

## Stray Feathers

**Wedge-tailed Eagles Destroying Lambs.**—I recently paid a visit to the Lake Frome District in the far north of South Australia. During my trip I had conversations with many stock breeders and many assured me that they had suffered loss from Eagle Hawks.

When up at Moolamatana in March last, a few Eagles were seen, but I am informed that during April and May they came along in mobs. As far south as Hawker many more Eagles than usual were present.

In the Lake Frome District as many as 300 Eagles have been destroyed, and I saw so many alive that I gave orders that more attention to poisoning should be given.

On two occasions I saw Eagles attacking strong lambs that but for my arrival would have been killed by the Eagles. Let me instance; When riding through a stock paddock containing ewes and lambs, I observed five Eagles diving down on to a lamb that they were driving from its mother. The Eagles took it in turn to dive and strike with the claws at the lamb. I rode up and found the lamb so torn about the shoulders, neck and back that I decided to destroy it and poison the carcass. Result, eleven dead Eagles close to where the poisoned carcass was left, but only the shank bones of the legs and skin, turned inside out, remained.

A week later I saw four or five Eagles (I am not quite sure of the number) attacking a lamb that was staggering along. Before I got up to it the lamb was struck to earth, where I found it, greatly torn from head to tail, with great gashes on flank and shoulder and in such a state that its end was near. I also poisoned this lamb and an hour later got four dead Eagles. In both cases the lambs were strong and from appearance about a month old.

As mentioned above, I do not know where so many Eagles came from, but I do know where they are going. From past experience I know it is impossible to keep Eagles and lambs.

Rabbits are fairly scarce with us, previous droughts and constant destruction by poison having almost cleared them out.

I asked some of the breeders of lambs to write to the press about the Eagle Hawk pest, but the reply was, "We don't want to let those bird cranks know about our slaughter or they will protect them; they don't know what we have to put up with," or words to that effect. As one of the "bird cranks," I think it necessary that I write this experience. Perhaps other members can give their experience, as Eagles, though destructive in one part of Australia, may not be a pest in other parts. Opinions of members who live where these birds are plentiful would be valuable.—J. NEIL MCGILP, King's Park, S.A.

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**Wilson Storm-Petrels (*Oceanites oceanicus*) on the Queens-land Coast.**—On May 17, 1925, a small party of Petrels was observed by me flying to and fro across the wake of the steamer on which I

was travelling from Brisbane to Port Alma throughout the afternoon. We were at the time within sight of the Bunker Islands, the most southerly islets of the Capricorn Group. The birds were undoubtedly *Oceanites oceanicus*, easily recognised by their dark plumage, only the upper and under tail-coverts being white. None of them showed the white band on the wings, formed by the white tips of the greater coverts, which is a conspicuous feature in freshly moulted birds. Though the Wilson Storm-Petrel is said to be common in Tasmanian Seas, there are few records of its occurrence in Australian waters, and as far as I can ascertain there is only one previous record from Queensland, though I have already expressed the opinion (*Emu*, XXI., p. 262) that the Storm-Petrels seen by Mr. McLennan near Cape York in July, 1921, were probably of this species, as he himself supposed. The previous record to which I refer is a specimen in the Macleay Museum collected 25 miles off Port Bowen on 27th May, 1875, almost exactly 50 years earlier than the day on which I observed them.—W. B. ALEXANDER.

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**The Spotted Nightjar in coastal New South Wales.**—One of the rarest birds which the writer, during a long experience, has met with on the far South Coast of New South Wales is the Spotted Nightjar (*Eurostopodus guttatus*), which occurred but once, and then the discovery was due to a marauding cat, which proudly brought in one of these beautiful birds.

The White-throated Nightjar (*Eurostopodus mystacalis*) although not a common bird, can usually be flushed on the saddles of the barren desolate coastal ranges, in the vicinity of which the rarer variety also occurred.

I have several times found the single handsome egg of this Nightjar, boldly marked with black or very dark brown on a ground of cream colour, lying on the bare ground with even less pretence at a nest than the very slight hollow employed by the Southern Stone-Plover—in fact, the spot where the egg lies is merely cleared of debris. It was interesting to watch the bird squatting, still as death and with closed eyes, on its treasure. Although on the whole very silent birds, one White-throated Nightjar, which I flushed from its egg, perched on a fallen tree near by and for several minutes uttered its melancholy and sepulchral call; most, however, when thus disturbed, flitted silently away.

