

be a number attending the camp from Sydney and several from New South Wales country districts and from Victoria. There are some twenty members of the Riverina sub-branch of the Union who also will be present. It is hoped that members in other States will make a special effort to be present. Branch secretaries are requested to prepare their annual reports for presentation to the Congress, and arrange for papers to be read during the sittings.

Those who intend to be present should notify, at once, the chairman of the Riverina sub-branch, Mr. R. Lindsay Black, Box 10, Leeton; or the N.S.W. State Secretary, Mr. R. P. Cooper, Bull's Chambers, Martin Place, Sydney. Members are requested to intimate whether or not camping gear and/or tents will be required.

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## Stray Feathers

**Birds and Beekeepers.**—The following letters, extracted from *The Australian Beekeeper*, illustrate a difficult phase of bird protection, and seem to suggest that the commercial interest will prove an insurmountable barrier in achieving protection for a good many species of birds.

The spread of the mistletoe pest and methods of controlling it are the subject of a letter published in the issue of February 15, 1939, which prescribes wholesale destruction of Mistletoe-birds. The letter is headed "Mistletoe Bird is Spreading the Mistletoe Pest."

. . . The mistletoe is becoming more prevalent every year, and also spreading over clean country. It would take years to treat and lop the affected trees even if we could prevent the cause. I have made a thorough study of mistletoe growths and how it is spread, as for years I was cutting off and pulling down hundreds of mistletoes, but all in vain. I discovered a species of bird could graft the seed on, quicker than I could cut them off.

I have cut twenty-six mistletoe growths off only a fair-sized (Mugga) Red Ironbark tree. I decided after some years of cutting off and pulling down to make war on the birds that were responsible, but have found them a tougher problem than I expected, for I never guessed they were so numerous. I have destroyed well over twelve hundred of these birds during the last six years, nearly all on my own property, and still there are a few coming in from other parts. I was told quite recently by a beekeeper that he had quite a lot of mistletoes but no birds. I would like to have a look at this place when the berries are ripe; I think I would find a few.

This mistletoe bird is very small, somewhat like a robin with blue-black back and red thorax, describes the cock bird. It lives almost entirely on the mistletoe berries. In caging this bird I was unable to substitute anything else for its diet, and it thrives on these berries. I have had the berries germinate on the perch in the cage. Without this bird we could, I believe, by systematic lopping clean up most of our mistletoe. They go all day from tree to tree, sowing the seeds unconsciously perhaps, visiting hundreds of trees in a day. I noticed about the nesting places of these birds trees often become riddled with mistletoes. They often nest more than once in a season

and have often five eggs\* at a time, so, you see, they soon increase and as our trees are rapidly decreasing, where are we going to finish? . . . —R. H. TAYLOR, Denison Street, Mudgee, N.S.W.

It might be added that the writer of the above letter disposes of "possums" as useless in controlling the spread of mistletoe.

The second letter, also from Mudgee, appeared in the *Australian Beekeeper* of March 15, 1939. It has the heading "Bee-eaters Bad at Mudgee." As it is only a short note it is quoted in full:

Sir,—You might warn apiarists through the A.B.K., to be on the watch out for the bee-eater (*Merops Ornatus*). Great numbers have come into this district lately. They are utterly destructive and eat almost nothing but bees. They catch bees anywhere, often around blooming trees, also near the hives. But they live on bees, whether they are seen near the hives or not. If a cold morning comes they wait near the apiaries for the bees to fly. I have shot two hundred and twenty-odd during the last three or four weeks.—R. E. MARTIN, "Sunnyside," Mudgee, N.S.W. 24/2/39

It would be interesting to know if ornithologists can advance any arguments to the apiarists to discourage such wholesale destruction of bird life.—JOHN GRAY, Melbourne, 7/5/39.

\*The usual clutch of eggs is three, with a very occasional four. Did Taylor starve the birds to death in his cages? Aviculturists would deny that *nothing* can be found as a substitute for mistletoe berries.—Ed.

**Feeding Habits of Spotted Owl.**—An individual of our small Spotted Owl (*Ninox novæ-seelandiæ*) has found an easy way of picking up a living since the wayside has been electrically lit. Just outside my garden fence there is a light-pole with small bulb affixed to it by an iron bracket about ten feet high. There is a circular shade behind the light bulb, which leaves the bracket in the darkness. On the latter the owl sits in the early evening, keeping watch, and every now and then swoops down on the large moths which flutter around the light. Having made a capture, it either returns to the bracket or sits on a nearby fence until the capture is packed away, when it returns for another swoop.

