

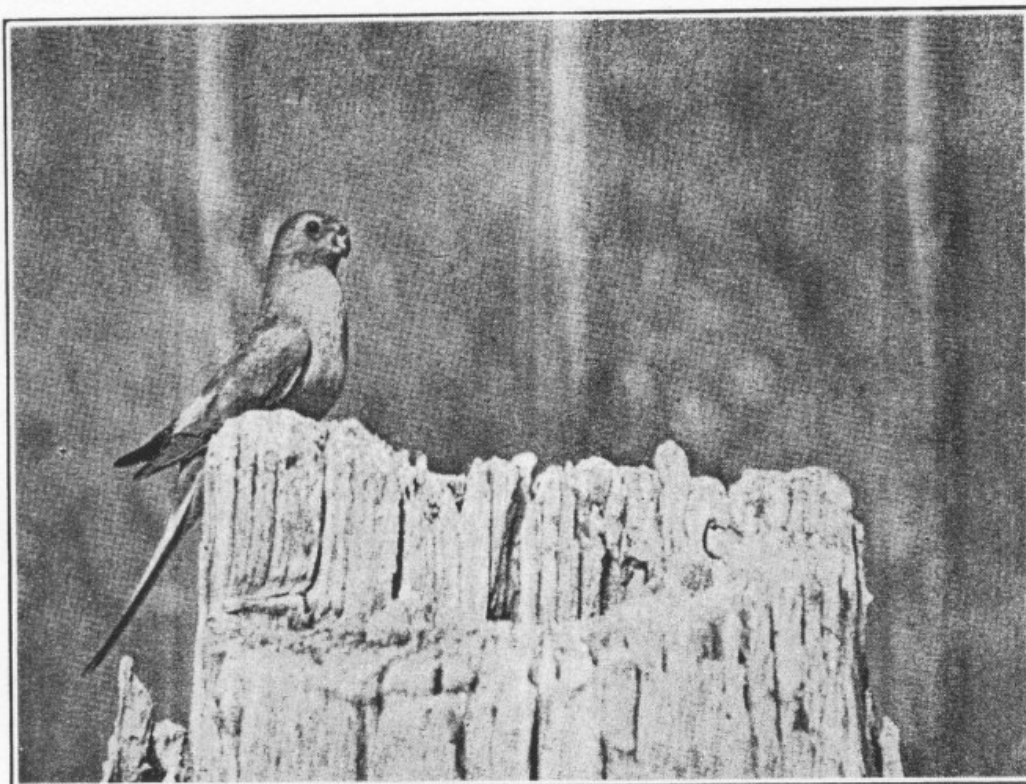
From Hummock Island we steered for Batavia Roads, on the east side of South Island; where we anchored for the night, but next day ran round to the western side, where we anchored in perfectly smooth water, about a hundred yards from the beach. Here I landed . . . All the internal part of this portion of the island was a dense thicket of samphire, &c., in which amasing numbers of birds were breeding, particularly the common noddy (*Anous stolidus*); there birds were in one spot, covering several acres in extent, in such prodigious numbers, and their nests of seaweed so closely built to each other, that it was no easy matter to avoid crushing birds or eggs at every step; the birds, too, are so tenacious of leaving their eggs as to suffer us to walk among them, and even take them by the wing and throw them off their nests. The noddy lays but a single egg, but so variable in the character of their blotches and spots, that scarcely two can be found alike; the increase annually of this species must be very great, and would be much more so but for an effectual check which nature has provided against it, in the presence of a species of lizard,¹⁹⁰ which destroys vast numbers of both old and young birds. I feel confident, from constant observation, that not more than one out of every twenty birds hatched ever reaches maturity. . . . they do not devour the whole of the bird, but merely extract the brain and vertebral marrow, the remainder of the bird, excepting the bones, being effectually cleared away by the *Dermestes lardarius*, known more generally as the museum beetle. This insect is so abundant, from the constant supply of food prepared for it by the lizards, as to have been a constant source of annoyance and trouble to me in preserving my collection from their repeated attacks."

(To be concluded)

190. *Egernia kingii* (Gray).

