

a pair of Spotted birds excavating in a bank on 25/9/17), Sparrow-Hawk (*Accipiter torquatus*), Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*), Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*), White-fronted Herons (*Notophoxyx novæ-hollandiæ*), Pied Grallina (*Grallina picata*) (a pair about the camp, but the White-backed Magpies drove them away), Laughing Jackass (*Dacelo gigas*).

The following birds were only seen occasionally:—Nankeen Kestrel (*Cerchneis cenchroides*), White-winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) (two flocks seen, 1916 and 1917), Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*) (noticed carrying stick for building nest), Whistling-Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*), Black-cheeked Falcon (*Falco melanogenys*), and Little Falcon (*F. lunulatus*). Also European birds, such as Starlings, Goldfinches, and Sparrows. Several species were in evidence during the summer only, such as Leatherheads (*Tropidorhynchus corniculatus*), Orioles (*Oriolus viridis*) (arrived in 1917 on 15th August), Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) (first heard in 1917 on 22nd August), Fantail Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) (first heard in 1917 on 8th August), Bronze-Cuckoos (*Chalcococcyx basalis*) (first heard in 1917 on 22nd August), Wood-Swallows (*Artamus personatus* and *A. sordidus*) (come in flocks for nesting), Spine-tailed Swifts (*Chaetura caudacuta*), and Fairy Martin (*Petrochelidon ariel*).

Tasmanian Notes.

Swifts and Weather.—The past summer was remarkable for the number of Spine-tailed Swifts (*Chaetura caudacuta*) which visited North-West Tasmania. None came within my personal ken until 4th February, although a pioneer pair was reported by Foster Leek from the neighbourhood of Mersey Bluff as early as 6th December, 1916. When, however, these birds did begin to make their regular appearance, they were on view at frequent intervals until the third week of April. The first individuals which I saw, early in February, passed at intervals towards the west, then returned, and were apparently insect-catching, for the air was full of flying beetles, Tipulæ (crane-flies), and moths, the time being about 8 p.m., near dark. Numbers of flying ants were observed emerging from a decayed log and taking wing, so that the Swifts were well supplied with food variety. The evening was clear, with light breeze from S.E., but next day was cloudy and rain threatened. On 21st February there was a warm rain all day from the N.E., then a cool change, wind veering N.W. to S.W. Heavy fall of snow occurred shortly afterwards on the Tiers, in sight to the south. On the 23rd inst. the Swifts, which had not been seen since the 4th inst., came after dinner, and were seen heading to N.W. against a heavy squall. Between 3 and 4 o'clock a large party passed to N.W. against heavy wind and showers, flying very high—the highest could just be discerned against the thick squall-cloud. They were moving in circles,

but making steady progress to windward. On 25th the wind was fairly strong and cool from S.W., and numbers of Swifts were about Mersey Bluff all the morning, sweeping almost to the ground, then rising to a fair height, taking insect food. Next morning, between 7 and 8 o'clock, the wind was cold and from the S.W.; the sky was covered with fine interlacing cirrus, and numbers of the birds were circling very high from E. and S.E. towards the N.W. Later in the day, the breeze moderating and the sun becoming warm, the Swifts were all the afternoon between Don Road and Mersey Bluff, passing backwards and forwards, feeding, at a low altitude. After sunset the wind was again cold and from the S.W.; the birds, singly and in pairs, passed continuously towards the N.W., often tacking backwards and forwards while doing so. They were at varying heights, from 50 to perhaps 400 feet, but mostly high. They were still going over, sparsely, one in three or four minutes, at a height of 50 or 60 feet, as long as I could see, and there may have been numbers passing at a greater altitude. The following day, between noon and 1 o'clock, numbers were flying backwards and forwards at a great height, looking no larger than flies. The wind was N.E. and light, thundery clouds were passing over from the west. Their next appearance was recorded on 6th March, when from half an hour before sunset until after sunset there was a great company overhead. A large number, fully 300 feet up, were circling and wheeling, apparently for pleasure; others, much lower, were flying backwards and forwards capturing insects, for great numbers of beetles and ants were in the air. Some flew just over my cottage, "swishing" very distinctly with their long wings—sometimes gliding, sometimes fluttering the wings, turning on one side, then reversing, like a swimmer "changing arm" in side-stroke. There had been a thunderstorm in the morning, followed by a close, muggy atmosphere, which is very favourable for bringing flying ants, beetles, and other insects into the air. The birds were about until nearly dark; the wind was light and variable. The 14th March was very squally from the N.W., with heavy showers, and so on through the night. Next morning, at 8 a.m., large numbers of the birds passed over at a height of about 300 feet towards the N.W., not circling or feeding; the air had then changed to light southerly, with overcast sky. There was a cold change, with snow on the Tiers, on the night of the 21st. On the afternoon of the 22nd Swifts appeared at varying heights up to 150 feet, apparently taking food; the wind was squally, strong from S.W., heavy cumulo-stratus clouds spread over the sky. On 23rd and 25th Swifts again appeared; on 26th they were very high, gliding towards the west, the wind being S.E., and the birds just discernible against heavy cumulus clouds. There had been heavy showers at mid-day and early in the afternoon. Later in the afternoon the birds were seen near the beach, flying low and feeding. These appearances were noted every day or two until 17th April, when a few birds were seen

feeding at a height of 30-60 feet; next morning there was a change to drizzling rain, which seems to have heralded the departure for the season of the last of the Swifts.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U. West Devonport, Tasmania, 18/8/17.

