

***Strepera graculina*. Pied Currawong.**

Scattered over the whole island, there was a flock constantly in attendance about the kitchen where they were quite tame.

As the foregoing list is of interest in so far as it does not contain birds that one would expect to find in two weeks' search of a comparatively small area, a list of birds follows which were seen on the mainland opposite during the brief opportunity offered by travel. It does not include many also seen on the island. Little Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*), Pied Cormorant (*P. varius*), Masked Plover (*Lobibyx miles*), Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*), Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*), Cockatiel (*Leptolophus hollandicus*), Blue-winged Kookaburra (*Dacelo leachii*), Forest Kingfisher (*Halcyon macleayi*), Silveryeye (*Zosterops lateralis*), Horsfield Bush-Lark (*Mirafra javanica*), Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*).

I would like to acknowledge the kindness of Mr. C. T. White, Queensland Government Botanist, who supplied much information on the flora of the Whitsunday Group.

Stray Feathers

Two Unusual Nesting Sites.—On the morning of September 23, 1948, I flushed a Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*) out of a eucalypt tree which contained a large stick nest like that of the Crow. This was at Allong Springs in the vicinity of the R.A.O.U. camp at Murchison River, W.A. Passing this tree later I chanced to look at the nest and there was an owl looking at me. The bird flushed from the nest as I began to climb the tree, and, on my arrival at the nest, which was about forty feet off the ground, I found two owl eggs, one of which was chipping. I measured the eggs, which were 34.5 x 43 mm. The nest was situated on a horizontal fork and was composed of small twigs lined with bark and an Emu feather, also some small feathers which appeared to have come off the bird. There were also a few fairly fresh eucalypt leaves on the bottom of the nest. The tree was described as a flooded gum.

Climbing to the nest again five days later I flushed the bird and discovered one white downy youngster and the other egg commencing to chip. The departure of the bird from the nest was the signal for bedlam in this neighbourhood as there were sixteen pairs of birds to our knowledge breeding in the immediate vicinity.

On September 30 I was shown the nest of the Western Silveryeye (*Zosterops australasiæ*) in an unusual position

at Pelsart Island in the Abrolhos, off Geraldton, W.A. This nest, which contained six eggs, was suspended between two spiral electric light wires in a man's bedroom. A start had been made in one place with spider webs and fibre and carried along for about two inches like a tail until the real nest started. The nest then contained many pieces of fine wool with some cotton and fibre in its construction. It seemed strange to pick this position when there were plenty of low bushes suitable for a home within a few feet of the doorway. Some of these birds are very tame on this island and forage amongst the huts and even eat the sugar and jam out of the bowls on the mess hut table. Perhaps these nesting birds were a pair of the table-frequenting birds as the bedroom they chose for their home adjoins the kitchen.—HAROLD E. TARR, Middle Park, Vic., 15/11/48.

Parent Birds Transporting their Young.—There are a number of records of Australian birds transporting their young. The best known and most convincing of them concerns several species of ducks which, it is claimed, carry their young from the nest in a tree to the ground or directly on to the water. Swans and grebes are known to carry their young on their backs when on the water. In most other cases, however, the reports are, to me, less convincing.

Simpson Newland (*Proc. Royal Geogr. Soc. Australasia, S.A. Branch*, XXII, 6-7, 1923) recorded two instances of the Australian Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*) carrying a young one on its back and flying out of danger when pressed by an approaching man.

F. R. Zietz (*S.A. Orn.*, III (2), 44, 1917) reported a Southern Stone-Curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*) carrying a young under each wing, the head of each protruding forwards.

A. H. Chisholm (*Bird Wonders of Australia*, 175-180, 1935) and W. B. Alexander (*Ibis*, 88, 18, 1946) appear to think that, in certain species at any rate, the transporting of the young by the parent birds is purposive, not merely accidental.

My own experience with the Chestnut-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficeps*), Eastern Whiteface (*Aphelocephala leucopsis*), and Black-capped Sittella (*Neositta pileata*) which I have observed transporting young over very short distances, leads me to conclude that in those species the carrying was hardly purposive. In each of these cases a very anxious parent bird flew so close below a fledgeling on its maiden flight that the latter scrambled on its back and was supported for only a moment.

I am inclined to treat most reports of birds deliberately carrying their young over some distance with considerable reserve.—ERHARD F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 10/1/49.



Female Fantail-Warbler at nest in rank grass.

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.

