

insects, small snails, and beetles. This was an adult male. The other was the bird I shot for Mr. Campbell.

I have spent many hours watching this bird feeding and building its nest, and to my mind it closely resembles the Tree-creepers (*Certhiidae*). With its mouse-like movements, it will fly to the base of a tree fern, run rapidly to the top and down the other side, just pausing long enough to grasp an unwary beetle, or some such small object, then off again to another tree, and repeat the performance.

When building it is very wary, and if it sees anyone watching it will at once begin to put the material which it is carrying in quite a different place from where its nest is situate, and will do this for some time, making several trips and bringing material to do so. This I have noticed several times, and when the intruder has withdrawn for some time it will go on building at the nest, sometimes using the material it has placed in the false position, but more often leaving it where it was first put. They will go a long way for material suitable to their needs, and on one occasion I followed a pair of them for over a quarter of a mile. They had found a dead opossum, and were engaged in lining their home with its fur. It took me just over an hour to find that nest, though some 200 yards of the distance was open country.

Whilst it is feeding its note is a short "Cheep, cheep," but at times you will hear it trilling out a little song something like the Calamanthus (Field-Wren), but not so full or sustained as that bird's note.

It would be a difficult matter to place any limit to the distribution of this species, as I have seen members of it at the Huon, Carnarvon, North-West Bay River, Glenorchy, Bismarck, New Norfolk, &c., and as high up on the mountain as the Springs, and under the Organ Pipes.

There is just one word to say in closing, and that is, I hope that members and others will not destroy this interesting bird, but will remember that, as the land is being cleared, it will retire to the backwoods, and only leave a few of the more venturesome of the tribe to eke out an existence in some secluded spot. Watch them, note their habits, but do not take their life.

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### Stray Feathers.

FOUR CURIOUS NESTING PLACES.—I am sending two photos. of peculiar nesting places. One is the nest and three eggs of the Grey Thrush (*Collyriocincla harmonica*), in the wickerwork off a demijohn, and the other a nest and two eggs of the Pipit (*Anthus*). The latter was found on the Casterton Golf Links, the former in the scrub along the River Glenelg, evidently carried there at flood time. I have also had presented to me a nest with four eggs of the Little Crake (*Porzana palustris*). The nest was placed in an old jam tin in a vertical position, in a clump of

round rushes in swampy ground in the town, and quite close to a road with much traffic. I have been to the locality to see for myself, and flushed the birds, which may possibly breed again. Again, at the local rifle butts, there is a Swallow's (*Hirundo neoxena*) nest built in a old pair of trousers hanging up in the marker's shelter alongside the target. I must say it is a very remarkable thing to get these four nests in such unusual sites, especially those in the old tins. The Crake's nest is made of the round rushes only, and the tin is one of the size of a "lobster" tin, and as the nest material is small in amount, it means that the bird must have had to manœuvre somewhat to get in, but her long legs would doubtless come to her aid.—(DR.) ERNEST A. D'OMBRAIN. Casterton, Victoria, 12/11/05. For the nest of the Grey Thrush see Plate XII.

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LONGREACH (Q.) NOTES.—The Tricolored Chat (*Ephthianura tricolor*) was very rare on the Peak Downs before the drought, but now flocks of 20 and 30 can be seen feeding on the ground, generally on a bare red soil ridge with dead timber. Since I have been working near Longreach I have seen flocks of 60 or 70, and they are quite common in the Boree forest, where the soil is brown.

The Red-capped Robin (*Petræca goodenovi*) is here now, but I have seen only females, or else the males have lost their bright colours.

A great part of Central Queensland was visited last December by an irruption of Native-Hens (*Microtribonyx ventralis*), upper mandible green and lower red, much resembling in general appearance a Game Bantam hen. They came in tens of thousands, and ate the frontages of all waterholes quite bare, besides polluting the water. They became very tame, and came into the streets of the country towns, and suddenly left in April, but from what direction they came or which way they went nobody seems to know. At first they were welcomed as allies of the Ibis army doing battle with the young locusts, but examination of their crops showed that they were vegetarians strictly.

