open coastal foothills that one meets with the Ground-Parrot in moderate abundance. In such localities as the coastal flats at Cox Bight or the long seven-mile plain running from Freney Lagoon to New Harbour Creek, *Pezoporus* is to be flushed in numbers, just as are the so-called "Button-grass Moths"—the bushmen's name for that dainty little midget the Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*).

The local name for *P. wallicus*, "Button-grass Parrot,"* is fully justified, for it is amidst the button-grass that the species appears to spend most of its time and to make its home. It nests often at the foot of button-grass tussocks, and is therefore one of the first species to be exterminated when cats are introduced.

Bush fires have also to be considered, for the first act of prospectors and others when exploring the country is to fire the button-grass in order to give open going. Trappers also burn off with the object of enticing the game when the young shoots spring up after the burn. Immense areas are burnt out in this way, and if settlement spreads west not many years may be left during which the Grass-Parrot, Emu-Wrens and Grass-Birds (*Megalurus*) will flit across the tops of the tussocks in the numbers that they do at present.

Our trip to the south-west was filled with incident, but in spite of the charm and grandeur of the mountain scenery, the thousands of Ducks and Swans on the waterways of Port Davey, and the many other attractions of a like nature, ever among one's foremost thoughts will be the sight of the Grass-Parrots and their allies as they rose before us on the moors, tipped the tops of the buttons, and sank again within the deep piles of Nature's wonder-carpet of these western moors. Just as the general green colouration of the Button-grass Parrot is broken by gold and a rare touch of red, so are the moors, for every here and there rise the golden and red flowers of *Blandfordia* or the star-like blossoms of *Hewardia*.

Truly, this south-western region of Tasmania is a wonderland in many ways, and the avian gems of the button-grass plains seem but as gems to further gild a section of Nature's grandeur which so far has escaped defilement.

Stray Feathers.

Rare Bird Visitors to Bendigo.—A pair of Painted Honeyeaters (*Grantiella picta*) visited Bendigo (Victoria), on October 10, 1926. These were only noticed on the one day and apparently did not remain. One of this same species was also seen in the previous year on November 29, 1925.

* In Queensland, *Pezoporus* was once known as the Swamp Parrot.—EDITOR.

The second strange occurrence was the appearance of four Rainbow-Birds (*Merops ornatus*) in the centre of the town. I have not observed them nearer than five miles before.

The third rarity was an Australian Ground-Thrush (*Oreocincla lunulata*); the first that I have ever seen or heard of in Bendigo. This was seen on November 9, 1926.

The fourth surprise was the finding of a pair of Gilbert Whistlers (*Pachycephala inornata*) on November 14, 1926. They built a nest and laid three eggs in a very thick bush of honey-myrtle (*Melaleuca gibbosa*). I secured several photographs (see illustration). The birds were robbed, but built and laid three eggs again in an *Acacia* which is known locally as "monkey-nut bush." The birds were still about several weeks later, but I was unable to ascertain whether they reared a family.*—MARC COHN, Bendigo, Victoria (March 15, 1927).

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Colombo Crows Reach Australia.—A most interesting record of bird visitors to Australia is furnished by Mr. C. G. Hylton, manager at Broken Hill for the Zinc Corporation, Limited. It indicates how, in these days of quick transport, birds may find their way from one part of the world to another, and lead to modification of local forms. Here is Mr. Hylton's note, as contained in a letter to Dr. W. Macgillivray, C.F.A.O.U., of Broken Hill, under date October 14, 1926:

"During the trip of the s.s. *Naldera* from London to Australia—the boat left Tilbury Docks on August 27 and arrived in Adelaide on October 2—a matter of interest to ornithologists occurred. On leaving Colombo it was noticed that three Colombo Crows had settled on the main mast yard-arm of the ship, and remained there, with an occasional fly around the vessel, until nearing Fremantle, when one of the birds died. The other two, however, as soon as they were sufficiently near to land, left the vessel and flew ashore.

