

## Stray Feathers

**Unusual Mimics.**—On the afternoon of September 20, 1936, I heard the various calls of the Satin Bower-bird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) coming from a tea-tree thicket. Thinking the birds were displaying at a bower I made a cautious approach and was greatly surprised to find a pair of Whip-birds (*Psophodes olivaceus*), one of which mimicked, with amazing accuracy, the "Satin-bird's" calls, interspersed with a few of its own notes. Mr. K. A. Hindwood has told me that he once heard the Grey Thrush's song in a blackberry bush and on investigating was much surprised to see a Whip-bird uttering the call.

From these observations it would appear that the Whip-bird, like the White-browed Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis frontalis*) utters only the one "borrowed" call at a time and at about the same volume as the original. In that they are quite unlike most other mimics such as the Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascians*) and Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*)—to mention two others which seldom mimic. Those birds mix the calls of many different species with their own, uttering the whole in a very soft and more or less continuous song.

Since writing the above I have had further experience of mimicry from an unexpected source. While walking through a patch of scrub I heard a series of unfamiliar bird notes which presently changed to the calls of the Eastern Shrike-Tit (*Falcunculus frontatus*) uttered more softly than usual. I approached carefully and saw a female Shrike-Tit which indulged in occasional bursts of mimicry, preening its feathers between times. It mimicked about a dozen species whilst I watched, the most favoured being the Lyrebird (*Menura novæ-hollandiæ*), Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*), Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*) and Black-faced Flycatcher (*Monarcha melanopsis*). Once when a Black-faced Flycatcher called overhead the Shrike-Tit left off preening its feathers to mimic the calls. It gave the "grinding" notes, which often precede the clear whistling notes, to perfection, but failed on the latter part of the "witch you, why you" call. A point of interest was that marked preference was given to the harsh calls of the species mimicked, the chattering alarm notes of the Grey Fantail being very well done.—ELLIS MCNAMARA, Cordeaux River, N.S.W.

**A Few More Notes on Wedge-tailed Eagles and Notes on Ravens.**—It is impossible for the writer to agree entirely with Mr. J. N. McGilp, whose article on Eagles appeared in the last *Emu*. In this district and the greater part of southern Riverina, New South Wales, Wedge-tailed Eagles very seldom kill a lamb and practically never kill a sheep

over two months old. On each of two occasions when, to my knowledge, Eagles killed a lamb, the lamb was either sick or one of twins and was deserted by its mother. Rabbits form the principal diet of Eagles here and very many are killed during the year. As usual the Eagles generally work in pairs, one disturbing the rabbit from its seat while the other catches it in its talons. Having visited the nests of at least ten pairs for each of the last four years and never having found any trace of a lamb in or under the nests, it is quite fair to say that Eagles, in this district, do far more good than harm. As many as thirty rabbit skulls have been seen in one nest and on several occasions fresh rabbits were found in the nest long before the eggs were hatched.

The Eagle is of great value as a scavenger and being a ravenous feeder does much good in cleaning up old carcasses. Fly trouble is rapidly becoming worse and, unless people in districts such as this realize the economic value of Eagles, it will become still worse.

Crows are rare but Ravens are plentiful and do untold damage in a drought. A very serious drought occurred in this district in the 1935-36 season, nearly all of the stock being hand-fed for at least six months during lambing. Ravens take the eyes from live sheep apparently just for the sake of killing and not to satisfy their hunger. During the drought mentioned Ravens were particularly numerous and as soon as a sheep got cast through weakness and being heavily-woolled, the Ravens would take out one eye and leave the unfortunate animal to die of blood poisoning two or three days later. Skinned carcasses were left about to feed them but they would prefer to take the eye from a live sheep a few yards away rather than eat any portion of the carcass. On one property 1,400 ewes died out of 10,000 and practically all of the deaths were due to Ravens. This season another neighbour's flocks lambed early when there was little feed about. He had the experience of losing 1,000 ewes out of 4,000 and, besides that, nearly all the lambs. In this district it seems that if the sheep are strong and there is plenty of green feed about during lambing, Ravens do more good than harm but, if the sheep are weak, nothing could possibly be more cruel or more destructive.—G. L. LANSELL, Moulamein, N.S.W., 3/10/36.

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Several articles and notes, including the concluding part of "The Birds of 'Mernot'," have been held over on account of pressure on space.