

CONCLUSION

During the past half-dozen years covered by our observations the Superb Parrot has been not uncommon, and is probably more common at the time of writing (May, 1953) than at any other time during this period. As the country it inhabits has been settled for a long time and it is therefore probable that there will be little further alteration of the habitat for agricultural pursuits, it is considered that the future of this interesting species is assured.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are due to Mr. P. A. Bourke, of Cuncumgillica, N.S.W., for much useful information on distribution and ecology, and to Mr. K. L. S. Harley, of Brisbane, Qld., for records.

REFERENCES

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White, S. A., 1912. 'Bird-life in the Riverina', *Emu*, 11, 207-209.

Stray Feathers

Co-operation Between Butcher-birds and Falcon.—From time to time over a number of years I have noticed instances of co-operation between the Pied Butcher-bird and Peregrine Falcon. I have not seen this Butcher-bird assisting any other hawk, nor have I noticed the Grey Butcher-bird acting similarly. It starts when the Falcon chases some bird or birds which elude it by flying into some thick tree or bushes. Then the Butcher-birds—there are usually two or more—get to work and try to hunt them out. This the Falcon seems to know, for it hangs about, usually flying a little above the tree so that it can see what is going on. Naturally the intended victims are not too keen on leaving the shelter for they well know what sort of welcome awaits them outside. But a Butcher-bird which is intent on hunting them out can be rather unpleasant at close quarters. So the poor victims, when they are at last forced out at one side of the tree, usually dash back in at the other side, and who would blame them with that shadow hovering ready to strike as soon as they far enough away from shelter. Then the whole business starts over again.

I have never seen a kill made as a result of this action, but have no doubt it often is effected. Possibly my presence near at hand has had a disturbing effect.

On several occasions the intended victims were Starlings, and once the Butcher-birds had a party of Apostle-birds bottled up in a small bushy brigalow tree. The Butcher-birds would hunt them out—although they took considerable dislodging—and as soon as they appeared the Falcon

would swoop at them. They always managed to dive back into the shelter in time. The Apostle-birds were plainly scared and only uttered a few protesting 'squawks' as the Butcher-birds drove them out—so different from the streams of abuse they would have hurled at any cat or goanna.

A few evenings ago I saw this 'co-operative' hunting happening again, but this time the hunted ones were quite small and too far away to be identified. They were fortunate enough to dash into some thick tea-tree scrub near at hand when the Butcher-birds hunted them out of the box-tree in which they had first sheltered. The Falcon made a very determined dash at them but they were too quick. After this the collaborators moved off, apparently realizing it was useless trying to get them out of their hiding place.

I imagine that the Butcher-birds have learnt that there may be pickings for them when a Falcon kills, hence the desire to help, and the Falcon seems ready enough to hang around and watch the proceedings when the Butcher-birds go into the refuge to hunt the intended victim out again.

It would be interesting to hear if other members have noted similar behaviour on the part of these two, or other, species. I have not seen it recorded. It may be a locally-developed trait, but that seems unlikely.—J. MACQUEEN, Millmerran, Qld., 19/9/52.

Some Fruit-loving Birds.—During November 1951, when revisiting my former home town Templestowe (11 miles north-east of Melbourne) I was surprised to see Regent Honeyeaters (*Zanthomiza phrygia*) and Little Lorikeets (*Glossopsitta pusilla*) making daily raids on a row of loquat trees growing beside the house. The birds so obviously enjoyed the over-ripe fruit that they were unperturbed by our standing near them.

Every year two of the larger Honeyeaters, the Red Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*) and the Noisy Miner (*Myzantha melanocephala*) cause considerable damage to certain soft fruits grown in this fruit district. Cherries and peaches suffer most. However, the worst culprits are the introduced Starling and Indian Myna. Actually it is not the quantity eaten that matters, but rather the birds' habit of moving about having a few picks here and there, thus affecting the market value of a fairly large amount of mature fruit. This random picking is also a bad habit of the Eastern Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*) in a peach orchard. The Silver-eyes (*Zosterops lateralis*), which are particularly partial to cherries, quite often leave clusters of bare 'stones' hanging in dejected fashion among the foliage.—J. V. RYAN, Bendigo, Vic., 20/8/52.

