

single Robin's nest, nor see a single bird, while Square-tailed Cuckoos whistled on all sides. I do not blame egg-collectors for this, but I accuse the Cuckoos of exterminating a lovely species of Robin in a lovely spot (part of a National Park, in fact), where they ought to be safe from extinction by artificial agents. Egg-taking does not decimate numbers; it has rather the reverse effect, as instanced in the barnyard fowl; it is an incentive to greater fecundity. But the methods of the Cuckoo are more than a match for any other species of bird it insinuates itself upon.

For similar reasons, and also because of its restricted habitat, I think the Scrub-Tit (*Acanthornis magna*) is doomed. This unique bird, at all events in the secluded gullies upon the flanks of Mt. Wellington, Tasmania, is very frequently the foster-parent of *C. flabelliformis*.

The Cuckoo at this rate will become in time the commonest bird in the world, and what will happen then? However, egg-collectors need not yet be afraid, nor museums anxious to gather into their archives specimens of bird life fast becoming extinct. The Cuckoo may never become more a menace to quiet home-loving birds than it is now. It is not reasonable to suppose that parasites in nature, of whatever kind they be, will entirely exterminate their hosts, or whence would their livelihood come from?

The Cuckoos are foolish birds, fond of perching in exposed positions and whistling as if they had not a care in the world. For this reason they fall easy prey to the smaller *Raptores* (Hawks, Falcons, Kestrels). From observation I believe that the *Cuculidæ* lose greater numbers annually from birds of prey than any other family.

When a surplus of Cuckoos does occur we can expect to find them dying off for some reason or other or vying with one another to find and "break in" new foster-parents, or perchance developing again the respectable nest-building habits they possessed in olden times.

Some Notes on the Cuckoo.

BY A. MATTINGLEY.

DURING a visit to Ringwood on 7th October of this year I found *two* eggs of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) in the nest of a Brown Tit (*Acanthiza pusilla*). The nest was situated about 9 feet from the ground, in the top of a wild cherry tree (*Exocarpus*), an unusual place for this *Acanthiza* to build in. The finding of two Cuckoos' eggs in the same nest is an unusual occurrence, although not an isolated case (see "Nests and Eggs,"

A. J. Campbell), and has some connection with the mysterious habit that young Cuckoos have of ejecting eggs and young birds from the nest. Both eggs in this instance were fresh, and had evidently been laid by the same Cuckoo, since they were almost identical in size, shape, and colour. There were no other eggs in the nest. One is naturally led to inquire whether the same Cuckoo laid both eggs? If it did, then the Cuckoo must be unaware of the ejective habit of its own species, since it would have known that one egg or its equivalent, a young bird, must ultimately be destroyed by being ejected by the first young Cuckoo hatched out. Then, again, were it two different Cuckoos that placed the eggs in the nest, the bird that deposited the last one should (according to some observers) have "instinctively" known that it was simply "love's labour lost" for it to deposit its egg there; otherwise the Cuckoo must be ignorant of the type of egg its own species lays. In the same district, on the day previous to my finding the two Cuckoos' eggs in one nest, Mr. J. Ross and myself observed what was probably a Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) at the entrance to the nest of a Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*). We were making our way along a creek bed, when suddenly we heard a great commotion amongst some Blue Wrens, Crescent Honey-eaters, and other birds. The noise made by the different birds which had combined with the Blue Wrens in vociferously expostulating with some other bird or animal in their vicinity was so pronounced that we hastened to ascertain the cause of so much excitement. On arriving at the spot we observed the complaining Blue Wrens fluttering excitedly around their nest, which was attached to the branch of a fallen limb, about 4 inches from the ground. It was dusk, and the light uncertain, otherwise we might have observed an interesting development of the Cuckoo's habits which would probably have helped slightly to lift the veil that shrouds this bird's breeding habits. Our attention was directed to the nest by the Blue Wrens, which flitted angrily about it. The cause of the excitement of the Wrens was not apparent, so my companion proceeded to investigate the nest, when—whirr-r-r—up flew a Cuckoo from the ground at the entrance to the nest and made off through the scrub. We were indeed sadly disappointed owing to the failing light preventing us observing the Cuckoo before we had disturbed it. Search around and in the nest did not reveal any Cuckoo's egg. What was the Cuckoo doing at the nest? Was it spying out the best nest in which to deposit its egg? Or was the Cuckoo in the very act of laying its egg? On the same day I found the egg of the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) in the tiny nest of the Spine-bill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*)—a nest about five or six times too small for the young Cuckoo, which

would, ere it had reached its adult size, more than likely have been thrown out of the tiny nest as it swayed about on the top of a tall tea-tree (*Leptospermum scoparium*). Why do Cuckoos place or lay their eggs in nests that are too small for their full-grown young? Since writing the foregoing, on 21st October, 1906, I visited the nest of the Blue Wren again, but there was only a clutch of Wren's eggs in the nest. During the same day we found the nest of a *Sericornis* or Scrub-Wren in which was imprisoned (if one may use such a term) a large young Fan-tailed Cuckoo. The *Sericornis*' nest was situated but a few inches above the water in the overhanging bank of a creek. Such a position must necessarily have been somewhat difficult of access to the parent Cuckoo. The opening of the nest was far too small for the Cuckoo to enter and lay its egg. The bird must therefore have used its beak to get the egg into the nest, an act which in this case must have been awkward for the Cuckoo, since the bird would have found it necessary, when placing her egg in the nest, to fly directly on to the nest, meanwhile supporting herself by an unsteady clutching of the nest with her feet. But does the female Cuckoo deposit the egg, or is it the male that deposits the egg with its beak? The *Sericornis*' nest in question was completely hidden from view, and the Cuckoo must have found out its whereabouts by observing the Scrub-Wrens coming and going as they proceeded with the architecture of their nest, just as we observed them before realising that a nest was there. The more notes that we can collate on these points, the sooner will we have some tangible evidence, some material basis, some established facts about the Cuckoo, and then we can relegate hypothesis to its proper sphere of usefulness.

Stray Feathers.

STRANGE NESTING PLACE.—I took a nest of the Black Duck, containing nine fresh eggs, last week out of an old nest of the Eaglehawk.—SEP. ROBINSON. Bathurst, 26/9/06.

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A WHITE EMU.—Mr. A. C. Le Souëf, of the Sydney Zoological Gardens, draws attention to a letter he has discovered, dated Warialda, N.S.W., 3rd December, 1887, in which a white Emu is offered for sale to the society. It was about 2½ months old and stood 3 feet high. No record is given of its purchase.

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BEE-EATERS IN SOUTHERN VICTORIA.—I have to report that three pairs of *Merops ornatus* appeared in this district during the first week in November. They have taken up their abode on a road cutting through a sandy rise, and their tunnel-