

## Reviews.

## NESTS AND EGGS OF BIRDS.

[Australian Museum, Sydney. Special Catalogue No. 1. "Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania," by Alfred J. North, C.M.Z.S., &c.]

AFTER a delay of 11 months this handsome work has reached its second part, containing pp. 37-120, plates B ii.-iv. This deals with the various Bower-Birds, Orioles, Fig-Birds, Drongo-Shrike, Magpie Lark, Shrike-Thrushes, Cuckoo-Shrikes, and Caterpillar-eaters, and forms a most interesting and valuable study in the life-history of the birds named. The general get-up is equally deserving of commendation with Part I., which has already been reviewed in *The Emu* (vol. i., p. 28-30). The half-tone photo-blocks of nests and bowers are really beautiful, while Mr. Neville Cayley's black and white drawings and natural poses of birds are admirable.

Perusal of the part under review makes more emphatic the previously expressed opinion that the author does himself an injustice by his title. Descriptions of nests and eggs form but a moiety of his work, which is really a praiseworthy endeavour to chronicle a full description of each species, where it is found, and how it lives. It is hence more valuable than a work dealing merely with nidification, and Mr. North virtually admits that his aim is wider than his title expresses by delineating (and rightly so) two species which have not yet been "found breeding," and the "nests and eggs" of which remain to be discovered—namely, the Golden (Newton) Bower-Bird and the Tooth-billed Bower-Bird.

It seems a thousand pities that such a splendid work should have any blemish—more still when it is realized that those most readily perceptible are caused by an oft-repeated fault of the author, for which it is hard to find any justification. Indeed, there is evidence in the present number that Mr. North recognizes that acknowledgment should be made of what has been recorded by prior or contemporary workers in the same field. In an innocent footnote on page 80 [*Zeitschr. f. ges. Orn.*, i., p. 92, pl. xvii., fig. 1 (1884), and *op. cit.*, p. 283, pl. xviii., figs. 2-4 (1884)] he draws attention to a work in a foreign language not available to the majority of Australian ornithologists, who have hence inadvertently overlooked the descriptions, &c., of one of the Orioles therein contained. Yet he himself has omitted an important reference on the subject of Bower-Birds in his own language, to wit the *Proceedings of the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh*, vol. xiv., pp. 13-46 (1898), with eight photo. illustrations, four being similar subjects to those in his own book. Seeking a reason for this omission lands the reader in a dilemma as to whether the author has been negligent in failing to consult authorities, or has desired to avoid reference to

the work of a brother Australian naturalist, and in passing it by has slighted one of the most venerable and learned societies of Great Britain.

Again, in the chapter on the Great Bower-Bird, justice has been denied to another well-known worker. The original descriptions of eggs, &c., by Mr. Dudley Le Souëf, C.M.Z.S., which appeared in *The Ibis*, p. 359 (1899), and in the *Victorian Naturalist*, vol. xvi., p. 66 (1899) have been ignored. Mr. North has alluded to specimens of these eggs in the Ryan and Snowball collections only, though almost every collector is aware that Dr. Ryan, the late Dr. Snowball, and Mr. Le Souëf formed a syndicate of three to send Mr. E. Olive to the Northern Territory. He has also quoted at length Mr. Olive's field note pertaining to the Great Bower-Bird without acknowledging the fact that the information was procured whilst Mr. Olive was in the pay of the syndicate named. It would surely have been courteous to do so.

There is still another omission—and a very serious one—which cannot be overlooked. It is hard to understand why, whilst the other Cuckoo-Shrikes have been fully described in the present part, so well-defined a species as *G. lineatus* has not been included. The non-inclusion of this bird renders Mr. North's work incomplete, and discounts its value as a complete work of reference very greatly. The beautiful Barred Cuckoo-Shrike is certainly "found breeding in Australia," its habitat includes Mr. North's own state, and its nest and eggs have long since been discovered. They were described by Mr. Le Souëf in *The Ibis*, p. 314 (1896), and re-described in Mr. Campbell's book (*vide* p. 99), with an authenticated coloured figure of an egg on plate vii., while there is a photograph by Mr. Le Souëf in the *Victorian Naturalist* (vol. xiii., p. 63, 1896) of another type of egg.

Looking casually at Mr. North's technical matter, it will be noticed he states that the Satin Bower-Bird lays three eggs "occasionally," and that both the Spotted Bower-Bird and the Cat-Bird also lay three "sometimes." It would only be right to have given his authority or data, because he has stated in his previous work that these birds only lay two eggs to a clutch. Regarding the Spotted Bower-Bird and a "remarkably handsome set of two in Mr. Joseph Gabriel's collection," it would have been interesting had Mr. North furnished the history of these eggs, especially as he has deemed it of sufficient importance to figure one (pl. B ii., fig. 5). Again, touching the Spotted Bower-Bird (page 44), Mr. North says, as "was pointed out by me years ago, this bird is an excellent mimic." A footnote reference would have been confirmatory evidence that he had first pointed out this remarkable trait in the bird.

