

Coxen's Fig-Parrot

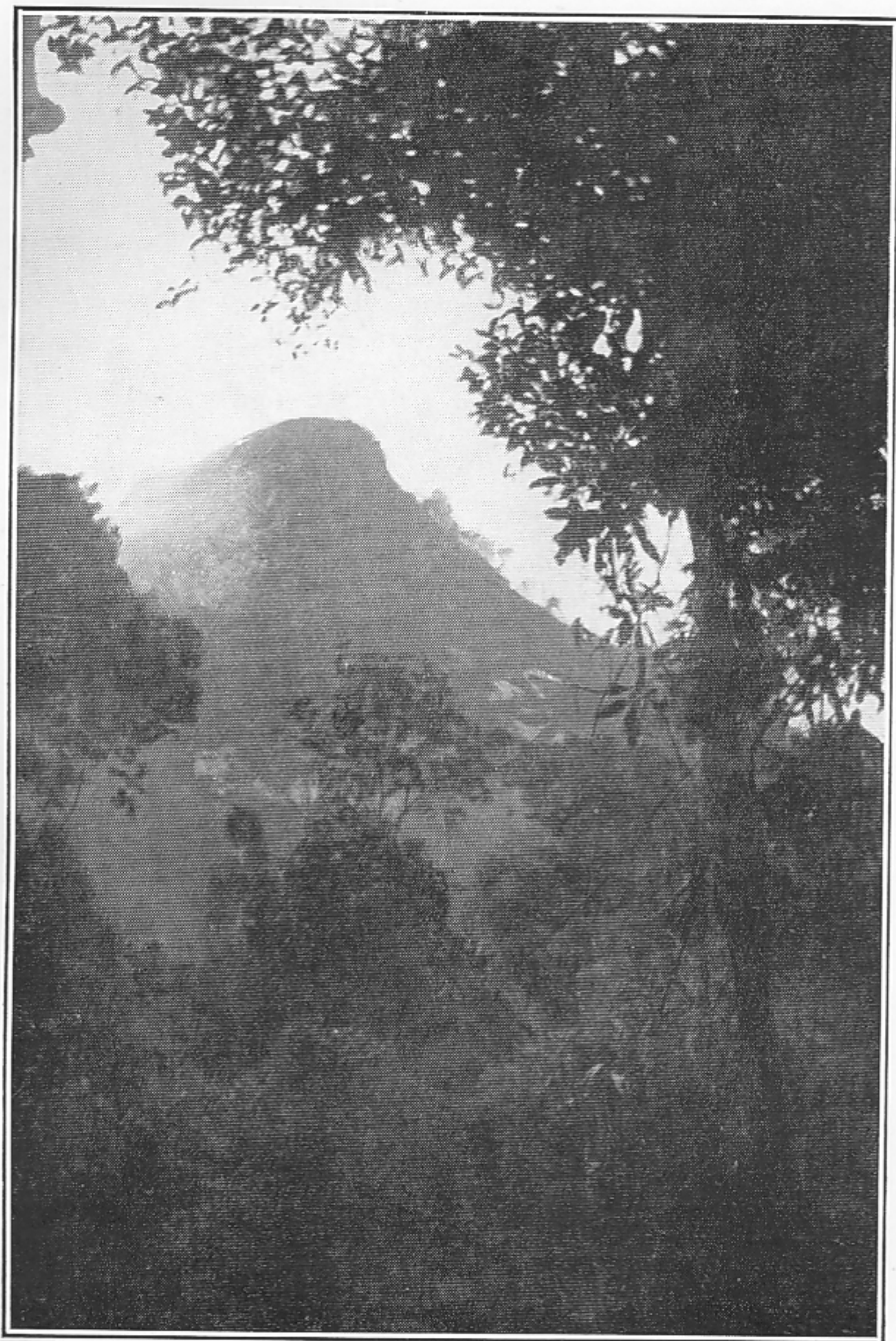
By FLORENCE M. IRBY, R.A.O.U., Casino, N.S.W.

Reading, with interest, Mr. A. H. Chisholm's paper on Australian Lorilets, or Fig-Parrots, in *The Emu* vol. xxix., p. 81, I wondered if a few notes on the Red-faced Lorilet, or Coxen's Fig-Parrot (*Opopsitta coxeni*) would be of interest to members.

