

Some Birds of Mount Tambourine, South Queensland

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The motor drive from Brisbane to Mt. Tambourine, a distance of approximately 45 miles, is full of interest to the visitor from the southern States, as it prepares one for the totally different class of country on the Mount, which is 2000ft. above sea-level. Unfortunately for the bird-observer, the roads afford such excellent travelling that one gets but a swift glance at the bird-life seen *en route*.

Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) and Magpie-Larks (*Grallina cyanoleuca*), Black-backed Magpies (*Gymnorhina tibicen*), and Kookaburras (*Dacelo gigas*) were seen frequently. The favourite site for the large, unmistakable nest of the Magpie appeared to be on branches arching over the roadway, many nests so placed being observed. Occasionally one heard a Crow (*Corvus cecilia*), and numbers of Crimson Rosellas (*Platycercus elegans*) flew with noisy screeching on the approach of the car. A White-faced Heron (*Notophoxyx nova-hollandia*), commonly but erroneously called a "Blue Crane," wading in a small stream, and a Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sanctus*) in an adjacent tree, were added to the list quite early. Later a pair of Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*) and a Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*) were seen. Nearer the foot of the Mount, and just before crossing the railway line, a large lagoon gave promise of numerous forms of water-fowl, but a scheduled time-table did not permit of a close inspection.

Although the ascent of Mt. Tambourine reminds one somewhat of the Dandenong Ranges of Southern Victoria, it could scarcely be more unlike. The colourful Lantana is as serious a pest as the Blackberry is in Victoria; and every little water-course was gay with the Wedgwood blue of *Ageratum*. Both are serious pests in Queensland, but are considered desirable garden plants in the southern States, and are cultivated even in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens.

By far the most common birds at the settlements at Eagle Heights were the Pied Currawong (*Strepera gracula*); the Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) busily building under verandahs and eaves; and the Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*), a bird of ashy-grey. Flying from post to post, the black centre tail-feathers of this bird were most conspicuous, the white tips of the remaining tail feathers giving the illusion of a forked tail. Although the Pied Butcher-Birds (*Cracticus nigrogularis*) were noticed frequently in the daytime, it was in the early morning that their four distinct, rich notes were heard; they reminded one somewhat of a piano-tuner harmonising notes.

It was while looking for the Albert Lyrebird (*Menura alberti*) that a male Brush-Turkey (*Alectura lathamii*) was first noticed, high up in a tree, in a gully, where Walking-stick Palms grew like standard roses. Yellow Robins (*Eopsaltria australis*) were numerous, and, in more open country, the Golden Whistler (*Pachycephala pectoralis*), the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*), and a Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina nova-hollandiae*) were seen.

In the scrub, the predominating bird-call was the sharp crack of the Eastern Whipbird (*Psophodes olivaceus*). Strangely enough, one can be quite near these interesting birds and yet not distinguish them. The thick scrub, especially the Lawyer-vine or "Wait-a-while," as it is called locally, precludes the possibility of following up the call. However, paradoxical though it may sound, once the bird is actually observed, it is possible to see it quite easily. Sitting quietly one day, the writer was delighted to find a pair of Whipbirds almost within touch, and apparently oblivious that anyone was near. The one that appeared to be the female raised her bill slightly, and called softly at first, but each succeeding call louder, "Coo-coo-coo-co-o-o-o," dwelling on the last "coo" until her mate answered with the familiar whiperack. While doing so his crest was slightly raised, the fan-like tail described an almost complete half-circle, the wings were lowered, much as a domestic cock does when in fighting mood, and the bird jumped with the vehemence of the call. Nearby, still another bird answered "Chick Chick." The calls were repeated many, many times, so that there was ample evidence that the first impression was not a mistaken one. Occasionally, there were two whip-cracks; one from the bird actually under observation, and the second from a bird in the scrub; and the succeeding "chick chick" was sometimes a single note. The "coo-coo" was certainly very definite; generally three, occasionally four, or even as many as five "coos" were counted. From a distance this call sounds more like one long in-drawn note.

Many birds have purely local vernacular names. "Devil Bird" is shared by the Yellow-throated Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis lathamii*) and the Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*); while the name "King Bird" is given to the Eastern Shrike-Tit (*Falcunculus frontatus*), "because," the children say, "he wears a crown"! Not always are the pet names so apt. There is a large Pheasant-tailed Pigeon (*Macropygia phasianella*), a most graceful bird, cinnamon and brown, the nape glowing with indescribable colour, and nicknamed "Brownie." Possibly, the name "White Lug" given to the Yellow-eared Honeyeater (*Meliphaga lewinii*) is a name that will yet be heard in other States. Although an insect- and honey-eater, "White Lug" has acquired a fancy for oranges, piercing the outer skin, and eating the inside. Unfortunately, it damages a great deal more than it actually eats, and is regarded as a serious pest at Mt.

Tambourine, where the growing of citrus fruits is one of the staple industries. This Honeyeater has a peculiar undulating flight when flying upwards, and "dives" with closed wings in a most fascinating way, for quite a long distance, when coming down. The word "dive" is used advisedly. The movement is suggestive of a well-trained swimmer diving from a height, and is totally unlike the alarming "fall" of the Skylark or the studied "volplane" of other birds. "White Lug" seems to have constituted himself the busybody of the scrub. As surely as one heard the harsh, quavering call, rather like the call of a cricket unduly prolonged, just as surely would the smaller scrub birds become silent, and vanish from sight miraculously.

Of small birds there were many. Brilliant little Diamond Firetails (*Zonæginthus guttatus*), modest Brown Thornbills (*Acanthiza pusilla*) and Little Thornbills (*A. nana*), remarkable for their peculiarly strong notes, considering their lack of size. Of Grey-backed Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*), there were scores. In equally large numbers were charming little Red-browed Firetails (*Ægintha temporalis*), tiny little birds, which build such elaborate nests, in which their six or seven babies are reared. No wonder they are always busy! One can imagine no prettier sight than a large flock of Firetails round a drinking saucer placed for them. They tested the depth of water with one foot before performing their morning ablutions. Still more attractive, in a quaint way, is the Orange-backed Wren (*Malurus melanocephalus*), a wee, little body, scarcely the size of a ping-pong ball, of richest black plush, with decorations of brilliant tangerine, tiny bill, and a fine tail, unduly long, placed at a grotesque angle. Such is the male, but the females are very plain little birds of greyish-brown.

It was a joy to see the bower of the Satin Bower-Bird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) within a stone's throw of a habitation. This Bower-Bird has a special fancy for using blue objects for decorating its playground, and in this particular instance the blue flowers of the native Tobacco-bush and blue feathers of the Eastern Rosella had been utilised. Some time previously, this bower had been inadvertently destroyed and reconstructed by humans. The male bird, with many scoldings, removed practically every little twig, and replaced them at an angle to suit himself.

The beautiful black and orange Regent Bower-Bird (*Sericulus chrysocephalus*) was unfortunately not seen.

The Green Catbird (*Ailurædus crassirostris*) usually proves of interest to visitors not otherwise interested in birds. That is, when they realise that the harsh sound is made by a bird, and not by a cat. Occasionally, one might mistake the call for the startled cry of a newly-awakened child. It was interesting to find this observation verified in an extraordinary way; a very excellent bird-observer, who daily heard the Catbird's call, mistaking it for that of her own babe!