A sight for bird lovers is a flight of Betcherrygahs or Warbling Grass-Parrakeets (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) on the Peak Downs. To attempt an estimate of the numbers in some of the flocks is useless, and one would be accused of exaggerating, but I have seen some masses of green and gold some chains long and over a chain wide. The speed and concerted movement as they sweep round and round and in and out of the timber in a perfect ecstasy of flight are, I think, unequalled by those of any other bird: one minute they will be almost lost to sight as they turn edgeways, and the next present a broad waving ribbon.

Flock Pigeons (*Histriophaps histrionica*) came to the Peak Downs this year for the first time to my knowledge, the drought which still rages at Winton being, I expect, the cause.—F. B. C. FORD.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE NESTING OF PHAPS CHALCOPPERA AND OCYPHAPS LOPHOTES.—As the Pigeons had been at work from the end of August till the latter part of March, I concluded they would recommence about the same time this year, therefore judge of my surprise when upon going into the Crested Bronze-wings' aviary on the 29th of June I found two eggs in the nest, and in the aviary of the Common Bronze-wing one egg, the second being laid the following day. I can assign no reason for the birds nesting (both varieties) fully two months earlier than the preceding season, excepting that we had not had the usual severe frosts, and the weather, though wet, had been fairly mild. The Crested Bronze-wings failed to hatch their eggs. This variety, being nervous and excitable, is much more easily driven from the nest than the others. The Common Bronze-wing hatched both eggs, and the young did well until about the eleventh day, when in the night we had a sudden and heavy downpour, and although protected from the rain I found both dead next morning. At that age the mother is not able to cover them both well.

On the 13th of August the Common Bronze-wing had laid again two eggs in an open box, in which I had placed some fine wood shavings and a few pine needles on top, the birds adding to the latter later on. In the course of three or four days I found the Crested variety also had built, this time a tiny nest with pine needles in a tecoma, and was sitting upon two eggs. The Common Bronze-wings hatched their young, and when a fortnight old they were out of the nest; owing to the ground being damp and cold I replaced them, and they were just beginning to fly when to my dismay I found one dead yesterday morning (the 17th). On going to the nest last night I noticed the survivor alone in nest, the parents roosting beside it; it looked so bright and well that I thought I would risk leaving it there, but, unfortunately, this morning it also had died in the nest. I wonder they survived so long, as we have had a great deal of rain and two heavy falls of snow since they were hatched. The Crested reared only one young out of second lot, and the nest was so small at first as to make one wonder how the young would be kept in it, but as soon as it was necessary the parents enlarged it considerably. (I notice both varieties replenish the nest after the young are hatched.)

I may further remark that, although I have kept the Common Bronze-wings for some years, I never observed till lately how very fond they are of worms, snapping them up eagerly directly they are thrown towards them.—(MRS.) MARY G. ROBERTS. Hobart, 18/9/05.

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THE GANNET.—It is very interesting to watch the diving operations of the Gannet (*Sula sula*), especially when conducted on so large a scale as has been the case recently on this coast. A

great shoal of the delicate little fish called whitebait has made its appearance in our waters, and hundreds of bird pursuers are relentlessly following it up. Yesterday afternoon I counted 63 Gannets in one group floating on the blue waters of the Mersey, just where it debouches into the Strait, enjoying in the sunshine a brief spell from their fishing labours. Although I have repeatedly watched the Gannets diving off the coast of New South Wales and elsewhere, I never remember seeing them present in such numbers as here just now. When over a good shoal of fish they literally tumble by dozens and scores into the water, reminding the watcher of a shower of huge snowflakes melting into the waves; it is marvellous how they avoid striking each other when descending in such numbers and with such velocity into a small patch of water, each apparently oblivious of everything except that one little object it has sighted beneath the surface. The dive into a deep water is usually made from a height of 18 to 30 feet, and is a literal "header," the bird usually entering the waves nearly vertically, and with a splash; a perceptible interval elapses before it reappears some little distance away, giving its yellowish beak a swish backwards and forwards after swallowing its prey. It usually sits a few seconds upon the water before going aloft again, thus differing from the Tern, which takes to its wings the moment it reaches the surface. When diving in shallow water close to the rocks, the Gannet begins the descent from a height of 4 or 5 feet only, instead of 20 or 30 feet. The wings are not closed, as is usually supposed, at the beginning of the descent, but remain expanded until the bird is close to the surface, and apparently assist in guiding it to the exact spot which it desires to reach; it then flaps them suddenly to the side of the body, and the admirable adaptability of its shape to its aquatic life may be well seen just as it enters the water, the long beak, head, neck, and body stretched out rigidly in one straight line, the legs and wings tucked closely in, everything arranged so as to offer as little resistance as possible to the water. Few prettier sights can be imagined than a company thus engaged in diving on a spring afternoon, with the sunshine above and the blue waves beneath; the plunge is made with such zeal (there are no half-measures about the bird's dive).