"What they lived on during the voyage from Colombo to Fremantle it is very difficult to say; possibly they managed to steal some of the meat which was thrown out for the cats, of which there were a good many on board. Otherwise, it is hard to realize that they lived for nine or ten days without food or water. The incident was of interest to most of the passengers, and a number of us daily looked at the yard-arm to see if the intruders still remained and enjoyed their trip to Australia.

"The above will perhaps explain the unexpected finding of birds in one part of the globe which really belong to another part many miles distant, from which place it seems impossible for them to have flown."

* The Gilbert Whistler has been found breeding a good deal south of Bendigo on several occasions. Records of it nesting in the Maryborough district, about 40 miles south-west of Bendigo by air, are given in *The Emu*, Volume XVI, pp. 40-41 (1916).—EDITOR.

Do Plovers Ever Feed on the Wing?—At Kingston, near the mouth of the Derwent River, on March 15, in beautiful still weather, a flock of Spur-winged Plovers suddenly appeared to become much excited and commenced noisily wheeling to and fro over a rush-covered, marshy strip of land which follows the bend of the river. The birds kept strictly over the rush-covered area, though they might just as easily have flown over the meadow-land of the adjacent golf links. In a few moments a flock of Swifts appeared from the void, darting hither and thither about 100 feet above the Plovers. After about 15 minutes the Plovers became quiet and settled, and immediately afterwards the Swifts began to fly higher and wider and melted away. Assuming that some form of invertebrate life was rising numerous from the marsh, the eager and business-like way in which the Plovers patrolled the air, never straying to right or left, gave one the impression that they, as well as the Swifts, were fly-catching.—G. MURRAY ANDERSON, Raggal, Tasmania (April 12, 1927).

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White-eyed Duck in Queensland.—I secured a specimen of this Duck (*Nyroca australis*) when out shooting, and was surprised to note it had no trace of white about the eye. I have never before seen a specimen of this Duck without a white eye.

Another thing I noted about this bird was, the down appeared to me to be darker than usual. I skinned the bird and sent it to the Museum, in case it may have been of interest, but blowflies got at it. Is it not unusual for this bird to be minus the white eye?—N. GEARY, Mount Pleasant, Dalby, Queensland (March 27, 1927).

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Nests of the Musk Duck.—Some writers believe that Musk Ducks (*Biziura lobata*) always make their nests with an opening under the water. My experience differs in every instance. On September 18, 1923, I examined a half-dozen nests. The first was built on a limb of a broken tea-tree, just above the water. It was a mass of sticks and weeds lined with down, and took the form of an open nest, as of a tame goose. Tea-tree foliage was overhead about 10 feet up; otherwise it had no cover.

The next five nests were all made in coarse grass, locally termed "thatch grass," as haystacks were always thatched with it on Hindmarsh Island in the early days. The leaves were well interwoven above the nest and a side-entrance was fairly well concealed. The water was 2 feet deep around the nests, so that the Ducks could dive when out of their nests.

Most nests contained two eggs of a greenish tinge; the others were more yellowish. One nest contained one egg

only, and this had a very noticeable splash of gold. I have found a nest with six eggs and presume it a combination clutch.—H. H. NEWELL, Hindmarsh Island, South Australia (May 9, 1927).

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Birds Breeding Out of Season.—On March 6, 1927, I strolled through the bush about two miles from Bendigo with the object of ascertaining whether the Wood-Swallows had migrated. I was very surprised to find a nest of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga melanops*) containing two eggs.

Mr. Hector Taylor and I went out on March 13, 1927, with our cameras, and while he was photographing I looked round and found six more nests of the same species, some with young and some with eggs. In another paddock one more nest was found containing two eggs on March 14, 1927. The clutch in every case was two. I also observed a pair of Diamond Firetails (*Zonæginthus guttatus*) carrying nesting material to the top of a very tall ironbark tree.

I would be pleased to hear from anyone who has found these or any other birds nesting so late as March in this year or previous years.* The long summer evidently upset the birds and plants, because the golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) and waxflower (*Eriostemon*) are in bud, and a prickly *Acacia* that is usually the first to flower in the spring is in full bloom now.—MARC COHN, Bendigo, Victoria (March 15, 1927).

