

flat sheet of rock studded with small sharp pieces of stone, which project above the surface of the water. Thinking that the lap of a wave striking against one of the miniature pinnacles containing a blow-hole might in some way account for the sound, we stopped, and after marking down the precise spot whence it next arose, waded out a few steps, little more than ankle deep, and as we stooped to examine the rock the note sounded again, but there was no blow-hole. Time after time we were baffled. In sheer desperation my friend tried to attribute the cause to the shoals of fish fry which darted before us in the shallow pools as we splashed along. At last we noticed a flock of Musk-Ducks (*Biziura lobata*) fully half a mile out. From these the notes undoubtedly came. After listening for a while we could distinguish the deeper "ponk" of the male bird. The smooth liquid surface acting as a perfect conductor and sounding board, it appeared as though the call-notes of the birds originated at the water's edge at our feet. Hastening along we soon rounded the corner of the bay into the next. Off the point of land lay the island, with a strip of sand between, and further out a few scattered rocky outcrops with long lines of connecting reefs. On the still waters flocks of Black Swans (*Chenopsis atrata*), their red bills conspicuous against the black bodies, hundreds of Ducks (*Anas superciliosa* and *Nyroca australis*) and a few Silver Gulls (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) fed or lazily preened their feathers in the welcome glow of the winter's afternoon sunshine. Upon the reefs, in silent contemplation or asleep, sat numberless Black and Pied Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo* and *hypoleucus*), and on one particular eminence a family of Pelicans (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) gravely conferred together. Beyond, the eye followed the stretch of blue sea to the coastline of the opposite shore, where the low-lying, scrub-covered sandhills intercepted the horizon. All was peaceful and quiet in this far-away bird sanctuary, and for many minutes we stood silently watching the scene. Then I fired the gun. In an instant the air was full of birds. They rose in a cloud, the white-tipped wings of the Swans flashing like streaks of lightning throughout the dark mass. For a few minutes the birds wheeled and circled in wild disorder, then, gathering in families, flew away in all directions till the neighbouring points of land and the distant hills hid them from view.

Stray Feathers.

F.L.

THE PAINTED FINCH IN NORTH QUEENSLAND.—Mr. F. C. Berney has sent for verification a skin of *Emblema picta*. It was secured about the middle of last July, at Homestead, by Mr. J. H. Smedley, who reported that he observed two or three small flocks—first two birds, then four, and then eight together. The Painted Finch has once previously been reported for North Queensland, having been seen in the Gulf country by Dr. W. Macgillivray. See "Nests and Eggs," p. 1082.—A. J. C.

THE WHITE-PLUMED HONEY-EATER AS A BEE-KILLER.—Mr. W. M'Lellan, of this town, has some tree-lucerne plants, and just now they are in full bloom. Noticing a large number of dead bees on the ground, he examined them and found their bodies crushed. There were dozens of them. Very soon a solution of the cause of their death was arrived at, for he watched the "Greenies" or White-plumed Honey-eaters (*Ptilotis penicillata*) snap every bee that came to the blossoms. The birds simply gave the bees a crunch or two and dropped them.—E. A. D'OMBRAIN. Casterton, 4/9/05.

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EGGS OF THE EWING TIT (*Acanthiza ewingi*).—Although the eggs of this species have been described it may be of interest to record remarks about an authenticated clutch of two eggs in my collection, taken by the well-known Tasmanian ornithologist, Mr. E. D. Atkinson, on the 11th October, 1904, near Waratah, Tasmania. The eggs are inclined to be oval in shape, with fine texture of shell, and glossy in appearance. The ground colour is a warmish-white, and is finely freckled with reddish-brown, some spots appearing more indistinct than others, as if beneath the surface of the gloss; the spots are so thickly accumulated at the larger end that they form a blotch on the apex. A, measures .68 x .50 inch; B, .66 x .49 inch. The nest was dome-shaped, and typical of the *Acanthiza* family, and was placed in a small beech (*Fagus cunninghami*) which was growing in the bank of an old quarry.—J. W. MELLOR. Adelaide.

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SEAGULLS AS INSECT DESTROYERS.—During last harvest the crops, particularly those around Jan Juc, and further south of Geelong, were visited with the caterpillar pest. When the crops were ripe for cutting, these caterpillars would raid the farms and nip off the top of the crop, letting the ears of corn fall to the ground. Acres would be stripped in one evening by this pest. They seemed to commence their work just at sundown. A friend who related this to me, and who has a large farm, said the noise made by the caterpillars in nipping can be distinctly heard at some distance. One evening, on looking towards his crops, he saw hundreds of Seagulls (the ordinary white Gull, *Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) enter his crop, and attack and devour these caterpillars. Next morning there was not a caterpillar to be seen. My friend told me other birds would not touch the caterpillars.—ARTHUR WILSON. Geelong, 25/7/05.