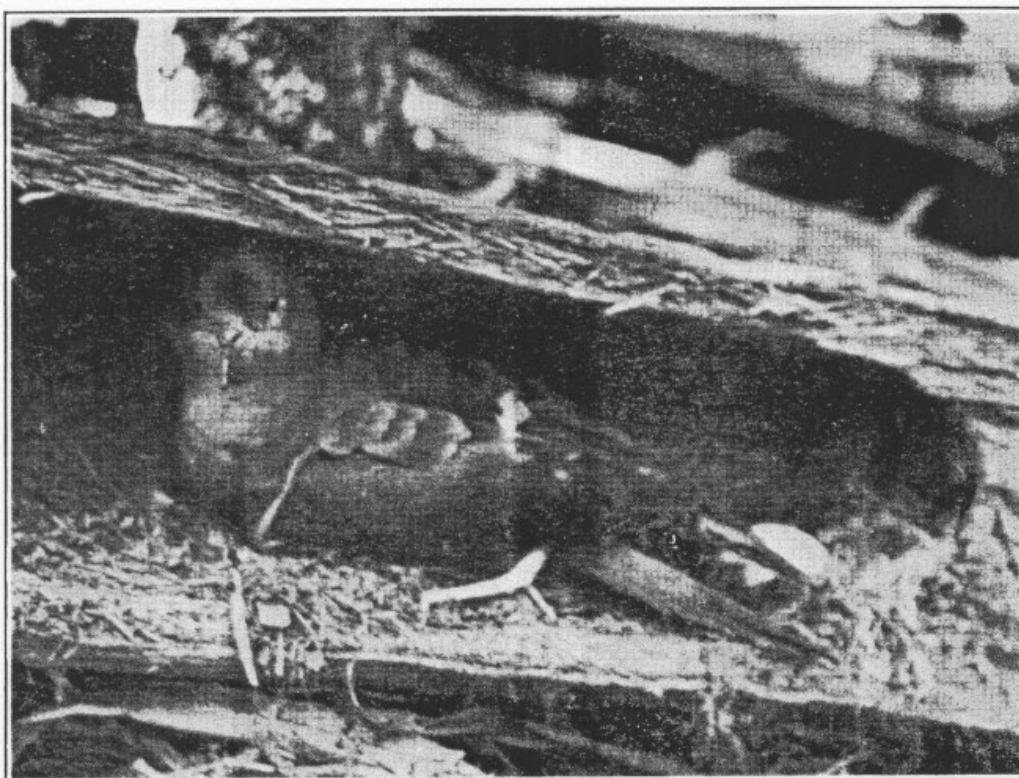
Stray Feathers

Notes on Blue-winged Parrot. — In open timber and grass-lands around Portland, Victoria, the Blue-winged Parrot (*Neophema chrysostoma*) is well distributed, but not common. In the open country around Bridgewater, 13 miles out, this pretty bird is sometimes disturbed from the grass on the sides of the roads. Sparsely-timbered paddocks containing plenty of hollow stumps, are the favourite habitat of the species during the nesting season, and a hollow stump, only a few feet high in most cases, is usually chosen as a nesting site. Two years ago, in February, I was shown, by Mr. H. F. Keiller, of Portland, a member of the R.A.O.U., a number of hollow stumps in which parrots had reared broods only a week or two before my visit.



Blue-winged Parrot on nesting stump.

Photo. by L. G. Chandler.



Wedge-tailed Shearwater nesting in decayed trunk of fallen palm tree.

Last year (1940) I was in Portland in December, and, hoping to find the species breeding, I visited the locality on December 21 and began a search for nesting stumps. Soon after my arrival in the paddock I met a local lad, and he showed me a stump that held a parrot sitting on eggs. Looking down the hollow I could see, as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, the lovely bird crouching at the bottom. It was a difficult matter to make her leave the nest. Tapping had no effect, and finally I tried scratching in imitation of a climbing lizard. This caused the bird to leave hurriedly, but it did not fly far and sat on an exposed limb of a tree about forty yards away. The nest contained five eggs which rested on wood about three feet from the top of the stump.

I had little time to spare but decided to try a camera shot although the conditions were bad for photography. Heavy wind and drifting clouds are always an unpleasant combination, and I found a month or so later when I developed the one plate that I exposed that afternoon, that the wind had shifted the camera and the bird was out of focus. After twenty minutes the parrot made a few nervous flights above and around the stump. Presently it settled, and was out of sight in the nest hollow in a flash. I flushed it again, and on the second occasion as it settled I held up a white handkerchief, and pressed the camera bulb as the bird paused.

I returned again on December 24 as I was not satisfied that I had obtained a good photograph. During the afternoon two more shots were taken. The weather was again windy and cloudy, and the parrot very nervous. It flew around the nest for an hour before finally settling on the stump, and, after taking a snap I allowed it to go below and did not disturb it for a quarter of an hour. Later it developed a little more confidence in its visits. Several times as I hesitated for better conditions or a nicer pose, the bird slipped quickly into the hollow. Only one bird was seen during my stay and circumstances prevented me from searching for further nests, or adding to my notes.—L. G. CHANDLER, Red Cliffs, Vic., 1/5/41.

