

### Stray Feathers.

**Nest of the Brown Hawk.**—Has any observer authentic evidence of the Brown Hawk, either *Hieracidea orientalis* or *berigora*, building its own nest? In 20 years I have never known either to do so, always occupying the disused nest of some other bird.—F. C. MORSE, R.A.O.U. Garah, N.S.W.

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**Pratincoles.**—I lately saw a small flock of Pratincoles in this district, the first for 30 years. I wonder if these birds are numerous anywhere, possibly in the southern plains. I have spent the best part of my life in the central regions, and have seen them only once before, and that 30 years ago. I also saw numbers of Bustards, counted 40 in one lot; so the foxes have not accounted for them all yet.—F. C. MORSE. Garah, N.S.W.

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**Starling Mimicry.**—I noticed in the last issue a note by A. E. Rodda on the mimicry by the Starling of the Pee-wit call of the Magpie Lark. I can add another striking case of mimicry by the same bird. The Californian Quail, fairly common in this country, cries "Come-back-quick" very distinctly (to my ear at least), and lately a Starling has puzzled me greatly on several occasions by giving the exact call. I could not understand the Quail's presence in a town garden, until I "spotted" the mimic.—Dr. T. J. ICK-HEWINS. Marton, N.Z.

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**Parras and Little Crakes.**—When recently on the Queensland coast I made two trips to the Sandgate Lagoon, which our members visited during the late Congress. I noted about twenty species of aquatic birds there, the most interesting to me being the Parras (Lotus-Birds) and Little Crakes (*Porzana palustris*), both of which were represented by three pairs. I saw a pair of these latter also on one of the ornamental lily ponds in the Brisbane Botanical Gardens. It was interesting to find them thus right in the town.—F. L. BERNEY. Barcarolle, Longreach (Qld.)

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**Black-and-White Fantail in Tasmania.**—Your correspondent, G. Murray Anderson, in last issue of *The Emu*, asks if the Black-and-White Fantail has been seen in Tasmania before. I can inform him that such is the case. In November, 1914, I was visiting the neighbourhood of Swansca, on our east coast, and saw one of these birds hopping about in a clear paddock close to Cambria homestead, the old home of the Merediths. The bird was quite a short distance from me, and as I am well acquainted with it on the mainland I could not be mistaken. I drew attention to the occurrence in the *Tasmanian Naturalist* shortly after, but have not a copy at hand to give the reference. Now we have a second record in a distant part of the island. It is re-

markable that this species, so plentiful and widely distributed in southern Australia, should have failed to establish itself here, seeing it is an occasional visitant.—W. L. MAY. Forest Hill, Sandford (Tas.), 27/1/20.

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**Belgrave Notes.**—During the New Year Holidays I had the pleasure of spending a few days at Belgrave with that keen bird observer Mr. L. G. Chandler. We had many pleasant tramps through the surrounding hills in the search of bird pictures, and although rather late in the season we succeeded in locating a few nests whose owners gave us some good opportunities for photography. Among our tame subjects were a pair of Spinebill Honey-eaters, the female of which was very quiet. Their nest was situated in a deep, scrubby gully which, in conjunction with dull weather, made photography rather difficult; however, we succeeded in securing a few good negatives. The birds, from the commencement of operations, showed little concern for the cameras, which is, as a rule, a very unusual thing for Honey-eaters of any kind. Their nest contained two young a few days old, which were constantly fed by one or other of the adult birds, largely on blow-flies. We removed the young from the nest on one occasion, and the female fed them while hovering over my hand. Photographs could have been obtained of the parent birds on our hands, but, owing to the dull lighting, the attempt was abandoned.—S. A. LAWRENCE, R.A.O.U. Melbourne, 27/2/20.

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**Birds about Gippsland Lakes.**—As the season has been so dry in many parts of Victoria, it is interesting to notice how many birds have congregated in places that have had a fair amount of rain. About the Lakes' Entrance, in Gippsland, birds are far more numerous than usual. There seemed to be hundreds of Coachwhips (*Psophodes crepitans*); the air just resounds with their cracks, but they are very shy. Every morning I woke to the almost deafening chorus of Wattle-Birds (*Anthochaera*), as well as numerous other birds. Gulls and Cormorants were very plentiful; the latter birds are by no means in favour here; but if they have no other virtue, they are a model of patience, and seen to sit for hours on piles, &c. In certain places Bell Miners (*Manorhina*) were in hundreds, and kept up their continuous tinkling; it seemed as if the whole clan had gathered to serenade us. King Parrots, Crimson Parrots, and Rosellas were very plentiful. Black Swans were on the Lakes in thousands, and it was amusing to see the sudden scattering amongst the young ones when a boat came too close; the adult birds were much tamer.—(Miss) F. NEELY. Melbourne.

