

Stray Feathers

Notes on the Crow (*Corvus cecilæ*).—Although a few of these birds are to be found here at all times, in the course of three or four years we find we are troubled by a severe visitation. One morning during August, 1932, we counted between fifty and sixty that had taken up their abode in a tea-tree swamp just behind the house. Possibly when a dry season comes and the water in the swamps evaporates, they come after the insects left in the mud. Their call is a bold "car, car", and may be frequently heard as they fly on moonlight nights.

Although their chief depredations are usually among the eggs and young chickens, upon more than one occasion we have found them a serious menace to the maize crops. About four years ago the contents of one field were almost ruined by Crows stripping the husks and devouring the half-ripe grain—all specimens shot had the white feather base. They are difficult to poison, as, finding they have swallowed something that disagrees with them, they will at once disgorge it.

While walking through a dry tea-tree swamp on October 3, 1932, my sister and I were attracted by the excited actions of a number of Crows flying about some tall red gum trees on which grew numerous large bunches of mistletoe. A search through field-glasses revealed four nests in one tree, all so cunningly built into the roots of the mistletoe that, but for the excited behaviour of the Crows, we should never have discovered them. A week or so later their presence was forcibly recalled to our minds by frequent and daring raids upon the poultry yards. With earliest daylight they would come, flying slowly over, ready to pounce upon any luckless chicken that might be roaming. Some carried away were about the size of Brown Quail. I saw a Crow seize one of these, and, flying straight up to a great height, drop it, then, swooping swiftly, seize its then dead prey from the ground and fly off with it. Some of the men were in search of the nests we had spoken of, and, finding a red gum with mistletoe, in which they could distinguish two nests, each about a hundred feet from the ground, they promptly felled it, in ignorance that the one containing four nests was a couple of hundred feet away.

In its fall the forest giant brought down all the leaves and smaller branches of another to add to the chaos. Searching among the debris, they discovered the two nests, one almost intact. In each case the nest had been built into the root of the mistletoe, many dead sticks of the mistletoe itself having been used in their formation; the lining was a thick, felt-like mass of finely-shredded bark of the swamp mahogany mixed with horsehair.

With the more broken nest two young birds were recovered, both dead; the eyes could not have been open more than two or three days at most. The skin was pinkish-grey, and tiny blue-black feathers were just showing through tufts of grey down on the back and head. The points of shining blue-black feathers were just showing as a fringe on the wings. The bill was blackish, tipped white; gape yellowish; iris in each specimen milky white.

Four young were found with the other nest—three dead; these were larger and older birds than the others. They were well covered with down and feathers, with the exception of the breast and abdomen, which were bare, reddish skin. The down was grey; feathers shining blue-black. Gape reddish, inside mouth and throat bright red; bill blackish, tipped whitish horn; feet and legs were blackish flesh. Iris in all four specimens was white. The fourth young probably had been injured in the fall, for it only lived four days. Its call was a loud "ca-war, ca-war"; it also frequently uttered a growling sound; but that is used by other nestlings, notably the Podargus. It showed no fear, and ate readily anything offered to it.—(MISS) FLORENCE M. IRBY, R.A.O.U., Casino, N.S.W., 31/10/32.

Tick Parasitism in Birds.—Although we not infrequently hear of such bush-dwellers as bandicoots, "possums", snakes and "goannas" being the hosts of the "bush tick", it is not often that we hear of birds being attacked. Accordingly, the following incident may be of interest to ornithologists. Towards the close of September this year, in company with Mr. Frank Clarke, I caught a "tame wild" Currawong (*Strepera graculina*), which is accustomed to enter the National Park Bird Cabin, south of Sydney, for food. Upon examining our captive, we discovered that one very large tick (*Ixodes holocyclus*) was lodged among the short feathers below the bird's eye, another fairly large specimen beside the other eye, and several smaller ticks were among the feathers at the nape. Two of the ticks appeared to have been on the bird for some time; the bodies of both were greatly distended, one in fact, being the largest example that has ever come under my notice.

With great difficulty the ticks were removed, and when the Currawong was recaptured a week later, the wounds were found to have dried and healed completely. Our semi-tame Satin Bower-bird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) was also caught and examined, but his satin plumage was devoid of ticks. Other birds known to have been the hosts of *Ixodes* are the Duck (sp.) and Ant Thrush (*Pitta*), (A. Musgrave, *Australian Museum Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 9, p. 318, 1932.)