Nests of the Golden-headed Fantail-Warbler.—Here are a few brief notes on the size and construction of some nests of *Cisticola exilis*.

No. 1. Fisherman's Bend, Melbourne. Nest built in a club-rush in exposed position. Oval shape, entrance $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches across, over-all length $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, width $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and inside depth from entrance 2 inches. Constructed mainly of very fine grasses, some coloured wool and lined cosily with thistle down.

No. 2. Bulleen ponds. Nest built in thick grass and very sheltered. Nest ball-shaped 3 inches long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, inside $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches, entrance $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches across. Main nest tightly bound with broad grasses and well lined with thistle down. Outside of nest covered with loose strands of broad green and dry grasses.—ROY WHEELER, Windsor, Vic., 27/10/48.

More Nests of the Fantail-Warbler.—The following two nests were found by C. E. Bryant and me (Bruce Amos) respectively. We had both nests under continuous observation and the hen was photographed at each.

No. 1. Bulleen Ponds, January 18, 1948. Found by watching the hen carrying lining to the nest. Four eggs. Dome-shaped structure built on the ground and constructed of fine grass externally and lined with thistle down. On January 31 the nest contained four young, approximately one day old. Only the female fed the young. On February 6, one young bird was found dead outside the nest entrance. During the night of both February 5 and 6 it rained heavily, with thunder and lightning. By February 7 one young bird had scrambled out of the nest, and by the next day, early in the morning, all had left. The chief food items were green caterpillars (when the birds were very young), white moths and small crickets.

No. 2. Bundoora. Found on October 23, 1948, by watching the hen carrying nest lining. The nest was well concealed in thick, coarse, green grass, and was about fifteen inches from the ground. The grass formed the outside of the nest, and internally the structure was comprised of 'down' from dead *Typha angustifolia* and from thistles. The dome-shaped nest contained one egg, but on the following morning at 10 a.m. there were two. On October 30 there were four and the hen was sitting. Only the hen was seen at or near the nest. On November 7 the bird was still carrying lining. Three days later there were four young in the nest, about one day old. They had grown considerably by November 13. A visit paid on December 5 showed that the young had died in the nest. The nest was not 'scragged.' Had something happened to the hen?—BRUCE AMOS, North Balwyn, Vic., 17/1/49.

Sea-Eagles Harrying Flying Foxes.—During my recent visit to Mataranka, Northern Territory, I saw the White-breasted Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) in a role new to me. Mataranka Homestead, now a tourist resort, stands on the banks of the Waterhouse River, a tributary of the Roper, over two hundred miles from its mouth. The Sea-Eagles are not normally present. But when the paper-barks began to bloom, Mr. Smith, the proprietor, told me the flying foxes would soon be moving up the river, and with them would come a large hawk. A few days later, having heard a faint clamour, we went down to the lagoon to find a camp of flying foxes installed, and a Sea-Eagle perched in a nearby tree. Soon two other Sea-Eagles flew over. From a raft on the river we watched their tactics. After reconnoitring, one bird would fly into an occupied tree, alighting in the midst of the animals and causing them to fly around in a panic. The chase would move on beyond our range of vision, the foliage along the river being dense, and I never witnessed an actual kill. Sometimes a second bird flew in after the 'bats' had been roused. During the brief remainder of my stay the Sea-Eagles harried the flying foxes from morning till night. I was told that the birds and the beasts would depart as they had arrived — simultaneously.—NANCY HOPKINS, Townsville, Qld., 15/1/49.

A Note on the Black-tailed Godwit.—In view of the apparent rarity of the Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) as indicated by Mr. A. R. McGill's paper in *The Emu*, vol. 47, p. 357, I should like to record my observations of this species.

My first record was made on October 29, 1947, when I was watching waders in a fresh-water lagoon at Belgian Gardens, near the Town Common. For some time I watched a single lame bird feeding in the shallow water. I had no books with me, and until it flew I was at a loss as to its identity, as I had associated godwits with the sea-shore only. I am familiar with the Bar-tailed Godwit (*L. lapponica*), and, though I have not seen the two species together, my impression is that they are somewhat dissimilar in general appearance. In addition to a difference in carriage, I should say that *L. lapponica* has a more mottled plumage, *L. limosa* appearing plain coloured in the field. Nevertheless it is the flight pattern that establishes identity.

