

Queensland Notes.

FROM A. H. CHISHOLM, R.A.O.U., BRISBANE.

Bird-Life in Far North.—Since the Gould League of Bird-Lovers has become firmly established throughout Queensland, many interesting notes on birds have been written by children and teachers in various parts of the State. A case in point is a letter I have from the head teacher of a small school beyond Cairns. Extracts follow:—

"I have been trying recently to find out particulars of a migratory bird which has been puzzling me for many years. It has, however, again departed, leaving me but little the wiser for my observations. The bird is small and brown, with a buff-coloured breast, and may be a Honey-eater. It has a beautiful song, quite out of the common, and absolutely different to any other bird I have ever heard. I am enclosing herewith an attempt at the song for piano. The local aborigines call the sprite the 'Jan-da-berry' bird, from the notes—'Jan-da-berry, pe-ta, pe-ta'—which are repeated over and over in a high-pitched whistle. I have lived at this place for 25 years, and have noticed this little bird every year, and always wait for its song. It arrives with the first general rains about the end of December, and stays until about the middle of April. The nest is suspended, and generally built in *débris* left on branches by the floods. I spent 12 months on the islands in Torres Strait, and visited several parts of Papua, but saw no trace of the 'Jan-da-berry' * in those places.

"The children here, as well as myself, have often noticed an act of the Apostle-Bird (better known in this district as the 'Squawker') which I have not seen it credited with in any of the bird books. We have seen a company of these birds bear down in full force on the nest of a Pee-wee (Mud-Lark), chase the rightful owners away, and take possession of the nest. In the books they are credited with building mud nests, but we have never seen them do so; always, relying on numbers, they take the nests of the Pee-wees. At one nest here one of the school-boys had to interfere to save the lives of young Pee-wees. To its own species, however, the Apostle-Bird is most faithful. I have seen men here shoot one and break its wing, and, when it squawked, the whole flock, numbering nearly 100, flew around, some even settling on the man. Shooting some will not drive the others away on such an occasion.

"The Cuckoo-Shrike (or 'Blue Jay') never leaves this district, and must live to a considerable age. There is a big tree close to my house, and in this two of these Shrikes have built their nest for the past 14 years. The nest is very small and difficult to see. One wonders how such a big bird can sit in it.

"The Black-and-White Fantail builds a pretty nest of very

* Probably *Gerygone lœvigaster*.—A. H. C.

fine tea-tree bark. We watched a certain pair of these birds build a nest and rear their young, and afterwards saw a Dove take possession of the nest. The Dove has since returned and reared a second family *in the old nest of the Fantail*.

"The Channelbill, also the Black and Speckled Cuckoos,* visit this district always before the rain, about October. Our notes, extending from 1915, give their arrival dates as about 5th October, and not, as Leach says, with the floods. These birds never come with the floods; they arrive well before that period, and depart when the floods are over. The Black Cuckoo is a noisy gentleman, and howls his 'Coo-ee' all night long. Miners who work night-shift often vow vengeance on him for keeping them awake. The Speckled Cuckoo lays her eggs in nests of the Leatherhead, and I have often seen keen battles for the privilege. The Australian Roller always comes here after the first rains and stays until the Cuckoos depart. He seems very fond of sitting high on a dead tree.

"The Sanguineous Honey-eater visits this district about the same time as the 'Jan-da-berry,' and I often see the little 'Red-head,' as the children call it, flitting among the trees. Then, when the tea-trees are in blossom, the Blue Mountain Lorikeets come here in millions, followed about a week later by the Friar-Bird (Leatherhead). The Lorikeet is much the quicker flier of these two birds.

"In regard to late nesting, I noticed only recently a nest built of long grass-seeds woven neatly together and suspended on a low bush. Two fairly large mottled eggs were in it at the time, and yesterday (29th April) there were two young ones. This nest belonged to birds we know as 'Australian Canaries.'

"I am pleased to say that, since the certificates of the Gould League of Bird-Lovers were distributed here, fewer birds have been destroyed. The chief offender was always the 'new chum.'"