A Burrowing Variation among Wedge-tailed Shearwaters.—An interesting illustration of how the type of terrain may modify the normal nesting habit of a petrel is afforded by the colony of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters (*Puffinus pacificus*) at Cabbage Tree Island, N.S.W. This species is essentially a burrower, but on this island it also nests in natural cavities, where no excavation is required, between heaps of boulders, concealed, perhaps, by fallen fronds of the cabbage tree palm (*Livistona australis*). The urge to drill a burrow is, however, seen in the manner the birds have utilized the fallen trunks of the palms. On a visit to the island on January 12,

1941, with Messrs. K. A. Hindwood and A. F. D'Ombraïn, two birds were photographed in burrows which they had made in the decayed core of the dead palms. The bird illustrated was discovered when portion of the outer rind was ripped away, revealing a petrel retreating farther into the log. The nesting site was fully five feet from the entrance at the end of the trunk.—D. L. SERVENTY, Cronulla, N.S.W., 6/5/41.

Birds Hampered by Shellfish.—On December 15, 1940, while watching waders feeding in the shallows at Fishermen's Bend, near Melbourne, I noticed a bird which, when flushed, did not follow its fellow waders out over the bay, but fluttered weakly, with both feet hanging, into some samphire close to the shore. The bird was easily caught, and on examining it—a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Erolia acuminata*)—I found that a small shellfish was fastened on to the middle toe of the left foot. After I removed the encumbrance the bird was released. It ran along the shore and, after a few minutes' rest, flew off with apparent ease. Evidently the small shellfish clamped to the toe was enough to hamper the bird a great deal.

A similar case came under my notice in February, 1941, at Ballarat. Wandering around Lake Wendouree I disturbed an Eastern Swamp-hen (*Porphyrio melanotus*) that had been feeding near the shore and took to flight, but had great difficulty in flying, and, after travelling only a few yards, it dropped with a heavy splash into the lake. Clamped across the toes of the right foot was a large freshwater mussel. While the bird was flying, the foot to which the mussel was attached was extended down to full length.

Waders and other birds which feed in the shallows must often be caught by shellfish. Has any reader seen birds in a similar plight to these that I have mentioned?—W. R. WHEELER, Elwood, Vic., 17/8/41.

White Egret and Nankeen Night-Heron in South-western Australia.—During the Christmas holidays 1939-40, S. R. White had the opportunity of visiting swamps in the lower south-west for the purpose of photographing Cormorant rookeries. On January 3, 1940, one particular swamp, south of Bunbury, was visited, where a few Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* and *Microcarbo melanoleucus*) were nesting. The nests were, for the most part, situated in paper-bark trees growing towards the centre of the swamp. In the outer fringe of trees there were numerous nests of the Night-Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) with young almost ready for flying. Amongst the birds which flushed from the trees were twenty or more White Egrets (*Egretta alba*) and when they settled it was noticed that three pairs had nests containing young. Possibly others had nested earlier in the season.

There are few records of the breeding of the Night-Heron in southern Western Australia. It is on record that there used to be a colony which nested on an islet off Rottnest Island, and, since the introduction of the species to the Zoological Gardens, South Perth, it has nested there numerous on free range. It breeds on some of the islands of the Recherche Archipelago. It is commonly seen near Busselton.

We can, however, find no previous record of the breeding of the White Egret in Western Australia, although the species is not rare in the south-west. It is not unusual to see it at Mandurah, and along the Vasse River, near Busselton, whilst there are numerous secluded swamps along the coastal districts between those two places which most likely provide nesting places for the bird. Mr. C. E. Orton remarked (*in litt.*) that one year four White Egrets frequented a large swamp and lake near Moora, but unfortunately they were shot.—S. R. WHITE, Busselton, and H. M. WHITTELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 27/7/41.

Display Behaviour in Red-capped Dotterel.—Early in January, 1941, I saw, by Lake Richmond, a Red-capped Dotterel (*Charadrius ruficapillus*) running with tail drooping and wings extended. A few seconds later it dropped with one wing outstretched. These actions were repeated until I withdrew and concealed myself. In a short time the bird returned with another Dotterel, presumably its mate, to where I had first seen it and there it was joined by a pair of chicks, each about the size of a walnut. My son, who was with me, then advanced towards the birds, which became agitated, bobbing their heads. Both chicks dropped beside a loose piece of hardened mud and remained motionless, even when I approached and turned one over. We again withdrew and soon saw the family re-united. I observed with interest that at one stage, while the adults were very agitated, they went through an interesting ceremony, each running and jumping over the other—a sort of zig-zag leap-frog. One bird then picked up a white object—a small white feather, I believe—and laid it on the ground before its companion.—ERIC SEDGWICK, Bassendean, W.A., 1/8/41.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—This act is undoubtedly to be grouped with the behaviour described by David Lack in "Courtship Feeding in Birds," *Auk*, vol. 57, 1940, p. 169. It is interesting not only in that a substitute object was used but that it was out of its proper place in the breeding cycle (i.e. during incubation and not as an accompaniment of copulation). This may, however, be due to the act being "unnaturally" called forth owing to the strain of the occasion. It might be mentioned also that Lack cites only one recorded instance of courtship feeding in the shore-birds and their allies (a German observation on the Stone-Curlew) and therefore he considers it to be normally absent in that group.