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Early Nesting of White-beard.—During the last week of August, 1917, my attention was called to a nest of the White-bearded Honey-eater (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*) situated in a prickly wattle (*Acacia verticillata*) which had sprung up in the grounds of a friend here. The nest was in a fork about 10 feet up, and on 1st September I got a step-ladder and investigated, to see whether incubation had started. To my surprise the contents were three fully-feathered young, snugly packed into their cup-shaped domicile. My friend saw them out with their parents two days afterwards. The nest must have been finished about the end of July, which is the earliest I have ever known for this species, or for any of the family, in this State. It was fortunate (or was it prevision?) that the pair selected August for the rearing of their brood, as that month was most unusually fine and sunny; the present month of September has, so far, been distinguished by rough winds and heavy, soaking rains. Inside the cup-shaped nest of small twigs was placed some fine bark, which the birds had pulled from a clematis stem, and upon this was a felted mass of white material. This was examined with a lens, and appeared to consist chiefly of long hair-like processes, resembling those from clematis seeds, and small white florets, probably from a native plant. The partiality of the White-beard to a floral lining is well known to ornithologists. Mr. A. J. Campbell, in his "Nests and Eggs," mentions one from Upper Werribee which was entirely lined with soft, yellowish-white seed-casings; and Mr. H. C. Thompson and myself, when investigating a nest some years ago, built into the fork of a paper-bark tea-tree (*Melaleuca*) at Distillery Creek, North Tasmania, found it lined with the soft downy seed-pods of the "Cotton Shrub" (*Pimelea nivea*).—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U. West Devonport, Tasmania. 8/9/17.

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Spring Migrants in Tasmania.—The notes of the Tree Diamond-Bird (*Pardalotus affinis*), or "Pick-it-up," were heard for the first time this season in the white gums at the Mersey Bluff on the morning of 27th August. The first Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) was seen on the afternoon of 26th August at Wood's Slip, on the Mersey, about a mile from the sea. The afternoon was beautifully warm and summer-like, with a breeze from S.W. On the morning of the 28th a Swallow was back at Leek's Gardens, Mersey Bluff, where Swallows build each year under the verandahs of the dwelling-house. On the same morning, which was beautifully sunny, with a light breeze off the sea, a Fantail Cuckoo

(*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) was trilling from a gum-tree, and some newly-arrived Pipits (*Anthus australis*) were sporting with one another on the track close to the beach. These birds seem to me lighter in tint when they first arrive, as if they had wintered on the sandy plains of Central or Western Australia, and their plumage had taken a corresponding tint. One or two stayed the winter with us, as did several Fantail Cuckoos and a pair of Summer-Birds (*Graucalus parvirostris*). The main body of *Graucali* are not here yet; they usually arrive in September and October, as do the large Pallid Cuckoos (*C. pallidus*).—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U. West Devonport, Tasmania, 30/8/17.

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Nesting of White-bearded Honey-eater (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*) in Tasmania.—The pair of White-beards which I recorded as having fully-feathered young here on 1st September built again very soon afterwards in the fork of a cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), about 18 feet from the ground, and on the morning of 18th September there were three eggs, which had evidently been laid a few days, as there were two newly-hatched young on the morning of 26th September. One of these was out with the parents on 8th October; the other left the nest the following day; the third egg was found cast out beneath the nest. The first nest of this pair, which was built at the forking of a branch from the main stem of a prickly wattle (*A. verticillata*), about 9 feet from the ground, was composed of tough brown rootlets, some nearly 12 inches in length, long pieces of string, and bark fragments. The thick felted lining, when re-examined, was found to consist mainly in the seeds of the aster, with the pappus still adhering, my friend, in whose grounds the nest was placed, being a large grower of these plants. When portions of the lining were pulled out, a number of lines like strong spider-web were seen connecting it with the side of the nest. Width of nest over all, 5 inches; depth of nest, outside, 3 inches; width of egg cavity, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches; depth of egg cavity, 2 inches. The second nest was similar, except that for the foundation lining the birds tore off portions of the circumference of tree-mallow (*Lavatera arborea*) leaves and placed them in the bottom of the egg cavity. The mallow was growing in the same garden, and certain of the leaves became whitish and semi-decayed at the edges. The Honey-eaters hung on to these, and tore off portions with their bills; after placing these in position, they formed a dense soft lining over them, consisting of hundreds of small, oval, woolly calices or seed-vessels, with a quantity of pappus-hair intermixed. A noticeable point about these Honey-eaters is their extreme pugnacity when nesting; they would not allow any others of the *Meliphagidæ* in the same grounds while breeding was progressing. The Crescent Honey-eater was formerly numerous in this large garden, but was completely driven out by the pair of White-beards, although still numerous in my own garden, about a mile distant,

which the White-beards have not frequented this season. When my friend was pruning his fruit trees with the long-handled secateurs, the male Honey-eater would come and attack the knives while they were working, probably attracted by the sharp "click," which much resembles his own alarm note. When the knives were held up, but not worked, he desisted from the attack.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S. West Devonport, Tasmania.

