

leading to the eye while the lower one joins with the white stripes of the throat. I have examined only two downy young of *novæhollandiæ*, one collected by Tom Carter at Broome Hill, Western Australia, on November 21, 1908 (American Museum of Natural History, no. 526245), the other collected by Palmer and Bryant near Batavia, Java, on March 13, 1909 (U.S. National Museum, no. 218771). The two birds seem to agree in all their essential features. Of *P. ruficollis*, I have seen eighteen downy young. The pattern is basically the same in all of them, although the nominate race is much darker on the head and neck—so dark, in fact, that the light-coloured stripes are barely visible. There seems to be some indication of geographical variations in regard to the connections of the white lines behind and below the eye. In two African birds, for example, the two white triangles above and behind the eye do not seem to be connected with the rectangular white line below and behind the eye. In the East Asiatic race, the white lines below the eye do not seem to come in contact with the bill.

Carefully-taken photographs of young birds would probably reveal such differences more clearly than the often poorly-prepared skins that are available for study. Nothing seems to be known on the pattern of coloration in the closely-related species *pelzelni* (Madagascar), *rufopectus* (New Zealand), and *poliocephalus* (Australia). It would be interesting to obtain downy young of these species and compare them with the illustrations of *novæhollandiæ* and *ruficollis*.

The heads shown in the figure are—

- A. *Podiceps novæhollandiæ* (Western Australia), seen from the side;
- B. The same bird seen from the top;
- C. *Podiceps ruficollis vulcanorum* (Timor), seen from the side;
- D. The same bird seen from the top.

The stippled areas are silvery grey; the cross-hatched region is rufous.

Stray Feathers

Appearance of the Darter.—The Darter (*Anhinga novæhollandiæ*) is well named 'Snake-bird.' It swims so low in the water that its small head and long slender neck give it a definite reptilian appearance; even its call note, a rather sinister 'hiss,' adds to the general impression.

It is a comparatively rare bird in the Sydney district, New South Wales, but is occasionally seen at the Botany waterworks lagoon (cf. *The Emu*, vol. 42, p. 174). Whilst making observations at that locality on June 4, 1944, I was watching a Dusky Moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*), which

was quietly resting on the fallen branch of a tree that extended approximately a foot above the thick growth of water-lilies covering a large portion of the swamp. It was only a few yards from where I was standing on the bank, and I momentarily wondered as to the cause of its call of alarm and its hurried departure, but soon observed beneath the branch a long, slender swaying object, that to all appearances could only be associated with some species of water-frequenting snake. However, it very soon struggled free of the thick growth to occupy the perch vacated by the Moorhen, thereby revealing itself as a very wet and dishevelled female Darter. In the manner characteristic of cormorants it immediately spread its wings to dry, but soon became restless, evidently because of my presence nearby. Only a few minutes elapsed before it fluttered off, struggled with difficulty over a few yards of the swampy growth, then quickly submerged below the vegetation and was lost to view.—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 29/6/44.

Unorthodox Nesting Sites.—During my sojourn at Hume military camp, it was interesting to observe the several species of birds that selected places in close proximity to human environment for nesting areas. Training trenches, drains and buildings, all of which were continually in use, became favourite nesting sites. Also a hollow tree in the centre of the parade ground was used.

The first species to attract attention was the Rainbow-bird (*Merops ornatus*). Large numbers of these gay-plumaged birds arrived from the north during early October. They selected 'fox holes' and trenches of varying depths and lengths, which at the time were being used for training purposes. Although the birds attracted constant attention from the troops, they succeeded in rearing their young. One rather optimistic pair started to tunnel into the side of the stop mound at the rifle range, but deserted after the first shoot and did not return to finish their burrow.

Fairy Martins (*Hylochelidon ariel*) bred prolifically in water drains. One colony, numbering one hundred and twenty nests, was found. I broke the spouts off several nests, finding every one contained eggs and/or newly-hatched young. All nests that I touched were completely repaired when the colony was visited again the following afternoon. The mud pellets used for repair were quite dry and of a different colour. Evidently the mud was taken from a small water-hole approximately a quarter of a mile distant. The water-hole from which the mud was previously obtained had dried up.

A pair of Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) constructed a nest, and reared three young, in a corrugated-iron

shed. The nest was firmly attached to a rafter placed six inches beneath the roof, and during the day the brooding birds would be disturbed many times. Eventually they succeeded in hatching the eggs. It was observed that the young Wagtails refrained from leaving their indoor home for some time, and roosted each night on the rafters. When the evenings became too warm for comfort in their man-made shelter, the young birds preferred telegraph wires to the surrounding trees.

The last to commence breeding in the camp area were a pair of Red-backed Parrots (*Psephotus haematonotus*). They used as a nesting site a hollow tree, the entrance to their nest being seven feet from the ground. If the young parrots had not left the nest before they were expected to do so, they may have been dwelling within the confined space of a cage, at the present time.—LAWRENCE C. HAINES, Haberfield, N.S.W., 19/6/44.

Are Birds Conservative?—In some ways birds seem to be very conservative. A few casual observations made on birds which select the same roosting perch night after night brings this trait under notice. Every ornithologist will have seen their droppings under some tree or shrub, which indicates that they have used the same perch night after night.

I watched a pair of Magpie-Larks (*Grallina cyanoleuca*) going to roost each evening in a tree in our back yard. The male would always select the same perch and face the same way while the female, which seemed a bit 'flighty,' would always, after fussing about, ultimately select her perch, which was about a foot above the male. This procedure went on for about a week without any variation before they left this tree for another.