Having studied bird-life on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales for a number of years, I venture to say that these little birds were never numerous, but they are no rarer now than they were some twenty years ago, when our vanishing scrubs still covered many a thousand acres now given over to crops and grass; though with the inroads of settlement one usually has to go further afield to find them than formerly. At the present time I should not consider them to be so rare as either the Albert Lyrebird (*Menura alberti*), the Paradise Rifle-Bird (*Ptiloris paradiseus*) or the Rufous Scrub-Bird (*Atrichornis rufescens*), but their colouring, allied with their habits, makes detection difficult.

As Fig-Parrots fly high, and are swift of flight, identification while they are moving from one feeding-ground to another is practically impossible. To see them properly it is necessary to note them while feeding, and even this is not easy, as their favourite haunts are among the branches of the giants of our scrubs, such as the white fig, a parasitical tree that, beginning life as a seedling in some hole or crack in the topmost boughs of an already tall tree, adds its own height to that of the victim, which it eventually over-grows and smothers. The birds have a habit of feeding with other Parrots, which, being noisier or more arresting in numbers or colouring, are apt to draw attention from the short, fat, little Fig-Parrots quietly pottering about in the same tree.

At infrequent intervals during the past fifteen years, I have met with this Lorilet in the Tweed River district, sometimes feeding with the Crimson Rosella (*Platycercus elegans*) on the handsome blue fruit of the Blue Fig (*Elaeocarpus grandis*) that grows so luxuriantly along many creek banks about the Tweed, and the fruit of which is loved by many birds. Again, a pair of these Lorilets may sometimes be seen feeding with a flock of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets (*Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus*) among the honey-laden flowers of a Silky Oak (*Grevillea robusta*). Possibly shortage of fruits in the spring months may account for this, or they may have a natural liking for a variety of food, just as the nectar-feeding Scaly-breast will sometimes attack the ripening fields of sorghum, or even strip



Haunt of the Fig Parrot—Upper Tweed River, N.S.W.

Photo. by Miss F. B. Irby, R.A.O.U.

some green tree of its leaves. I incline to the latter theory, for I first saw a pair of Fig-Parrots, with Musk Lorikeets (*Glossopsitta concinna*), in a silky oak in the Richmond River district many years ago, when scrubs with abundance of their natural foods were far more plentiful than now.

During later years I have occasionally known them to come about the side streets of a country town when the Silky Oaks were flowering, feeding in company with Scaly-breasts, Musk Lorikeets and the noisy Blue Mountain Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus moluccanus*), and I heard of one so overcome by over-abundance of nectar that it was almost caught by hand. I have usually seen these birds in pairs only, except late in the season, when there were sometimes four, from which it is presumed that two eggs only are laid.

Strangely enough, on October 9 of this year, I came upon a pair of these Lorilets in scrub near Mount Warning, on the upper reaches of the Tweed River. They flew into a tall fig-tree. Unfortunately, being away from home, I had not then seen *The Emu*; had I done so, and read Mr. Chisholm's paper sooner, I would in all probability have discovered their nesting-site, for the trunk of the tree was full of holes and crannies, and the little birds remained about it all the while I was there. My attention was distracted, however, by what was to me a far greater marvel—a Rifle-Bird bathing in a shallow pool.

Fork-tailed Swifts.—On January 8 and 9, 1930, the Fork-tailed Swifts (*Micropus pacificus*) made their appearance in this district, quite a number flying high in the air, many skimming around the trees, while a few flew lower in the open spaces. This was at about 10.30 a.m. on the first date. They appeared again on the next day late in the afternoon, about 5.30 p.m., but were not so numerous. They were flying lower, and at about 6.30 p.m. they commenced perching on a dry limb of a Eucalypt—a branch above the foliage. Three or four birds would sit there at a time—later on six were on the branch. When a horse walked under the tree they all flew and none settled again. There were still a few Swifts about at sunset, and they appeared to be weary in their flight.—HARRY H. NEWELL, R.A.O.U., Hindmarsh Island, S.A., 11/1/30.

Yellow Robins' Eggs.—In August, 1928, I found a nest of the Southern Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*) containing five eggs. They were of two distinct types and so were probably laid by two different females.—E. L. HYEM, R.A.O.U., Barrington, N.S.W.