These useful insectivorous and quite harmless birds are often styled "Night Hawks," and wrongfully accused of preying on smaller members of their race. Another and more appropriate bush name is "Ghost Bird," for a Nightjar, when flushed by day, does rise spirit-like at one's very feet.—H. V. EDWARDS, R.A.O.U., Bega, N. S. Wales.

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**Results of the R.A.O.U. Excursion to Yeppoon and Byfield.** As was recorded in *The Emu*, Vol. XXIV., p. 221, several leading entomologists took part in this excursion, and in an article entitled

"The Lepidoptera of Yeppoon," published in the *Australian Zoologist*, Vol. IV., pp. 17-23, Dr. A. Jefferis Turner gives a list of the butterflies and moths collected on that occasion. It is gratifying to know that as many as 407 species were met with and that the indefatigable labours of the entomological members of the party have resulted in a list which its author states "is of some scientific value."

The objects of the entomologists as set out by Dr. Turner were so similar to those of the ornithologists who arranged the expedition that it will be worth quoting these before giving Dr. Turner's conclusions and comparing them with those of the ornithologists already recorded in these pages in articles by Messrs. Chisholm and Wolstenholme. Dr. Turner says: "In Queensland the lepidopterous fauna of the coastal strip from the Tweed River to Gympie is fairly well-known . . . we may term this the Brisbane fauna. Next to this we know most of the fauna of the coastal district around Cairns . . . In the central district we know many species from Duaringa, from the work of the late Mr. George Barnard and his sons, but have with hardly an exception no records from the coastal district." [If we substitute "avifauna" for "lepidopterous fauna" in these sentences it will be almost equally true.] "We wished to know whether the coastal district of Central Queensland had any peculiar endemic fauna. So far as the species attached to the forest areas are concerned, this was scarcely possible, for the forest presents an unbroken area throughout the Queensland coast. The case is different with the species attached to the jungle. It is a perfectly accurate statement, that the Queensland coastal district consists of a sea of Australian forest dotted with islands of Indo-Malayan jungle, and whether the jungle presented a gradual transition in its fauna from south to north was an open question. We also wished to establish the relationships of what we may call the Yeppoon fauna to the Brisbane and Cairns faunas.

"To the first question we can give an unequivocal answer . . . The Yeppoon fauna is not peculiar, but consists of a mixture of the Brisbane and Cairns faunas. The presence of the latter was very evident; a large number of species . . . find in Yeppoon their most southerly record. Many of these species were both conspicuous and abundant. Yeppoon is probably the limit of the range of many of them, though we must acknowledge that stragglers at any rate may yet be found further south. . . . Many species also find in Yeppoon their most northern record, but in this instance it is much less probable that it is their real northern limit."

In Dr. Turner's list 41 species, or almost exactly 10 per cent., are marked as reaching their southern limit at Yeppoon.

Omitting sea-birds, water-fowl and migratory waders, about 110 species of land birds were seen in the Yeppoon-Byfield district, and of these 7 do not occur as far south as the Brisbane district. The proportion of northern forms among the lepidoptera and the land birds is therefore somewhat similar.

On the other hand, all the land birds met with in the district are known to occur further north, so that, if Dr. Turner is correct in

thinking that further collecting will show that the lepidoptera of southern types not yet known from further north, do actually extend there, then the two groups agree in this respect also. — W. B. ALEXANDER.

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**Black-breasted Quail (*Turnix melanogaster*) in the Burnett district, Queensland.**—Looking through Messrs. Barnard Bros.' interesting and valuable paper on the "Birds of Coomoooolaroo," published in the April *Emu*, I notice that the Black-breasted Quail (*Turnix melanogaster*) is stated to have disappeared from that locality at least 25 years ago. From other sources, also, I learn that this member of the Quail tribe is considered to have virtually "passed out." It seems worth while, therefore, to record the fact that I saw a bevy on July 10th, 1924. Walking at the edge of a patch of softwood and bottle-tree scrub I heard a call very like that of the Painted Quail, but not so loud; Oo-oom, oo-oom, oo-oom. Walking quietly, I soon came on three or four Black-breasted Quail feeding on the ground in the scrub. I could not see them all at once, as the undergrowth was thick, but, as one or other of them moved across the open spaces, I saw them plainly at a distance of not many yards. With my field-glasses I made out their markings very easily. All seemed to be of the same size, and all had the white-spotted black breast, the black crown, and white eye. The last mentioned feature I have not seen in any of the bird-book descriptions, but noted it particularly in the birds I saw. In addition to the call I have described, they often uttered a little clucking noise like poultry. They fed quietly in one spot, while I watched them, for fifteen minutes or more, but were eventually disturbed by the approach of another person. I have visited the spot many times since but have not repeated my luck of that day. I have hoped to find a nest, but if that hope is unrealized I have at least proved the existence of *Turnix melanogaster* here.—C. H. H. JERRARD, Blackdown, Gayndah, Q'land.