Yesterday evening (May 10), there was a fairly thick sea mist after a warm day, and it was quite interesting to watch the Owl dive out of the darkness, through the lamp-lit mist, and disappear again. There is a pair of them about, as I heard both calling close together, but only one bird uses the bracket at the one time. This bird seems to mate in autumn, as after silence all through the hot months, the "morepork" call begins in April. On some evenings it has a very passionate tone and is uttered a great number of times in rapid succession, as if the mate were close at hand.—H. STUART DOVE, Devonport, Tasmania, 11/5/39.

**Different Nesting Sites used by the Little Grebe.**—Since I first observed a pair of Little Grebes on a Caldervale dam, late in 1937, I have kept a check on their habits in these dry uplands. The nearest natural habitat, "as the crow flies," is about fifty miles north of here, yet one pair of Grebes are permanent residents. They live on a large dam on the station. How long they have been there no one seems to know, but they have never been absent from it during the last fifteen months.

During that period they have built three nests, the position of each differing entirely from the others. The first nest was built in February, 1938. It was placed on a large, partly-submerged branch of a dead tree floating in the corner of the silt tank leading to the main dam. It was constructed of dead leaves of the round-leaved box, briga-low and round-leaved ironbark, and twigs and stalks of dead plants. Cow manure was also added to the structure. Two fresh eggs, heavily coated with lime, were in the nest, which was exposed to the view of Crows and goannas that were present in fair numbers. Several weeks elapsed before my next visit, when I noted four immature Grebes swimming about after their parents. They remained with their parents for several weeks until the old birds decided to nest once again.

The second nest was built about October, and was a flat, untidy mess of debris, etc., placed a few inches above the level of the water in the dam itself. This nest, too, was exposed to the elements, and even easier for the goanna to rob than the first nest. On my arrival, the brooding bird hurriedly pulled leaves over the two eggs before diving neatly into the water. The materials used in the construction of this nest were similar to those of the former one. A few days later we had severe thunderstorms, which filled the dam to overflowing point and washed the nest and eggs away.

The third nest, which I have under observation at the date of writing, is of a floating type, fastened to overhanging bathurst burrs, and is about three feet from the edge of the bank. The day I discovered this nest, I found the female brooding, while the male was busily engaged carrying sticks to add to the structure, which is similar to the first, but more compact. As is usual, the sitting bird, each time it leaves the nest when an intruder approaches, pulls debris over the eggs to hide them. This nest originally contained three eggs; but the water in the dam has fallen a few inches—enough to tilt the nest and roll the third egg out into the water. If the water falls further, the two remaining eggs will probably meet a similar fate, owing to the flatness of the wet nursery, to which green grass is sometimes added.

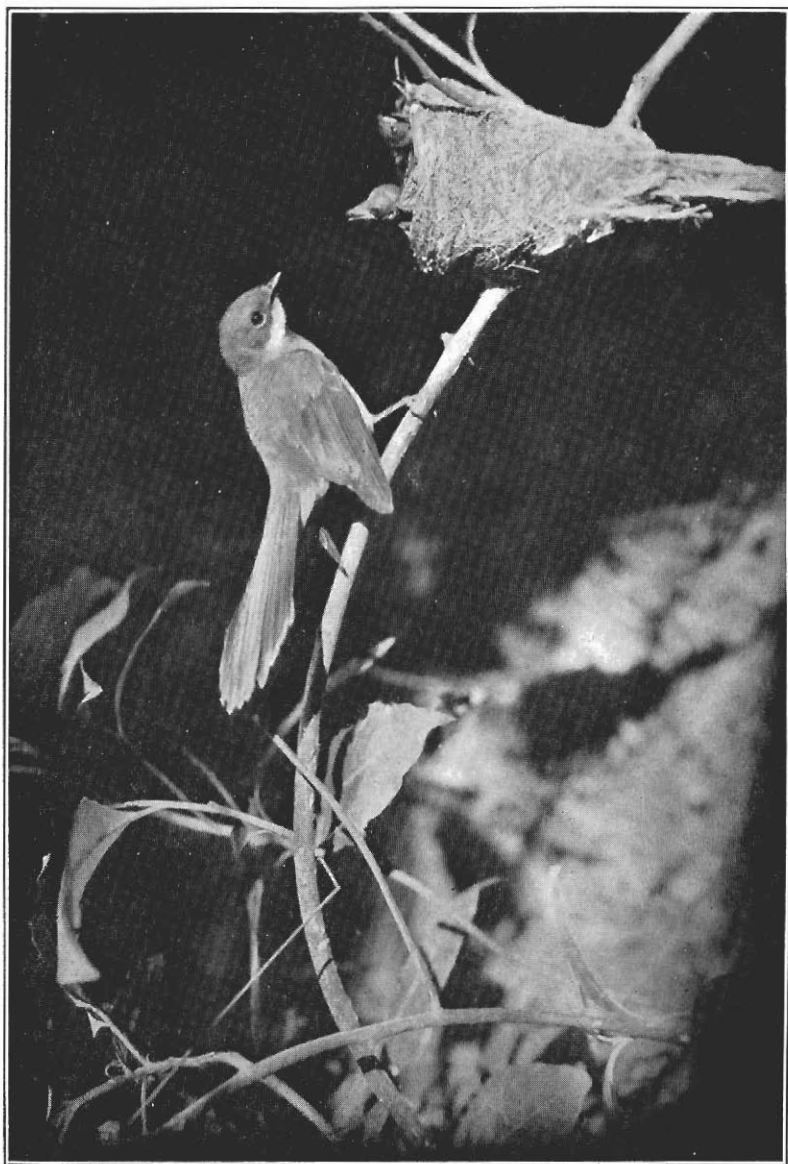
This little fellow is but one of the score or so of water-