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Crows in Western N.S.W.—The drought which still prevails throughout western New South Wales has sent great numbers of Crows into the outskirts of Broken Hill in search of food. When the grapes and peaches were ripening, *Corvus bennetti* took a share of them; and they are still in constant attendance at school grounds after the children's lunch-hour, seeking scraps. There are thousands of these birds, both Ravens and Short-bills, about our abattoirs all day and every day, and they are a great help to the local authorities in clearing up all waste material and fly larvæ. During the week-end there is no killing, and it is a rare sight to see the numbers that await the first of the blood to run on Monday mornings after their two-days' fast.

Mathews places very little importance on the colouring of the irides. However, it is a matter of age with Ravens and Short-bills. The former have bluish-brown irides till the thirteenth month, when they change at once with the moult to white and always remain so. All adult Ravens have white

* Early in May, 1921, when re-visiting the Maryborough district (about 40 miles south-west of Bendigo), I found several pairs of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters breeding, and heard of other species of birds that were nesting out of season.—A.H.C.

eyes. The Short-bills, however, take two years to change. That is as far as my investigations have gone. Adults always have white irides.—W. MACGILLIVRAY, Broken Hill, N.S.W. (May 20, 1927).

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Summer Visitors.—The first Spine-tailed Swifts (*Hirundapus caudacuta*) seen in this district for three years, made their appearance on February 4 this year—one pair only, between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon, heading north-west against a strong wind and heavy showers. They flew at a height of perhaps 200 feet. Several more, on the evening of February 8, near sunset, were making to the north-west, with long intervals between the individuals; wind was W.S.W., strong, weather gradually clearing after a heavy blow. The height of the flight was from about 50 feet (the lowest bird) to 300 feet or so. A clear, cold night followed, with frosty air in early morning. On February 26 more Swifts were seen, heading north-west, while one or two individuals circled south. Evening fine, wind light from north-west; next day also fine; after that wind and rain.

All Swallows (Welcome, Tree, and Wood) seem to have left us this autumn by end of March. The only Cuckoos noted after that date were two or three of the Fantailed species, which usually winter here. Of Pipits, none was seen after end of March until May 9, when a pair in spruce plumage suddenly appeared by the wayside. On May 28, after a southerly blizzard, with heavy snowfall on the mountains, a Pipit flitted across the road, seemingly unperturbed by the Antarctic disturbance.—H. STUART DOVE, West Devonport, Tasmania (June 1, 1927).

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The Black Swan (*Chenopsis atrata*).—These beautiful birds are not nearly so numerous in this district now as in years gone by, when thousands took possession of various mud-flats to feed on the various river-weeds. "Sportsmen" then would take advantage of a strong south-west wind in the evening, when mob after mob of Swans would fly past southern points on Hindmarsh Island. The breeze kept them low when weathering these points, so that they were often in easy gun-shot, and residents would fill their larder. Adelaide visitors often refused Swan for dinner, but were later tricked by being asked if they would care for a bit of goose. And when asked how they enjoyed the goose they would say it was good!

Having a lifetime of experience among Swans, I venture to say the noise made by the birds on rising from the water is caused by their wings. The wings splash up the water, as can easily be seen when one is near enough. I have been in many a chase after a wounded Swan, and have seen at close quarters

how the wings beat the water and heard the sound they make. No doubt some little noise is made by the feet.

The nesting-places in the Coorong are to my idea rather too exposed. Perhaps if some of the islands were planted with marrim grass or reedy grass it would be the means of saving many a nest. Crows have played havoc with many of the eggs in scores of nests through these being too open. The reedy patches on the mainland have been made unsafe since the fox has made such progress. No doubt bird-lovers will do something to have the islands in the Coorong made more suitable for nesting homes of Swans if someone will only take the matter up seriously.

