

Notes from the Murphy's Creek District

By E. A. R. LORD, Murphy's Creek, Queensland

QUARRIANS AND DOLLAR-BIRDS

A dead ironbark with but one suitable nesting hollow has been the scene of many battles for possession over a period of several years by such birds as Kestrels, Quarrians, Rosellas and Dollar-birds, the last-named always succeeding in putting out the birds which are in occupation.

This spring, 1941, a pair of Quarrians (*Leptolophus hollandicus*) were brooding their second clutch of eggs there. On November 5 a pair of Dollar-birds (*Eurystomus orientalis*), which have used the nesting place for the past six years, endeavoured to move the parrots, but the latter sat tight: one bird always endeavoured to drive the Dollar-birds off, but its efforts had little effect. On November 7, both parrots were out of the nest and possession was at once taken by one Dollar-bird, the other keeping the parrots on the move. On November 9 the parrots, after two days' effort to regain possession of the nest, departed.

No eggs were seen on the ground, so apparently the parrots' eggs were not thrown out. If their eggs are brooded with those of the Dollar-birds there will be an interesting problem, as the parrots' eggs, being advanced in incubation, will hatch while those of the Dollar-birds are still fresh.

[Mr. Lord was asked to supplement the foregoing by indicating what transpired after November 9, and he writes as follows.—Ed.]

I was unable to reach the nest to investigate what happened to the Quarrian's eggs. When the Dollar-birds took possession the parrots remained two days, endeavouring to regain possession, but were always driven off by one Dollar-bird while the other remained in the hollow. The parrots were absent on the third day but resumed their efforts on the fourth day, remaining until the seventh day, and being continually harassed by one of the Dollar-birds.

I examined the ground below the nest each day to see if the parrot eggs had been thrown out, but found no trace. Apparently, however, the hen Dollar-bird had laid and was brooding, only one bird, either hawking nearby or perched on the tree, being seen as a rule. Occasionally both were seen at the nesting hole when much bowing and chattering took place. Possibly this was part of the change over ceremony.

After three weeks of brooding there was a great fuss at the nest one day and both birds were noted frantically trying to drive a goanna away from the nesting hole. Evidently

the reptile achieved his object as the birds deserted the nest, although they occasionally returned to the tree to rest between flights in search of food.

WHITE-BACKED SWALLOWS

A pair of White-backed Swallows (*Cheramæca leucosterna*) had their tunnel in a gully bank well advanced in June, 1941. Tunnelling continued throughout July, and by August the birds were taking dry grass and leaves to the nest. In September there was a bird brooding. On October 13 the parents were seen with four young birds which had apparently been on the wing for several days. A fifth young bird was dead below the entrance to the tunnel, having probably been removed from the nest by the parents, which were adding fresh material to the nest. On examining the dead bird it was seen that though fully feathered it did not have the white on the back and head, those parts being black. The only white showing was from the throat to the chest. On November 3, a bird was seen brooding its second clutch. On November 7, the nest was wrecked by storm waters. The nest was a thick mat of dry grass and leaves one inch in thickness, 7 inches \times 5 inches in diameter. Tunnel 2 feet 7 inches, nest chamber $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches \times 7 inches. Eggs six, slight incubation.

FIGBIRDS

In records taken over a number of years I find that the Figbird (*Sphecotheres vieilloti*), which usually appears about the first week of September, commences almost at once to test out likely-looking nesting sites. I have not seen the male take part in choosing a place for the nest, but he follows the female wherever she may go and gives forth his loud and varied calls, while she answers with a plaintive twitter as she shuffles about on some small fork amongst the outer foliage.

It is usually the end of September, or possibly early October, before a nesting place is chosen and work commenced.

As this spring, 1941, has been unusually dry and fruit foods scarce, Figbirds, like many other species, are breeding late, and it is only now (November 9) that the birds are showing signs of nesting. Good rains, the first for many months, have fallen during the week just ended and birds of all kinds are becoming active.

STAGHORN NESTING

Mr. Roberts' interesting note in *The Emu*, vol. XLI, p. 164, recalls notes that I made on the effort of a pair of pardalotes during the winter of 1940.

In May, 1940, when I was on the Dawson, 250 miles north-west from Murphy's Creek, a pair of Red-tipped Pardalotes (*Pardalotus ornatus*) were making a determined effort to tunnel into the base of a staghorn in a friend's garden. The owner of the plant, thinking that damage might be done, endeavoured to prevent the birds from nesting by plugging the tunnel entrance with pieces of bark, but each time that was done the birds at once tugged at the material and removed it in quick time. Finally they were allowed to continue their nesting in peace, and as no harm was done to the staghorn they were permitted to use it for future broods.

A spring brood followed that of the winter of 1940, and I have been informed that the birds nested again in the staghorn during the winter of this year (1941) and followed with a second nesting in September.

Further Notes on the Birds of the Rockingham District

By ERIC SEDGWICK, Bassendean, W.A.

When I compiled my earlier notes on the Birds of the Rockingham District (*Emu*, XL, p. 129 and p. 237) it seemed highly probable that my residence in the district would shortly be terminated. Such, however, was not the case, and during the further twelve months which elapsed before I left the district I accumulated further material, some of which I now present as an appendix to the above-mentioned paper.

Much of this new material relates to individual species and does not affect my earlier observations on the bird-life of the district. I have, however, given further attention to the effect of bush-fires upon forest-frequenting birds and to the seasonal fluctuations of water-fowl on White Lake.

Further observations on the bird-life of the islands off the coast were carried out, mainly in conjunction with Messrs. S. R. White, V. Serventy, Wm. Plumb and Axel Poignant, who obtained much interesting data which I hope will ultimately be published.

This is, perhaps, an appropriate place to correct an error which unfortunately occurred in the first part of the paper referred to (*Emu*, XL, p. 129). The approximate areas of two of the localities mentioned are misstated. Penguin Island is roughly 30 acres in extent (not 300) and the Point Peron peninsula approximately 85 acres (not 850).