

**Barnardius barnardi whitei**, Mat. South Australian Mallee-Parrot.—These were met with near Clare, and again near Dawson, on the east side of the Flinders Range. Those handled were of the usual northern form that has recently been designated a sub-species.

**Psephotus varius (multicolor)**. Many-coloured Parrot.—These were numerous in the Nackara district.

**Owenavis (Chalcites) osculans**, Gld. Black-eared Cuckoo.—One male was obtained near Nackara, and several were heard in the same locality. At a distance the note reminds one of the warning whistle of the Scrub-Robin. The sound carries much further than one would suppose. It is most difficult to judge the distance the bird is away by the whistle.

Of the genus *Sericornis* two species were secured — (*Sericornis*, *Pyrholaemus brunneus*, Gld. (Redthroat), in the blue-bush country near Nackara, and *Sericornis maculatus*, Gld. (the Spotted Scrub-Wren). One specimen was obtained near Port Germein, in the dry country, and it is interesting to note that it is the pale form, similar to those obtained on Eyre Peninsula, and named sub-specifically *S. m. mellori* by Mathews.

The specimens of **Geobasilus chrysorrhous** (Yellow-rumped Tit-Warbler) that were secured near Port Germein were brighter yellow in the rump than is usual in Adelaide specimens, and were similar to the form from Port Augusta, described by Mathews sub-specifically as *G. c. addendus*.

**Acanthiza (redalei) morgani**, Mat. Southern Thin-billed Tit.—We were most interested in meeting with this bird in the blue-bush country near Nackara. It is a locality much further south than I believe it has been recorded from in this State before.

A considerable number of other species were noted, and a few more species were obtained; but the foregoing seem of interest as indicating certain definite tendencies of variation in the dry districts, even when they abut closely on localities favoured with a heavier rainfall. Also, in some cases the known range of the species has been extended.

In referring to variant forms it has seemed best to adopt Mr. Mathews's sub-specific names, but it is an open question as to whether it would not be better, in many of the cases under review, to refer simply to the variant forms as varieties and not attempt to give them sub-specific rank.

## Bird Life as Affected by Drought.

BY CHARLES BARNARD.

UNDER this heading I would like to mention a few instances that have come under my notice, showing how certain forms of bird-life can be driven away from, or exterminated in, certain districts during times of severe drought, and also showing how birds can become a medium of conveying seeds of plants, or grasses, possibly of a injurious nature, from one district to another, in other ways than by the usually accepted one of eating and evacuating.

Referring particularly to the district round about Coomoooboolaroo, Central Queensland, I can mention the case of the Beautiful Parrot (*Psephotus pulcherrimus*). Previous to the terrible drought of 1902 it was not very uncommon to see a pair of these birds when out mustering on the run, and on two occasions nests were found, but since that year not a single specimen has been seen.

About the year 1882, when on a collecting trip to Fairfield, a station about 70 miles south of Coomoooboolaroo, many of these birds were seen, and several sets of eggs taken.

Since 1902 I have frequently asked the people living at Fairfield to keep a look-out for the birds, but they report that none has been seen. I have also been in the vicinity myself, but saw no birds. The reason of their disappearance is not hard to discover. For three years previous to the climax of the drought in 1902 there had been no wet season, and very little grass grew, consequently there was little seed; then the worst year came on, in which no grass grew, so that the birds could not find a living, and either perished or migrated. As there was more grass on the coastal country, the latter is possible, but if so, it is strange that they have not found their way back to their original haunts.

Then we have the case of the Scarlet-backed Malurus (*M. melanocephalus*). These little birds were always numerous in the long grass, but after that drought not one was seen on the run for at least three years, but since then an odd little flock has been seen. It is possible that as the grass became scarce inland they worked their way towards the coast, where the grass was longer. The year after the drought I had occasion to be on the coast country, and noticed numbers of *Malurus* in the long grass.

During the year of drought many of the far western birds came into our district, notably the Ground Graucalus (*Pteropodocys phasianella*), Western Miner (*Myzantha flavigula*), and Cockatoo-Parrot.

The Bustard, or Plain Turkey, is rarely seen in our district, but when a bad season occurs in the West, they work in towards the coast, and last winter I shot a female weighing 17 lbs. When plucking the feathers off I was surprised to find spear grass seed sticking thickly into the skin, principally round the base of the neck, but more or less all over the body, many of the "spears" being completely embedded in the flesh. Now, hundreds of these birds would find their way back to the Western plains, and eventually drop the dreaded spear grass in the sheep country.

In 1903 I was up towards the Gulf country, and was told that the Bustards were driven in towards the Gulf by the drought the previous year, and that hundreds died from drinking the salt water in the salt-pans.

The poor Laughing Jackass (*Dacelo gigas*) had a bad time in that year, and numbers died. Several times three or four were seen lying under the night-roost, and for some years after the drought it was rare to hear a "corrobboree" in the early morning. Now,

however, they have become plentiful again, and the "bushman's clock" chimes regularly every morning. Magpies became so weak that they could not fly, and no doubt many died. Also many of the smaller birds died.

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## Observations from the Fern-tree Gully District (Vic.)

By R. T. LITTLEJOHNS, R.A.O.U., AND S. A. LAWRENCE, R.A.O.U.

For the last two or three seasons we have carried out our modest observations with the comfort of a house at Upper Fern-tree Gully as headquarters. Here we have used our limited opportunities in an endeavour to secure photographs and reliable information of the local birds in their natural surroundings. We always make it our aim to refrain from injuring our subjects in any way, and, probably for that reason, know very little of sub-species. We are more bent on obtaining photographs such as that of the Yellow Robin here reproduced than on seeking new forms. It appears to us that the bird in question would far rather be recorded by photography than have the honour of position as a type specimen.

Our experience has satisfied us that results can be obtained even with an inexpensive outfit. Some of our first photographs were obtained with an ordinary box camera of the cheapest variety. Much time and energy, however, we have always found it necessary to spend. During the season 1915-16 practically every week-end from June to January was spent at Fern-tree Gully. For the early part of this time our attention was confined almost entirely to the Lyre-Bird (*Menura victoriae*), with which we were, and are, anxious to try conclusions. Several week-ends of strenuous hunting through damp gullies failed to disclose a nest. The time was not wasted, however, as on two or three occasions we were able to observe from very close quarters. The first occasion was at Belgrave, when we located a pair feeding a few yards from a tourist track. By carefully stepping from log to log we approached close enough to obtain a glimpse of the male as he paraded to and fro on a fallen tree-fern. For some time he treated us to imitations of various bird-calls, including those of the Laughing Jackass, Coachwhip-Bird, and many others. Eventually our presence became known, and the pair began to work slowly down the gully. A silent chase on hands and knees brought us more than once to within a few feet of them when they paused to feed.

A few weeks later we spent the whole of one damp, foggy morning watching a male bird we had often heard in the Fern-tree Gully Reserve. We had located a fresh dancing-mound the week before, and made our way carefully to this spot. Unfortunately for our proposed attempt at photography, the bird was already on the mound when we arrived. We were fully compensated, however, by a fine performance lasting about half an hour, and