Recognition of Other Species by Birds.—Both the alertness and the rapid alarm note of the White-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*) are well known. The alarm note often appears to be a general alarm referring to any known danger, but is used so frequently to give warning of an approaching Kookaburra, hawk, or butcher-bird, that it is, of course, a common practice for an observer to look for one of those birds immediately the call is heard.

In the metropolitan area around Melbourne, and particularly in Wattle Park and the grounds of the University, I have been surprised to note, during recent months, the number of occasions on which this species has given this alarm when all that has been in sight (to the observer) has been a domestic Pigeon or a Red or Little Wattle-bird. This has been observed frequently enough, particularly with regard to the Pigeon, to imply, on the part of the White-plumed Honeyeater, either (a) an inclination to raise an alarm for anything which *might* be dangerous—an explanation appropriate to the alertness and general field character of the species—or (b) a plain case of faulty identification. The latter is less appropriate to character but in closer agreement with the nature of the event as observed.

This raises general questions. First, how much do we know of ability in birds to identify other species? Secondly, do any species have distinctive alarm calls which they use exclusively for specific situations of danger?—A. R. McEVEY, Melbourne, Vic., 8/7/53.

Rufous Song-Lark's Singing.—In *The Emu*, vol. 49, p. 81, P. A. Bourke writes of the Rufous Song-Lark wintering at Cowra, N.S.W., during 1948. During the winter of 1949, which was cold and wet here, I recorded this species. Contrary to Mr. Bourke's experience the birds in this area did not cease to sing, and my records of the species were unbroken from the summer. It did not give its full song, but nevertheless continued to sing as it flew from perch to perch. In 1950 I moved to another district and misplaced my records, but since 1949 I have been on the watch for this bird remaining or otherwise, and I did not record it in the winter of 1951 till September 30. In 1952 it departed in February and returned before the school holidays in August. The birds are still here in great numbers this year, and still singing lustily. This may be due to the wonderful season and lush thick growth of grass which is everywhere in this district at present, and which seems to have encouraged most local birds to continue nesting later than usual. Recording the Rufous Song-Lark, which I would have concluded had gone had it not proclaimed its presence by song, during a winter, made me wonder just how many birds we fail to record simply because they do

not sing. The Pied Butcher-bird is one which in these parts remains silent for at least two months of winter, and used to make me think it had departed.—HELENA A. DOYLE, Muswellbrook, N.S.W., 8/3/53.

Autumn Nesting in the Bendigo District.—I did not record a nest of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga melanops*) in the spring of 1951. However, in 1952 the birds began nesting in March, and between March 26 and April 21 I recorded twenty-six nests of the species containing either eggs or young. At least ninety per cent of the nests were built in low scrub within two feet of the ground.

A nest of the Crested Bell-bird (*Oreoica gutturalis*) with one egg was found at Spring Gully on March 11, 1953. About twelve semi-paralysed caterpillars surrounded the egg. On March 29 the nest contained a fluffy chick and an addled egg. Some of the caterpillars appeared quite lively.

For some time I have suspected that Blue-faced Honeyeaters (*Entomyzon cyanotis*) nested in the vicinity of the main Melbourne road near Kangaroo Flat (five miles south of Bendigo). This opinion was based on the fact that the birds have been 'permanents' in the area over the past two years at least. On April 11, 1953, a small flock was observed in roadside trees attending two fledgelings. The adult birds were also seen carrying food to a stick nest higher up in the same tree. Obviously, the brood numbered three at least.—J. V. RYAN, Bendigo, Vic., 17/4/53.

Size of Silver Gull Eggs.—In *The Emu*, vol. 53, p. 264, Messrs. J. D. Gibson and A. Sefton, of Thirroul, New South Wales, commented on the size of the eggs of the Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) measured by them on the Five Islands off Port Kembla on November 1, 1952. They found that, of eggs measured, those contained in three-egg clutches were slightly larger, and those in two-egg clutches smaller than the average egg, both in axis and diameter measurements. They mention also that a comparison with measurements taken by the Altona Survey Group would be interesting.