In order to be quite certain that the parasites collected by

Clarke and me were *Ixodes holocyclus*, I submitted them to Mr. Anthony Musgrave, Curator of Entomology at the Australian Museum, who confirmed our opinion. It would seem that birds are not so seriously affected by the arachnid as are mammals. The Currawong I examined showed no signs of distress, even although the ticks had obviously been attached for some time, and a week after their removal, the host seemed to be in perfect health. Yet I have seen "possums" and flying "squirrels" die from the effects of tick paralysis with parasites attached which were neither so large, nor which appeared to have been attached so long, as those in the instance cited.—A. J. MARSHALL, R.A.O.U., Penshurst, N.S.W.

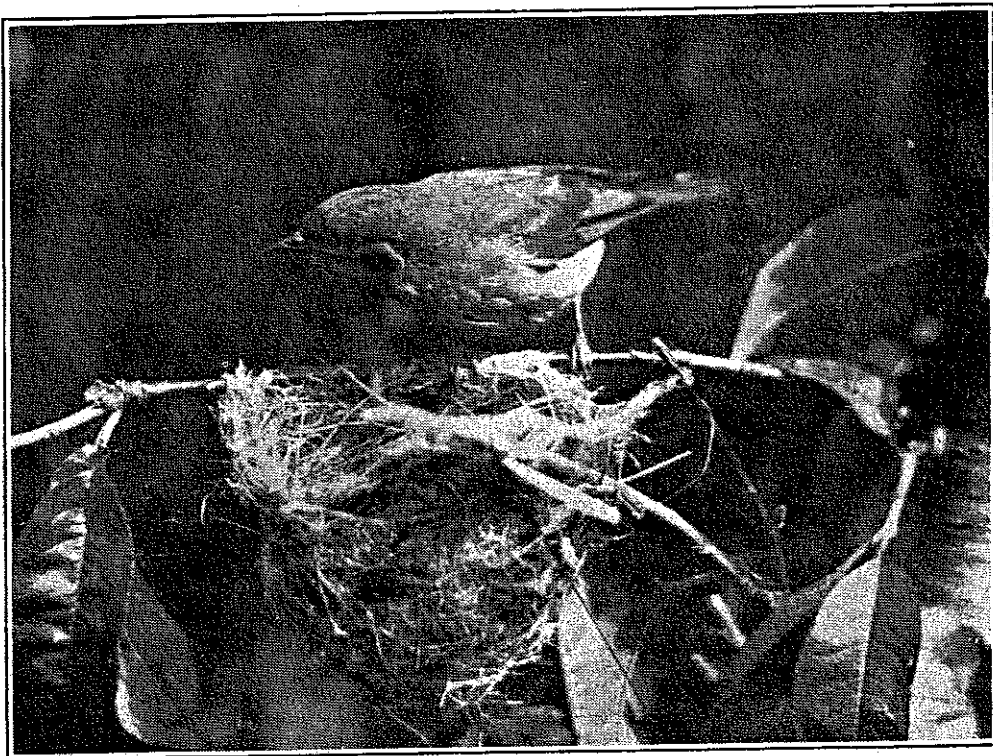
Nest of Brolga.—I notice that Mathews and Iredale, also Cayley, state that the Brolga makes no nest, but the accompanying photograph shows that sometimes they make a very substantial nest. The Native Companion or Brolga was, at one time, very plentiful in this district, (the Western District of Victoria), and I have seen many nests. In only one instance were the eggs laid without a good nest being built, and that was an exceptionally dry year, when there was no water in any of the swamps. The nests are made of bits of tussock grass pulled up by the roots, the space around the nest being more or less denuded of grass, which has been pulled up to form nesting material. The mud adhering to the roots helps to make a solid platform.—R. F. DENNIS, R.A.O.U., Terang, Victoria, 17/9/32.

Honeyeaters Near Melbourne.—One of the most favoured spots in the suburban areas of Melbourne is that portion which lies along the Yarra River at Bulleen. The low river flats, intersected by cut-off meanders of the river, which form billabongs wherein reeds and other swamp growths flourish, provide shelter for comparatively rare water birds, and the tea-tree scrubs and small eucalypts attract Honeyeaters of several species and other birds. Eight species of Honeyeaters (a large record for Melbourne suburban areas) are found there and along the Koonung Creek, which runs back to Doncaster. They are the White-plumed, Yellow-faced, Eastern Spinebill, White-eared, Red Wattle-bird, Yellow-winged, White-naped and Noisy Miner. The Rev. C. L. Lang, R.A.O.U., obtained many interesting bird pictures whilst residing at Doncaster, including photographs of several of the Honeyeaters mentioned, and the accompanying picture is a typical one of the Yellow-faced species, a creek-loving bird, whose rattling notes are always to be heard along the Koonung Creek. Although a common bird, good photographs of the "Yellow-



Nest of Brolga.

Photo. by R. F. Dennis, R.A.O.U.