Of many nests examined the highest number of eggs in one clutch was nine. The most exposed nest seen was on a stony reef, about a half-chain out from any rushes; this nest contained two fresh eggs.—H. H. NEWELL, Hindmarsh Island, South Australia (May 7, 1927).

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Wagtails and Cows.—I have learned recently of two instances in which cows gently resented the attentions of Wagtails, which dance about the animals' noses in order to snap up insects disturbed by the warm breath. Here is the more interesting of the two cases, as related by a lad in Victoria:

"One day, while I was watching our cow graze on the grass, a little Wagtail flew down and kept hopping about her mouth. The animal stood it for a while; then, to my surprise, she gently picked up the Wagtail with her mouth, and put him to one side. The Wagtail was not satisfied with that. He hopped to the front of her mouth again. Then the cow gently picked up the bird again, but did not put him alongside her. She walked about 25 to 30 yards from where she was feeding, and put the Wagtail down. Then the cow returned to the place where she was at first. The Wagtail then flew off. Perhaps he realized that the cow didn't want him to be playing around her mouth."—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney (May 15, 1927).

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Swan River Birds.—In regard to my taking a specimen of the Oriental Dotterel (*Charadrius veredus*) near Perth, which I considered in my paper on "New Records for the Swan River District," in the last *Emu*, as constituting the first record for the south-west, Mr. F. R. Bradshaw, R.A.O.U., of Tambellup, informs me that in November, 1924, he noted a flock of about 100 of these waders at a salt lake near Tambellup. Four birds were secured and proved to be immature Oriental Dotterels. In the Checklist the distribution of this species as set out specifically excludes the south-west of this State, a reference

being made to its general rarity in the rest of southern Australia. The lack of records from this side of the continent may be accounted for by the fewness of resident observers, and it may be shown in the future that there is no disparity in the occurrence of this northern wader, east and west.

I greatly regret that my record of the Grey-rumped Sandpiper (*Tringa brevipes*) is erroneous and must be deleted from the list. I said that a specimen was in the W.A. Museum, collected at Kelmscott. It is so stated in the index of the collections, but I find now that the skin entered as such is really identical with the Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), already recorded by Mr. Alexander.—D. L. SERVENTY, Perth (June 1, 1927).

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Log-runners (*Orthonyx temminckii*) south of Sydney.—On February 17 last, in the company of Miss Doreen Hordern, I was exploring what was to me an unexpected treasure-house, the scrubs that line the slopes of Macquarie Pass. We suddenly heard a loud alarm note and sudden quail-like "churr" of wings, and I was almost certain there was an *Orthonyx* about, though not well acquainted with the bird. Five minutes later, sitting near a stream, we again heard the note on the hillside above us. This time it was repeated and answered, and we had a regular concert from two birds coming down the hill. In a few minutes a male *Orthonyx* came down to the stream, not 10 feet from where we sat, and proceeded to bathe himself in a pool of water, an operation that lasted two or three minutes. Then his mate came down and did the same thing. Afterwards, we watched them for a quarter of an hour or more, feeding among fallen leaves and constantly uttering their loud notes, particularly at any movement we made. It was a pleasant surprise to find them there, as I knew they had not been seen recently in National Park.* It is a magnificent piece of scrub where we saw these birds—the "old-fashioned" type, where the trees meet overhead, and there is a soft carpet of leaves for the explorer to walk on, and no undergrowth to impede him. It is sad to think that the new Port Kembla-Moss Vale railway will probably wind its destructive way through the heart of these beautiful scrubs, and another bird sanctuary will have "gone west" under the wheels of progress.—B. C. J. BETTINGTON, Merriwa, N.S.W. (May 20, 1927).

* North gives several records of the Spine-tailed Log-runner in the Illawarra scrubs, about 50 miles south of Sydney. Curiously, however, they do not occur in the scrubs of National Park, 25 miles south of Sydney, where the chief ground-birds are the Lyre-Bird and Pilot-Birds. It would appear that *Orthonyx* has a distributional break of well over 100 miles from the north to the south of Sydney, and peters out in the vicinity of Macquarie Pass.—EDITOR.