[Mr. Jerrard is to be congratulated on his discovery of a second Queensland bird which it was feared had become extinct. Readers of the *Emu* will recall that it was he who rediscovered the Paradise Parrot (*Emu* XXII., p. 9). We hope he will ultimately be fortunate enough to secure photographs of the Black-breasted Quail as good as those he obtained of the Paradise Parrot. It is a curious fact that these two birds should be surviving in the very district in which that remarkable survivor from ancient times, the Lung-fish (*Ceratodus*), still exists.—EDITOR.]

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**Birds and Motor Cars.**—Last month, while travelling home from Gosford (Northern Line, N.S.W.) to Somersby, an orcharding district a few miles out of the township, a Boobook Owl was seen perched on a fence post a little way ahead of the car. As the car drew level with the post, the Owl attempted to fly across the road

but was evidently dazzled by the head lights, and struck the radiator. As we were doing about 25 miles an hour, it was some distance before the car was pulled up. Just as we were on the point of getting out to go back and pick up the dead bird, there was a flutter in front of the car, and we looked up in time to see the Boobook flying off into the bush.

The bird had evidently clutched the radiator and its claws getting caught in the holes, it was unable to free itself until the speed was slackened. It did not seem to be affected much by its adventure, as it flew away quite strongly.

A friend of mine, driving an Oldsmobile car, had just taken some people out to their home at Erina, a few miles east of Gosford, and was coming down a very steep hill, keeping the engine in second gear owing to the steep incline. He was about half way down when suddenly a Hawk (what species of course is not known) chasing a small bird swooped through the car striking the driver in the face with its wings. The sudden blow made him put both his hands to his face, and at the same time his foot pressed the accelerator down hard. The car crashed off the road, fell over an embankment and rolled over and over, hitting large rocks and trees as it went until finally it came to rest against a large blackbutt one hundred and ninety feet down the gully. The driver escaped severe injury and only suffered from a few bruises and shock. How he got out he can not explain, but was thrown clear, evidently before the car had gone more than 50 feet. The car, of course, was damaged considerably, the wheels being broken and the body work smashed, but the engine itself was not much damaged. I have heard of birds entering a house when chased by Hawks, but this is the first case of its kind that I ever heard of. Has any member ever known a similar occurrence?—A. F. D'OMBRAIN, Somersby, via Gosford.

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**Noddy Terns (*Anous stolidus*) resting on the water.**—While cruising early in June, 1925, in the Pumice Stone Passage, Moreton Bay (the sheet of water that lies between Bribie Island and the mainland) I noticed three unusual birds resting on the water directly ahead. They were wonderfully buoyant and graceful, and allowed us to motor within a yard or two of them before they rose—then circled around us, and again rested on the water directly in the boat's course. I gave the tiller to my daughter, and went forward to observe more closely. The birds were *Anous stolidus*, but their heads were more grey than the "mouldy white," described in Campbell's *Nests and Eggs*. The bodies were rich chocolate brown, merging into grey at the throat, still lighter grey on the head. The boat was steered straight at the birds, and we were within a foot of them when they again rose. I could quite easily have touched them by leaning over the bows. Though they watched us closely as we approached, the noise of our engine did not worry them. I wondered if the birds were deaf;

they seemed so insensible to the noise we made. For the third time, they dropped to the water, and stayed on it—more graceful than any bird I have ever seen—until we lost them in the distance. They were not fishing—just resting on the water.—MRS. L. M. MAYO, R.A.O.U., Brisbane.

[In his important paper on "The Behaviour of Noddy and Sooty Terns," 1908, Prof. J. B. Watson stated that these "birds never swim nor dive . . . During my three month's stay (on the Tortugas Islands) I never saw one of these birds in the water, except by accident, and then the bird, if the tide is against it, can never reach the shore, so poorly does it swim." Audubon, however, in his *Birds of America*, 1840, wrote of the Noddy: "It swims with considerable buoyancy and grace, and at times immerses its head to seize on a fish." Mrs. Mayo's interesting observation is in agreement with this latter statement and shows how dangerous it is to deny the capacity of a bird to perform any action.—EDITOR.]