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Harriers.—The Harrier (*Circus gouldi*) is, to my mind, after the Wedge-tailed and Sea-Eagles, our finest bird of prey, and I have been rejoiced to see a marked increase in its numbers during the past two seasons. In springtime it is a grand sight to watch a pair of these birds, with their great wing-spread, playing together high up in the "ethereal blue," turning at times a complete somersault, and uttering their wild cry as if permeated with the sheer joy of living. How a man can pay his bills with such "blood money" as that derived from the slaughter of these harmless and beautiful birds, as related in the current *Emu* (vol. xvii., p. 109), passes comprehension. I was pleased to see the editor's comment—"Why this useless slaughter?" If the New Zealand Acclimatization Society will consider the case of the brave and accomplished Lord Lucas, who lost his life during an aeroplane ascent in Flanders, and had previously willed his fine estate in Norfolk as a bird sanctuary, but *especially for the breeding and preservation of the Harriers*, in whose aerial evolutions he took the greatest delight, it should go far towards inducing the society to abrogate its barbarous enactment.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S. West Devonport, Tasmania.

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The Black Bell-Magpie (*Strepera fuliginosa*).—Last Christmas vacation I spent a week with friends (Wilsons) at The Steppes. I was much interested in the Black Magpies, which were regular visitants to the homestead. The original pair came about ten or twelve years ago, and many of their progeny are now about, and are particularly tame in winter, when snow is on the ground, and food, therefore, scarce. A pair of the old birds frequently brought their two young ones to the house during my visit. The latter were nearly as big as their parents, but whenever the camera was in evidence they kept under the shadow of a large willow tree overhanging the roof. Sometimes their rather petulant cries would be heard as early as 4 a.m. as they walked about the roof, evidently wondering why their tit-bits had not been placed out for them. There were several nests in the gum-trees near the house, where the birds build regularly. In my journey to The Steppes I noticed, as we drove along, fourteen nests of these birds, placed at varying heights. Some were in the dark-leaved cider gums, others in the ordinary white gums. Their nests were also seen in some of the trees near the road on the way to the

Great Lake. I questioned Miss Wilson about the behaviour of the Black Magpies, and she gave me the following information:—The tame birds prefer sweet food, such as cake, but when the ground is frozen hard they will eat anything. Sometimes they go into the stable loft and catch mice in the hay. They are very fond of chickens while they are small, and these have to be kept shut up till they are feathered, after which the Magpies will not touch them. They prefer young Ducklings to anything, and it is almost impossible to keep them. As the wild Ducks breed in this locality, I expect many of the Ducklings furnish a meal for the Black Magpies and their young. Young Turkeys are also favourites. When a Magpie attacked a Turkey and her brood, the mother would give the alarm, the young ones would lie flat beside a stone or tuft of grass, and the old Turkey would go and fight the Magpie. In their wild state these Magpies eat a great many common red berries which grow amongst the rocks. When the young ones are in the nest the old birds seem to have a hard time hunting for them, and get very shabby and rusty-looking. Sometimes they alight on the roof of the porch with a load of grubs and beetles in their bills. They put their load down and have a feed of bread or cake themselves, then pick up their load and fly straight off to their nest. They do a lot of good killing the grass-grubs. On the marshes some miles back, flocks of these Magpies gather, all hunting grubs. Those coming round The Steppes homestead seem rather more kindly disposed to each other than most wild creatures, judging by their treatment of a one-legged Magpie in their company. This one is always given a larger share of the dainties than the others, and in no way have they ever molested it.—(MISS) J. A. FLETCHER. Boat Harbour, Tasmania, 16/9/17.

Queensland Notes.

Finches.—I have reared young Gouldian (*Poephila gouldiæ*), Black-throated (*P. cincta*), Plumhead (*Aidemosyne modesta*), and Banded (*Stictoptera bichenovii*) Finches in my aviary, and was most interested in the markings in the mouths of the young Gouldians, or Painters, as we call them. I thought they might be for the protection of the young when disturbed, opening their mouths wide and wagging their heads and showing all their spots, with their naked neck behind, in a fearsome manner, which gave me the impression that they were reptiles peering out of the entrance to the nest, as I never saw other young Finches do this when alarmed; they usually cower down and remain still. I have never noticed any signs of bright spots or colouring in the other young Finches reared in captivity. Many Finches build family nests to play building with by day and sleep in in cold weather. I always keep a supply of dry grass for them, and after every rainy day they have a building fit, but when they mean to nest for young ones each pair builds separately, and fiercely