

A Bell-Miner Colony

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Two lengthy visits were made to a large colony of Bell-Miners (*Manorhina melanophrys*) that dwelt in a coastal gully at Avoca—a seaside resort just north of Broken Bay.

The famous bell notes were heard chiming in the distance, and rang more and more clearly as we drew near, until the sweet musical rings "Tank - - - tink - - - tink - - -" at short and irregular intervals were echoing ceaselessly about us from the tall eucalyptus trees round the gully. Sometimes a bird would "tink" near the ground and close at hand, but this one, rather annoyingly, always seemed to be a ventriloquist, and could not be easily located with the eye. Each bird (tossing the bill upwards and opening wide the mandibles) gives its own separate "tink," or is it "tank"? It gives only the one note at a time. Whether at rest for a little while on a bough or on the move among leaves, or even busy preening its feathers, whatever the bird may be doing, it seems never to forget to contribute its own individual note to the general chorus. So all day long these "silver-voiced bellbirds" keep on their tinkling; just from pure "joie de vivre" apparently, but providing at the same time some of the sweetest bird music to be heard by human ears.

When the birds come into sight, the bright yellow colour of the legs and of the bill—hefty legs and a stout bill—is the first thing noticed, and then the green colour of the plumage. At close enough range this is seen to be of a bright shade on the upper parts, a dull brown green on the wings, and a lighter tint of green on the lower parts. Noticeable, too, is a small patch of red behind the eye. Points of similarity to their relatives, the Noisy Miners (*Myzantha garrula*) are soon recognised. The yellow bill of the Bell-Miner, the conspicuous yellow patch of bare skin about the eyes, and the small black marking on the forehead, combine to give it a facial appearance that is suggestive of its larger and more noisy relative.

Some habits and notes, too, are alike. Fluttering about in the branches or hanging by their strong feet amongst thick leafage, as they play or squabble, a few together after the manner of Noisy Miners, the Bellbirds will reproduce (perhaps not so loudly) the noisy birds' well-known unmelodious squawking notes. And both species have the same curious habit of moving along a horizontal bough towards another bird of the same species with head lowered and bill pointed at the other bird.

No other birds of any kind were seen in the trees, but in the undergrowth and about the ground there were Whip-birds (*Psophodes olivaceus*), White-browed Scrub-Wrens (*Sericornis frontalis*), and beautiful Yellow-throated Scrub-Wrens (*S. lathamii*).