In answer to this request, I have compiled a list of measurements taken by members of the Group in August and September of 1951, confined to eggs in the main colony. In all 124 egg measurements were taken of 30 clutches of three eggs and 17 clutches of two eggs. Five clutches of a single egg were measured, but I consider the number too small to be included in the over-all averages. The average measurements in millimetres were 54.02 x 38.35, with maxima 61.0 x 38.5 and 56.4 x 42.0, and minima of 50.3 x 36.0 and 57.1 x 35.2.

The average of the three-egg clutches were 54.33 x 38.51, and that of the two-egg clutches 53.76 x 38.20. Thus the three-egg clutches are .31 and .16 over the average, and the two-egg clutches are .26 and .15 under the average. Over all, the eggs of the Altona birds were slightly larger than the Five Island birds. Further work of this nature will be needed to find if the increase in size of the three-egg clutches over two-egg clutches is consistent.—ROY WHEELER, Windsor, Vic., 7/10/53.

White-browed Wood-Swallows wintering at Bendigo, Vic.—Constant observation showed that this species, *Artamus superciliosus*, congregated in the neighbouring ironbark forests during the period from October 1951 to September 1952. A few Masked Wood-Swallows (*Artamus personatus*) were noted with them. Very few, if any, moved north at the end of the warm weather, as the numbers did not appear to be reduced during the winter months. During the cold weather the birds were noted to be feeding on the ironbark blossom which harboured small insect life. Very little hawking for food was observed. Towards the end of August 1952 the White-browed Wood-Swallows began nesting again. From August 20 until the end of the month I recorded twelve nests with eggs and many others in the course of construction. The chief sites chosen were fence posts, dodder creeper and hakea. In early September the birds departed, deserting their nests, and did not reappear in the district during the 1952-53 season.—J. V. RYAN, Bendigo, Vic., 17/4/53.

Channel-billed Cuckoo in New Caledonia.—The normal range of the Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novæ-hollandiæ*) embraces the Flores and the Moluccas east to New Guinea and New Britain (Bismarck Archipelago), and northern and eastern Australia to about as far south as the Sydney district (New South Wales). Stragglers have been collected in Tasmania (a few records) and New Zealand (one record, Invercargill, December 1924).

A recent occurrence of considerable interest concerns a specimen received in the flesh by the Australian Museum, Sydney. It arrived by air-post on June 13, 1953, from Noumea, New Caledonia, and was sent by Dr. R. Catala. The body appeared to have been injected with formalin. When skinned it was found to be that of a female with "enlarged gonads, some of the follicles being more than 1/16 in. in diameter" (*teste* J. A. Keast).

New Caledonia is approximately 1,000 miles from the nearest part of eastern Australia, and considerably more from New Britain. The New Zealand occurrence is also more than 1,000 miles from the usual range of the species.

No precise information has yet come to hand about the New Caledonian specimen—date of capture, weather conditions, observed habits, etc.; should such be forthcoming at a later date it will be published in a subsequent issue of *The Emu*. The specimen has been placed in the reference collection at the Australian Museum.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 30/7/53.

Jabiru Family. — A party of Jabirus (*Xenorhynchus asiaticus*) observed recently on the Town Common comprised two adult birds and four young. Of the latter, two were fully grown, but in immature colouring, dark brown and near-white, with dark legs. The other two were much smaller, and possibly represented a second clutch. Whether this is unusual or not, I have never before seen a group of more than four birds. Parties of three or four are noticed from August to October.—NANCY HOPKINS, Townsville, Qld., 4/11/53.

News and Notes

CORRECTIONS

The following corrections should be made to the article 'Birds of the Cooktown and Laura Districts, North Queensland', *Emu*, vol. 53, pp. 225-248, by G. M. Storr:

p. 236. Under *Eurystomus orientalis*, for 'Koel' read 'Dollar-bird'.

p. 244. The notes under *Philemon citreogularis* and *P. corniculatus* should be transposed.

p. 245. *Steganopleura bichenovii* should follow *Poëphila gouldiae*.

FIFTY YEARS INDEX

This work, the 'McGill' Index to vols. 1-50 of *The Emu*, is now available. In particular (but without being taken as limiting the usefulness of the volume) it is pointed out that the Index should be of great use to libraries and museums and to those possessing full (or near) sets of *The Emu*. The price is £1/1/-, plus postage—7d. in Australia, 9d. to British Empire countries, 1/5 foreign. Exchange should be added to cheques.

UNION'S FINANCIAL YEAR

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