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NOTES ON BRONZE-WINGS.—When I wrote my notes on the Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) for the April number of *The Emu* the hen was on her nest, having begun to sit for the last time on or about 3rd March, just as the final lot of the common Bronze-wings (*Phaps chalcoptera*) were out of the nest. Unfortunately I accidentally broke one of the eggs; however, as the weather soon became changeable and snowy, one was quite enough for the parents

to bring up well. They had begun a little earlier and finished up later than the other species.

This season has commenced considerably in advance of that of last year, as, to my surprise, I found yesterday, 26th June, two eggs in the nest of *Ocyphaps lophotes*, and one in that of *Phaps chalcoptera*; last year the dates were about 1st and 15th September respectively. The birds have been kept under exactly the same conditions, so the season, which has been extremely mild (almost total absence of frosts), must alone be accountable for them nesting so much earlier, I think.—MARY G. ROBERTS. Hobart, 27/6/05.

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KURRAJONG (Q.) NOTES.—The Grass-Birds (*Megalurus*) have almost totally disappeared. I saw one to-day, the first for some weeks. Hawks are unusually numerous this winter, although this locality is most noticeable for their absence at other times. Gos-hawks (*Astur approximans*) were in evidence some time ago, terrorizing the poultry everywhere, but now there have been none molesting them for some weeks. The other species I have noticed are—Brown Hawks, very numerous; Spotted Harriers are to be seen on any of the little black-soil plains; Kestrels, Black-shouldered Kites, Little Eagles, Little Falcons, and Sparrow-Hawks are also to be seen, though not plentiful. Eagles are also more numerous than I have seen them before. We have had some visitors, in the shape of tiny greenish Parrakeets (Warbling Grass-Parrakeets); they were very wild, and were either in pairs or small parties of five or six. Red-capped Robins have put in an appearance, one or two pairs being seen. Although it has been very dry for some months, the Scrub-Turkeys (*Talegallus*) would vie in condition with any domestic fowls. Some of them are almost too fat to eat.—ERNEST D. BARNARD. 23/6/05.

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TASMANIAN HAWK-NOTES. — Anent Harriers (*Circus gouldi*) settling on trees, I have had good opportunities of watching them, and have seen them many times settle on a dead tree, near their hawking grounds, and also, at the nesting time, have seen the male perch on the tree and wait there for the female, while the latter was placing material in the nest, which was in a crop close by. White-fronted Falcon (*Falco frontalis*).—On a very hot, sultry evening, about the New Year, I noticed one of these birds near me feeding on what I concluded were the common black beetles, which were then very numerous. This bird would settle on the branch of a dead tree and there watch for one or more of these beetles to come along, then with one or two flaps of its wings would dart upwards, downwards, or at an angle, and take its prey, sometimes taking more than one in a flight, and always returning to the same perch. It was very interesting to watch its performance, but I failed in one thing, through being afraid to venture too near, and that was to ascertain if the prey were taken in the mouth or claws, but I

fancy at times I could see them taken in the claws—it may have been when one was secured in the mouth first. I noticed also that when the bird returned to the tree its head invariably went down to its claws, as if it were feeding on them while holding them down.—
ARTHUR E. BRENT. South Bridgewater (Tas.), 21/7/05.

