

Nesting of the Cassowary

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On September 26, 1960, Mrs. R. G. Gill found the nesting place with three eggs, of a Cassowary (*Casuaris casuaris*) near Pin Gin Hill, Innisfail, North Queensland. A fire had burnt over the area on September 19 and, as only one of the three eggs was scorched, it seemed that the female had continued to lay despite the then open situation of the nest-site, which, before the fire, was in fairly thick blady-grass under a lantana bush in second-growth forest only 25 feet from a busy road to a quarry.

A fourth egg was found in the nest on October 1 and a fifth egg on October 6; this completed the clutch. The female then deserted, and a month later weeds were growing up between the eggs. Seventeen days elapsed from the time of the fire to the finding of the fifth egg, from which fact it may be assumed that the eggs were laid at intervals of at least four days. Frequent observations were made at the nest-site, but it was not determined precisely when the fourth and fifth eggs were laid, although the time of laying is known to within a day in both instances.

The measurements and weights of the eggs were:

- (a) 133 x 94 mm; 20 oz.
- (b) 133 x 95 mm; 21 oz.
- (c) 134 x 95 mm; 21 oz.
- (d) 138 x 96 mm; 20 oz.
- (e) 138 x 96 mm; 21 oz.

The average weight was 20.6 oz. This compares with an average of almost 20.5 oz. for the nine eggs of the Emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*) selected at random from a series, the extreme weights in that instance being 16.25 and 23.5 oz. (Campbell, A. J., 1901, *Nests & Eggs of Australian Birds*, p.1059). A comparison was made with normal eggs of the domestic fowl and it was found that the weight of one Cassowary's egg equalled that of nine fowls' eggs.

Mrs. Gill feels sure that the same pair of birds nested again near the original site because, on December 31, 1960, she saw three chicks nearby: "they could only just walk and didn't seem to have sense enough to follow the parent." Altogether she observed about 25 young Cassowaries in various localities near Innisfail and adjoining districts during the latter part of 1960, indicating a successful breeding season for the species.

A. J. Campbell states (*loc. cit.*, p.1071) that upon the male, as with the Emu, devolves the task of incubating the eggs. He does not give any evidence supporting his statement, which is at variance with the remarks of E. D. Frizelle who studied the Cassowary for several months while search-

ing for the eggs of that species in 1911 (*Emu*, 1913, 12: 172-178, pl. 21-24). Frizelle remarks (p.175): "I know now that the male bird never visits the nesting country [presumably the nest-site is meant — K. A. H.], but keeps within warning call of it. When anyone approaches he utters his deep-sounding 'Bōōm bōōm'; or else, if taken by surprise, a short 'Heûgh, heûgh, heûgh'. He may also stamp his feet on the ground as he goes away."

Observations on the nesting habits of captive birds could clear up the problem indicated.

My thanks to Mrs. Gill for her interesting field notes and for details of the Cassowary's eggs.

Nest usurpation in scrub-wrens.—In early August 1960 a companion and I were hunting birds in the jungle-clad ranges 25 miles east of Allora, Qld. We were in the habit of inspecting any nests of the Yellow-throated Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis lathamii*) that we found. Approximately one-third of them contained an infertile egg, and all nests found were old.

One nest containing a number of broken eggs was pulled apart for closer inspection. To our surprise we found three eggs of the Yellow-throated Scrub-Wren and two eggs of the Large-billed Scrub-Wren (*S. magnirostris*). All the eggs were broken. Evidently the nest had been deserted by both species.

This interesting case of nest usurpation invites the question: which parent was the first to lay. It would seem less likely that *magnirostris* had laid after *lathamii* as the latter should have been brooding, but still less likely that the Large-billed would have laid in a deserted nest of the other species and containing three eggs, as there were many empty nests nearby. The fact that there were two eggs of *magnirostris* in the nest emphasizes the bird's intention, perhaps, to lay its full clutch and incubate; but if it was driven off by the larger bird, why did the rightful owner desert its eggs?—LLOYD NIELSEN, Jandowae, Qld., 18/2.61.