

In the recent cyclone which took place at Mackay, on the coast of North Queensland, the damage done to the small bird-life can hardly be realized. Probably many thousands of birds have been killed. The following note from our member, Mr. E. M. Cornwall, will give a little idea of the havoc wrought:—"One of the saddest features of the storm is the loss of bird-life. The deadly stillness of the bush is to me simply awful. Lying round about my place there are a pair of Leach's Kingfishers (*Dacelo leachi*), a pair of Koel Cuckoos (*Centropus phasianus*), two or three Crows (*Corvus coronoides*), and one Black Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus quoyi*). All the hundreds of Honey-eaters, &c., that were in the habit of coming into the garden are utterly gone; the Doves, which used to come into the yard and feed with the fowls, are also gone, and I fear greatly that it will be a long, long time before we shall see the fluttering wings and hear the cheerful twitter and whistle of our little friends again. You will be glad to know that my collection did not come to grief. When the house came down, with the piles on which it stood, it fell so gently that we barely felt it; the roar of the cyclone drowned all the noise of falling, and not one single egg in my cabinet was out of place." Another member, Mr. W. G. Harvey, states that, "sad to relate, the birds and beasts are nearly all gone, and, as the country has been devastated for about 100 miles on either side of Mackay, I fear that it will be some years before we can hope to have a full complement of birds in our district."—D. LE SOUËF, C.M.Z.S.

---

### Stray Feathers.

**Flight of Galahs.**—The accompanying photograph was taken in 1910 by Mr. F. C. Morse, R.A.O.U., at a place 35 miles north of Maxwellton, on the Townsville-Cloncurry railway, North Queensland. The Rose-breasted Cockatoos or Galahs (*Cacatua roseicapilla*) are nomadic, and appear at times in immense flocks.

\* \* \*

**Albino Birds.**—It is interesting to notice the albino phases of some of our birds. In Parrots, for instance, where the red never changes, the green becomes yellow and the blue white; green and blue are both composite colours. In other birds that are shades of black and white the bird becomes pure white, as, for instance, the Emu, Crow, Magpie, Eagle, Hawk, &c. I have never yet heard of a white Bower-Bird, but in any case albinos of any birds are very rare, and, being conspicuous, may soon be killed by birds of prey. A white Magpie often has trouble in securing a mate; the other birds of his kind evidently do not recognize their companion in his new dress. An albino Eagle we had for some years occasionally grew an ordinary-coloured

feather, and the white Emu in the Sydney Zoological Park has now grown several feathers of the natural colour. The albino Magpie in the illustration belongs to our member, Miss S. M. Robertson, of Mordialloc. It has the run of the garden.—D. LE SOUËF. Melbourne.

\* \* \*

**Freckled Duck.**—The Freckled Duck (*Stictonetta nævosa*) is fairly plentiful on our lakes this season. I had one brought to me for the table last week, and it proved excellent eating. The very compact plumage resembles that of the Musk-Duck. Sportsmen have never seen the bird in this locality before.—A. TREZISE. Robe, S.A., 14/6/18.

\* \* \*

**Quail and Mice.**—A strange thing has happened in these parts lately. A month ago the whole country was alive with Quail, both Stubble (*Coturnix pectoralis*) and Little (*Turnix velox*), but in a few weeks they were gone almost to a bird. I believe the reason is mice. These little rodents have run over the plains in countless swarms, and probably eaten all the grass seed; there are still heaps of dry grass, but no seed.—F. C. MORSE. Garah, N.S.W.

\* \* \*

**Cuckoo and Mice.**—I secured a male Coucal (*Centropus phasianus*) the other day, and I was surprised on opening the stomach to find two partly digested and one fresh mouse and the remains of a grasshopper. This bird swallowed the mice whole, there being no sign of their having been torn to pieces in any way. I have not seen any of these birds about here before. I secured the bird on the edge of a thick brigalow scrub which was thickly infested with prickly pear. Has there been previous evidence of this bird eating mice?—N. GEARY, R.A.O.U. Mount Pleasant, Dalby (Q.), 19/5/18.

\* \* \*

**Hungry Honey-eaters.**—For some unexplained reason the bush does not seem to be producing sufficient food for the Honey-eaters at the present time, as far as the vicinity of Hobart is concerned. Although my home is within two miles of the G.P.O., I am deriving great pleasure owing to my garden being graced with the presence of numerous *Meliphagidæ*. There are nearly always a few Crescent Honey-eaters (*Lichmera australasiana*) in the garden, but in addition, at the present time, I notice Yellowthroats (*Ptilotis flavigula*), New Hollands (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*), and an occasional Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus dubius*). The latest arrival, however, is no less than the Wattle-Bird (*Anthochaera inauris*). This is the first time that I have seen a Wattle-Bird so close to the city for many years. The main object of their visit appears to be to feed upon a few apples that have been left on the trees, these being now almost over-ripe.—CLIVE E. LORD. Hobart, 27/5/18.