Yellow-faced Honeyeater at nest.

Photo. by C. L. Lang, R.A.O.U.

face" are not abundant, the bird's quick actions and the location of its nest not being conducive to successful photography. The nest is frequently built in tea-trees or in a similar type of shrub overhanging water.—C. E. BRYANT, R.A.O.U., Melbourne, Vic.

Ground Parrot.—Since the last visit of R.A.O.U. to Port Stephens district I have been searching for the Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*) in that neighbourhood but without success till April 21 last (1932), when one was noted on the moor near Tanilbah. A local resident also saw a flock further east near some swamps that Mr. Cayley searched on the visit referred to.—W. J. ENRIGHT, R.A.O.U., West Maitland, N.S.W.

Spring Arrivals in North-West Tasmania.—On August 30, 1932, the first Fantailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) was heard trilling in the garden at Devonport. The first pair of Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) from across Bass Straits was seen flitting along the sea-beach on the morning of August 31. A flock of about fifty "White-eyes" (*Zosterops lateralis*) appeared in the manna gums at the back of the cottage early this morning (September 3). They were in a great state of excitement, flitting rapidly among the branchlets, never still a moment. Some of the party then flew down into a wattle, and in two or three minutes the whole lot made off simultaneously towards another group of trees in a north-westerly direction. The party was so large and so excited that they gave one the impression of having come across the Strait or from one of the islands. On September 17 a solitary "Summer-Bird" (*Coracina novæ-hollandiæ*) was noticed in the morning flying from west to east. It was a fine sunny day. On September 19 five of the same species were seen flying fairly high, west to east again. The wind was easterly, and the sky overcast, but the day fine.

The first Pallid Cuckoo (*Cucullus pallidus*) was heard calling at 2 p.m. on September 3; the day was dull, with a cold north-east breeze. The first Pipit (*Anthus australis*) was noted by the wayside on September 26, about a month later than usual. When travelling from Burnie to Devonport on September 28 a number of Wood-Swallows (*Artamus cyanopterus*) was observed flying among the white gums just west of the Forth River. It was a fine sunny afternoon. A "Tree-Diamond" (*Pardalotus striatus*) was calling "Pick-it-up" in the gums behind the cottage on October 10. Usually they arrive a month or more earlier.—H. STUART DOVE, R.A.O.U., West Devonport, Tasmania.

Neophema chrysogaster near Melbourne.—A male, in full plumage, of the beautiful Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster* Lath.) was picked up near Werribee, twenty miles south-west of Melbourne, Victoria, about three months ago. The finder (Mr. S. Stirling), knowing well, in the aviary, the Blue-winged and Elegant Parrots of the same genus, realized that he had something out of the ordinary, and thoughtfully sent the specimen to the National Museum. Although slightly damaged, it was otherwise in excellent condition. A number of what appeared to be similar birds were seen in the same locality on the same day, and in recent months I have been informed of large flocks on two islands, which were definitely of the genus and probably of this species. Like other representatives of the genus which a few years ago were said to be extinct or nearing extinction, and have since appeared in good numbers, the Orange-bellied Parrot is probably also as numerous as ever it was. Climatic conditions explain the movements of the inland forms, but in this instance it would appear that the stronghold of the species has always been the uninhabited islands of Bass Strait and the Tasmanian coast, whence the birds move to Tasmania and the mainland only for the nesting season. As with other species of restricted habitat, the lack of records simply reflects the lack of investigation. Apparently the last record of *N. chrysogaster* in Victoria is that given by Belcher (*Birds of Geelong*, p. 188), who collected a specimen near Geelong in 1912. There are three specimens in immature plumage in the collection of this Museum taken at Belfast (Port Fairy) in 1884.—GEORGE MACK, R.A.O.U., National Museum, Melbourne, 5/12/32.

The White Variety of *Demigretta sacra* in South-west Australia.—Messrs. A. H. Lucas and W. H. D. le Souëf, in their *Birds of Australia*, say "There are three forms of this bird in Australia; on the southern coasts both the white and the grey, which inter-breed, and in the northern portion a darker variety is also found, as well as the other two forms". I spent the latter half of October, 1932, on the coast between Cape Naturaliste and Leewin and noted that the bird is fairly numerous at least on the northern half of that coast, between Cape Naturaliste and the mouth of the Margaret River. On one occasion I saw, in the evening, no less than eleven examples of the grey variety in one flock feeding on the beach. Residents told me that there was a white Reef-Heron about the coast just south of Cape Naturaliste and that they had seen it carrying sticks to a nest so I set off to see the bird myself. The pair of Herons was soon spotted as the young in the nest were about three weeks old and the parents were busy feeding them. One of the parent birds

was of the grey variety and the other was pure white. Of the three young in the nest one was grey while the other two were white.

