



Dusky Wood-Swallow removing egg-shell from the nest after emergence of the young.

Photo. by R. T. Littlejohns, R.A.O.U.

Camera Craft

The Dusky Wood-Swallow—From Egg to Bird.—On the 29th November I spent half a day at the nest of a Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*) at Ringwood. Two days earlier Mr. L. G. Chandler had located the nest, which then contained three eggs. When I arrived at the spot at mid-day on the 29th, the nest contained one young bird and still three eggs. One additional egg, larger and lighter in colour than the others, had been laid in the meantime.

At the first visit I found the female bird much more trustful than is usual with Wood-Swallows. She showed little hesitation in visiting her nest while the camera was 20 inches away. Probably this was due to the advanced state of incubation of the eggs. On the second occasion the female bird showed still greater anxiety, and I allowed her to sit undisturbed while I waited for the male to bring food to her on the nest. This little service he had performed two or three times previously, and I particularly desired to make a record of it.

But when he came near she took it as a signal to have a spell, and allowed him to feed the young bird. I watched the eggs closely during the next quarter of an hour, and moved a few feet away when the female came back. Up till that time there was no sign of chipping, but the female stood on the edge of the nest and pecked carefully at one of the original eggs. Very soon the shell was in two pieces, and between these sections I could see a second young bird struggling. Then the mother carefully pushed one portion of the egg clear of the new arrival, took the shell in her beak and flew away with it, dropping it fifty yards away. I was so interested in the incident that I quite forgot to expose a plate. The head and shoulders of the young bird were still in the remaining part of the shell (the wide end), which adhered to its shoulders. On her return the adult bird made no attempt to remove this portion of egg-shell, but settled very carefully on the nest again.

After a quarter of an hour I roused her and found that the young bird was then free, though head and shoulders were still in the egg. On her return the female again pushed the shell aside, and took it in her beak. But this time I was ready, and before she carried it away I exposed a plate. Unfortunately the plate had been in the camera for nearly an hour, and was badly light struck. The wind had also moved the camera slightly, and had interfered with the focussing.

The young bird was hatched at about 1.30 p.m., and, up till 4.30 p.m. had not been fed. The other young bird, which I judged to have hatched the day before, was fed six times during the same period.—R. T. LITTLEJOHNS, R.A.O.U., Melbourne.

Home Life of the Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*).—On December 10th, 1921, in the bush on the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges, I saw an old nest of the Ring-tailed Possum. On kicking the tree, a Bronzewing looked over the side. A short climb revealed the Pigeon's nest—the usual frail structure—placed in a depression on the old debris about twenty feet up. The two white eggs were in an advanced stage of incubation.

On December 19th two helpless nestlings covered with down were in occupation. I spent much time in preparing for photographing the nest, a ladder being necessary to elevate the camera. As no long ladder was available, two short ones were joined, but proved clumsy and unsafe. During these preparations the bird sat tight, but when the ladder was raised, she left hurriedly.

Next day arrangements were completed, and a leafy bough was fastened to the ladder. In the afternoon I found all was well and the camera was lashed to the top of the ladder. While clearing branches away, the lens was removed. After covering the camera with the focussing cloth and camouflaging it with branches, I went away so as to allow the bird to become accustomed to this formidable object near its nest.

On December 21st I was pleased to see the bird on the nest apparently unconcerned about the camera. The replacing of the lens, however, scared the bird, and I left the locality to allow her to quieten down. When I returned, the bird was still absent, and I climbed to the camera and had an uncomfortable wait of fully two hours, but she did not return. I exposed a plate on the nest and young, fearing the bird had deserted them.

Late in the afternoon, as the young were showing the effects of exposure, I removed the camera.

On December 23rd, the bird was on the nest, and faced the camera. A distance release for the shutter was fixed up, and the camera was left all night. About 9 o'clock it was very dark, and threatening rain, so I went to cover the camera with my oilskin coat. Though I was very careful, the bird flashed off the nest and away. However, next morning she was again on the nest.

Early on the morning of the 25th I removed the cap of the lens. When I returned later, the bird was absent; evidently it had not returned to the nest after my early visit. After several hours, I re-covered the lens and the bird returned. In the evening I uncovered the lens and left it uncovered all night, though I was afraid moisture might settle on the lens and spoil the picture.

On December 26th, I was delighted to see the sitting bird before the lens at last. In the evening I polished the lens, the bird leaving the nest while I climbed the ladder. Usually she would allow me to climb only a short distance up the ladder before leaving the nest. Generally she sat in about the same position, almost side on to the camera. The beautiful greenish-bronze sheen on her wings shone in wonderful contrast with



Bronzewing on Nest built on top of an old nest of the Babbler.

Photo. by D. F. F. Thomson, R.A.O.U.

the sombre surroundings. She would look at the observer with head up, in the alert, enquiring attitude depicted in the photograph, apparently ready to leave the nest on the slightest alarm. When leaving, she would rise, as a rule, with a great clatter of wings and vanish in the bush. At other times she fluttered to the ground and vibrated her wings rapidly, either in simulation of injury, or, possibly, to remove the cramped feeling due to long sitting on the nest. After a short time, she flew away. On one occasion, I flushed two pairs of Bronzewings close at hand and went to the nest expecting to find the bird absent, but she was still brooding. When not molested, I believe that the Bronzewing sits very closely, probably feeding the young—by regurgitation—at long intervals only.

It appears that the birds do not search for seeds at random, but have regular feeding haunts, usually where seeds to which they are partial are abundant. To these feeding grounds they evidently return again and again. At all events, the birds are flushed repeatedly from the same spots. Apparently they are very fond of the seeds of Acacias and the introduced gorse.

On December 27th everything was in readiness, but the weather was very cloudy, and the light poor. However, a prospect of a break in the fleeting clouds with the chance of a short burst of sunlight offered. After a fair wait, I was able to expose one plate on the sitting bird. She did not leave the nest as the shutter went up, but stretched her neck enquiringly.

Apparently the climax was reached when I went aloft to change the slides, for the bird left, and, I believe, never returned. I was exceedingly sorry to think that the photograph cost the lives of the helpless nestlings. However, Mr. A. J. Campbell inclines to the belief that the bird was probably shot, as she would not willingly desert her young.

Fortunately, the single exposure was successful. After my experience at this nest, I certainly do not expect to have another such opportunity with the Bronzewing at home.—S. F. F. THOMSON, R.A.O.U., Canterbury, Vic.