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ROCKHAMPTON (Q.) NOTES.—The winter in Queensland has been long and trying. The cold has been intense for this part of the country—below the freezing point on many nights in July. The rainfall here has been—May, 1.01; June, 0.56; July, 0.45. Pastures have become burned up, and in the absence of blossoms one wonders how honey-eating birds find food. Lagoons and waterholes have not fallen so low as might have been expected, and waterfowl have not been stinted for food. Still they have not recovered so quickly from the effects of the prolonged drought as some other kinds—Quail, for instance, appear to have been breeding incessantly, and are numerous all over the country. Cranes and Herons, too, are common again, and Ibises come into the precincts of the municipality. Flocks of Finches of various kinds are to be seen at times. There was an influx of strangers in the cold, dry weather of July, driven hither probably by the cold, stormy weather which then prevailed in the southern States. Cuckoos were noticeable among them. One evening a cluster of little birds about the size of Sparrows were observed going to roost on the lee side of a scaly-bark araucaria tree in a garden on Athelstane Range, within sound of the city clock bell. They crowded together like a hive of bees. In the morning they were hopping about the adjacent pasture, but soon disappeared and did not return. What were they? They were conirostres of some kind; ash and white were the predominating colours in their plumage, and the tail feathers had lovely white scallops at the extremities. The Kestrel has been coming and going; Kites are not nearly so plentiful as they used to be. The Pied Crow-Shrike, which was a common and agreeable winter visitant before the great drought, has not been here for three seasons now. The little grey Doves, which are always with us, became very tame in the cold weather. They discovered where Canary seed was to be obtained, and boldly lit on the verandah, where the singing birds had scattered it from their cages. Becoming familiar, four were seen at one time perched on a cage, and by turns robbing the seed-box. Magpie-Larks are unusually plentiful. During the day they forage about the lagoons on the west side of the range, but are careful to seek shelter in the bamboos on the east side from the cold westerly winds at night. Their home-coming reminded your correspondent of the return of boats from mackerel fishing in the Firth of Clyde. Bee-eaters are very troublesome. They sit on the fence opposite hives, and, as the bees are not smart in the cold weather, snap them up without difficulty. It is when they are sitting on the fence, rapping the bee to kill it outright, that the bee-man makes a stone whizz pass the offenders. They are

making preparations for nest-boring in the sandy soil of the Botanic Garden. The Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike is to be seen feeding on the fruit of the native fig-tree under the shadow of the post-office tower in East-street. Bronze-wing Pigeons are abundant all round the town—visitors from dry country.—A.O.U. 21/8/05.

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Re FANTAIL CUCKOO.—I notice Mr. Barrett, in *The Emu*,* mentions finding addled eggs in nests. My experiences have been the same, which can easily be accounted for, at least as far as Tasmania is concerned. Cuckoos arrive here in August, the month in which most of our small birds build (at least most foster birds to the Cuckoo). Very likely this is so arranged in order for them to be ready for the Cuckoos' eggs, which would then be ready for placing in the nest. But down come a fall of snow and rough weather, lasting some weeks, putting the builders off for at least a month; therefore the eggs of the Cuckoo are placed in the nest, *very, very* often before the nests are completed, and if it should happen to be put into a Sericornis' or Brown Acanthiza's the birds will at once leave the nest. These little fellows seem to be able to detect any little disturbance that may be caused by putting one's finger in the nest before any eggs are laid, and therefore when doing so one wants to be very careful. I once found a nest of the Brown Acanthiza by seeing it chasing the Cuckoo away and flying back to the nest. I carefully felt one egg and left, thinking to go back later and get the Cuckoo's egg. I returned three times, saw the birds there, felt carefully—only one egg. I fancied the third time something was amiss, so took out the egg, which proved to be the egg of the Fantailed Cuckoo—this was my first experience. While packing the egg away I noticed the Acanthizas darting about, so sat and watched, to see if they went back to the nest, but to my surprise I saw one with material, and discovered another nest only two yards away, nearly built. After waiting a week I went to the spot again and took another Cuckoo's egg (with two of the Acanthiza), which proved to be exactly similar to the other. (Query — Do Cuckoos lay more than one egg? My answer is decidedly yes.) While on the subject of Cuckoos, I might say that my notes appearing in *The Emu* re the Pallid Cuckoo were based on my own actual knowledge, obtained through constant watching, but I have never seen them perform at the age of 30 or even 48 hours. It would be impossible for them to eject a young bird from the nest of our Yellow-throated Honey-eater, or Black Cap, at that age, on account of the depth of the nest. I have found them in the nest of the Black Cap, and as soon as you touch them they commence to jostle the other occupants and try to throw them out. I have seen them do so at times, and have caught them in my hand and placed them again in the nest, to see the same performance go on.—ARTHUR E. BRENT. South Bridgewater (Tas.), 21/7/05.

* Vol. v, p. 21.

JOTTINGS FROM TASMANIA.—9th June, 1905.—With regard to the stay of the Flame-breasted Robin (*Petræca phœnicea*) in cold latitudes during the winter months, the following observation was recently made:—While walking with a friend up the hill leading to the Don, we saw nearly thirty Robins grouped together on the electric light wire and on the fence below. One pair belonged to the Scarlet-breasted species (*P. leggii*); the others were all Flame-breasts, only about 25 per cent., however, being in full plumage, the grey tints of the remainder showing them to be either females or immature males. The hen of *P. leggii* was easily distinguishable, owing to the light red patch upon her breast, this being absent in the others. It was very pretty to see how the males in full plumage of *P. phœnicea* shone out like small live flames in the long row upon the fence, the females and younger individuals being all but invisible on the grey timber under a grey sky. This took place on 5th June.