frequenting birds I have listed from this dry, scrubby area. Following heavy rains, when the dams and gully catchments are filled, it is the commonest water bird to be found here.—N. H. E. McDONALD, Caldervale Station, Charleville, Qld., 25/2/39.

**Psittacosis from Fulmar Petrels.**—Some time ago I published some notes on psittacosis in man, contracted in Australia from Cockatoos, Budgerigars and other members of the parrot family (*Emu*, vol. XXXVI, p. 51). There are now records of a peculiar form of broncho-pneumonia in the Faroë Islands which appeared first in 1930, with further cases each year since 1933. As there was no spreading of infection from one person to another, spread was evidently due to some outside source. Altogether 174 cases have occurred, mostly among women, with a mortality of 20 per cent., the onset in every case except one being between August 30 and September 25. That is the season when thousands of young Fulmar Petrels (*Fulmarus glacialis*) are caught by the islanders before they can fly, the plucking being done by the women.

Material from the patients and from the Petrels was examined at Berlin and Copenhagen and the disease proved to be psittacosis. The infection is thought to be caused by the inhalation of dust from the feathers. If species so remote from one another in classification, habitat and geographical distribution are affected, it is thought probable that other species may be also. Let us hope both for the sake of the birds and ourselves that this will not be found to be the case.—ERIC POCKLEY, Avalon Beach, N.S.W., 25/5/39.

**Photographing the Rufous Fantail.**—The position of the sun has doubtless caused concern to many a bird photographer, and probably many, as I have done, have attempted to reflect its rays, by means of a mirror, on to the object sought to be pictured. The Rufous Fantail often nests in dark gullies, where, considering the very short exposure that can be given because of quick movements of the bird, the light is inadequate. To overcome such a difficulty, I had a friend catch the sun's rays and throw them on to a Fantail's nest that I was photographing. Unfortunately, although the line of vision of the camera and the beam of light crossed on the nest and bird, it was not possible to deflect the light from behind the camera, so that the respective backgrounds did not coincide. Although the effect of the bird standing out in relief, as it were, is not unpleasant, the arrangement is one to be avoided if possible, and beginners at bird photography might benefit by this example.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 7/6/39.



Rufous Fantail at nest in dark gully.

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.

**East Tasmanian Birds.**—On February 18, at the Bay of Fires, my friend, Mr. Eric Reed, noticed a flock of Spine-tailed Swifts—about a dozen individuals; they were just sailing along, not hawking, except one on the outskirts of the party.

On February 19, at 4 p.m., we saw a dozen or two of the White-rumped Swifts (*Micropus pacificus*), fairly low and easily identifiable. They looked quite a degree smaller, and with less wing-spread than the other species. F. M. Littler says that they often mix with the Spinetails, and so their identity is lost. I have never identified this species before. They were moving north and were hawking while they flew. The previous day had been very rough and stormy, with three inches of rain. In places all along the coast, Wood-Swallows (*Artamus cyanopterus*) were collecting; they were noted at The Gardens and the Bay of Fires, and between there and Scamander River, and stayed several days. The Red-capped Dotterel was nesting, which seems very late, but their habit of laying in exposed situations probably loses them many broods. I noted a Field-Wren (*Calamanthus*) feeding a young Bronze-Cuckoo.—BRUCE ANDERSON, Launceston, Tas., 25/1/39.