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**White-backed Swallows** (*Cheramoecca leucosternum*) near **Brisbane**.—"It is remarkable that in Eastern Australia this bird is strictly an inland species, while in South and Western Australia it also occurs on the coast." In this sentence North summed up our knowledge of the distribution of the rarest of the four Australian Swallows. Reference to all other published information on the subject is in complete accord with North's summary. There is no record of the occurrence of the White-backed Swallow anywhere east of the main divide in Queensland, New South Wales or Victoria. It was therefore with extreme surprise that I saw one of these birds flying about over the Brisbane river on Sept. 29, 1923. I was standing at the time on the edge of a sandy cliff at Fig-tree Pocket, 15 miles above the city following the windings of the river. This cliff is greatly favoured by Bee-eaters or Rainbow-birds (*Merops ornatus*) which nest here in large numbers, excavating burrows in the face of the cliff. Knowing that the White-backed Swallow also nests in burrows and is fond of excavating them in just such situations, I watched this individual with great interest hoping that it would presently fly into a hole in the cliff below me. Though it often came close to the cliff, giving me excellent views of its strikingly contrasted black and white plumage as it flew past a few feet below, it showed no special interest in any particular portion of the cliff and I was forced to conclude that it was a solitary individual. During the next few weeks I visited the spot on several occasions but did not see the unusual visitor again.

However, two months later, on Dec. 1, 1923, I saw another solitary individual flying over a grassy paddock on the river bank at Sherwood, about a mile lower down the river and on the opposite bank. Again a month later yet another solitary bird of this species was seen by me towards evening flying rather high above the tree tops at Sherwood. This was on Jan. 2, 1924, and from that date until June 28, 1925, I did

not see another specimen. On the latter date two White-backed Swallows were flying about together along the face of the same cliff at Fig-tree Pocket where I first saw a bird of the species 21 months before.

On July 19, 1925, I visited the same spot with Mr. J. Mann, R.A.O.U., and found five birds of this species flying about the cliff. They frequently uttered a rather harsh twittering call. Occasionally one flew to the face of the cliff and clung just beneath a hole there for a moment, and on one occasion one actually entered the hole but very soon emerged again. On inspection the hole was found to go in at least a foot; the entrance was fairly large but it soon dwindled, and it was impossible to see the end. The mouth showed traces of recent scratching.

A week later I visited the spot with Mrs. Mayo, R.A.O.U., and though the birds were not at first in evidence we later saw five or six flying about. Mrs. Mayo informed me that she had previously seen White-backed Swallows about the banks of the Brisbane River on several occasions, but her reports of their occurrence had been received with incredulity by local naturalists.

I mentioned to Mr. Edgar Young that I thought these birds were breeding at the sandpit, and on August 3 he visited the spot in the hope of securing photographs. Though he waited about 1½ hours with his camera by the hole the birds did not enter it, and he concluded that they were a pair with three young and that nesting operations were over. It is noteworthy that on June 28 I only saw two birds, whilst from July 19 to Aug. 3 five were constantly present, which strongly supports Mr. Young's view. We may reasonably conclude that the species actually nests in the banks of the Brisbane River and is not only a visitor.

On Aug. 5 I saw a single White-backed Swallow between Gatton and Lowood, near the Lockyer Creek, a tributary of the Brisbane, whilst on Aug. 10, again in company with Mrs. Mayo, I watched three flying about a steep sand-cliff at the narrows of the Brisbane River, about two miles above Riverview, twenty miles above Sherwood.

The occurrence of the White-backed Swallow as a rare species, probably breeding, in the Brisbane district is thus well established.

The late A. J. North remarks in connection with the distribution of several birds that whilst in New South Wales they are only found in the western districts, in southern Queensland their range extends to the coastal districts. The White-backed Swallow may be added to the species cited by him. Another inland species which is fairly common near Brisbane is the Red-backed Kingfisher, *Halcyon pyrrhopygius*, which breeds regularly about Sherwood. I have several times also seen Quarriors, *Leptolophus hollandicus*, in the Lockyer district, which is not far inland. The intrusion of such characteristic inland forms into districts where typical jungle species occur in the scrubs is of considerable interest. It is doubtless due to the lack of any high dividing range in this portion of eastern Australia.—W. B. ALEXANDER, Sherwood, Brisbane.