One evening just after dark, as I entered the front porch of our home, a bird flew out just past my face. The next evening the same thing occurred again. Then, a few nights later, quite late at night, the front door was opened and a bird flew into the house from the porch. It proved to be a White-throated Tree-creeper (*Climacteris leucophaea*), which was caught and released. It did not return after that. This species is not often seen where we live and it must have come some distance each evening to select this spot.

One evening I flashed a torch light down the back yard and was surprised to see a bird perched on the clothes line. It was asleep with its head tucked under its wing and so far as I could make out was a Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Meliphaga chrysops*), a pair of which seem to have territorial rights hereabouts. I thought no more of the matter, but a few nights later I saw the same species of bird, prob-

ably the same bird, asleep in the same position. I watched on subsequent nights, but did not see it again. What induced the bird to select such a position when there were plenty of trees and shrubs about is beyond my comprehension.—G. R. GANNON, Pymble, N.S.W., 3/7/44.

The Noisy Scrub-bird—Some Early Field Notes.—Through the kindness of Mr. J. S. P. Ramsay, of Sydney, I recently had the pleasure of reading through some diaries and notebooks kept by his father, the late Dr. E. P. Ramsay, one time Director of the Australian Museum and a distinguished scientist of his day.

In one of the diaries covering the years 1865-1867, when Ramsay was some twenty-four years of age and before he was associated with the Museum, is an account of the habits of the Noisy Scrub-bird of Western Australia, *Atrichornis clamosus*, a species now presumed to be extinct. These interesting observations seem to have been retailed to Ramsay by George Masters, at that time Assistant Curator to the Museum, shortly after his return from a collecting trip to King George's Sound, Western Australia, early in 1866. Masters lived at Petersham, a suburb of Sydney, and, from other remarks in the diary, was in touch with Ramsay concerning various ornithological matters.

The field notes in the diary apparently form the basis of Ramsay's remarks on *A. clamosus* (and also on *A. rufescens*) in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*, for 1866 (published April, 1867), as quoted by Major H. M. Whittell in his recent paper on the Noisy Scrub-bird in *The Emu* (vol. 42, pl. 4, April 1943, pp. 217-234—see p. 222). However, as they are in more detail than the published account I think they are of sufficient interest to be quoted in full, particularly in view of the apparent extinction of the species. Under the date July, 1866, on pp. 167 and 168 of the diary, the notes read:

Remarks on the *Atrichia* of Western Australia, *Atrichia clamosa*, by George Masters.

Masters informs me that the *A. clamosa* is also a very good ventriloquist, he himself was exceedingly puzzled in finding the whereabouts of these birds in Western Australia. The first time he met with them was in a thicket of brush and high grass, reeds, etc., where it was almost impossible to force his way through, and although quite close to the bird could not get a glimpse of it—finally he mounted a *Banksia* and standing up had a view of the reeds all round, heard the bird first as if in one place and then apparently several yards off, but although he threw sticks and did everything to hunt the bird away in the hopes of it flying, he was obliged to depart home without a sight of it, afterwards he heard more but never knew what bird it was until one day in passing by the edge of a very close thicket he observed what he thought to be *Dasyornis longirostris* disappear from the edge, and after looking for some time to no purpose determined to lay down and wait per-adventure it would make its appearance again, after waiting over two hours, out it came first putting forth

its head and looking carefully about to see if the coast was clear and finally ran out altogether and commenced to scratch on the ground which was of a sandy nature, although too close for a decent shot yet rather than lose the bird he fired and found to his delight that the noisy birds which had so tormented him were *Atrichia clamosa*, he says he never heard a bird with such a loud clear call before, and which had such a variety of notes.

The bird collected by Masters is now in the Australian Museum, Sydney. A photograph of this specimen appears on plate 20 of Major Whittell's article (*loc. cit.*). The registered number and particulars of the specimen are: no. 0.16743 ♂, collected King George's Sound, Western Australia, March 15, 1866.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 27/7/44.

Feathers in Nest Lining.—Many birds line their nests with feathers. The number used varies a good deal, no doubt, within any species group, and may depend as much on the disposition of individual birds as on the proximity of feathers to the nest site.

Separating and counting the feathers from a nest is a somewhat tedious occupation. I have done this on three occasions only, with the following results.

Little Grassbird (*Megalurus gramineus*), Eastlakes, near Sydney, October 1941; total 187 feathers. Another nest from the same locality, taken in November 1941, contained 167 feathers. The feathers from these two nests ranged, for the most part, between two and three inches in length and were mostly the soft curved contour, or body, feathers of Swampheens (*Porphyrio melanotus*), Moorheens (*Galinula tenebrosa*), and Coots (*Fulica atra*), species common in the neighbourhood.

Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*), East Hills, Sydney district, October 1944. The deserted nest contained two dead nestlings and an addled egg. The nest seemed so thickly lined with feathers that I removed it and counted the feathers later, the total count being 755. Most of them were small body feathers from a domestic pigeon. They were very closely packed in the nest, but when separated bulked almost as large as the entire nest.

More than 700 feathers in the lining of the nest of a bird scarcely five inches in length may seem a large number, but it is by no means a record. Considerably over 2,000 have been counted from a nest of the British Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalus caudatus*), a bird about the same size as the Yellow-tailed Thornbill. Details relating to the Long-tailed Tit were taken from *The Birds of the British Isles*, series one, T. A. Coward, 4th ed., 1933, page 147.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, New South Wales, 11/12/44.

Members are invited to forward Stray Feathers for publication.