During February 1948 I saw a flock of eight birds (*L. limosa*) in a swamp on the Town Common, a short distance from the site of my first record. A week later they had increased to twenty. They remained in the locality until the middle of May. I saw them always in fresh water, usually around the same spot, once in another lagoon two or three

miles away. Possibly they visited the sea-shore also, as it was not far distant.

I have no doubt as to the identity of the birds, as they were seen frequently in flight, showing the unmistakable colour pattern. This is also seen when the bird stretches its wings, as noted by Mr. McGill, which it does often when feeding. I heard no calls. Although many shore visitors may be overlooked here in Townsville where little field work is done, I can say quite definitely that this prolonged visit was exceptional in a locality which is under regular observation. —NANCY HOPKINS, Townsville, Qld., 15/1/49.

The Ranges of *Malurus pulcherrimus* and *M. assimilis*.—In the account of birds met with during the recent camp-out of the R.A.O.U. at the mouth of the Murchison River, special prominence is given to the presence of *M. pulcherrimus* so far north, and mention is also made of its congener, *M. assimilis* North. As I had had some field experience with both these 'chestnut-winged wrens,' a few supplementary notes may be of interest.

Since the discovery of the first-named in Gouldian days, little or nothing has been written about it, and I think it was in September, 1902, that the late A. W. Milligan determined to make a search for it. He was accompanied by Mr. C. P. Conigrave of the Perth Museum, and it was determined to search the northern side of the Stirling Ranges. The search was quite successful and a series of specimens was added to the Museum bird collection. The Stirling Ranges lie about 52 miles from the south coast at Albany, and have a rainfall of about 25 inches on the average. The searchers can justly claim to have re-discovered a long-lost species.

In 1903 I was collecting birds for the Perth Museum, and in August I had moved down to Wurarga, a railway station 114 miles due east of Geraldton. It was at Wurarga I first became acquainted with a 'chestnut-winged wren.' In an attractive-looking creek, favoured with small pools of fresh water and patches of good low cover, I encountered several parties of *Malurus*, and noted the conspicuously-coloured males. I also found nests with eggs. I secured a male and sent it down to the Museum, where A. W. Milligan, then honorary consulting ornithologist, declared it to be North's *M. assimilis*. All the adults I saw appeared to have black breasts. I noted none suggesting indigo-blue breasts.

A few weeks later I joined Messrs. Corrigan and Milligan in a trip to the Wongan Hills, a locality between 70 and 80 miles north-east of Perth. We actually camped amidst a haunt of *M. pulcherrimus*, and very quickly Milligan placed a male in my hands to be skinned. I examined it critically. The blue breast was quite apparent, and I also noted that the long ear-coverts were of a darker blue

shade than those of *M. assimilis*, but I admit the delicate colour shades do not appeal equally to all human eyes. Also I noted that these ear-coverts do not end in a point, as I once saw them depicted in a colour plate. Also I noted they are not carried during life pressed closely to the head.

To return to *M. assimilis*. On behalf of the late H. L. White, I visited Dirk Hartog Island on two occasions. I had a permit to collect specimens, but the chief object was to obtain a nest and eggs of the Black-and-white Wren (*M. leucopterus*). On one occasion, whilst I was watching a nest of a wren to make certain of its ownership, a party of wrens came along. They were not Black-and-white Wrens, but had the typical chestnut wings of *M. assimilis*. The party contained two males in nuptial plumage, one in charge, and an entourage of brown females or immatures—eight or nine in all. I was provided with a very good little field-glass, but even with its aid could not detect any shade of blue on the breasts of the two adults. They were not timid and took no interest in the nest.

Dirk Hartog is separated at its south extremity by a channel about a mile and a quarter wide. This should not prove a serious obstacle to even poor fliers like *Malurus* to cross in favourable weather.

Considering the foregoing evidence it appears to me that the Murchison River district is about the northern limit of *M. pulcherrimus* and that it here overlaps in a small way with that of *M. assimilis*.—F. LAWSON WHITLOCK, Bunbury, W.A., 11/4/49.

Pallid Cuckoo Carrying Egg.—On November 23, 1948, a bird of this species, *Cuculus pallidus*, was seen to fly to the ground with an egg in its bill. There it repeatedly tossed its head backwards. Though the egg was occasionally dropped, it was picked up and the tossing repeated. After two minutes or so the bird flew off, leaving the egg, which I immediately examined and found to be a typical egg of the Pallid Cuckoo. There was a large hole in one side of the egg, which was empty. That it was recently emptied was clear, for the albumen was moist and not in the least 'tacky.'

