

Stray Feathers.

A CURIOUS CLUTCH.—Mr. H. L. White, Belltrees, N.S.W., reports the finding of a Spotted Pardalote's (*Pardalotus punctatus*) nest containing three eggs, together with two eggs of the Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx basalis*) and one egg of the Bronze-Cuckoo (*C. plagosus*).

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THE PUGNACITY OF "MAGPIES" (GYMNORHINA).—As regards the pugnacity of the common Magpies (*G. leuconota*) when nesting, I rather think such is a natural propensity with these birds. I settled at Jackson's Creek 27th January, 1846. Any time between that date and 1850 Magpies "pegged" youngsters for climbing to a nest. The old birds also attacked me. We did not molest nests, and there were no children on the three stations that adjoined us. On skinning a bird, on one occasion, nothing was found in the stomach, thereby indicating it had come a good distance without feeding. A bird came back in search of its mate, and hung about some little time.—ISAAC BATEY. Drouin, 21/4/10.

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WHITE-EARED HONEY-EATER (PTILOTIS LEUCOTIS).—Mr. F. E. Wilson, A.O.U., recently wrote me on the above, which appeared in my list of Drouin birds in the last issue of *The Emu* under the name of *P. auricomis*. Previously, in the same magazine (vol. vii., page 9), in "Sunbury Birds of Sixty Years Ago," this bird was referred to as *P. auricomis*, so Mr. Wilson asked me to forward a specimen in the flesh. Having a stuffed one, it was sent, when in due course a reply came to the effect that instead of being *P. auricomis* or *P. cassidix* it was really *P. leucotis*. The manuscript was roughly written, and unfortunately Mr. Campbell's volumes were lent, thus I was not in a position to supply technical nomenclature. I take this opportunity of correcting a mistake.—ISAAC BATEY. Drouin, 6/5/10.

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EGGS OF *PACHYCEPHALA MERIDIONALIS*.—Although these eggs have been previously described,* the description of the first set taken in Victoria may not be out of place:—Clutch two, roundish-oval in shape; texture of shell fine, surface glossy; colour yellowish-white in specimen (*a*), but much darker in (*b*), speckled all over, more particularly about the larger end, with spots of dark umber or brown, and dark-grey spots and blotches, which appear as if beneath the surface of the shell; approaching nearest to those of *P. pectoralis*. Dimensions in

* North, "Nests and Eggs of Birds," vol. ii., p. 25.

inches :—(a) .88 x .65, (b) .87 x .66. Taken by J. A. Ross, A. H. E. Mattingley, F. E. Howe, and C. McLennan, at Pine Plains, Victoria, 16th September, 1907.

Nest.—Very like that of *P. pectoralis*, and built in a small Murray pine on a sand-ridge, about 5½ feet from ground.—F. E. HOWE. Canterbury, Victoria.

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FLAME-BREASTED ROBIN.—As regards the Flame-breasted Robin (*Petræca phænicea*), this bird seems to arrive here (the Monaro highlands) when the snow is on the ground—i.e., in winter; and it nests with us about October. In the adjacent coastal districts I have never seen it, but the Scarlet-breasted Robin (*P. leggei*) is common in both. I think the Flame-breasted never appears to greater advantage than when perched on a dead thistle or twig standing up above the snow. The brilliant colouring of the breast is then thrown out in strong relief.—H. V. EDWARDS. Bibbenluke, N.S.W., 8/2/09.

P.S.—The Pied Robin (*P. picata*) is now nesting in this vicinity. It appears to place its nest at a much greater elevation than most Robins.—H. V. E.

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THE SATIN BOWER-BIRD.—Mr. C. F. Cole, in his interesting "Notes on the Satin Bower-Bird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*)," states that the change from the green to blue-black plumage takes place in the male birds only. I know of one exception to this rule, having found one "Black Satin-Bird" to be a female. This was at Cape Otway, over 40 years ago. We had shot a few Satin-Birds, all in green plumage but one, in which were found eggs. I have not handled Satin Bower-Birds since then. In the spring hundreds of Satin Bower-Birds used to come from forest country at the back of Cape Otway to flats among the sand-dunes to feed on native spinach. In a flock of perhaps a hundred there would be only three or four birds with the black-blue plumage. The birds were very destructive to peas and cabbage plants in the garden.—H. W. FORD. Fitzroy (Vic.), 20/4/10.

