

near the garden. These birds well deserve the term of "Soldier Bird," as their quarrelsome nature is largely the cause of the congregation of our smaller birds into colonies, where the Miners do not intrude. The safety from foxes, and the abundance of insect life in the garden, no doubt accounts for the remarkable collection of nests.

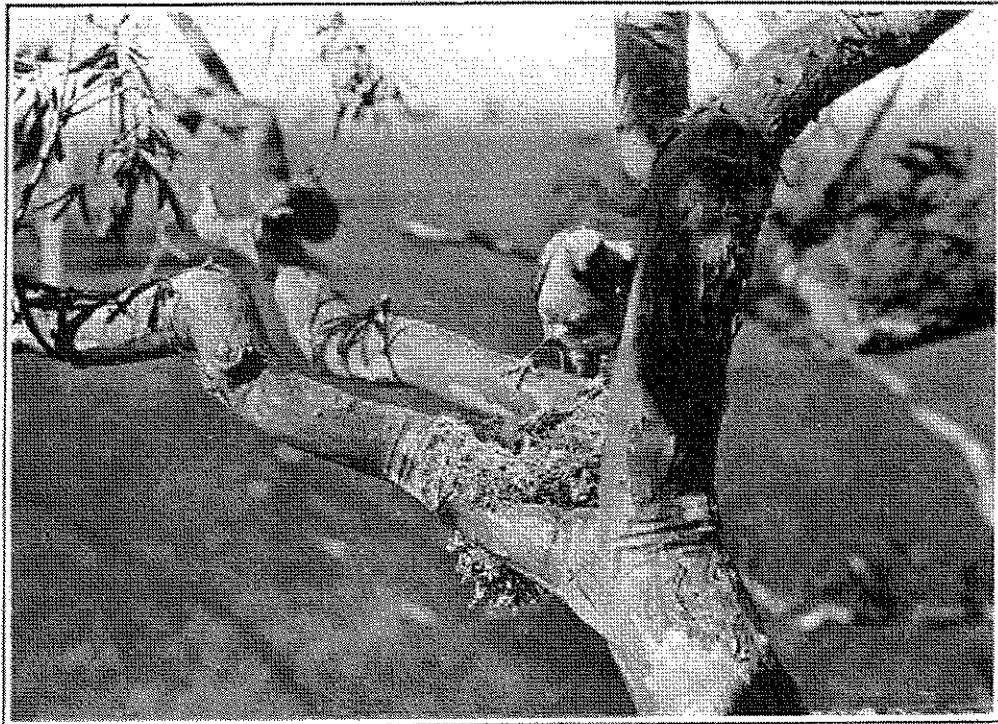
The little Black Honeyeater has been known to nest in a grape vine, but this year it visited for a while only to feed. Such a gathering of birds caused some interest, and the local school spent an enjoyable afternoon studying them under good conditions. Although the district has been raided by grasshoppers, they never overcame the birds guarding that garden.

It is pleasing to feel that our bush birds may become so friendly to man, when their haunts are converted into cultivated fields. It is impossible to estimate their value to us, and this season pastoralists are suffering greatly from the scarcity of birds in some areas. The planting of shelter trees and bird protection would be a much better policy for the control of the grasshopper and caterpillar than the laying of poison baits, advocated by some people, which naturally slays our best friends. Never before has the value of ducks as grasshopper eaters been so apparent as this year. May we as Australians learn to appreciate our birds, and respect the great work they do for us.

Notes on the Ground Cuckoo Shrike.—I first noticed birds of this species (*Pteropodocys maxima*) about five or six years ago, and last spring my brother and I decided to try to photograph them, and the nest and eggs, if possible. I located the first nest about the end of September, but it was blown down in a gale a few days later, while still unfinished. It was built in a small ironbark tree, and appeared to be a typical Cuckoo-Shrike nest.

