

A Visit to the Great Barrier Reef.

BY THOS. P. AUSTIN.

WHILE on a two-months' holiday to North-Eastern Queensland, through the kindness of Mr. E. M. Cornwall, of Mackay, I was given the opportunity of visiting many of the islands and banks off that part of the coast. At 9 a.m. on Saturday, 16th November, 1907, Mr. H. Gogay and myself went on board Mr. H. Neilson's beautiful little three-ton yacht *Lassie*, and, after spending two hours taking in a supply of stores, &c., also forty gallons of drinking water, we sailed down to the mouth of the Pioneer River, to there await the arrival of Mr. H. Neilson himself and Mr. J. W. Healey, two gentlemen who have had many years' experiences along the north-eastern coast, also the tide, to permit of our sailing over the sandbank across the entrance to the river.

At 4 p.m. we hoisted the sails, and, after a run of 17 miles with a fair wind, we reached the pretty little Victor Island just after dark. Having already partaken of tea, we at once launched the dingy (which we carried on board), and, with the assistance of a powerful acetylene lamp, visited the sandy banks which are a few hundred yards from the main island. We turned the light upon a large flock of Terns, but could not with certainty identify them. A little further on we heard the plaintive cry of the White-shafted Ternlets (*Sterna sinensis*), which gave us to believe they were breeding there. This proved to be the case, for we saw several nests with eggs. Next morning before breakfast we visited the main island, and here also saw nests of *Sterna sinensis* on the shelly beach. A little higher up, amongst the rocks, just in the scrub, we saw a few nests of the Reef-Heron (*Demigretta sacra*). Some of these nests appear to have been rebuilt year after year, a few of them standing from 3 to 4 feet high, others being only a few sticks on a bough of a low tree or between large rocks. By 8 a.m. we were all on board the *Lassie*, and in a quarter of an hour were on our way to Taffy Island, which we reached in a little less than two hours. Here we again saw Reef-Herons breeding, also Sooty Oyster-catchers (*Hæmatopus unicolor*) and White-rumped Wood-Swallows (*Artamus leucogaster*). Leaving Taffy about mid-day, we dropped anchor off Cape Palmerston Island at 2 p.m. Here only Mr. Neilson and myself went on shore, but before we landed we saw running along the beach some fine Pied Oyster-catchers (*Hæmatopus longirostris*), which from their behaviour gave us to believe they had young, also the Large-billed Stone-Plover (*Orthorhamphus magnirostris*). On this island we saw a rookery of Silver Gulls (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*). Most of the nests had two eggs, and breeding with them were a few Sooty Oyster-catchers. In the middle of this rookery was a

pandanus tree in which was a Crow's (*Corvus coronoides*) nest only about 10 feet from the ground, and while we were standing under the tree we could see the Crow on her nest. From here we had a little over two hours' run for Temple Island, which we reached just in time to give us an hour on land before dark. The only bird we saw breeding that evening was the Pied Oyster-catcher. Early next morning we again visited this island, and examined a tremendous nest of the White-bellied Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*). This nest was built in a white gum tree about 20 feet from the ground, and consisted of about a fair-sized dray load of sticks, and was quite flat on top, but broad enough for four or five men to sleep upon. I might here mention that we saw one nest of these birds upon nearly every island we visited, and on no occasion did we notice two of their nests on the same island, but on a few of the islands we saw the nests of the Osprey (*Pandion leucocephalus*). Just before leaving Temple Island Mr. Healey noticed the nests of three Large-billed Stone-Plovers (*Orthorhamphus magnirostris*) within a few yards of each other. At 10.5 a.m. we set sail for the Beverley Group, which consists of six fair-sized islands on an average about 350 feet high. To this group we had a glorious sail before a strong south-westerly. At 2.45 we lowered the sails, having covered the 35 miles in less than five hours. Here, much to our disappointment, we found bird-life very scarce indeed; the only birds we saw were Coucals (*Centropus phasianus*) and Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*). After an early breakfast next morning we departed for Reid Island, a small, rocky peak with a little low scrub growing on the top. Here we saw a great many egg-shells of the Panayan Terns (*Sterna anaetheta*), and beneath the rocks were many young birds. Leaving Reid Island at 1.15 p.m., we had a very trying time. There was very little wind, and what there was was dead against us. We beat against it for fourteen hours. At last, much to our relief, we reached Snare Peak at 3.15 a.m. Here we dropped anchor for a two-hours' sleep. At 6 a.m. we were all on deck, and at once decided not to land here, but to hoist the sails and make our way east for Redbill Island, on the Great Barrier Reef. At first there was very little wind, and after practically drifting for an hour, a breeze sprang up, which increased in force as the day wore on. At 1 p.m. on Tuesday, 19th November, we reached Redbill Island and the long-looked-for Barrier Reef. By this time the weather looked anything but pleasant, especially as we were in a small boat at the Barrier. On this island there was an immense rookery of Reef-Herons (*Demigretta sacra*) and Panayan Terns (*Sterna anaetheta*), all nesting together. About 5 p.m. a storm arose, so we went back on board the *Lassie* and eventually decided to remain where we were for the night, as we were very anxious to visit Sandpiper

Island, two miles to the north, and Tern Island, about the same distance to the south. Strictly speaking, these islands were the principal object of our trip, but unfortunately luck was against us. Just before daylight next morning a very heavy thunderstorm broke upon us, accompanied by a strong south-easterly wind, so there was nothing for it but to hoist the sails as soon as possible and away on a 15 miles' sail for shelter behind Scawfell Island. Here we saw no sea birds, but a great number of land-birds, and besides most of those already mentioned as having been seen on several of the other islands we noticed a great many Pied Crow-Shrikes (*Strepera graculina*), also a few Scrub-Fowls (*Megapodius duperreyi*). Scawfell was the first island upon which we found fresh water; here it was running down a small rocky creek. By 2 p.m. we were on our way to Silloth Rocks, arriving at 6 p.m. Went on shore for half an hour, but, finding it very uninteresting, decided to move on after tea to St. Bees Island. At 9 p.m. the moon rose, so, as there was a fair wind, we at once set the sails, and at 12.15 a.m. dropped anchor in Egremont Passage. On this island we saw a great many Crows, Pied Crow-Shrikes, and White Cockatoos (*Cacatua galerita*). After rambling over the greater part of this island for half the day, we departed for Green Island, where we anchored for the night. Next morning we lifted the anchor for the last time, and, turning towards home, reached the Pioneer River just in time to sail up against a very strong outflowing tide at 4 p.m. on Sunday, 24th November, having had a most enjoyable eight days' trip. From point to point on the chart the journey measured about 250 miles, and we had visited fifteen very interesting islands.

The Spangled Drongo-Shrike.

BY E. J. BANFIELD, DUNK ISLAND, N.Q.

IN many parts of the coastal tract of North Queensland the Drongo (*Chibia bracteata*)—a singularly important little bird—is fairly plentiful. He is black, but not so solemnly black that a shade of purple is absent from his shoulders. He has a decidedly crowish head and bill, brownish-red eyes, and a long, forked, fish-like tail, which he has the habit of twitching or flicking to emphasise the meek clinking tones of his staid and sober moments. Though a bird of the forest, the Drongo chooses those resorts which are adjacent to the jungle, and in my experience invariably selects the Moreton Bay ash for nesting. Among the thin grey-green leaves, far towards the end of a branch, the nest, though conspicuous, is fairly safe. But if the nest were not easily seen, the Drongo is not of the disposition to allow anyone to pass without noticing his demure