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WHITE-RUMPED SWIFT (*MICROPUS PACIFICUS*).—I have to record an appearance of this rare visitor to Tasmania. At about 5.30 p.m. on 17th February, the sky being very overcast, with a light south-east breeze blowing, I noticed a Swift flying from the south. In a few minutes a fair-sized flock of the birds was circling over Launceston. Owing to the fact that many of

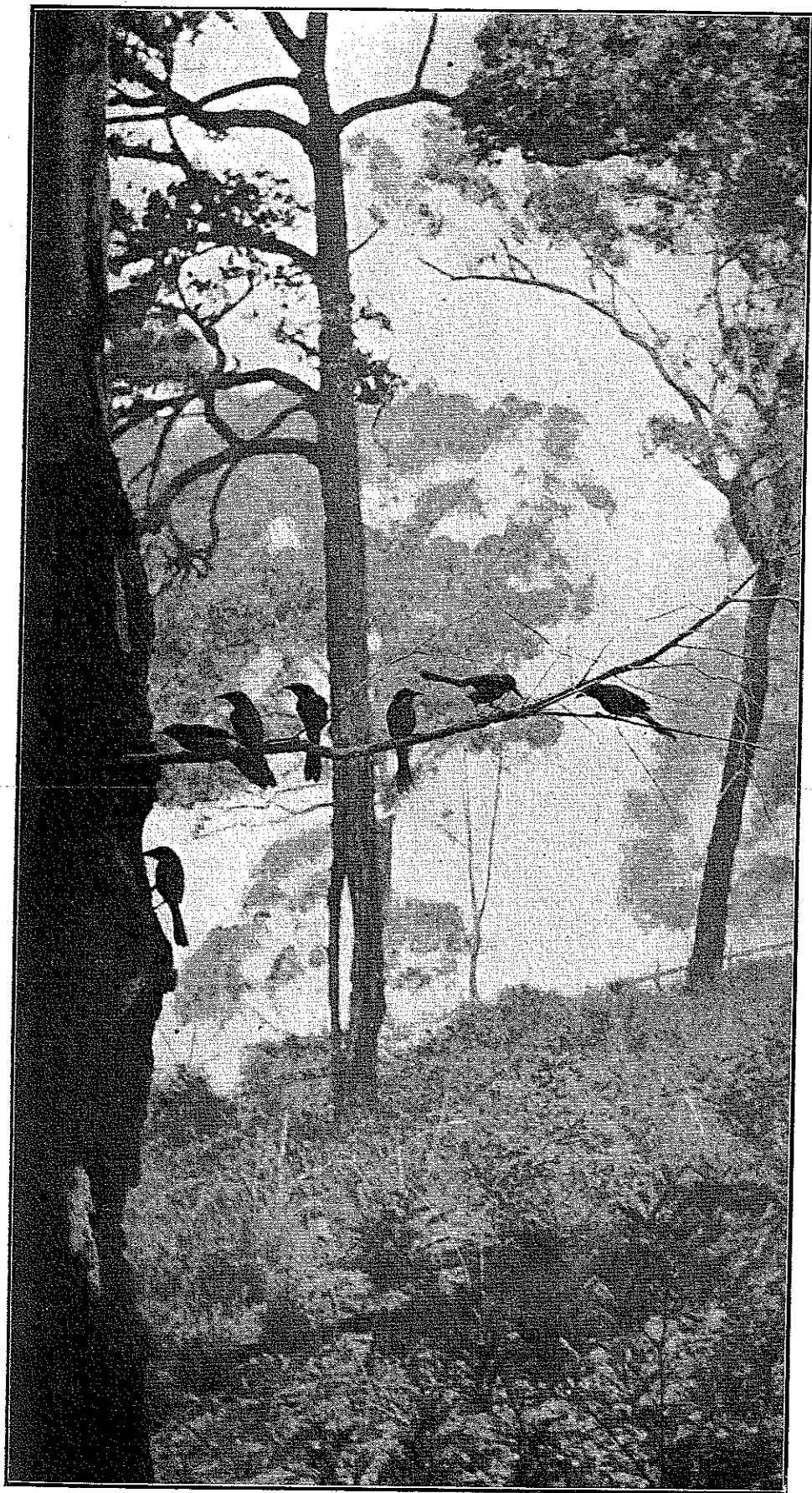
the birds were flying low and not fast, I was able to bring my glass to bear with good results. The first bird to come within easy range was a *Micropus pacificus*. Up to the time the birds disappeared to the north-west, 6.30 p.m., I identified positively at least 20 as being of this species out of a flock of perhaps 100 birds. In all probability the bulk of the birds were Spine-tailed Swifts (*Chaetura caudacuta*). I was fortunate enough to witness the apparent return southwards of a portion of the flock, as previously recorded from Tasmania by Messrs. H. C. Thompson and H. Stuart Dove. I say apparent, because I was able to watch the return of these birds to join the rest after having made an enormous ellipse. The vantage ground on which I was standing afforded a very extensive view in all directions.—FRANK M. LITTLER. Launceston, 25/2/10.

