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Stray Feathers

Mortality of Small Birds in Late Snow-Fall.—On October 23, 1958, at a time when seasonal conditions are generally stimulating the breeding of birds in Tasmania, and many of the migrants have returned to our island State to enjoy the warmer weather, north-west Tasmania experienced an unseasonable cold snap.

Mr. Ken Jacobs of Needles informs me that in his district, situated about 40 miles inland from the north coast, and lying close to the foot of the Western Tiers, a heavy snow-fall occurred on the evening of October 22. Early next morning his children picked up several dead birds from his back lawn. This prompted him to further investigation during which he found other birds dead where they had dropped from their roosts at night, apparently killed by the abnormal and sudden drop in temperature.

Several Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) were found dead on the open verandah where they usually spent the nights perched on the rafters.

Superb Blue Wrens (*Malurus cyaneus*) suffered heavily, half a dozen being found dead under one garden bush.

Other birds were found dead around the farm buildings.

Upon further inquiries from a neighbour he was told the same story, particularly as regards Swallows, fifteen to twenty being found dead in stumps, hollow trees, etc., over the succeeding days.—R. H. GREEN, Antill Ponds, Tas., 17/8/59.

Clutch Size in the Goldfinch.—In the *Emu*, vol. 57, p. 287, H. J. Frith gives some of the clutch sizes of the Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) as affected by climate and habitat differing from that of its native land. His mean clutch size of 3.7 for 136 nests in Griffith, N.S.W. (latitude 34° 17' S) seemed smaller than that usually seen here at Kindred, Tas., so a record of nests was made over the past two seasons. Latitude is approximately 41° 15' S, altitude about 900 feet,

rainfall 40-50 inches, and distance inland about nine miles. The majority of nests were in a hedge, but others were in blackberry bushes, fruit trees, garden shrubs, and one in a blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*)—the only nest in a native plant.

In 1957-58, of 16 nests 9 contained 5 eggs each, 6 held 4, and one (a February nest) only 3, giving a mean of 4.5.

In 1958-9, of 20 nests 3 contained 6 eggs, 12 held 5, 4 held 4, and one 3, giving a mean of 4.85.

Over the two years 36 nests contained 169 eggs, a mean of 4.69, much closer to the English mean of 5, than in the N.S.W. records, and seeming to illustrate quite definitely the latitudinal trend.—M. LEICESTER, Kindred, Tas., 14/7/59.

Ravens Attacking Man.—On November 12, 1958, I flushed four 'crows' from a carcase in belar and sugarwood scrub in remote mallee country near Dareton, New South Wales. They flew into a dead tree close to the carcase and made no attempt to fly further as I approached closer and eventually stood underneath the tree. Such tame behaviour is not unusual in the Little Crow (*Corvus bennetti*), but at the close range the identification of the birds as immature Ravens (*C. coronoides*) was without doubt. As I stood beneath the tree, the birds gradually came lower, dropping from branch to branch, until they were only ten feet above me. Suddenly two of them swooped down and struck at my head with their bills. Taken completely by surprise, I managed to shield myself with my arms and beat a hasty retreat. All four of the birds followed me for some fifty yards, swooping and diving at my head.

At about 100 yards distance, when the attack had apparently ceased, I stopped and turned to watch three of my assailants pitch alongside the carcase and recommence their meal. I was not left in doubt regarding the whereabouts of the fourth for very long, as a scuffle of wings made me look up to see this persistent bird hovering only four feet above me. As I looked up it dived in a most vicious attack which I barely avoided. This was enough for me, and, keeping a wary eye over my shoulder, I left for an area where my presence would not be so resented.

The Raven is a bird normally very afraid of man and does not even make an effort to protect its nest. The area of scrub where this attack took place was most remote, seldom visited by man, particularly by a man on foot. The birds were very young and possibly I was the first human being they had sighted. To them, I was not a dangerous predator but a possible competitor for their rotten meal, and they treated me as such.—J. N. HOBBS, Finley, N.S.W., 27/11/58.