I have not the least doubt that the bird had been eating the contents of the egg — presumably its own. Possibly the egg had been laid and the bird had been unable to find a nest into which to deposit it. But eating the contents is, from the scarcity of records, unusual, and it would be interesting if others with similar records were to communicate them.—A. GRAHAM BROWN, Colac, Vic., 24/2/49.

Range of the Australian Gannet.—While I was travelling from Colombo to Fremantle, two gannets, considered to be *Sula serrator*, were seen by me at noon on June 21, 1947, when the ship was in the same latitude as the Cocos Islands and from 40 to 50 miles to the west. There was

a strong south-easterly wind with occasional showers. The birds were white with black primaries and yellow heads. There was no doubt of the second character and they were seen by another ornithologist, Mr. Duncan Macdonald, who agrees with me. The extent of black on the tail could not be seen, though its presence was noted.

The Australian Gannet's range is generally accepted as not extending much further north than Fremantle, W.A., and the two birds seen were well without the accepted range of this species. Dr. C. A. Gibson-Hill (*in litt.*) thinks that the birds seen were the Masked Gannet (*Sula dactylatra*) which breeds on North Keeling Island. These, however, have not the straw-yellow head. No claim for extension of range, of course, can be made without procuring skins, and these notes are published in the hope that they may be of interest should further records occur.—A. GRAHAM BROWN, Colac, Vic., 24/2/49.

A Rare Sydney Species.—Although the Pink-eared Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*) is widely distributed, though confined to Australia, its occurrence in the Sydney district is apparently more accidental than usual. Reasonably large flocks are frequently reported from favoured south-eastern localities both inland and coastal, so a reason for its obvious reluctance of patronizing Sydney's inviting lagoons cannot readily be assessed. As previous known records are few, it is interesting to add a further recent occurrence.

On January 23, 1949, at Pitt Town bottoms, about 30 miles north-west of Sydney, and in company with Messrs. R. Boughtwood, J. Fearnley and E. Hoskin, I located a small number of Pink-eared Ducks on a backwater of the lagoon, recently filled by heavy rain. About six to eight birds were present. They indulged in short flights, usually in pairs, but apparently always returned to the favoured backwater. A close approach was possible, especially whilst they waded (or waddled) over the trampled grassy margins. Many of the identification marks mentioned in Jack Jones's 'Field Key' (*The Emu*, vol. 46., p. 127) could be clearly noted, including the absence of speculum, white 'trailing' edge of the wings, large bill carried at a downward angle, and barred underparts. I thought the white rump-bar the most noticeable feature in flight and it appeared more extensive than that shown in Jones's plate. The birds called frequently, but the notes are difficult to describe, though quite unlike that of any other duck known to the observers.

A few weeks later, February 13, Messrs. T. Everitt, N. and J. Fearnley, K. Hindwood and I counted five Pink-eared Ducks associated with a large assemblage of ducks, including over a hundred Maned Geese (*Chenonetta jubata*),

on Baker's Lagoon, another of the chain of Hawkesbury swamps.

Mr. Hindwood has obliged me with known earlier records for the Sydney district. The Pink-eared Duck appears among the 'Lambert' drawings (vol. 1, no. 77), which are mostly of birds found near Sydney during the early years of settlement (1788-). The next published record appears to be that of A. J. North, who states: "Rare. A few examples were obtained at Botany in May, 1897, during the unprecedentedly dry weather inland" (*Handbook of Sydney, Austr. Assoc. Adv. Sci.*, 1898, p. 104). Later, North remarked: "This species seldom occurs in the neighbourhood of Sydney. A few examples were brought under my notice in May, 1897, obtained at Botany during a period of drought inland, one of these specimens being presented to the Trustees of the Australian Museum by Mr. H. Burns. I have never seen or heard of its occurrence near the metropolis since" (*Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia*, vol. 4, pt. 1, January 22, 1913, p. 85). The specimen mentioned by North is still in the Museum collection (registered number 0.9314) with the following particulars in the register—"Shot by the donor, previous day. Randwick, A.J.N.", the date of collection being May 22, 1897. The locality given, Randwick, is close to Botany.

The only field-notes known since are those sent by M. S. R. Sharland, which briefly are as follows—"March 28, 1944. Two birds seen, Baker's Lagoon. A few weeks earlier four or five birds, believed to be this species, seen in the same locality."—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 16/5/49.