When visiting the coast about twenty-five miles farther south a resident told me that not only the white and the grey forms occur on this portion of the south-west coast but that a "black" form was also there. Unfortunately, I was unable to see a specimen of this dark form. The white form is undoubtedly rare on this portion of the coast of southern Australia. Carter (*The Emu*, Vol. XXIII, 1923) says: "The only white variety of this bird that I saw in the south-west was one that Captain Winzar, then Harbour-master of Albany, kindly forwarded to me as a rarity." Campbell, in his *Nests and Eggs*, however, says: "... about twenty years ago I observed Reef-Herons, both the slate-coloured bird and the pure white variety as near Melbourne as Phillip Island" and "Mr. Atkinson and I observed the association of both varieties in Bass Strait."

While the white variety may be very uncommon in southern Australia it, however, undoubtedly occurs as the above notes prove. The statement made by Neville Cayley in *What Bird is That?* that "The dark phase appears to be the only form frequenting the coasts and islands of southern Australia in the tropical regions", is therefore not quite accurate.—H. tralia and Tasmania; the white-plumaged bird being found M. WHITTELL, R.A.O.U., Bridgetown, W.A.

The Jabiru.—My first acquaintance with the Jabiru (*Xenorhynchus asiaticus*) was in the frontispiece of Dr. Gordon Bennett's *Gatherings of a Naturalist in Australia*, published in London in 1860. He says:—

"In October, 1858, I succeeded in purchasing a fine living specimen of the New Holland Jabiru or Gigantic Crane of the Colonists (*Mydersia australis*). It was brought alive to Sydney from Port Macquarie. In 1839 a Jabiru was shot on the Hunter River and another on the North Shore near Sydney about three years since, both of which were presented to the Australian Museum. The Jabiru is partial to salt water creeks and lagoons. It is usually seen in such localities on the Hunter, Macleay, and Clarence Rivers.

Mr. Edward Hill informed me that he found and shot Jabirus in the early days of the colony on the swamps about Windsor, and after found nearly two pounds of eels and other small kind of fish in the stomach."

My recollection of the Lower Hunter extends over nearly fifty years, and I never saw or heard of the Jabiru in that neighbourhood till three years ago when a pair took up their residence on Eskdale swamp near Seaham on the Williams River. Mr. Cyril McDonald, the lessee of the swamp and a

zealous bird lover, protected them, but one morning eighteen months after their arrival, he found one of them shot dead, and the other disappeared a few days later.—W. J. ENRIGHT, R.A.O.U., West Maitland, N.S.W.

Birds' Sense of Pleasure?—That birds possess a sense of enjoyment apart from their mating performances is evinced at times by their behaviour. Thus the Bower-birds make elaborate playgrounds wherein to amuse themselves, Magpies indulge in wonderful aerial acrobatics, and who has not seen a Swallow toying with a feather in mid-air, releasing it, swooping around it, and catching it, again and again? Quite recently during a flood in the river a Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) was seen riding a piece of driftwood that was caught in a slowly-whirling backwater. Occasionally the bird would make a short excursion into the air to secure an insect, but it was with obvious enjoyment that it would return to its floating perch (which had only the two extreme ends clear of the water), and after resting a few moments hop across to the other end, twittering pleasantly the while. Half an hour later, its meal completed, the bird was still on the drifting wood, being carried slowly round and round the backwash.—A. E. BRIDGEWATER, R.A.O.U., Mansfield, Vic.

The Mischievous Magpie.—In recent issues of *The Emu* various articles on nest destruction have appeared, but the offender remains unknown, although in some cases Currawongs are suspected.

Personally, I think the Magpies are responsible for most of the damage. The other day I was watching a Magpie worrying a pair of Yellow-tailed Thornbills. It was, of course, unable to catch them, so turned its attention to their half-built nest, which it commenced to destroy. The nest was built right out in the leaves, about 12 feet from the ground. The twigs being too small to afford a secure perch, the Magpie adopted an upside down position, clinging to the leaves and twigs with its feet. I intervened and drove it away, thinking that no nest of a small bird would be safe from the Magpies. Apparently their only motive is a desire for mischief.

About a week afterwards I saw a pair of Magpies in pursuit of a Starling. After pursuing it for some time, one of them caught it in mid-air, and extracted a beakful of feathers. The other one then caught it, and bore it squeaking to the ground. As I approached, the Magpie made off, and I expected to find the Starling dead. To my surprise it was alive, and could even fly a few yards. It finally recovered sufficiently to make good its escape.—A. C. CAMERON, R.A.O.U., Biddeston, Queensland, 15/11/32.