

Stray Feathers

Range Extension of Three Bird Species.—During the 1953 Camp-out at Lake Barrine, north Queensland, there was a strong suspicion by at least two members that they had seen the Eclectus Parrot (*Lorius pectoralis*). However, as they had not had a perfect sight of the bird, and as it had not previously been recorded within a considerable distance from the area, the sighting was not noted in *The Emu*, part 1, vol. 54, in the paper which dealt with the birds of the Camp-out. Therefore, I feel it worth recording that during a recent visit to Queensland I had an excellent view, for almost ten minutes, of five of these birds at a spot approximately thirty miles from Lake Barrine, on August 4, 1955. They were at an altitude of over 2,000 feet in the Herberton Range south-west of Atherton, and were high in a large tree overhanging a forest track. The party included two fully-coloured females, and I believe there were more birds in the same tree that I could not observe clearly. They appeared to be resting and not feeding, though there was an occasional slow movement among the branches by each of the five birds, which eventually all retired into a thicker part of the tree where they could no longer be seen. No doubt the scarcity of field observers in the far north of Queensland has so far limited our knowledge of bird distribution in the area.

Dealing with matters closer to home, the Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) is not generally recognized as occurring in the north-west of Victoria, and that area was omitted from its distribution in Cayley's book, *Fairy Wrens of Australia*. During Easter 1955 I observed two parties of these birds, each including a fully-coloured male, on the south bank of the Murray on the property Ned's Corner. This is close to the South Australian border, and is about the point where the Murray reaches its northern limit. No doubt this species occurs there on the New South Wales side of the river, as suitable habitat is not confined to the Victorian bank, which means that four species of *Malurus* may be observed within not more than three miles.

The Southern Emu Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*) in western Victoria is generally considered to be found only fairly close to the coast, but investigation in the ranges of mountains broadly referred to as the Grampians has proved it to be a quite common and widespread bird there. It occurs wherever there are heath flats, and also high in the ranges where the eucalypt forest is dense. I have also found it on many heath flats along the catchment of the Glenelg River, and no doubt before the advent of white man and clearing, the bird had a continuous distribution from the mouth of the river to its source in the Grampians. Ashby

(*Emu*, vol. 26, page 287) reported that Emu Wrens had been seen in the Grampians, but were then non-existent owing to swamp draining, and Cohn (*Emu*, vol. 27, page 277) reported having seen them there. However, these records were apparently not known to Cayley who, in his book on the wrens, gave the range of the Emu Wren as coastal.—CLAUDE N. AUSTIN, Coleraine, Vic., 10/10/55.

Unusual Nesting Sites.—During the spring of 1949 a pair of Magpie-Larks (*Grallina cyanoleuca*) and Black-and-white Fantails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) nested close to each other in a small isolated stand of eucalypts on property owned by Australian Iron and Steel Ltd. at Port Kembla, N.S.W., and did so each succeeding spring up to and including 1953. They were unperturbed at the comings and goings of large numbers of employees and the roar of the adjacent heavy steel-making processes, and successfully raised their broods during such period.

In the spring of 1954, disaster struck in the form of cold southerly gales accompanied by torrential rains which caused the Magpie-Lark's nest to topple. The Fantails were unable to incubate due to the gyrations of their nest on its slender branchlet and the eggs were broken. Undaunted, both species rebuilt their nests in a 33,000 volt outdoor substation some 300 yards from the original nesting site, the Magpie-Larks on the angle-iron framework of the towers which support the high-tension conductors, and the Fantails near the ground on a half-inch diameter lead-covered transformer metering cable.

The Magpie-Larks successfully raised two broods in this new environment during 1954, and are nesting again at the time of writing, in 1955, in the same location.

The Fantails, however, were not as fortunate. They built their nest in the usual manner, but upon completion the weight of the birds standing on the perimeter of the nest at right-angles to the line of the cable support, aided by the slippery and 'soapy' surface of the external lead sheath of the cable, caused the nest to turn through 180 degrees, leaving it hanging upside down. The birds, with characteristic engineering skill, then rebuilt the nest directly on top of the inverted structure, i.e. the new nest was attached to the upturned base of the old one, the suspended weight of the old nest having a stabilizing effect upon the new structure and giving it an 'hour-glass' appearance. Upon completion of this odd-looking piece of avian architecture, a successful brood was raised. The birds have commenced nesting operations for 1955, but have not selected a lead-covered cable this time.—A. R. SEFTON, Thirroul, N.S.W., 26/9/55.