

## Further Notes on *Neositta pileata* and *N. chrysoptera*

By NOEL F. LEARMONTH, Portland, Victoria

Several articles have appeared in recent numbers of *The Emu* on the distribution, overlapping, and nesting of members of the genus *Neositta* (e.g. McGill—'A Distributional Review of the Genus *Neositta*,' August, 1948; Gentili—'Foundations of Australian Bird Geography,' October, 1949; and Mayr—'Taxonomic Notes on the Genus *Neositta*,' April, 1950). A few notes gathered in one of the overlapping areas—south-west Victoria—personally, and by other local observers, may be of interest.

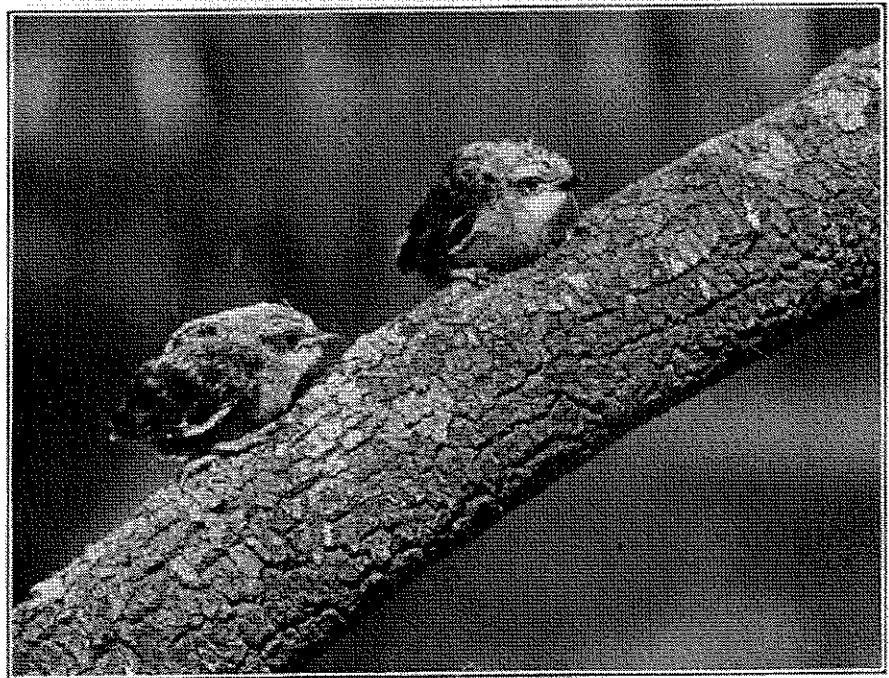
The Black-capped Sittella (*Neositta pileata*) and Orange-winged Sittella (*N. chrysoptera*) undoubtedly overlap in the Portland forest areas, but the maps which accompany the articles by McGill and Gentili do not correspond with the range of these two species as recorded by us who live in the district. McGill's map leaves the western limit of *chrysoptera* at least 100 miles short of the distribution known locally, whilst Gentili's line is out more than double that distance. On the other hand Gentili's range of *pileata* is too far east as there are no records of the species east of Newfield (30 miles east of Warrnambool). Dr. Graham Brown of Colac, who is recording birds of the Otway Ranges and north to Lake Corangamite, has no trace of Black-capped Sittellas in that area.

I do not think that the appearance of the bird at Newfield is "some eastward nomadic movement" as suggested by McGill, but is, I believe, a permanent residence. The country for miles around Warrnambool is very closely settled and bare of timber, the very reverse of satisfactory sittella terrain, but before white settlement there was a continuous line of forest there. The Newfield bird would be among those cut off in this eastern pocket. The following records show that *pileata* is not uncommon in the Portland district. During the last five years Mr. Percy Finck—a bird observing resident—has many records of the species at Heathmere (8 miles from Portland). In August, 1950, I saw several birds two miles south of the town, and three months later a pair in timber within a mile of the post office. A party of us saw about eight birds near Mt. Clay in February, 1950. Mr. Claude Austin, Finck and I found a small flock near Tyrendarra (16 miles east of Portland) in September, 1950.

We find that the western range of *chrysoptera* is about the Victoria/South Australia border in our district; it is a very natural boundary as the country there changes from forest on the east to bare open downs in South Australia. The late Eric Simson had this Sittella on his list of Nelson



White-headed Sittella on Nest.



Young White-headed Sittellas.

Photos. by W. G. and R. C. Harvey.

birds. The Bird Observers Club recorded the bird from Nelson during their visit in December, 1949. Mr. Cliff Beaglehole, a keen naturalist at Gorae, says the species is resident in those forests. Messrs. Chandler, Claude Austin, Ponder and others have recorded *chrysoptera* from the environs of Portland Town. In fact Austin's record of January, 1950, was in the same area as my *pileata* of eleven months later.

Mayr in his notes says—"I have been unable to find any valid evidence for a nesting of two forms of *Neositta* at the same locality." McGill says: "... nor have I been able to ascertain from any field-notes two species breeding in the one locality"; and again—"There is no evidence that both species [*pileata* and *chrysoptera*] breed in the same locality." I am able to help them with information on this point. Here is John Ponder's account to me of two Orange-winged Sittellas he found nesting two miles south-west of Portland in September, 1949. He writes—"The birds were very actively building when I found them and I watched them for some time at close range. I set up my camera but as the light was failing left it overnight and took up my position next morning as soon as the light was strong enough. When I had to go to catch my train the birds continued building within a few moments of my getting down from the tree. The nest was almost completed." Finck found two nests of the Black-capped Sittella at Heathmere prior to 1948 but did not keep any details as he was not aware of the controversy on the subject. However, in November, 1950, I found the species nesting in a small dead limb of a manna gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) in thick timber within Portland town boundary. Both birds were at the nest and did not fly far away when disturbed. I was unable to climb more than half way up to the nest, so in order to secure a photograph returned two days later with a rope. In the meantime, however, a heavy gale had blown several limbs off the tree including the small fork with the nest. I secured this nest, which had contained at least one egg as some small pieces of shell were scattered around the wreck. I have returned several times to the paddock where the birds had their home but they must have cleared out after their loss for there was no trace of them. In conclusion I would draw attention to the dates given for the records of *N. pileata* and *N. chrysoptera* in the overlapping district of Portland. These extend from August to February, which is the nesting period for practically all birds in this area, and helps to corroborate the nesting evidence just set out of the two Sittellas.

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