**"Rooks Killing Sheep.**—Damage in Hawke's Bay.—Farmers in Hawke's Bay are complaining of depredations of Rooks among their flocks. The Rooks have acquired the habit of attacking not only lambs, but full-grown sheep, and the losses in some parts of the district are becoming serious. The birds attack the flocks not only in the daytime, but also during moonlight nights, and one farmer near Farndon has lost scores nightly. The Rooks attack the throats of the sheep, and numbers can be seen in the paddocks with open wounds. One was seen with its head completely severed with the exception of the spinal column. The birds also eat the flesh right down the middle of the back, rendering the skin quite useless. As the Rooks are protected, the position is serious in some parts of the district. Representations are being made to the Government on the subject." The above paragraph cutting is from the *Auckland Weekly News*, and may be of some interest as showing some of the troubles of an Acclimatization Society. — Communicated by Dr. T. J. ICKHEWINS. Manaia, Taranaki, N.Z., 9/6/18.

\* \* \*

**Birds and Caterpillars.**—The interesting observations by Mrs. Adam Black, of Charters Towers, on the "fearsome manner" in which young Gouldian Finches open their mouths and wag their heads when disturbed,\* calls to mind the following note on the young of *Gerygone personata*, which occurred in one of Dr. Macgillivray's valuable papers † on the birds of North Queensland:—"The young birds have four peculiar head-plumes, which they have the power of erecting and quivering vigorously. When one looks into a nest these head-plumes are put into motion by the birds, and remind one of a number of caterpillars waving about." These notes are the more interesting to me in the light of a recollection I have of a similarly curious experience with a pair of baby Bell-Birds (*Oreoica cristata*). Wandering through a bush recess in the vicinity of Maryborough (Vic.) on a day in October of 1912, I chanced upon these two squatting in a nest on a bushy stump. They were altogether uncanny-looking objects. Though almost fully fledged, the tops of their heads and a patch right down their respective backs were quite free of feathers, and instead of the usual wide-eyed stare of inquiry the visitor gets from most young birds, the eyes were tightly closed. Both babes, in fact, might have been quite devoid of life; but when I touched them lightly there was a decided change of tactics. The eyes remained closed, but the necks were outstretched, the sprouting feathers on the foreheads started, and the heads waved in exactly the threatening manner of the tails of processional caterpillars. Meanwhile, the old birds kept

\* *Emu*, vol. xvii., p. 228.

† *Emu*, vol. xiii., p. 166.



severely away from the nest. In half an hour's time I stole a march on the young actors, and found them sitting up complacently, with eyes wide open! Immediately, however, these were closed again, and the uncanny mimicry (?) of caterpillars was vigorously resumed.

Is there, one wonders, any affinity between this queer process and the Bell-Birds' habit of storing their nests with caterpillars? Of dozens of these homes examined, I do not recollect one that had not its complement of caterpillars, usually the larvæ of *Darala ocellata*. Sometimes the insects were on the rim of the nest; sometimes they were under the brooding bird or beneath the young ones; sometimes they were obviously dead; sometimes they were alive, but sluggish; and sometimes they appeared to be petrified. I saw no indications of the caterpillars being used as food,\* and the only theory presenting itself was that the birds gathered them for the same reason as the young Bell-Birds wave their heads—defence purposes. Can anything better be offered? An interesting observation upon the subject is given by Mr. G. F. Hill in his "Ornithological Notes on the Barclay Expedition of 1911-12,"† wherein he remarks that he was surprised to find Bell-Birds in the Northern Territory using a species of caterpillar (*Spilosoma*, sp.) closely related to *Spilosoma obliqua*, which he has noted to be much favoured by Victorian Bell-Birds. The matter was discussed also in early issues of *The Emu*, but no definite conclusions arrived at.—A. H. CHISHOLM. Brisbane, May, 1918.

## Correspondence.

*To the Editors of "The Emu."*

DEAR SIRs,—In the issue for October, 1917, page 108, it is stated that I express doubt in reference to the Pacific Gulls dropping "Warrener shells" to break them and extract the contents. It was my old friend Dr. A. M. Morgan who doubted the above, and I brought evidence to bear in my article which appeared in *The Emu* to substantiate my contention that the Gulls do drop the shells. I would like to know what evidence caused Mr. Le Souëf to be "satisfied the Pacific Gull does drop the shells to break them." Not by personal observation, I should think.—Yours truly,

S. A. WHITE.

"Wetunga," Fulham (S.A.), 22/11/17.

\* Mr. Charles Barnard, in "Nests and Eggs" (Campbell), makes the sound point that the caterpillars usually gathered by *Oreoica* seem altogether too hairy to be used as food by the birds. This observation applies particularly to caterpillars of *Darala* and *Spilosoma*.—A. H. C.

† *Emu*, vol. xii., p. 258.