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A BIRD DRAMA.—The other day I, with two companions, witnessed a pretty drama in bird life. We were on a half-completed wheat-stack, standing between two others already finished, at about 3.30 p.m., when suddenly a flock of 8 or 10 Spur-winged Plovers (*Lobivanellus lobatus*) came sailing round the end of the stacks. They wheeled sharp round and down past one of the outer stacks on our flank, coming quickly into view again and settling in some long, dry grass, about 60 yards away. No sooner were they down than, ducking, all crept into the long grass, disappearing as though by magic. "Whissssh!" a Black-cheeked Falcon went, not directly over where the Plovers were concealed, but a little to one side, about 6 or 8 feet above ground. Following the Falcon's flight, we saw it perch about 300 yards away on a tall, dry tree. Up stood one of the Plovers on "sentry go," and was immobile for fully three minutes until the Falcon left his perch and sailed away. Then the sentry moved. All was quiet for a minute, when, one by one, the Plovers rose, and were soon on the wing clamouring to announce their victory, or, rather, their craft in evading the enemy. I have been a close observer of birds all my life, yet have never before seen so interesting an incident as this.—R. W. LEGGE. Cullenswood (Tas.), 22/2/10.

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SHARP-TAILED STINT IN TASMANIA.—One day last February, while wandering, gun in hand, over the great Apsley Marsh, which lies at the northern extremity of the Moulting Lagoon, on the East Coast, I surprised a small flock of wading birds. After a short flight, during which they uttered faint twittering, chipping notes, the birds settled, and I killed several. On examination they appeared to be Sharp-tailed Stints (*Hetero-*



Tufted Honey-eaters (*Ptilotis auricomis*) feeding upon "Manna" exuded by Grey Gum (*Eucalypt*), Nelson Island, Hawkesbury River.

pygia acuminata). They were in shape and marking like an immature Snipe, the bill being about 1 inch or $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches long, slightly depressed at the end; the legs and feet light green, extremely delicate, the former measuring about 4 inches; head, neck, back, and wings soft grey, the wing coverts and tail having the faintest olive tinge; the tail delicate and pointed and prominent in flight. The birds were frequenting shallow grass-grown pools on the marshy wastes, and they did not run like a Dottrel, but seemed to stand about and pick here and there. I noticed the white breast and front or belly had delicate streaks of black, more especially about the thighs and vent; the thighs were white, under tail coverts white, and the wings underneath delicate black and white, like a Snipe. The local residents regarded these birds as rare.—ROBT. W. LEGGE. Cullenswood, Tas.

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MELIPHAGIDÆ AND MELITOSE.—On 19th December Dr. J. Burton Cleland and myself observed a number of birds feeding upon "manna" which was exuding from a large wound in a grey gum (*Eucalyptus punctata*) at Milson Island, Hawkesbury River. Among them my colleague identified *Ptilotis auricomis* (Yellow-tufted Honey-eater), *P. chrysops* (Yellow-faced Honey-eater), *P. leucotis* (White-eared Honey-eater), *Melithreptus lunulatus* (White-naped Honey-eater), *M. brevirostris* (Brown-headed Honey-eater), and *Meliphaga phrygia* (Warty-faced Honey-eater). The birds flew down from the uppermost branches of the neighbouring trees, and, clinging to the large trunk of the grey gum, licked the yellowish exudation with the greatest relish. So eager were they that, as we stood near the tree, numbers of them, while looking for a foothold upon the tree trunk, fluttered round our heads. A photograph of the birds clinging to the tree was taken, but they did not show up well against the dark background. A small branch was therefore thrust into a portion of the wound in the tree, and a very good photograph of seven specimens of *Ptilotis auricomis*, in various positions, was obtained. (See plate VI.) The exudation from the tree had a very sweet taste, and such exudations are apparently used as a supplementary food by Honey-eaters when they have located a tree where a supply is to be obtained. The "manna" from the grey gum has been proved by Mr. H. G. Smith, F.C.S., of the Sydney Technological Museum, to contain as its principal constituent the sugar known as raffinose or melitose.—G. P. DARNELL-SMITH. Sydney, 28/4/10.