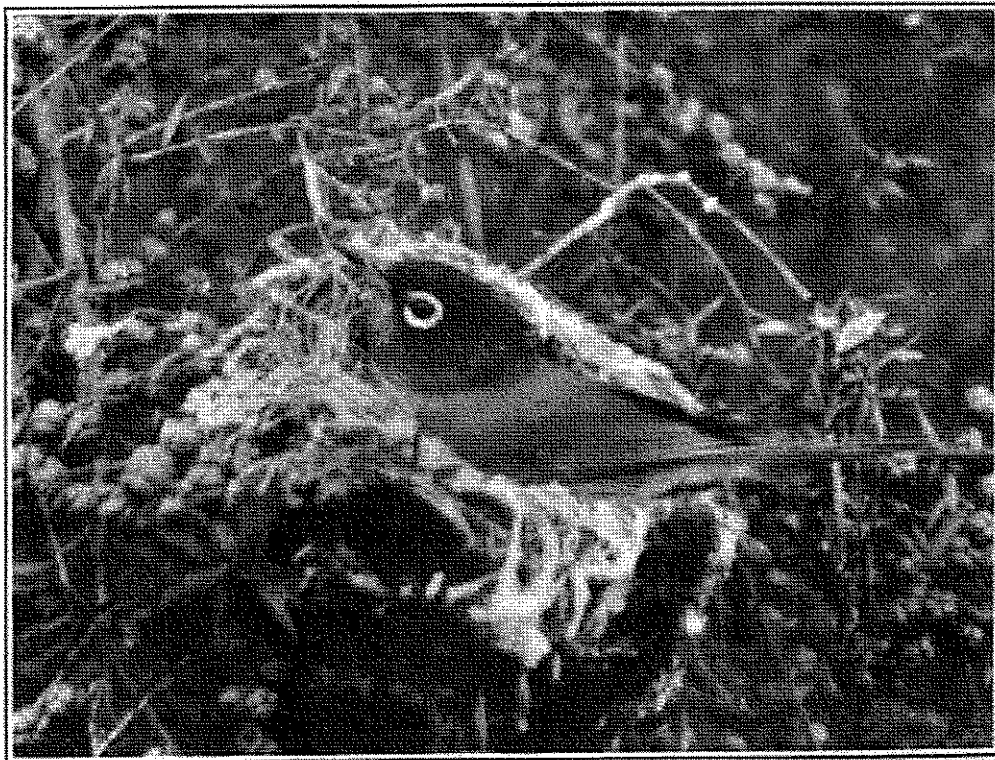
About a week later I noticed the birds favouring another tree in the vicinity, but the only nest that I could see was a Magpie Lark's, and a very ancient and dilapidated one at that. A week's careful watching convinced me that the birds were making use of this old nest. They first raised half an inch of flimsy battlement on the mud foundation. This was then lined with fine grass and a few feathers. Subsequently they laid two eggs in this nest. Their second nest was based on a Chough's old home, which was renovated in a similar manner. Three eggs, the usual clutch, were laid.

By the end of the season I had located five nests, the last two of which were the most interesting, each of them being inhabited by two pairs of birds. The two clutches were quite



Ground Cuckoo-Shrike at nest.

Photo. by J. B. Cameron, and A. C. Cameron, R.A.O.U.



Grey-backed Silvereye on nest.

Photo. by D. J. Dickison, R.A.O.U.

distinct. One of the nests was built high up in the branches of a red gum. When I found it, three birds were engaged in driving away a pair of Pied Butcher Birds, and the fourth was sitting on the nest. This was found to contain five eggs—conclusive proof of the double occupation, especially as two of them differed widely from the others.

The last nest of all was the only one which held photographic possibilities. When the birds appeared to be incubating we commenced operations. The female, which was sitting on the nest, was not at all shy; she would not leave the nest till I was half way up the tree, and returned to it before I had reached the ground again. She sat a few feet away, evidently camera-shy, for some time, but a half-hour's wait achieved the desired result, which is reproduced here. The nest was built in a thin horizontal fork, and measured internally 4 inches across by 2 inches deep. It was made externally of twigs, fine grass, stems and leaves, cobwebs, spider cocoons, and other woolly material. It was lined with fine grass and a few of the bird's own feathers. The black bars on the breast feathers and the black tips on the wing feathers were quite distinctive.

Near each of the nests I found a patch of feathers on the ground; evidently the "plucking" takes place here, and suitable feathers are afterwards removed to the nest. After the nesting season the birds congregate in small flocks, and it is not uncommon to see nine or ten of these beautiful silvery birds feeding together on the ground.—A. C. CAMERON, R.A.O.U., Biddeston, via Oakey, Qld.

The Silvereye.—The Grey-backed Silvereye (*Zosterops halmaturina*) is a common bird in most parts of Victoria, especially in the tea-tree scrub along the north shore of Phillip Island in Westernport Bay, where the French naturalists, Quoy and Gaimard, claimed to have procured the type specimen.

Twenty years ago during Christmas holidays in Gippsland, I used to find many nests of this bird in the hawthorn bushes. Most of the eggs were heavily incubated. Near Melbourne the breeding season commences towards the end of November and is continued through into January. The eggs hatch out rapidly, twelve days being about the incubation period. The birds are not difficult subjects to photograph and when on the nest the female will remain so motionless as to enable a photographer to take a time exposure of it. Once while engaged a photographing a pair of Silvereyes at their nest the shutter was accidentally released when the bird was not at the nest, but the negative subsequently revealed both birds together in the bush making their way cautiously towards the nest.—D. J. DICKISON, R.A.O.U., Melbourne.