

of four young Swallows sitting very close together near by. They placidly awaited the visits of their busy parents, and each took its just turn of a meal, without protest or fuss from the others. They never tried to rob their little brothers.

## Notes on Birds of Prey from Casterton, Victoria.

BY C. E. SIMSON, R.A.O.U., CASTERTON, VICTORIA.

**ALLIED Swamp-Hawk (*Circus gouldi*).**—Swamp-Hawks are fairly plentiful all over the district, preferring the growing crops along the river and the rushes of swamps in the scrub. They do a good deal of hunting for small birds, but do not seem to have enough courage to attack the larger ones; they also feed on young rabbits. They are very harmless, and, apart from killing a few small birds, do no harm. We generally find their nests at harvest time when cutting the crop.

**Grey Goshawk (*Astur cinereus*).**—I have seen odd birds about which, I feel sure, belong to this species. Their habits seem to be the same as the Australian Goshawk.

**White Goshawk (*Astur novæ-hollandiæ*).**—I have seen only one specimen of this beautiful Hawk in these parts, but it is said to be more plentiful in the forest country towards the mouth of the Glenelg River.

**Australian Goshawk (*Astur approximans*).**—This Hawk is very plentiful all over the district, but seems to prefer the more lightly timbered country to the stringybark scrub. They are very fearless about a homestead, and take an odd chicken or two, but do more good than harm by keeping Sparrows and Parrots away. One used to perch on the roof of our hay-shed, and any Sparrows or Parrots that happened to be under the roof when he arrived had to run the gauntlet to some pine-trees a hundred yards away, when the odds were on the Hawk. I was not at all pleased when somebody shot the unfortunate Hawk and incidentally put a charge of shot through the iron roof. These birds will often return to their old nests. One that was used in 1914 was again used last year. I have no record of it during the years 1915 to 1918.

**Collared Sparrow-Hawk (*Accipiter torquatus*).** This is a rare bird here, and is only occasionally seen. I knew of two eggs that were taken from a nest last year, and a fortnight later a full set of four eggs was taken from the same nest.

**Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaëtus audax*).**—These magnificent birds are always to be found about the district, and they nest in the big red gums along the river and the steep gullies leading into it. Most of the nests are in commanding positions on the side of a steep hill or gorge, and, although the nest may be not more than 60 or 80 feet from the butt of the tree, you appear to look straight down from the nest to the bottom of the gully: perhaps

200 or 300 feet below. In ten years' experience with lambing ewes I have never actually seen an Eagle killing a lamb. One of the boundary riders once told me that he had seen five birds hunting a mob of ewes and lambs, and they had killed three or four lambs before he could get to them and hunt them away. This year, when the ewes were low in condition, a pair killed several and maimed others so badly that they had to be destroyed. When a ewe got down lambing they would start at the tail and eat down the back of the legs as far as the hocks. I think the Eagles are like foxes—only certain ones take to killing, and when they do they kill regularly. Nearly every year they kill a few weaners in the autumn and early winter. Now for the credit side of the ledger. When once the young rabbits come about I have never known the Eagles to be any trouble, even though they may be nesting in a lambing paddock. In one nest that we examined last year there was an Eaglet about three weeks old sitting amongst a mass of dead rabbits. We estimated there must have been the remains of over thirty. When all is considered, the good they do more than balances the harm, and if odd birds do get troublesome it is better to destroy the guilty one and leave the innocent to carry on their good work.

Whistling-Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*).—Whistling-Eagles, I consider, are amongst the most useful birds we have. I have never known them kill their food, as they live entirely on carrion, and do not appear to mind in what state of decay their food is. They followed the men who were digging out rabbits this year, and between them and the Ravens there would, next morning, be very little left of the day's catch of fifty or sixty rabbits. Last summer I saw a Whistling-Eagle standing up to his knees in water at the edge of the river feeding on a dead fish. It is easily seen that these birds are harmless by the indifference shown towards them by wild birds and fowls. They never appear to notice their presence, whereas if a Falcon or Goshawk is on the wing the bush is full of the alarm calls of Honey-eaters and other birds. If the full value of these birds as scavengers was realized by Australians they would be encouraged and protected, as the Kites are in Egypt. They nest freely along the river and in the red gum country, generally choosing the topmost branches of tall trees near water; the last nest we examined was 80 feet up in a red gum. They love to use the same nest year after year, unless molested, and, although they sometimes build a new nest near the old, they generally end up by being faithful to their old home. One nest I know of has been in use off and on for twenty years.

Black-cheeked Falcon (*Falco melanogenys*).—This dashing bird is the terror of the birds of the bush, and its speed and daring are amazing. When out riding one day I heard a frightened screech from a White Cockatoo, and, looking up, was just in time to see a puff of feathers fly from the Cockatoo as a grey flash shot past it. When I picked the unfortunate bird up it was stone dead,

with a hole as large as a two-shilling piece under its wing. The Falcon merely wheeled round and sat in a tree near by waiting till I left, so that he could commence his meal. I have also known them kill Starlings, Parrots, Finches, Black Duck, and White-fronted Herons. To see a Falcon attacking another bird reminds me of nothing more than a black-nosed German aeroplane attacking one of our observing machines. Falcons nest freely in the district in the hollow spouts of old red gum trees, and are very fierce when they have a nest about.

Brown Hawk (*Hieracidea berigora*).—These are very harmless birds, and like to get their living as easily as possible; consequently, a good many are poisoned from eating rabbits that have been poisoned with strychnine and apple. All the nests I have found have been in red gum trees, and they are very fond of making their nest in a mistletoe.

Nankeen Kestrel (*Cerchneis cenchroides*).—Common all through the district, and nothing but good can be said of them. A favourite spot for them is the ridge of a haystack, where they can swoop down on any mice that may appear. I saw a Kestrel fly from a hole about 25 feet up in a gum-tree last year, and on climbing up was surprised to find three eggs of the Harmonious Shrike-Thrush in their well-built nest instead of (as I had expected to see) the rusty-brown eggs of the Kestrel.

### Return of Migrants and Visitors.

BY H. STUART DOVE, WEST DEVONPORT (TAS.)

IN their very interesting paper on "The Birds of Sydney" in current (October) *Emu*, Messrs. Le Souëf and Macpherson remark having noted a Rufous-fronted Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*) in the same spot, at the same time of year, for three years in succession. The same experience has occurred to me with more than one species. A Tree Pardalote (*P. affinis*) returns to the same gum-tree in my enclosure at the beginning of September each year, and utters for several days its sprightly "Pick-it-up" call. About three weeks later its congener, the Spotted Pardalote (*P. punctatus*), utters its double note, "Wit-loo" (second syllable lower and softer than first), from the same tree. Each spring a Bronze-Cuckoo (either *plagosus* or *basalis*) comes to sit on the same electric light wire not far from the beach and Bluff, and calls with great persistence from that perch. There is a peculiarity in the notes by which it may be recognized as the same individual. A still more remarkable instance is quoted in the latest *Bird-Lore* (Audubon Society, U.S.A., vol. xxii., 4), where it is recorded by an Illinois observer that on 25th May, 1919, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak flew in through the open door of a glass-enclosed porch, where he beat vainly against the panes until exhausted; was picked up and resuscitated, but before