

clearly defined that it could well become, or have been, a natural plumage characteristic. It is certainly an extremely good example of melanism associated with normal markings.

Mr. C. J. Simpson-Scott of Surrey, England, has kindly furnished me with some details of another melanistic hen Zebra Finch. This bird was melanistic from the first adult plumage. About half of the plumage was melanistic, the remainder being normal. The impression was gained that the melanism varied somewhat from time to time. These notes were supplied when the bird was about a year old.

REFERENCES

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Stray Feathers

Some curious eggs.—An egg seen in the nest of a Yellow-tufted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga melanops*), in Victoria during September, was so unusually large and pale-coloured that I supposed it at first glance to be the product of a Pallid Cuckoo. But, as there was no shortage of suitable hosts in the area, I found difficulty in believing that the parasitic bird would place an egg in a nest before the owner had laid.

When visited again a few days later the nest contained a second egg, normal in size and colour, and in due course this egg hatched and the young honeyeater departed. More or less idly, then, I lifted the first (larger) egg from the nest and broke it open, expecting to see only infertile fluid. To my surprise, however, the contents comprised two young birds, fairly well developed; the heads and beaks were clearly defined, but the bodies were so messy (owing to the rough method of opening) that I could not determine if they were joined.

This is the only instance I have known of two young occurring in one egg of a wild bird, and it is interesting to speculate on what would have happened if the honeyeater had continued her brooding long enough to cause the egg to hatch—it probably needed a rather longer period than its single-yolked companion. A poultry expert tells me that he has never known two chicks to emerge from one egg, though a double-yolked egg sometimes produces a chick with portions of a second chick attached to it.*

Another odd discovery in the same area (Maryborough) was a nest of a Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanop-*

* More recently, a Sydney newspaper has published this paragraph cabled from London: "Siamese twin chicks were hatched at Diss, Norfolk, today—the first ever in a hatchery which produces millions of chicks a year."—A.H.C.

terus) containing three eggs which, instead of having the usual array of dark spots on a creamy background, were pure white. The nest was placed on a fragile scrap of bark jutting from the side of a eucalypt, at a height of about 6 feet, and it was only by chance that I lifted the eggs out and saw their astonishing colour. Unfortunately, all three eggs were lying broken below the nest on the following day. As the bark appeared too fragile for a Raven (or even a Grey Thrush) to perch upon, and as the nest was not disturbed, the idea occurred that the owner itself had ejected the eggs because of my slight handling of them, though, in fact, I have not known this to happen previously with any wood-swallow.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, 12/2/62.

White-backed Magpie in south-eastern Queensland.—On September 12, while travelling along a road four miles south of Jandowae, a dead magpie attracted my attention. The bird had been shot. This magpie had a white back with white under the body extending from the tail to a line just above the knees. Other markings were similar to those of the Black-backed Magpie, which is very common in this particular area. The bird, a male, was skinned and sent to the Queensland Museum.

After finding this bird I searched an open, lightly-timbered paddock nearby and located two more white-backed birds. Both had markings similar to those of the dead one. They were feeding with a flock of 16 Black-backed Magpies on insects and grubs turned up by a tractor and plough cultivating the paddock.

White-backed Magpies have been recorded from such localities as Cecil Plains, Oakey and Murphys Creek in south-eastern Queensland. The late Mr. E. A. R. Lord had a White-backed Magpie in his area at Murphys Creek for 15 years, and it paired and bred with a black-backed bird.—LLOYD NIELSEN, Jandowae, Qld., 17/11/61.

Review

Rediscovery of the Noisy Scrub-bird.—The past 12 months have been notable for outstanding discoveries in Australian ornithology. An American expedition has unearthed a large fossil (late Tertiary) flamingo at Lake Eyre, the Western Australian Museum has announced the finding of an egg of a gigantic emu-like bird, larger than the largest moa, and reports were made of the sighting of three Australian birds thought to have become extinct: the Eyrean Grass-Wren, the Night Parrot and the Noisy Scrub-bird. Preliminary reports on the last-named have been published by H. O. Webster (*W. Aust. Nat.*, Vol 8, 1962, pp. 57 and 81), and a detailed account is being prepared for *The Emu*.

Webster's original find was made in a remarkable situation. A male bird was heard singing in a densely vegetated, swampy thicket alongside a holiday hut at Two People Bay, a few miles east of Albany, and the bird appeared oblivious of motor cars traversing its territory, children playing nearby and the other distractions of a popular holiday