Ways of Emu.—In a recent discussion in the Brisbane press on events of 50 years ago, an old colonist contributes the following interesting notes on Emu:—

"Before I was 20 years old I had charge of the Emu Holes cattle station, Mookii River (pronounced Mukhi). Emus were fairly plentiful on those plains, and I have now and then run one down. No ordinary horse could run down an Emu in a long chase the same as he would a dingo or a kangaroo, if you did not bustle along at first. After going about a mile the Emu would put up his head and go steadily for a few hundred yards, and seem to take a second wind, then stretch out his neck and lay himself out to go; and he would, too, and keep it up. The horse would be run down before the Emu. The way to catch an Emu is to lay up your horse's neck so that the Emu cannot tell what sort of an 'animal' it is. I have often got within a hundred yards of them by walking straight towards them, so that they did

* Probably male and female of *Eudynamys cyanocephala*.—A. H. C.

not get a side view. As soon as they started to run we went for the one intended to be caught as fast as the horses could carry us, and yelled and made as much noise as possible. The Emu, instead of running steadily, then staggered along. When near enough the stockwhip was swung overhand in circles, and the lash continually dropped on him, when he went head over heels from fright. The Emu's heels are his only weapon. I have been kicked twice with Emus, and it is no joke. When an Emu is being run fairly close, if there is any cover under which he can hide his head he will often do it, for he seems under the impression that if he cannot see you you cannot see him. On Liverpool Plains there is a bushy weed called 'roly-poly.' It breaks off near the ground, and is blown about by the wind into large balls. I have on several occasions seen an Emu, when frightened and tired, run up and push his head under a clump of roly-poly, and stand so still that on two occasions I tied his legs together with my stockwhip. Of course, I took care not to get behind him, for fear he should kick. I never saw an Emu strike to the side—he always kicked straight back. I seldom bothered to run them; when I did I always picked a half-grown one, for it is bad enough to get kicked by a half-grown one, and a young one may be a bigger fool than an old one. I think Emus do not learn from experience, as the following will show:—There was a tame Emu at the head station at Wolhollow. A screen was put about half-way up the kitchen window to prevent him putting his head in and snatching from the table anything that took his fancy. He could get his head over the top of the screen, but could not reach down to the table. When the meat was being cooked in the old long-handled bush fryingpan I used to take a piece of it on a fork hot from the pan and give it to him over the screen. He always grabbed it, but as soon as it burnt his mouth he seemed in a hurry to swallow it, and if it was a big piece he used to get it down his neck about a foot, at the time walking round with his mouth wide open, saying 'Wheep' in a most disconsolate manner. He never seemed to learn that it burnt his mouth and neck, and was always ready for another piece. Meat treated with black pepper was also given to him, but he always swallowed it. I did not do this for cruelty, but just to find out if it was possible for an Emu to learn by experience. When I was satisfied that he could not learn I often fed him, and burnt his mouth no more. He had his little joke, too, for when a strange dog came on the station he would run round, passing close to the dog, trying to coax the animal to chase him. If successful the Emu would slow down, and the dog got a kick that astonished him. I do not recollect any dog trying to catch that Emu a second time. I had cattle dogs that would heel cattle and horses, but I never saw one of them try to heel an Emu.

"Captain Francis had a tame Emu at Folkstone, Breakfast Creek-road. I was very intimate with the captain, and one day when I was at Folkstone the Emu was squatting down and did not seem

to want to get up. I said, 'Captain, your Emu is a bit seedy.' He then told me that his man had been going to do some painting, and had left a large pot of green paint for a little while. The Emu had eaten all the paint, the colour having apparently taken his fancy. It did him no harm, however."

Another old observer, writing of the blacks and Emus, says:—
"If a red-coloured blanket is hung out the Emu will not leave until he has come close enough to see what it is. I once did this, and brought nine Emus close to the house, and then got the gun to shoot one. But it seemed a cruel sin to fire on the beautiful birds, and I could not. We had a black man on our station, however, who could imitate an Emu to perfection. The evening suited exactly. Light clouds partly hid the moon, and we had a surprise for the young people. The black only had his grey blanket and a stick for the neck of the Emu, his hand inside the blanket for the head; and thus equipped he personified the Emu so well that at ten yards distant no one could have known but that it was one."

Ourselves.

THE first re-union of members of the Union took place on the evening of Thursday, 24th May, 1917. A dinner was held first at Nissen's Exchange Hotel, at which 21 members were present, and an adjournment was then made to the room at No. 2 Temple Court, where seven more members joined.

Mr. D. Le Souëf was voted to the chair.

Details as to the proposed future re-unions were discussed.

Mr. J. A. Kershaw stated that as soon as the "H. L. White collection" of skins had been received by the National Museum he would inform the Council; also that the skins could be seen there at any time during the day when the Museum was open, as well as on one evening a month by members of the R.A.O.U. only. The room in which they would be kept was well lighted and had seating accommodation.

A hearty vote of thanks was unanimously passed to Mr. H. L. White for his generous gift of Gould's "Birds of Australia" to the library of the Union.

The bird skins, eggs, books, and other property of the Union were inspected.

LEGAL POSITION OF THE R.A.O.U.

At a meeting of the Executive Council of the State of Victoria on 29th May, 1917, His Excellency the Governor of Victoria consented to the use of the word "Royal" in the name of the company known as the "Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union."

All legal preliminaries being now in order, registration of the Union as a no-profit company will soon be completed.