

Birds Observed in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens.

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A VISIT to the Botanical Gardens was arranged for Wednesday morning 30th Sept., but unfortunately business duties prevented a very large attendance. During the morning the following birds were observed:—

Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*). Many seen wheeling gracefully over the Yarra River or resting peacefully on small motor boats.

Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*). As we were nearing the concrete wall one of these birds alighted near the edge. Mr. Cohn and myself approached it carefully and were able to obtain a clear view of the crest which was very prominent. Not until we were within ten feet of the bird did it take flight.

Black Moor-hen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*) and **Coot** (*Fulica atra*). Both species were very common in the lakes in the gardens, where they breed annually. Our attention was drawn to five young Moor-hens being cared for by a Coot. Mr. Ross assured us that they were the young of *G. tenebrosa*, which had probably strayed from their parents. Two days later I paid a visit to the gardens and watched the birds for a considerable time. Although there were a number of Moor-hens near, the five young birds (with bright red frontal plates) were still following the Coot. From time to time she would disappear and bring to the surface some weeds which were given to the young. Whether she adopted them after hatching or claimed some poor Moor-hen's nest I am unable to say. Although there were other families of Moor-hens on the lake I could not find another instance of this.

Bald Coot (*Porphyrio melanotus*). Only one was seen. They appear to be very scarce in the gardens and seldom stay long.

Hoary-headed Grebe (*Podiceps poliocephalus*). Three were feeding on the northern side of the lake; no nest could be found although they breed there every year.

Black Swan (*Chenopsis atrata*). A pair of birds nested as usual on Swan Island and succeeded in hatching their five young. One of the mature birds was on the northern side with three young, while the other was on the southern side with the remaining two; the young looked about three weeks old.

Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*). These were by far the commonest ducks present. Several young broods were noted near the edge of the lake in company with the older birds, but for the most part they appeared quite capable of looking after themselves.

White-eyed Duck (*Nyroca australis*) and **Blue-billed Duck** (*Oxyura australis*). Six of the former species and two of the latter were in company with the Black Ducks. The Blue-billed do not very often stay long but the White-eyed remain throughout the whole

year, though, strange to say, I have never known them to breed on the lake, except one occasion in 1922.

Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*). One lonely specimen contented himself in the centre of the lake. Occasionally three or four may be seen but they never seem to make themselves at home as the other ducks do. They never come close enough to be fed with biscuits or bread-crumbs.

Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). These large birds were patiently sitting on some rocks just above water level. They remain nearly all the year, but in spite of this the lake is still infested with eels.

Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*). Eight Cormorants with white breasts were sitting in an old tree, but, as no one had field glasses we were unable to tell whether they were *P. varius* or *P. fuscescens*. Two days later, while watching the Water-hens I had a look at the Cormorants through glasses and as there were no *P. fuscescens* present I concluded that the birds we saw previously were *P. varius*. I have seen *P. fuscescens* in the gardens on several occasions.

Nankeen Night-Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*). Many birds in various phases of plumage were dozing in the higher branches of pine trees. The majority of them, however, were immature, probably last season's birds.

Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*). Seen in an elm tree toward the latter part of the morning, he had something in his bill but we were unable to find out what it was. A male was heard laughing a little later.

Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*). Very plentiful; nearly all busily engaged in building nests under the bridges.

Black-and-White Fantail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*). Four of these homely birds were seen during the morning. They were so much taken up with their task of catching small flies that they paid little or no attention to their admirers.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*). For the first time this season our reed-loving friends were heard in Melbourne. Nearly every bird was adding his voice to the joyful chorus; as yet domestic duties have not appeared to trouble them.

Grass Warbler (*Cisticola exilis*). Only one solitary bird was heard among the reeds. Had it not been for his pleasant notes it is probable that he would not have been noticed at all.

White-browed Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis frontalis*). While trying to get a better view of some young Water-fowl, one of these birds was seen carrying some food in its bill. Although it was watched carefully it eluded us and, as usual, all efforts to locate the nest failed. Some time later another was seen feeding on the lawn and had no objection to being watched at close range by Mr. Campbell and Dr. Anderson.

Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*). Several families of these sprightly birds inhabited the fernery and hedges. Only one or two males were noticed although many more were close at hand.

Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*). Birds of both sexes were wading in the shallow water. One pair had a nest on a thin limb of a Willow tree overhanging the lake.

White-eye (*Zosterops dorsalis*). A flock of about 30 birds were feasting on insects in rose trees.

White-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*). These were the first birds seen on entering the gardens. Six of them were chasing each other about the lower branches of a leafless tree and gave a fine exhibition to our visitors who were specially interested in them because they are not known in Tasmania.

Red Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*). Only one bird was seen although the harsh notes of several others were heard in the distance.

Brush Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*). Mr. Campbell reported having seen one of these Wattle-birds in a flowering Japonica but unfortunately no other birds of this species were seen until the party had broken up when several members had the good fortune to see a pair of them.

Spotted Ground-birds (*Cinclosoma punctatum*). My hopes in regard to taming the pair of Spotted Ground-birds mentioned in the *Emu*, xxiv, p. 301, were doomed to disappointment. One bird disappeared. I wondered what had happened, but a few nights later my poultry yard had a visit from a Tiger Cat, so I concluded the same creature must have taken the Ground-bird. Afterwards I found the nesting-site on the hillside a short distance away. The nest was made of eucalypt leaves tucked neatly round a hollow beneath a small rock, over which a spray of *Pimelea* hung, forming a door curtain. The nest faced north-east.

The remaining bird procured another mate, but the pair went further up the hillside, and the young ones were not brought near until the autumn. The whole family spent much of the day in the heath and scrub adjacent, sometimes venturing into the garden enclosure and scouring the flower-beds for food. As a rule, when they did this, one of the older birds came first to scout. If all appeared quiet, he or she would utter the peculiar cry and presently the others would slip in, running quickly over the paths until hidden by the foliage of the plants. I have watched them from the window and occasionally from the verandah, but, at the first movement, they were gone.

Their note is a very hard one from which to locate the exact position of the maker. I have listened, and listened, and heard one bird answering the other, but could not say definitely: "No. 1 is just there; No. 2 is by that bush." Towards evening I hear the family talking together as they make their way up the hillside, evidently to their sleeping quarters. Lately the children have been cast off and the parents have returned to their selected area and I expect may have the nest ready.—(Miss) J. A. FLETCHER, R.A.O.U., "Lyeltya," Eaglehawk Neck, Tas.