

## The Gorgeous Regent Honeyeater

By NORMAN CHAFFER, R.A.O.U., Roseville, N.S.W.

The large family of the *Meliphagidæ*, widespread throughout Australia, contains many brightly-coloured species. The Regent Honeyeater (*Zanthomiza phrygia*) is perhaps the most showy of them all with strongly-contrasting coat of bright yellow and black. The face is covered with warty excrescences, from which the bird received its old name of Warty-faced Honeyeater. It is a very active bird, continually flying from tree to tree or fluttering among the branches in search of insects or honey. In flight the strongly-patterned wings and tail show up very conspicuously. About Sydney it inhabits chiefly the open forest shale country a little to the west of that city. Its appearances are somewhat irregular. Some years good numbers will be present during the nesting season, and at other times scarcely any. During the winter numbers congregate in flocks, often approaching the coast to feed on the banksia and other flowering shrubs of the sandstone regions.

On September 20, 1930, Mr. C. Rhodes showed me a nest some 40 feet from the ground in a eucalypt, and in a position suitable for photography. It rested on a substantial branch among a few stems of mistletoe. The situation differs from that adopted by the majority of Honeyeaters, which usually choose the finer twigs of the outer branches to support their nests. Other Regent Honeyeaters' nests I have seen were built in the strong upright forks of some of the main branches and usually at a good height from the ground. The nest is composed of grasses and strips of bark and is warmly lined with hair. It differs from that of most Honeyeaters, being more solidly constructed. Although smaller in size, about 5 inches in diameter, it bears considerable resemblance externally to the nest of the Grey Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*). The eggs, usually two in number, are of a salmon-buff ground colour marked with deep reddish-brown and purplish spots which mostly form a zone toward the larger end.

One young bird, the sole occupant of the nest, fluttered out when I climbed the tree. Mr. Rhodes informed me that two young birds had occupied the nest a week previously. The young bird was placed on a suitable perch close to the nesting tree, and the camera was focussed thereon. The adults frequently visited the empty nest, but for quite a while would not approach the young one, and I almost despaired of securing a picture of them. However, the baby commenced a more persistent squeaking, and the attention of the adults was finally directed to it. They approached cautiously with repeated retreats before plucking up courage



Regent Honeyeater and young.

Photo. by N. Chaffer, R.A.O.U.

to face the camera, although it was partially hidden with leaves. They formed a delightful picture, flying and gliding from branch to branch with the bright sunshine enriching the already gorgeous plumage. They often alighted on the sides of the upright trunks of the trees, using the beautiful tail outspread as a support. Frequently they called and scolded with a variety of curious unmusical notes, which resembled somewhat the peculiar notes of the Brush Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*). Many of their usually hurried movements, and particularly the jerky action when calling, reminded me of that bird. Having once fed the young bird, they lost a lot of their fear, and soon disregarded the camera but would dart away when the shutter clicked. The birds moved very rapidly and a few of the several photographs secured were blurred with movement. Both birds attended to the young one, but the female was by far the most assiduous. I was particularly struck by the great difference in size between the two birds, the male being considerably the larger.

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**Winter Notes from Devonport.**—All Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) left the town at the end of April, but on May 19 there reappeared in the business part of the settlement a pair that stayed throughout the winter. The same thing has happened in previous years. A few Fantailed Cuckoos (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) have been noticed about the gardens during the cold months: all quite silent. No "Summer-Birds" (*Coracina novæ-hollandiæ*) were seen this season, although a pair usually winters in the vicinity of the town.

Brush Wattle-birds (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*) returned to the Blue Gums in the enclosure near my cottage after some months' absence; they seem to know just when those trees begin to blossom, which was towards the end of July this season.

On a sunny morning, July 22, with a fresh north-west breeze blowing, a Striated Field-Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*) sang very sweetly from the top of a post in a fence near the beach. Just within the fence was a tangle of bracken and small tea-tree, in which, no doubt, the birds will nest.

It is pleasing to report a decided increase in the number of Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ*) in the paddocks about the town, now that people are more alive to the value of this handsome species.—H. STUART DOVE, R.A.O.U., Devonport, Tas.