

on insects (at times apparently subsisting solely on them), soft fruits, and berries.

In colour the adult Lewin Honeyeater is olive green above and considerably lighter beneath, with a whitish gape and a conspicuous patch of pale yellow behind the ear. It was from this yellow ear-patch that the local popular name, "Brasseye," was derived, and it was by this name only that the bird was known to us until the end of our school days, when we learned its correct name. In those days, when we "shot" with catapults instead of with cameras, "Brasseyes" received a lot of our attention, for they made excellent targets as they clung, upside down, whilst exploring the blossoms of coral trees, and a number lost their lives when in the midst of a meal.

Nests of the Lewin Honeyeater may be found from spring until about March, as the bird appears to be irregular in its breeding habits. In structure the nest resembles that of most species of Honeyeaters. String and paper are sometimes used in the construction when these are obtainable. Nests are generally situated in a cluster of leaves or vines, sometimes at a considerable height, but more often in a rather low position, and are often difficult to locate.

The accompanying photograph depicts one of a pair of birds, which had their nest concealed in an orange tree. When the two young birds that the nest contained were ready to leave, we captured them one evening and kept them until we had everything in readiness for photography next morning (December 23, 1930). Before tethering them near the branch on which the camera was focussed, we induced them to squeak, thereby informing their parents that they were still alive and ready for breakfast. After a period of indecision, both adults quietened down, finally becoming moderately trustful subjects, and we made a few exposures. The only food brought to the young while we were in attendance was unripe berries of the lantana bush. The bird in the picture has its bill well filled with these.—A. J. ELLIOTT, R.A.O.U., and A. O. ELLIOTT, R.A.O.U., Camberwarra, N.S.W.

The Dusky Wood-Swallow.—Bird men have had great doubts as to where these birds should be placed—some writers put them in a family of their own, *Artamidæ*, others would put them with the Shrikes. Others again consider the Orioles their near relations, whilst still others think they should be put with the Starlings. In the Australian Checklist they are put in the family *Artamidæ*, of which there are 17 species.

The Dusky Wood-swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*) is perhaps the best-known species in southern Victoria. The

colour is a smoky grey, the wing quills are black with a white line on the edge of each wing; the tail feathers are largely tipped with white (except the two centre ones), and are very conspicuous when the bird is in flight. The bill is blue with a black tip, which is unusual. The bird has a brush tongue, being both a honey-eater and an insectivorous bird. The feet and legs are a dark, greyish-black. It is one of the few perching birds that has powder down. It has another peculiarity in that when handled it gives off an odour exactly like decomposed flesh.

The nests are rather untidy. They are constructed of fine twigs and grass, and lined with rootlets. No particular situation is chosen. They may be in a bush a few feet from the ground or on the side of the stem of a tree or on a tree stump. The eggs—three or sometimes four—are oval in shape and yellowish white in colour, spotted with brown and dull grey, chiefly in the form of a ring round the large end.

The bird is by far the most common Wood-swallow in Australia. It goes right across the continent, down into Tasmania and the islands of Bass Strait, but does not inhabit the far north. There has also been great discussion as to whether this bird is stationary or migratory. I think it is both. In southern Victoria they are much more numerous from the beginning of September to the end of April. I have seen large flocks of them, hawking for insects at the end of May, possibly preparing for a northern flight. Certainly some are stationary. I have watched them for 18 months at Ivanhoe, Vic., and they were to be seen for the whole period. They are most friendly birds, and certainly one of the most graceful. They float in the air in a very pretty fashion, and are one of the few birds that take their food on the wing. They sometimes hover, and have a peculiar habit of moving their tail from side to side when perching.

These birds have been accused of eating bees. I think they do, but it has been proved that they also eat the bee moth, which is an enemy of the bees. They are most wonderful insect destroyers, and range in Australia as second to the Ibis in that capacity. They have a peculiar habit of swarming like bees. The usual time is just at dusk, when they select a dead or blackened tree trunk for preference, where there is material for them to hang on by their sharp claws. They make a loud cheeping noise the whole time they are settling, struggling and fighting their way for a place, late-comers settling on the side or going into the general mass head first. The cluster, of course, varies in size according to the number of Wood-swallows. They have been seen in hundreds, and at other times the swarm contains only about twenty or thirty. One observer says that

there were about two hundred in a flock that came under his notice, and when surrounding a single branch, heads inwards and tips of wings and tails outwards, they formed a frill-like mass resembling an orchid growth—a remarkable sight. Another swarm on the side of a tree which came under his notice was about the size and shape of a big dish cover. When swarming, they always have a bird on guard, and when frightened they disperse with a great noise, like a mild clap of thunder. This swarming is supposed to take place to keep the birds warm, and sometimes after the birds have flown some of their number may be found dead on the ground. This is such a remarkable thing for birds to do that one wonders if the birds could possibly have learnt this swarming habit from the bees themselves.

A good deal has been written about "the blueys," as these birds are sometimes called. They are certainly a fascinating study, intensely interesting, and worthy of all the study one has time to give them.—(MISS) M. L. WIGAN, R.A.O.U., Vic.

Yellow-tailed Thornbills.—During the spring and early summer of 1930, I had several nests of Yellow-tailed Thornbills under observation and was surprised to find that the one bird not only used one nest a second time, but also some birds had made a clever attempt to defeat the Bronze Cuckoo, which was very active at the time, and had even placed its eggs in some nests very early in August. I saw one young Cuckoo, nearly full-grown, being fed by Thornbills on September 11. Later I noted a Thornbill's nest that evidently had been built to confuse the Cuckoo, of which I will give detail further on.

Two others had been sealed. One had two Thornbill's eggs in it, but was abandoned after the entrance had been closed, following an unsuccessful attempt by a Cuckoo to place its egg in the nest (it evidently having been disturbed before laying its egg). The other had the entrance to the lower part of the nest sealed. In this part were three Thornbill's eggs and one egg of the Bronze Cuckoo. Evidently the Cuckoo had been disturbed after placing its egg in the nest and before it had removed any of the Thornbill's eggs. The upper part of the nest had been completed and when found contained three fresh Thornbill's eggs.

The following are taken from my note-book:—On August 15 a pair of Yellow-tailed Thornbills commenced building their nest in dry bean vines in my garden in an exposed position. The materials used were grass, leaves, rag, string, and bark. The outside of the nest was decorated with spider cocoons, paper, and small pieces of rag. The inside was well lined with feathers.