

## Birds of the Bush

By H. STUART DOVE, R.A.O.U., Devonport, Tas.

During the summer just gone (1930-1931) a trip was made to Arthur River, Northern Tasmania, to see the prospectors at work, washing for gold. The journey entailed, after a long motor drive, a ride through several miles of splendid forest—giant "myrtles" (*Fagus cunninghami*), Sassafras, Musk, Dogwood, and Tree-ferns; the rainfall here is so heavy that running-fires are fortunately impossible. At one place several stems of the curious Horizontal Scrub (*Anodopetalum biglandulosum*) had fallen together across the bridle-track in an arched fashion, forming a leafy bower under which one could ride by bending slightly. The paucity of bird-life in this dense forest was very marked; the curious saw-like noise made by a party of Black Cockatoos (*Calyptrorhynchus funereus*) while tearing away at the bark of standing trees in their search for wood grubs underneath, came very distinctly to the ear, while every now and again the penetrating notes of the Green Rosella or Mountain Parrot (*Platycercus caledonicus*) disturbed the stillness.

When I reached the camp on the river bank, where a small clearing had been made, a family party of the natty little Pink Robins (*Petroica rodinogaster*) was in evidence; the parents and three young flitted about the huts in a confident manner, as if welcoming the presence of man. This species seems to differ from the Scarlet Robin (*Petroica multicolor*) in thus keeping the young with the parents after the former are fledged. A pair of "Scarlets" has frequented my garden ever since I came here, and go away, probably only a short distance, to nest; when they reappear in resplendent plumage, at the end of summer or beginning of autumn, they never bring any young with them, but return just as they went. In this they differ entirely from that other garden-dweller, the Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*), which retains its brood, or often two broods, with it through the entire autumn and winter until mating-time once more comes round.

Towards the end of April an excursion was made to Waratah, a small mining township, 2000 feet above sea-level, in the vicinity of the famous Mt. Bischoff. The morning after arrival, being clear and beautiful, with a very keen wind from eastward, I went out at daylight and climbed the mount to watch the sunrise. Most of the mount is covered with scrub, and this is much frequented by the Mountain Parrot, which is surprisingly tame, several of them approaching close to my head as I climbed. A couple of tiny brown birds popped from one patch of scrub to another, probably Thornbills, but they were too rapid for me to make certain. There were plenty of Ravens (*Corvus coronoides*) about the township, no doubt acting as scavengers

to the mining community. The day following I went through the gorge of the Whyte River, eleven miles beyond Waratah, and on reaching high and comparatively clear ground beyond, observed some Beautiful Firetails (*Zonæginthus bellus*), also a Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*) hovering over the hillside. While dipping again into the deep gully of Nineteen-mile Creek, where the osmiridium diggers are at work, the track took me past a steep hillside covered with graceful young White-Gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) in which were scores of Crescent Honeyeaters (*Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*), rejoicing in the autumn sunshine. The songs of this, the most melodious of our Tasmanian Honeyeaters, were delightful to hear in that bush solitude, and recalled vividly an experience of a couple of years ago, when the same musical chorus was enjoyed on a hillside above Cradle Valley, not far from Mr. G. Weindorfer's "Waldheim" (*The Emu*, Vol. xxviii, p. 295). The Crescent Honeyeater, like our other familiar bird of the same family, the Yellow-throated Honeyeater (*Meliphaga flavicollis*) seems to frequent every altitude, being quite plentiful just now on this coast at sea-level, as well as on mountain sides. While chatting with the diggers down in the bed of the creek, the notes of the Clanging Bell-Magpie, or Crow-Shrike (*Strepera arguta*) struck upon my ear, this bird, too, being a familiar denizen of Cradle Valley.

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**Vocal Powers of the Yellow Oriole.**—The Olive-backed Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*) has no contemptible repertory of calls, and his "musical monologue" is often a delightfully varied performance. But he is far outdone by his northern congener, the Yellow Oriole (*O. flavocinctus*), as the following "mnemonic," for which Mr. Walter R. Petrie is responsible, will show. Mr. Petrie's unusual powers as an imitator of bird-calls impressed members of the R.A.O.U. 1930 camp-out, and are a guarantee that the phrases comprised in his mnemonic follow their originals very closely, even though ears do not always agree as to "what a bird says." The value of bird-mnemonics as an aid to call-identification and description is acknowledged by competent bird men and writers, and justifies the preservation in the pages of *The Emu* of Mr. Petrie's clever attempt to render in this form the performance of a truly remarkable vocalist. His rendering of some of the more easily-imitated calls is as follows:—"Two trips" (sub-note in distance), "Bob Chowder," "Old Bob Chunoo," "You come down one," "Jim, come down one," "I tip Chunoo," "I tip Trotol," "That chap don't know," "Up on top, Jack," "Up on top, Joe," "Jack's on top," "Shut your tongue," "I've just come out," "I've just come home," "Is that the restaurant?" "Eel fryin'," "Some throw," "He shan't come home," "That's talking,"

"It's all off," "Keep on shunting," "Keep on choking," "Keep on shoving," "It's ready," "Wish you'd keep it," "Keep on jumping," "Keep on joining," "It's not so hot," "It's a beauty," "This afternoon."

The Yellow Oriole calls, like a Pitta, at regular intervals for the space of from half an hour to two hours at a time, from the same tree, varying the call after repeating each several times. Sometimes the variation consists in dropping or changing a single syllable, as some of the above phrases indicate. The effect is most intriguing. Mr. Petrie gives "Bull-voiced Oriole" (from its deep, rich notes) as a local name, and Duganjullol as the aboriginal (Bloomfield) name of *O. flavocinctus*.—C. H. H. JERRARD, Blackdown, Gayndah, Qld.

**Crested Terns in Port Phillip Bay.**—Members of the Bird Observers' Club, on their excursion from Black Rock to Beaumaris on February 21, 1931, had an opportunity of seeing a flock of 150 or more Crested Terns (*Sterna bergii*) at very close quarters. The birds were on the rocky shore of Rickett's Point, quite a number showing the pretty mottled immature plumage. The old birds were fishing and feeding their young with small fish at frequent intervals, both old and young birds keeping up a ceaseless croaking and screeching noise. It was possible to get within a few feet of them so intent were they on their domestic duties. It was most interesting to see the parent birds drop like stones into the water, and after a very short immersion immediately to fly with a small fish and pick out their own young with never-failing accuracy. It was not till a stranger went within very close range of the nearest birds that they were disturbed and then they rose *en masse* like a most beautiful silver cloud—the white under surface and scimitar-like wings making a lovely sight in the bright sunlight against the blue of the sea and sky. One imagines such a sight on the Barrier Reef magnified many times, but it is surely good fortune to see it even in such a minor fashion at Melbourne's own front door. These birds had probably nested on one of the near islands and may have got out of their course during the previous couple of days of rough weather, or have been attracted to the spot by a shoal of small fish—perhaps both.

Fishing also at the same spot were a small number of Pied Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax varius*), their wet plumage scintillating with metallic hues—a larger number of Silver Gulls (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) and a few Pacific Gulls (*Gabianus pacificus*), about half in immature plumage. The last-named watched every opportunity to steal the fish from the Terns, and met with a good deal of success.—M. L. WIGAN, R.A.O.U., Melbourne.