Nesting Notes on the Spotted Quail-Thrush.—The presence of this rather elusive ground bird, *Cincoloma punctatum*, on the tops of the sandstone ridges by the Hawkesbury River estuary, north of Sydney, may be often detected by its plaintive, high-pitched call. Usually an observer is favoured with only a brief glimpse of the bird before it flushes in 'quail-like' fashion, or runs swiftly to cover. In country where feral cats are not as yet much in evidence this species is apparently holding its own.

Several pairs reside within close proximity to the buildings of the Muogamarra Sanctuary which overlooks the Hawkesbury River, and these birds have become accustomed somewhat to human activity. For several years a pair has been known to breed each spring, usually in August, in the same locality on the edge of the car-parking area. The round open nest of entwined grass is placed on the ground amongst low growth at the foot of a tree. During the latter part of October, 1948, the first disastrous bush-fire for six years raged in the Sanctuary, and only a few acres, containing the buildings and the parking area, were saved. Quail-Thrushes still breeding in the area engulfed by the

fire apparently suffered heavily, though a few birds were noted foraging over burnt ground shortly after the fire.

On November 28 I found a nest containing two well-grown young, slate-grey in colour, at the base of a grass-tree within the green 'oasis' and only a few yards from the Sanctuary's museum. Both parents were attending the young, and when I approached the female adopted quite an aggressive attitude, spreading her tail and emitting a low rasping 'growl.' The male kept more to the background. A week or so later I noticed a family party slowly crossing the parking area.

A perusal of *Emu* records over the past twelve years revealed only two very brief notes on this species. Neither of them referred to any nesting activities. A. J. North (*Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania*, vol. 1. p. 323) quotes various breeding places in south-eastern Australia from the Clarence River to Adelaide. It is possible that the species reaches its greatest intensity in numbers, though not being actually common, in the Hawkesbury Sandstone geological area of New South Wales.—R. M. VIRTUE, Eastwood, N.S.W., 16/5/49.

The Jabiru Near Sydney.—The Jabiru (*Xenorhynchus asiaticus*) is an extremely rare bird anywhere near Sydney. It is represented among the 'Watling' (no. 208) and the 'Lambert' (no. 79, vol. 1) drawings, which are, for the most part, of birds collected near Sydney during the first years of settlement, from 1788. George Bennett (*Gatherings of a Naturalist in Australasia*, 1860, pp. 195-201) gives an interesting account of the habits of the species, based largely on a bird he kept as a pet. He notes, in passing, that a Jabiru was shot on the Hunter River, near Newcastle, in 1839, and another on the "North Shore, near Sydney, about three years since" (*circa* 1857); also that a "Mr. Edward Hill informed me that he formerly shot Jabirus, in the early days of the colony, in the swamps about Windsor (Hawkesbury district), and often found nearly two pounds of eels and other small kinds of fish in the stomach."

More recent records, and they are few, for the County of Cumberland, are all from the Hawkesbury swamps about thirty miles west of Sydney. In April, 1944, a single bird was seen on Bushell's Lagoon, Wilberforce (*vide* K. Cobcroft). Another bird was noted on a small lagoon near McGrath's Hill, a mile east of Windsor, on October 24, 1948, by Mr. M. Schraeder, who was later told by some local farmers that a Jabiru was seen at Wilberforce 'about two years ago': this may have been the same bird noted in April, 1944.

A Jabiru, perhaps the one recorded by Mr. Schraeder, was observed by J. Bebert, T. A. Everitt, E. Hoskin and K. A. Hindwood, on Baker's Lagoon, Richmond, on December

26, 1948. It was wary and would not allow a close approach but was watched through binoculars for some time, and the iridescent glossy sheen of its plumage and the colours of its legs (reddish), and eyes (yellow) clearly noted. Its movements were rather stately and deliberate and in size it dwarfed the White-faced Herons, White Egrets, White and Straw-necked Ibis, Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills nearby. Later it took flight with some White Ibis and soared above the lagoon to a height of some two thousand feet. The contrasting 'black' and white plumage was then conspicuous, with the long reddish legs, kept well apart, trailing behind—a great sight against an azure sky.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 15/1/49.

A Summer Record of the Double-banded Dotterel.—As summer records in Australia of this migrant are rare, I thought the following record might be of interest.

