

## Tasmanian Birds at Home.

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HOBART.

THE birds which first attract one's notice in approaching Cascades (Tasman's Peninsula) are the Gannets (*Sula serrator*) and White-breasted Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax gouldi*). The Gannets keep to the deep water; the Cormorants often approach close to the shore, and are to be seen at rest on the old jetties in great numbers. In the winter season flocks of Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) and Teal (*Nettion castaneum*) frequent the shallow water of two or three fathoms in depth; and, lastly, the shore-line and the mud-flats adjoining it are resorted to by White-fronted Herons (*Notophox novæ-hollandiæ*) and Silver Gulls (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*). Both Herons and Gulls seek their food in the neighbouring paddocks occasionally, but the Gulls and Lesser White-backed Magpies (*Gymnorhina hyperleuca*) do not agree well, and the former have to yield pride of place to the Magpie. Small crabs form a portion of the food of the White-fronted Heron; countless numbers of these crustacea, with blue carapaces and yellow extremities, perambulate the sandbanks left bare at low tide, and create a swishing sound with their multitudinous movements. In addition to the Anatidæ above mentioned, the Shoveller (*Spatula rhynchotis*) has been shot (1/6/93) in the vicinity.

When we arrive at the road which leads from Koonya to Impression Bay, we have on our left a rocky ridge terminating at a clump of blue gums which marks the site of an old burial ground, a locality much resorted to by the two Tasmanian

*Melithrepti* (*M. validirostris* and *M. melanocephalus*), and on the other side of the road a disused paddock, now overgrown with leptospermum and prickly wattle, wherein the Ground-Bird (*Cinclosoma punctatum*) dwells, and round the outskirts of which the Striated Field-Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*) flits from bush to bush. The New Holland (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*) and the Crescent or Tasmanian Honey-eaters (*M. australasiana*) frequent the banksias at the north-east corner of the paddock, and the Spine-billed Honey-eater (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) assiduously visits the flowerets of *Epacris impressa*, which grows everywhere around. The two last-named Honey-eaters are as much at home in the flower gardens of the residents as in the open bush. There are no Noisy Miners (*Manorhina garrula*) in this thickly-wooded district. Their absence might have been anticipated, but the same cannot be said of the absence (unless it has appeared recently) of the Fulvous-fronted Honey-eater (*Glycyphila fulvifrons*), which is known on the right bank of the Derwent, a few miles south of Hobart. The remaining Meliphagidæ of the Peninsula are the Yellow-throated Honey-eater (*Ptilotis flavigularis*), the Yellow Wattle-Bird, and the Brush Wattle-Bird (*Acanthochæra inauris* and *A. mellivora*), and the White-eye (*Zosterops cerulescens*).

On the 19th and 20th days of June two companies of Crescent Honey-eaters, consisting of about twelve birds in each, passed along this road about four miles from Hobart. There had been strong north-west gales, and a heavy fall of snow on Mt. Wellington, and I think the cold must have induced the birds, which are not usually gregarious, to leave the higher ground in order to seek warmth and food. They uttered continuously a low, plaintive note, very different from the harsh discords which constitute their only song. Amongst them were birds with an oblong black mark on each side of the throat—the vestiges, as it were, of a pectoral collar; whilst in others, the adult males, the collar was interrupted by the white of the throat, which extended down the breast, thus forming the two crescents from which the bird has received one of its vernacular names.

The order in which Passerine, Picarian, and Psittaceous birds of migratory or nomadic habits arrive on the Peninsula is as follows, so far as I have observed:—The Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) is the first to arrive (23/9/91), and is followed by the Swift Lorikeet (*Nanodes discolor*), 1/10/92, and the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*), 2/10/91. The Blue-banded Grass-Parrakeet (*Neophema venusta*) was observed once (5/10/91); this may have been an accidental visit. The Wood-Swallow (*Artamus sordidus*), 23/11/90, and the Shining Flycatcher (*Myiagra nitida*), 27/11/92, arrive later than the abovenamed birds. The Bronze Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx plagosus*) was observed once (December, 1889); this also may have been an accidental visit. Cuckoo-Shrikes (*Graucalus parvirostris*) are sometimes

seen before spring commences. In 1890 I observed one on the 17th of August.

Let us resume our ramble. To the level tract a sandy ridge succeeds, covered with stringybark and native cherry trees (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*), and with a thick undergrowth of bracken ferns. Here I have surprised in mid-afternoon the little Spotted Owl (*Ninox maculata*) ensconced in the foliage of a stringybark sapling. The tarsi of this Owl are closely covered with pale rufous feathers to the base of the toes; the claws are well curved and pointed; the iris a waxy yellow, the beak lead-coloured, with the basal lighter in hue than the distal portion. Total length,  $12\frac{1}{4}$  inches; wing, 8 inches; tail,  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches; tarsus,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Mice are said to constitute its principal food, and to obtain these it does not require to leave its haunts in the bush, for there are bush mice in abundance, which dwell in rocky crannies or beneath tussocks of rank grass, from which they sally forth in quest of food in the daytime, as well as by night—quaint little creatures, cautious rather than timorous in the presence of man. The brow of the ridge is frequented by large companies of Hill Crow-Shrikes (*Strepera arguta*). There are at times as many as 40 birds together; they come to feed on the berries of the *Exocarpus*. Bush fires necessarily destroy much of the food of fruit-eating birds, and this may be one reason for their seeking food in cultivated areas. The Hill Crow-Shrike filches from the apple orchard, and leaves the trace of his presence in varying degrees of mischief. Sometimes only a puncture is made on the rind of the apple; generally a large piece of the fruit is scooped out; rarely is the whole apple eaten excepting the core. When these Crow-Shrikes are flying overhead the white basal portions of the inner webs of the primaries are very conspicuous, and may well serve as marks whereby they can be recognized by others on the ground. Beyond the ridge for about a mile the country is undulating, and slopes gently towards Norfolk Bay. The soil is of a turfy nature. *Epacris* abounds, and there are dwarfish orchids of pale hues and also sundews. In some of the hollows tall sedges grow, concealing marshy ground. Birds are not plentiful hereabouts, because of the paucity of trees and shrubs which harbour insects. In 1889 I saw the Ground Parrakeet (*Pezoporus formosus*) in this locality, but have not heard of its being there since that time. The Yellow-tail (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) is a gregarious Tit, which prefers grassy hillsides, with a sunny exposure, near the shelter of trees or shrubs. In such situations flocks of about twenty systematically work patches of ground, tripping lightly over the sod in quest of seeds or insects. They find these conditions at Impression Bay. "Redbills" (*Hæmatopus unicolor*) and Pied Oyster-catchers (*H. longirostris*) visit this place, but rarely appear further south in Norfolk Bay.