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THE BLUE WREN OF TASMANIA: ADDITIONAL NOTES.—The curious tactics adopted by the female *Malurus* in her

endeavours to lure an intruder away from her nest were described by me in a paper in *The Emu*.^{*} The same device is occasionally resorted to by the male. In the Launceston district one November day a Wren's nest was discovered, placed about 3 feet from the ground, in a *Lepidosperma* tussock, and containing four young, whose eyes were beginning to open, and upon whose bodies could be seen the lines of sprouting feathers. The nest was of grasses, lined with rabbit fur, and shaped like a big egg with the end sliced off. It was tilted slightly upwards, the usual *Malurus* type of architecture. When we examined the young, the male parent, near by, went through some curious antics to lure us away, running low along the ground with shoulders hunched up and wings trailing, tail bent down like a puppy about to be whipped, instead of carried aloft in the usual jaunty fashion. The appearance of the little actor when hunched up on the ground in this fashion is curiously mouse-like.

Pugnacity.—Although the male Blue Wren displays much persistence in attacking and driving away others of his sex from the neighbourhood of the breeding-ground, yet it is the females which exhibit a surprising depth of hatred towards each other. When approaching Gould's country, Eastern Tasmania, one summer afternoon, we discerned a small brown ball rolling about in the dust by the wayside, and squeaking vociferously. My friend, Mr. H. C. Thompson, succeeded in capturing the curiosity, which resolved itself, on close inspection, into two female *Maluri*, locked together in an embrace by no means affectionate, and digging with their beaks at each other. So absorbed were they in their quarrel that they had heard nothing of our approach, and two very scared Wrens shook out their ruffled plumage and left my friend's hand hurriedly as soon as separated. During the past spring, in a Devonport garden, I witnessed a similar spectacle.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S. West Devonport.

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BIRDS NEW TO TASMANIA.—Of the two following species I can find no record of their having been previously found in Tasmania :—

Strix delicatula, Gld., may or may not be a sub-species of the European *S. flammea*, Linn. Being a dimorphic form, and without being able to satisfy ourselves on the matter of their geographical plumages, there is no certainty of its true position. Recently it has been raised to the position of a species.† As a species its distribution has been known to be Australia and New Guinea.‡ On 6th May, 1910, Mr. P. J.

* *The Emu*, vol. ix., pp. 151-155.

† Brit. Mus. H. Birds, i., p. 300.

‡ Mathews, H. Birds, p. 44.

Nicholls brought a specimen in the flesh into the Tasmanian Museum. He found it dead near the back door of the home-
stead of his property at Richmond, some 16 miles north-east of
Hobart. For years past it, or its like, had frequented his out-
houses. It appears to me to be a dark race of the mainland
Strix delicatula, the vermiculations of the dorsal surface being
scarcely visible. The tail is pure white, with only a faint tinge
of pale orange on one portion of the upper surface. Although
one specimen is alone available for record, the white of the
under surface of it is so very clear, and the deep brownish-grey
of the upper surface so devoid of tawny or pale orange, that it
appeals to me as being an insular form of the mainland species.
The characteristic feature of this specimen is that it is deep
brownish-grey, with scarcely any orange upon it, causing it to
appear sooty on the whole of the upper surface rather than
tawny or orange. The colour of the legs is creamy and not
yellow.

Calopsittacus novæ-hollandiæ, Gm., is the second species. It
was forwarded to the Tasmanian Museum by Mr. Charles
Eaton, and collected on the Russell River, North Huon, 9th
March, 1910. Thinking it possible the bird had escaped from
captivity, I wrote to Mr. Eaton for particulars. In reply I learn
that the residents have not seen this species, it being quite
unfamiliar to them. It was shot while upon a dry eucalypt,
and is in autumn plumage. The Cockatoo-Parrot is migratory
in both eastern and western Australia. It is possible it overflowed
its normal southern range, and may have been one of a scattered
flock. I scarcely think that Tasmania was at any time the
southern portion of its home.

It is on record* that a flock of Lorikeets (*Trichoglossus novæ-
hollandiæ*) has been seen in a district after an absence of 25
years; while a flock of Galah Cockatoos (*Cacatua roseicapilla*)
has been seen after 30 years' absence. Even so, this record, I
consider, is simply that of an errant bird rather than of one
that has escaped from its cage.—ROBERT HALL. Hobart,
6/6/10.

A Defence of Oology.

THE following is an abridged account of an article by Milton S.
Ray, California, which appeared in *The Condor*, January,
1910:—

"The first point I wish to take up is: Is oology scientific or
popular ornithology?"

"In the opinion of some, perhaps many, the structure and

* *Emu*, October, 1903.