On December 27, 1948, David Corke and I saw a fully-plumaged Double-banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*) on the coast at Little River, Victoria. The bird appeared to be in good condition and, when approached, could fly quite well. Visiting this same area on January 30, 1949, we noticed a small bird swimming in about a foot of water near the shore, and realized that it was being attacked by a pair of Silver Gulls (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*). One Gull lifted the bird about a foot out of the water during one of these attacks. I waded out to the bird and, to our surprise, it was a Double-banded Dotterel—possibly the same bird we had noted in December. The Dotterel was swimming quite well when rescued and the upper surface of the bird was quite dry. How it came to be in the water we could not say. When released the bird did not fly off, but ran along the beach to join company with a party of Red-capped Dotterels (*Charadrius ruficapillus*) nearby.—BRUCE AMOS, North Balwyn, 3/6/49.

Freakish Nests.—During last spring I found, near Melbourne, the nest of a Yellow-tailed Thornbill which, owing to its situation in a thorny bush, did not afford scope for the 'upstairs room,' and so this open chamber was set apart, ten inches away from the nest proper. Another Yellow-tailed Thornbill's nest found in a similar situation near Maryborough (Vic.), had only a slight arch at the top; and yet another was most unusual in that it was completely open at the top, so that the four well-developed eggs could easily be seen in the honeyeater-like nest. More remarkable, perhaps, was a nest of a Mistletoe-bird, found near Maryborough in December of 1947, which also lacked the usual side-entrance. Built of wool, it was attached in two places to a slender branch four feet from the ground, and was completely open at the top, thus affording a ready

view of the two eggs. When the female returned she slipped on to the nest between the supporting strands and under the branchlet. It seemed queer to be able to have one of these birds in full view while it was brooding. The nest came to grief later.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Melbourne, Vic., 4/6/49.

Gilbert Whistler Nesting.—One of the most melodious of all Australian bird voices is that of the Gilbert Whistler. Some of the notes resemble certain of the sweet, wistful calls used by the Red-lored Whistler of the Victorian-South Australian Mallee, and also have affinity with the melody of the Olive Whistler, which we hear occasionally in the heavily-wooded ranges near Melbourne. I first met the Gilbert Whistler, and found it nesting, near Maryborough (Vic.) in 1912, and in recent years have on various occasions renewed acquaintance with the species in the same area, where it appears to be sparingly distributed. Possibly it remains in the locality throughout the year (or is at most a gipsy migrant), for I have seen it as early as August and as late as May.

In September of 1946, Mr. A. S. Chalk and I heard one of the engaging calls sounding in the distance on a dry, ironbark-clad hillside just north of Maryborough, and subsequently we enjoyed a charming concert at close range, most of the notes being uttered as the bird foraged among debris on the ground. The species is, perhaps, the most terrestrial of all the whistlers. We did not see either a female or a nest on that occasion, nor was I any more successful in the quest in that spot later. I last saw the solitary bird on December 8 and still he appeared to be alone; apparently he was a 'bachelor.'

In October of 1948, however, I followed the alluring voice for some distance in a forest area immediately west of Maryborough, and, after calling up both birds of a pair, saw the female pick up a twig and go to a sapling where a nest was half built. The male, meanwhile, eddied about and uttered his call of agitation 'dearrrr,' varied at times by the notes that once caused a local man to ask "What's the bird that whistles like a dog?"—an odd question that he promptly amended to "What's the bird that whistles like a man whistling a dog?" A few minutes after seeing the female attend that half-built nest, I was surprised to find, on a stump two feet six inches high, scarcely twenty yards away, a new nest that could only have belonged to a Gilbert Whistler. Constructed of prickly twigs lined with grass, it was too small for the nest of a Grey Thrush and too large for that of a wood-swallow. During the next two days two eggs, fawn-coloured with dark spots at the larger end, were laid in the nest. Oddly, however, on no occasion did I see a bird in attendance.

That nest would have made an ideal subject for photography when equipped with young birds. Unfortunately, however, some robber intervened: a local resident who visited the quiet spot on October 31 (a week after the second egg was laid) found the nest to be empty, and a fortnight later he noted that most of the material had been removed. So ended my only experience with a Gilbert Whistler's nest, in the Maryborough district, during more than thirty years.

