

## Birds in a Riverina Garden

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The year 1931 was a happy one for the birds of Southern New South Wales. The past three springs have been lean ones, and the birds that survived to see the coming of good seasons have rejoiced, as only our feathered friends know how to do.

In the centre of an area of low sand hills, timbered with native pine (*Callistris*) and yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*), is hidden a little garden, consisting of about two acres of fruit trees and flowers. For nearly half a century the birds have been made welcome there, until to-day they show uncommon trust in their human friends. On the grape-vined verandahs Flycatchers nest annually showing wonderful friendliness, while Robins, Wood-Swallows, and Bee-eaters are regular nesters, their friends joining them occasionally, sometimes choosing the same tree or bush. Perhaps no other two acres of Australia was the chosen home of such a variety of birds this spring. Thirteen different species actually built within the garden fence, and another ten were observed within a few yards of that haven. The following nests were found in the garden, some being for second clutches of the same birds, while one Willie Wagtail used its nest for two clutches, an unusual thing for that bird.

Nests found in the garden were as follow:—1 Yellow-tailed Thornbill, 1 Whiteface, 1 Brown Songlark, 1 Spotted-sided Finch, 1 Scissors Grinder, 4 Willie Wagtails, 3 Grey Thrushes, 5 Rufous Whistlers, 4 White-winged Trillers, 14 White-browed Wood-Swallows, 2 Welcome Swallows, 2 White-plumed Honeyeaters, 4 Dusky Wood-Swallows—a total of 43.

Nests found within 300 yards of the garden fence were:—2 Little Thornbills, 1 Babbler, 1 Magpie-Lark, 1 Regent Honeyeater, 1 Blue-faced Honeyeater, 2 White-plumed Honeyeaters, 1 Hooded Robin, 1 Red-capped Robin, 4 Bee-eaters, 1 Sittella, 4 White-winged Trillers, 1 Scissors Grinder, 3 Willie Wagtails, 3 White-browed Wood-Swallows, 2 Dusky Wood-Swallows, 1 Masked Wood-Swallow—29 in all.

In the one apple tree, at the same time, nests of the following species were found:—1 Triller, 1 Rufous Whistler, 1 White-browed Wood-Swallow.

These nests were discovered in one pine tree:—1 White-plumed Honeyeater, 1 Scissors Grinder, 2 Dusky Wood-Swallows.

From these observations it may be noticed that, although this is a favourite haunt of the Noisy Miner, none nested

near the garden. These birds well deserve the term of "Soldier Bird," as their quarrelsome nature is largely the cause of the congregation of our smaller birds into colonies, where the Miners do not intrude. The safety from foxes, and the abundance of insect life in the garden, no doubt accounts for the remarkable collection of nests.

The little Black Honeyeater has been known to nest in a grape vine, but this year it visited for a while only to feed. Such a gathering of birds caused some interest, and the local school spent an enjoyable afternoon studying them under good conditions. Although the district has been raided by grasshoppers, they never overcame the birds guarding that garden.

It is pleasing to feel that our bush birds may become so friendly to man, when their haunts are converted into cultivated fields. It is impossible to estimate their value to us, and this season pastoralists are suffering greatly from the scarcity of birds in some areas. The planting of shelter trees and bird protection would be a much better policy for the control of the grasshopper and caterpillar than the laying of poison baits, advocated by some people, which naturally slays our best friends. Never before has the value of ducks as grasshopper eaters been so apparent as this year. May we as Australians learn to appreciate our birds, and respect the great work they do for us.

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**Notes on the Ground Cuckoo Shrike.**—I first noticed birds of this species (*Pteropodocys maxima*) about five or six years ago, and last spring my brother and I decided to try to photograph them, and the nest and eggs, if possible. I located the first nest about the end of September, but it was blown down in a gale a few days later, while still unfinished. It was built in a small ironbark tree, and appeared to be a typical Cuckoo-Shrike nest.

About a week later I noticed the birds favouring another tree in the vicinity, but the only nest that I could see was a Magpie Lark's, and a very ancient and dilapidated one at that. A week's careful watching convinced me that the birds were making use of this old nest. They first raised half an inch of flimsy battlement on the mud foundation. This was then lined with fine grass and a few feathers. Subsequently they laid two eggs in this nest. Their second nest was based on a Chough's old home, which was renovated in a similar manner. Three eggs, the usual clutch, were laid.

By the end of the season I had located five nests, the last two of which were the most interesting, each of them being inhabited by two pairs of birds. The two clutches were quite