Mr. North has probably made an omission by leaving South Australia out of the "distribution" of the Oriole. At least one

reliable collector has observed the bird in that State.\* And, strangely enough, while cleverly arguing that *O. affinis* of Northern Australia is merely a smaller form of *O. sagittatus* (*viridis*), and should be "lumped" with that species, he has omitted North-Western Australia and Northern Territory, in the proper place, from the "distribution."

In aiding ornithologists to unravel certain knotty points Mr. North's labours (with a national collection at his back) are exceedingly helpful. Writing, for instance, on the Oriole, he states:—

"In the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum' Dr. Sharpe does not regard either *Oriolus affinis* or *Collyriocincla parvissima* as distinct species, although the learned author ranks several of our Australian birds as good species on less slender grounds. Authorities are divided in opinion as to what is a sufficient character to constitute a species or sub-species, and have been classed as either 'lumpers' or 'splitters.' Personally I favour the former, for in a large island-continent like Australia, where geographical distribution and climatic influence are such important factors in the character of a species, it would render the study of birds impossible if each tinge or shade in colour of plumage from different latitudes were accorded sub-specific distinction. During a period of 12 years I have characterized three very distinct sub-species, but were I to separate from different localities each race that varies from the average type in size and depth of colour, the described Australian forms would be considerably more than twice the number they are at present. To do so, however, ornithologists, without the aid of a specimen being properly localized, and of a large reference collection only to be found in a museum, and possibly a few private collections, would be hopelessly involved in trying to distinguish the various climatic forms of a species. Taking *Oriolus sagittatus* as an example, one would pick out three distinct races from the typical form. An examination of a large series from different latitudes would prove, however, that they gradually merge into one another. Leaving the increase in the length of bill out of the question, the decrease in the white terminal marking of the tail feathers is shown on the preceding page from a photograph of the tails of two fully adult males obtained in widely separated localities."

It will be noted with satisfaction that Mr. North is adopting many of the vernacular names mentioned in the Australasian Science Association's List (1898), but it is quite unnecessary to excuse himself for doing so in some cases because he found (like the committee who drew up the list) they had already been used by earlier authorities.

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"THE Birds of My Parish," by the Rev. Evelyn H. Pollard (John Lane, the Bodley Head, London and New York, 1890), is by no means a new book, but is one that retains its freshness, and will repay every bird-lover's reading. It is also a good example of what is being done by modern writers to popularize natural history. Within a limit of 1,600 acres (a small holding in some parts of Australia) this disciple of Gilbert White has found material for a most interesting volume, recording the "doings and sayings" of the 76 birds observed and studied. These are

\* "Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds" (Campbell), p. 82.

"roughly classed, first as residents, regular or irregular, of the particular parish; secondly as migrants to and from the country, summer and winter. Fifty-one of the total number of birds are placed in the first of these two categories, the remaining 25 in the second." There is much in the volume that recalls the close observation and admirable description of Richard Jefferies, the patient watching and the keen sympathy with the object observed; and though the terse directness of White's "Selborne" is missing, one feels that the author is master of his craft, and does not find a dull page. To pick a gem from this casket, the chapter entitled "A Medley" might be chosen, and yet it is hardly more readable than several others. "Birds at the Soup Kitchen" and "Summer Migrants" are almost equally good. If the author is occasionally too imaginative in the language he puts into the mouths of his birds, he always makes it reveal bird ways, and thus elicits "points" a casual observer might overlook. Those who wish some acquaintance with British bird life could hardly do better than peruse this book.

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"STRANGE ADVENTURES IN DICKY-BIRD LAND."—A little book with this title, by the well-known writer, R. Kearton, F.Z.S., who, with his brother, has done so much to reproduce phases of bird-life photographically, shows a tendency of modern bird literature. The aim is to induce children to take an intelligent interest in wild life, and the author has endeavoured to do so by means of a series of short stories in which the heroes and heroines are birds and beasts. When these are read as illustrated by the admirable pictures (taken from life) it is hard to conceive of anything that could be more effective in the production of a love of natural history in the young. The incidents introduced being founded on facts which have come under the notice of the author, the work can be strongly recommended. It is published by Cassell and Co.

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A NEW magazine, called *Animal Life*, is being published by Hutchinson and Co., London. "Zoo Notes," in the first number, include pictures of the King and Thick-billed Penguins, as well as other birds. A Nankeen Night-Heron from Australia is figured, and as a novelty in bird life a photo. is given of an Osprey, with the remark that, though once common in Britain, more particularly in the north, it now never lives long if brought there. A paper on "The Last Hampshire Ravens" is worth perusal, and from it one regrets to learn that "as an inland bird the Raven has been nearly exterminated." The illustrations are good examples of the high standard to which photo-illustrations can be brought, and are of the more value as being taken direct from life.