Incidentally, although the nest in the sapling was apparently completed it did not receive any eggs. I remain puzzled over that double-nesting occurrence, for I have no doubt that the Gilbert Whistlers built the second nest in the sapling after building their 'real' nest on the stump nearby. Possibly the development was due to a lack of co-ordination between the nest-building instinct and the readiness to lay eggs.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Melbourne, Vic., 3/6/49.

Strange Vocal Mimicry.—Imitations of the simple yet distinctive trill of the Scarlet-breasted Robin have been credited more than once to the Heath-Wren (*Hylacola*) and the English Starling, but I had not expected to hear that call used by another robin. On October 24, 1948, when wandering about a dry, ironbark-clad hillside near Maryborough (Vic.), in pursuit of a Red-capped Robin, I was brought to a halt by hearing the unmistakable trill of the Scarlet-breast. Telling myself that this species had no 'right' to be in such a harsh spot in springtime (and mentally noting, too, that I had never before seen the Scarlet-breast and Red-cap associated in the breeding period) I followed the call to its source. Then, to my astonishment, I saw a male Red-capped Robin, perched in an ironbark, uttering his own insect-like trill and then swinging into the rattle of the Scarlet-breast. This odd combination was repeated several times. It was my first experience of vocal mimicry on the part of any species of robin.

Curiously, I had a similar experience in the same general locality three years earlier. While strolling through a parched gully in October of 1945, I was surprised to hear several times the trill of the Scarlet Robin, and, after searching in vain for the bird during about 15 minutes, I found that the call was being uttered by a nesting Grey Fantail. It is strange that, after knowing the Grey Fantail and the Red-capped Robin somewhat intimately for about forty years, I should hear isolated examples of each species use vocal mimicry, for the first time in my experience, in the same area, and that in each instance the subject of the imitations should be the same species of bird.

Another interesting observation on the general subject has reached me recently from a correspondent who lives

near Charters Towers, Qld. He relates that various examples of the Great Bower-bird (*Chlamydera nuchalis*) which come about his homestead are adept at imitating vocally the sound of a lawn-mower and the clashing and rustling noises made by homestead deer when fighting. Little has been written about the mimetic skill of the Great Bower-bird, but it is clear now that the species shares the remarkable vocal talents of the other members of the group.

In a recent issue of *The Emu* (May, 1949, p. 303) Angus Robinson quoted my booklet of 1946, *Nature's Linguists*, as having listed 49 species of Australian birds in which vocal mimicry has been recorded. It should be stated, on this point, that although I gave notes on 49 species, I did not definitely accept the tentative reports regarding at least five of them (Yellow-tailed Thornbill, White-plumed Honeyeater, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Tawny Frogmouth and Pied Currawong), but merely quoted claims made for them by various members of the R.A.O.U.

If we discard those five species, at the same time accepting Mr. Robinson's record of whisper-song imitations by a Western Magpie (which means that all three magpies are now recorded as mimics), together with my own record regarding the Red-capped Robin, we arrive at the fact that vocal mimicry has now been recognized among 46 Australian species, of which at least 12 may be regarded as master mimics.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Melbourne, Vic., 3/6/49.

Barrington's 'Hornbill'.—Your correspondent, W. J. Enright, in his note entitled 'The White Fulica' (*Emu*, vol. 48, part 2, pp. 160-161), referring to the plates in Barrington's *History of New South Wales*, 1802, states, "The Hornbill is clearly the Rifle-bird!" On what grounds does he make this sweeping statement? He proves, at great length, how unlikely it is that Barrington ever came into contact with the Rifle-bird; he does not explain the lack of similarity in colouring between the plate and any of the species of Rifle-bird now known.

In John White's *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, 1790, there is described and depicted on pages 142, 143 and plate 5, 'The Anomalous Hornbill,' which is almost certain to be the Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novæ-hollandiæ*). Moreover, on comparing the plates of both volumes, and the description in White's book, a marked similarity will be observed, especially as to the fact that "... the toes are placed two before and two behind, as in the parrot or toucan genus ...," a point well brought out in the rather crude engraving in Barrington's book.

White also depicts and describes *Fulica alba* on page 238 and plate 27. From its appearance in the plate one would judge it to be a white phase of *Porphyrio melanotus*.

The fact that White describes this bird as possessing 'Humeri spina parva incurvata' (The shoulders are furnished with a small crooked spine), does not make it referable to *Lobibyx*, with which bird he may have been confusing it.

To me, the most remarkable of all the plates in Barrington's work are those depicting 'Kangaroo' and 'Emu.' More perfect caricatures of our national heraldic figures would be hard to find.—DONALD SHANKS, Balmoral, Vic., 25/3/49.