**Migrants and Others—1938-39.**—The first pair of Pipits (*Anthus australis*) this spring (1938) were seen by the roadside, Devonport, on the morning of August 28, which was sunny after early north-west squalls. On August 29 a young *Strepera arguta*, which had lost his rectrices but showed a large white patch of under tail-coverts, was in the garden feeding on passion-fruit, and afterwards came into the house through the open door. A strong, cold wind was blowing from the south-west, and the bird had probably come down from the hills to the south of the town. Several Welcome Swallows were about the town at 11 a.m. on the last day of August. There was a warm breeze from the eastward, after a cool southerly at 5 a.m.

A "Tree-Diamond" (*Pardalotus striatus*) was heard calling in one of the garden trees, the first this spring, on September 10. It was a fine day of sunshine, with a south-west breeze. The first Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) was not heard until September 26, a fortnight later than usual. This species has, for some unknown reason, been very much scarcer than usual in this locality. Usually, by mid-September, they are sitting about on overhead wires and fences, "running up the scale," but this season only about four individuals have been heard. The first "Summer-birds" (*Coracina novæ-hollandiæ*) were heard on September 24—evidently just arrived from the mainland.

There was something of a surprise on October 2 when at 5 a.m. I heard and saw a Kookaburra give his alarm-notes from a fence where he had been sitting close to the house,

and from which he flew to the top of a light-pole across the road. This is the first I have seen in the district, although the birds are said to be fairly numerous a few miles from Launceston.

The Bronze-Cuckoo (*Lamprolaima placans*) was heard in the trees at Mersey Bluff about the middle of December; the Fantailed species we have always with us, winter and summer.

On January 23 this year, a young Pallid Cuckoo was seen in some scrub by the roadside at 5 a.m. The beautiful silvery plumage of the young Pallid renders it one of the prettiest of our native avifauna.—H. STUART DOVE, Devonport, Tasmania, 25/1/39.

## Council Meetings of the R.A.O.U.

The following matters, amongst others, have recently been dealt with by the Council:

*Ducks in Rice Areas.*—Following representations from Leeton sub-branch and from Sydney, the Council resolved to support protests against opening the season for ducks on September 1 in rice-growing areas, and to endeavour to persuade the authorities to consider less drastic measures for protection of rice crops.

*Foxes and Lyrebirds.*—The Council resolved to seek the assistance of the State authorities in Victoria to eliminate foxes from Lyrebird areas in the Sherbrooke forest and environs.

*Reprints from The Emu.*—It was resolved that the rule limiting gratis reprints to 25 be adhered to, with a provision that Council would consider applications (if made to Council prior to publication of the article in question) for additional copies gratis in special circumstances for distribution for educational or similar purposes.

*Sanctuaries, etc.*—Council has identified the Union with efforts being made to ban grazing of cattle on national parks and sanctuaries, as conducted at present in Victoria; has continued its efforts to secure the proclamation as a national park of a large area round Hattah Lakes and Kulkyne Forest (Victorian Mallee); and has suggested modifications to enhance the scientific value of the Sir Colin MacKenzie Sanctuary, Healesville (Vic.) by extending the area and appointing an advisory committee.

*Mathews Library.*—A minute of appreciation was recorded on the acquisition by the Commonwealth of the valuable ornithological library of Mr. Gregory Mathews, which contains many rare volumes which will be of great value to Australian ornithologists.

*List of Members.*—An anonymous donor has offered to defray the cost of printing a list of members, and the offer has been gratefully accepted.

*Dogs on Willis Island.*—An interesting point has arisen regarding the lonely radio outpost of Willis Island, maintained principally as a cyclone warning station. The R.A.O.U. was approached for support against an application by the wireless station staff to keep dogs on the island. In view of the abundant bird life of the island which would be destroyed if the application were granted, Council supported the objection.

*Export of Birds.*—Council recorded its strong disapproval of the large quantity of Australian birds exported from Western Australia, as shown in the last annual report from that State. Members agreed that the record was appalling (see *The Emu*, vol. XXXVIII, part 5,