

due largely to the inaccessible position usually chosen for nesting. The conspicuous bowl-shaped mud nest, placed on a horizontal branch or in a fork of a eucalypt or other suitable tree, is certainly not difficult to find. Again, the birds are, so far as my experience goes, timid at the nest. I attempted to photograph the pair nesting in my yard, but they refused for four hours to face the camera, although the nest contained half-grown young. I finally had to remove the camera for fear of the young coming to harm.

On August 9 last year a pair of Magpie-Larks were noted building in an unusually low position about 12 feet from the ground in a slender tree. On August 13 the third egg was laid, and the young hatched out, one on August 27, and the other on the 28th. The third egg did not hatch. I might add that four eggs is the usual clutch about this district. The young birds left the nest on September 15. About the time the young hatched out a Willie Wagtail commenced building immediately below the nest of the Magpie-Larks, and was a continual source of trouble, repeatedly betraying my presence to the latter birds by its harsh scolding notes. The nest, although low, was in a difficult position. The camera was placed on the top of a batten lashed firmly to the tree. Focussing had to be done with the aid of a mirror held behind the focussing screen, as I could not get behind the camera for that purpose. The female only would pay fleeting visits to the nest, but with long intervals between each visit. Often she would alight nearby, calling in loud scolding notes, while the male flew overhead uttering warning cries. I paid a visit to the nest on two separate days before securing a satisfactory photograph. The exposure used was one-hundredth of a second. The young birds don the adult plumage before leaving the nest, the sexes being readily distinguished. In the accompanying photograph the two young are males.

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## Report of Bird Observers' Club, Victoria

A small club party spent the afternoon of August 3 at Altona. The day was boisterous enough to make a walk exhilarating, but bird life kept much to shelter. By the shoreline several Red-capped Dotterels (*Charadrius ruficapillus*) and Silver Gulls (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) were feeding, and a solitary Pacific Gull (*Gabianus pacificus*) in perfect black and white plumage cruised about seeking what he might devour. A single wading bird among the rocks attracted our attention; it proved to be the Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominicus*), showing much black on the undersurface, the remnants of summer plumage. This is

an unusual record for this time of the year, raising the query whether the bird had been left behind on the migration flight. Several smaller Dotterels were the Double-banded species (*Charadrius bicinctus*) in good plumage. These would shortly be taking their south-eastern flight to New Zealand, where they nest. On the outlying reefs flocks of Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax*) perched. An interesting quarter is the sea marsh to the north-east, at the back of the racecourse. Here we heard a Striated Field Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*) singing, and we succeeded in stirring it from cover. A pair of Ravens (*Corvus coronoides*), a Heron (*Notophox*), several Spurwinged Plovers (*Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ*) and some White-fronted Chats (*Epthianura albifrons*) were also feeding about. In the lonely pine trees the querulous notes of the Black and White Fantail or Willy Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) and the Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) were heard, the cause of the disturbance being two brown Owls hiding in the covert. A picturesque spot—one of the by-ways near a great metropolis—is the mouth of the Kororoit Creek, where the curving estuary, flanked with mangroves, harbours a tiny fishing fleet.

Towards evening the sky and sea changed to pastel tones of greys and greens, a change of wind was brewing, and on the wings of the storm a brownish patch of birds moved over the water to alight upon the strand. They then showed themselves to be Eastern Curlews (*Numenius cyanopus*), our largest migrant—another interesting link with the old world. We felt we were actually witnessing the travellers' return from Kamschatka after nesting operations in the northern hemisphere, for this, as far as known, is the earliest date the species has been noted in Port Phillip Bay.

Another boisterous day was September 8 on an outing to the You Yangs, recalling the line, "September comes in on the winds of the west." This locality is 30 miles from Melbourne. Granite peaks rising sharply from the surrounding plains make for a type of country not found on the eastern side of Port Phillip. The quota of bird life includes many interesting species usually associated with north-western Victoria. Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) in the Forestry Department plantations was much admired, while a climb to the top of Flinders Peak was rewarded with a magnificent outlook over an expanse of hills, plains and bay dotted with shadow and shine.

The lecture by Dr. L. J. Clendinnen on August 27 on "Aviculture" gave a new view of ornithology. A Victorian Avicultural Society having been formed for the purpose of fostering live birds under healthy and natural conditions,

it should be possible to learn much about the food, habits and nidification of Australian species, particularly the parrot and finch tribes. In Europe almost without exception all our species have been kept and bred in aviaries, and some of these are thought to be extinct in Australia. The aviculturist would be in a position, when the time came, to stock sanctuaries and preserves. The Japanese have made some wonderful changes in the Shell Parrot or Budgerygah (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), and blue instead of green is the predominant colour in some strains. Some criticism was levelled at the restrictions placed by the Minister of Customs on import of all and sundry live birds. For many years\* persistent efforts were made to establish many species which were brought here in large quantities before even the Sparrow and Starling became acclimatised. The only species in the last 60 years to go wild is the Bulbul, and probably that was knowingly liberated by certain Indian visitors. Yet no bird at all is allowed in now, neither kinds where only the male is kept because of its colour, nor species which have been aviary-bred for generations and are now incapable of living in the wild state.—  
A. G. CAMPBELL.

\*See *Emu*, Vol. 5, p. 110.

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## Stray Feathers

**Pied Currawongs.**—For a week or more a party of Pied Currawongs (*Strepera graculina*), about seventy in number, has been in the hills near Montrose, Victoria. Each morning after sunrise the birds' rowdy calls attract attention, and if the morning be calm they can be heard over a mile away. The party then proceeds to trek through the forests and clearings in search of breakfast. They feed largely upon the ground, turning over sticks and bark in search of insect food, which must be required in considerable quantity for such a lusty party. Being partial to fruit they greedily devoured and even carried away some put out in a paddock for them. The Currawong's flight is not quick and vigorous like that of their relative the Magpie (*Gymnorhina*), but easy and leisurely. Collecting occasionally in the top of some prominent tree, they delight in a morning frolic, each bird calling and chattering its loudest. Some cries sound like "crick, crick, beware," "two and two are four," "get more work," while others answer "where," "wheeow," "whee." The whole performance is a rare exhibition of bird "jazz" music. From a row of pine trees one morning they descended and ascended with