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**Spine-tailed Swifts.**—On 26th January, 1920, a disturbance arose from the south-east, with a peal of thunder, a vivid flash, then rain and high wind. Knowing that the Swift (*Chaetura caudacula*)

usually makes its appearance either before, during, or just after an atmospheric disturbance, I kept a look-out, and next evening, just before sunset, noticed the birds begin to come over from north-west and make towards south-east, in the teeth of the wind, which was still strong, although the evening was fine. They came in small, straggling parties, at a height of from 100 ft. to 200 ft. and flew somewhat languidly, as if tired, "flittering" the wings more than usual between the "sailing" flights. Over 100 individuals, I should say, passed in this straggling fashion in about 18 minutes, when they ceased to come. They were the first of the species seen this season.

**Fan-tailed Cuckoo** (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*).—The first of any kind of Cuckoo I have seen for fully a month flew, on 3rd Feb., into a gum-tree at back of cottage, and sat there quite silently. Have heard no call from either these, the Pallid, or the Bronze for several weeks.

**Satin Flycatcher** (*Myiagra ntilida*).—On 4th Feb., a close morning, with showers from the north-east, a Satin Flycatcher was in the gum, and calling with its sweet reedy note, but flew before I could see whether the plumage was mature. This bird must be on its way back to the mainland, and is unusually early. The Scarlet Robins (*Petroica leggit*) are also back in the garden, so that the season appears quite autumnal already.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S. West Devonport, Tasmania, 4/2/20.

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**Bronze-Cuckoo and Shrike-Robin**.—Mr. A. C. Stone's discovery at Ringwood (Vic.), in November, 1919, of an egg of the Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx basalis*) in the nest of a Shrike-Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*) is not, as suggested,\* the first record of the kind. Yellow Robins were (and are) plentiful in my old locality of Maryborough (Vic.), but only on one occasion—30th September, 1912—did I find Bronze-Cuckoos represented in their nests; and then, freakishly enough, there were *two* of the pretty pink spotted eggs of *C. basalis* to keep the two green, brown-spotted eggs of the Robin company. The unusual circumstance was remarked on in a newspaper paragraph at the time, and subsequently (in 1916) a Melbourne magazine printed an account of the eventful history of this particular pair of Robins. Briefly, the nest in which the Cuckoo (or should it be Cuckoos?) laid was the second of four built by these Robins in the one season in the one clump of timber. The first was blown to pieces, and the second and third were robbed; but success attended the dauntless birds on the fourth attempt. In the second case I was interested in awaiting the possibilities with two Cuckoos in one nest. On 1st October there was one young Cuckoo in the nest with the two Robins' eggs. No trace of the second Cuckoo was

\* *Emu*, vol. xix., p. 244.

to be seen; a bit of shell at the foot of the tree probably had reference to the bird in the nest. Two days later the nest was empty, with no clue pointing to the cause. At a guess I should say some bird was to blame; the gentle small boy has (or had) a habit of taking nest and all.—A. H. CHISHOLM, State Secretary. *Daily Mail*, Brisbane.

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**Drought and Bush Fires.**—One hardly realizes the loss and suffering to bird-life in Queensland during the severe drought. Over a considerable extent of country many birds completely disappear—whether they migrate to more favoured districts, or whether they die out, is difficult to say. For instance, near Duaringa, inland from Rockhampton, the Beautiful Parrakeet (*Psephotus pulcherrimus*) was once plentiful, but a severe drought took place in 1902, and the birds have not been seen since in that district. We easily realize, also, how stock suffer and die. Even human beings are hard pushed at times. When travelling from Townsville to Prairie, near Hughenden, I counted, on an average, about 50 empty bottles to the mile, alongside the railway line on the 200-mile journey. The country there was mostly open and lightly timbered, and it was only near the coast that we passed through ranges. The Galahs, or Rose-breasted Cockatoos, come to drink in the evening, and often in pairs; although large flocks of these birds assembled round the water at one time, they belonged to different flocks; the same applied to the other birds. Birds evidently recognize one another, as they always seem to join the flock they belong to, whether large or small. I noticed that, when the birds drank, they mostly put their beaks well into the water, showing that they were evidently very thirsty. The sheep arriving in small lots at the water troughs were in the same thirsty state apparently, as many gave a short run when they came close to the troughs. It was interesting to find ancient fossils near the Flinders River and other places, which reminds one of millions of years ago, when the Sea-Lizard, which was over 20 feet long, lived; also the ancient shell *Ancylocera*, and many others. Probably there was no bird-life then as we know it to-day. Bush fires account for the destruction of many young birds, as, at the time of my visit to Prairie, in October, much of the country alongside the railway line had been burnt; possibly the railway engine was largely the cause, and birds nesting on the ground or in low bushes must have suffered considerably; but this trouble occurs in most parts of Australia.—D. LE SOUEF, Zoological Gardens, Melbourne.