The Grey Noddy: Another Australian Record.—Although the Grey Noddy (*Procelsterna cerulea*)* was listed from Australia by such workers as Gould, Ramsay, Hall, Campbell, Mathews, and others, it was omitted from the *Official Checklist of the Birds of Australia* (2nd edition, 1926), presumably because no authentic specimens from Australia were available.

The species was re-instated as an Australian bird by Tom Iredale, who found a fresh derelict on Manly Beach, near Sydney, New South Wales, on December 24, 1928^(1, 2); this was the first Australian specimen with a precise locality, though it may be mentioned that two skins in the British Museum are listed as from 'Australia.'⁽³⁾

Recently (January 15, 1949—twenty years after Iredale's find) T. A. Everitt and K. A. Hindwood collected the sun-dried remains of a Grey Noddy on North Cronulla Beach, some fifteen miles south of Sydney. Weather conditions for the week or so prior to January 15 had been very unsettled: heavy rains and strong winds, often of gale force, extended along the east coast of Australia from northern Queensland to Bass Strait.

The specimen from Cronulla Beach was sent to Ernst Mayr, of the American Museum of Natural History, for comparison with the more extensive range of material available in that Institution. Mayr replied to the effect that there were no obvious differences between the Cronulla bird and skins from Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island, and the Kermadec Islands. Lord Howe Island is the nearest breeding locality to eastern Australia and is some 450 miles north-east of Cronulla.

The Manly Beach specimen, collected by Iredale, was deposited in the Australian Museum (specimen no. 0.32399) but was 'Destroyed, useless; 22.4.36' (note in register). A clear case of unthinking ornithological sabotage. Such an interesting relic should have been preserved, even in part,

* James Lee Peters (*Check-List of Birds of the World*, vol. 2, 1934, p. 345) lists all the Grey Noddies under the species name *cerulea*, with the qualification that—"The forms of this monotypic genus are badly in need of revision by some one with ample material; the arrangement adopted here is entirely provisional."

as evidence of the first authentic occurrence of the species in Australia. Measurements, which agree with those of birds from Lord Howe Island, are: Culmen 28 mm., tarsus 25 mm., wing 205 mm., bill black, legs and toes black.

—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 1/4/49.

REFERENCES

1. Iredale, Tom, *The Australian Zoologist*, vol. 5, pt. 4, March 24, 1929, p. 361.
2. Iredale, Tom, 'The Vicissitudes of a Noddy: A Christmas Story,' *The Emu*, vol. 28, pt. 4, April, 1929, pp. 290-291.
3. Salvin, Osbert, *Catalogue of Birds, British Museum*, vol. 25, 1896, p. 135.

Obituaries

FREDERIC LEE BERNEY

When the late F. L. Berney was president of the R.A.O.U. in 1934/35, I asked him for a photograph of himself, for publication of a likeness of our presidents had been customary. The request was not acceded to and a promise later that he made to me in Melbourne to 'send one for an obituary' was regarded merely as another refusal to supply one at the time. A retiring nature of that kind was the substance of his whole existence. Nobody knew much of him: even Mr. Alistair Archer, one of his closest acquaintances and friends, writes me that "we all seem to know just about as much as old Fred. liked to tell us, which was very little indeed."

Mr. Berney was born at Croydon, England, on November 25, 1865, and was educated at Whitgift Grammar School, Croydon. His father was an architect there, and there is still an elder brother alive, also an architect at Croydon, Sir Henry Berney. When he came to Australia I do not know (about 1890, I believe), but he appears to have taken to an outdoor life as a jackeroo, starting, I understand, at Landsdown station out from Longreach. According to information from Mr. Archer, he spent several years managing a property at Richmond, north Queensland, and later had a dairy farm at Cawarral, towards Yeppoon, before settling at Barcarolle station at Jundah, again in the Longreach district. This property he purchased in partnership after the 1914-18 war. Twenty heart-breaking years followed, droughts, depression and dingoes combining to drive him out. I remember well a letter he wrote me when he left Barcarolle. The place had been 'sold up,' but he wrote, "I can easily start again; it's lucky I'm only a young fellow, I was born in 1865." He was then nearly 74.

This tendency, jocular or serious, to treat his age as of no moment, seems to have been a characteristic. There is a story of him, possibly apocryphal, but none the less