Some Fan-tailed Cuckoos (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) stayed with us very late this autumn; their rippling notes were heard upon the Mersey banks during the sunny afternoons of the last three weeks in April; one in a blue gum in Devonport town on 10th May; finally, one was seen at the Don River enjoying the genial sunshine of 21st May. I have a record of this species having been seen last winter at the Mersey Bluff on 16th July! This hardy bird was sustaining the assaults of a Shrike-Thrush with apparent serenity. "Summer-Bird" (*Graucalus parvirostris*).—Four of these graceful birds flew over my cottage on 12th May, keeping fairly high, and heading to the north-east. They uttered as they flew their peculiar rapid wiry notes. Pipit (*Anthus australis*).—Can members shed any light on the movements of this bird? They appear to move hence early in April, and reappear during the first or second week of September. Are they migratory or merely nomadic? An observer some time ago assured me he had seen them in the midlands of Tasmania during the winter months. The winters are more frosty and severe there than here on the coast, so one does not see how they would benefit by the change, unless they obtain insects in the neighbourhood of the sheep, of which large flocks are kept in the midlands.

12th June.—Three Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) were observed in Charles-street, Launceston, by Mr. H. C. Thompson during the first fortnight of June; they appeared weak, and kept under shelter of the shop verandahs. Mr. Thompson observed one taking its food in a way that is uncommon among Swallows—viz., clinging to the sash bar of a shop window and picking flies from the glass.

14th June.—A pair of fine Pelicans (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) was seen sitting upon a sandbank in the Mersey River, the first I have ever seen upon this coast of Tasmania. What an everlasting disgrace that these fine birds, and also the splendid Black Swan, should not be protected throughout the year; if that were done we should be delighted with the spectacle of numbers of them sailing continually on our waters, instead of, as now, an occasional

specimen, here to-day—and shot or (if fortunate) flown away to-morrow.

18th June.—The much-talked-of Starling (European) has begun to colonise Devonport; three pairs were seen on the summit of a dry tree this afternoon on the east bank of the Mersey. Their whistling call, with a peculiarly plaintive finish, first attracted our attention. At first we took the note to be a rather unusual call of the Dusky Robin (*P. vittata*) or "Sad-Bird," but eventually located the true whistlers.

25th June.—Two pairs of Flame-breasted Robins (*P. phoenicea*), the males in bright plumage, were noticed in a grass paddock near the sea, showing that some, at any rate, of these lovely birds remain with us during winter.

26th June.—A male Flame-breasted Robin, in fine plumage, sitting on electric light wire, uttered his plaintive little song of six or seven notes. The Brown-tails (*Acanthiza diemenensis*) were also heard uttering their sweet little mating-call, as if about to pair. Of all our small birds this seems to me to have the most wild sweetness in its call.

30th June.—A "Summer-Bird" (*G. parvirostris*) was seen in the pine trees of Dr. Payne's garden.

2nd July.—Another warm-weather bird was noticed to-day—that is, in midwinter. This was a Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*C. flabelliformis*) sitting near the Bluff Lighthouse, and facing a strong westerly breeze as if rather enjoying it.

3rd July.—A male Long-tailed Blue Wren (*Malurus gouldi*), in full plumage, accompanied by three sober-coloured friends, seen to-day on east bank of the Mersey; also a Grey-tailed Thickhead (*Pachycephala glaucura*), without colour, picking insects from the bushes.

4th July.—Flame-breasted Robin in full plumage noted in Fenton-street.

14th July.—A Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) was disturbed among the rocks on the beach; it made for the sea, running awkwardly in a horizontal position, and much resembling a bandicoot at a short distance. It used its flippers alternately on the rocks to prevent itself stumbling forward on its face. When exhausted it crouched down between two diorite rocks with rounded tops, and with its own dark blue rounded back was almost impossible to distinguish.

18th July.—Another Flame-breasted Robin in full plumage noted to-day; also a Fan-tailed Cuckoo flying near the beach and a "Summer-Bird" calling among the pines.—H. STUART DOVE. West Devonport.

NEW EGG-BLOWER.—*The Condor* for July describes a new kind of egg-blower and cleaner invented by Mr. W. L. Colvin, of Osawatomie, Kansas, by which it is said eggs may be blown six times faster than with the mouth. The principle is that of the syringe.