A few pairs of Terns (*Sterna bergi*) may be seen fishing in company with the larger birds, but the dive is a much milder affair in this case, the bird not going any depth, and in some cases only half-submerging itself, and rising on the wing immediately afterwards; it has a peculiar way of bending its head down when on the wing, looking for prey, and this, combined with its sharp-pointed beak, gracefully curved wings, and forked tail, render it unmistakable. The Gannet fishes very silently, hardly a sound escaping from the whole large company, but the Tern, while coursing up and down, frequently utters a querulous kind of whistle or wail, sometimes varying this by a harsher guttural cry.—H. STUART DOVE. West Devonport, Tasmania.

BIRDS OBSERVED AND BIRD-SKINS EXAMINED IN 1905.—Scarlet-breasted Robin (*Petræca leggii*): Variation in Plumage.—On the 13th of March my attention was arrested by the loud and oft-repeated calling of a small bird. The notes were those of the Scarlet-breasted Robin, and were unusually loud. On approaching the bird I observed that, although in other respects it resembled a male Scarlet-breasted Robin, it had a pure white breast. It thus resembled *Petræca toitoi*, but good reasons why it could not have been that bird readily occur. The white frontal spot was sufficient to distinguish it from the Hooded Robin (*P. bicolor*), and I have no doubt that it was a white-breasted variety of *P. leggii*. It returned on the following day.

Flame-breasted Robin (*Petræca phænicea*).—One adult male was seen on the 4th of July, near South Bridgewater, in the company of a small flock of White-fronted Chats.

Satin Fly-catcher (*Myiagra nitida*).—The latest record in the autumn of this year is 20th February, when three or four birds were seen (Mr. W. Duffy). The bird utters a series of peculiar sibilant notes when flying. When it perches the tail quivers rapidly.

White-fronted Chat (*Ephthianura albifrons*).—A flock of eight White-fronted Chats was observed on the 4th of July on Bridge-water Causeway. They came from the east bank of the river, and paused to feed amongst the drift-weed and *débris* on the embankment. I have not observed these birds on the west bank of the Derwent.

Grey Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus cinereus*).—An adolescent male had the marginal wing coverts tipped with buff and the median wing coverts tipped with olive; the feathers of the mantle had brownish-olive tips. Iris light brown. Length, 10.5 inches; wing, 6 inches; culmen, 1.56 inches; tarsus, 1.53 inches.

White-bearded Honey-eater (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*).—In an adolescent male and an adolescent female the malar tufts of the adult were absent; the small projecting white feathers on each side of the base of the lower mandible of the adult were also absent, but there were a few small buffy-white feathers which extended from the base of the lower mandible to the ears; the hair-like feathers on the chin were darker in colour than the corresponding feathers of the adult; the heads were not black but brownish-black, and the colours of the breast feathers were not markedly contrasted. The feathers of the mantle of the adult are black, with white edges; those feathers of the adolescent birds were uniformly dusky-brown; the bills were brown, blended with horn colour.

Azure Kingfisher (*Alcyon azurea*).—The comparative scarcity of this bird in the south of Tasmania must be my excuse for mentioning a well-nigh belated instance of its occurrence. In March, 1901, an Azure Kingfisher (the stuffed skin of which I have seen) was shot near Broad Marsh, in the county of Monmouth (Mr. T. Bowden).

Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*).—The latest date in autumn at which I have a record of this Cuckoo in an adult state is 19th

March (Mr. W. Duffy); the earliest date in spring is 21st August (Mr. A. R. Reid).

Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*).—The latest autumn record is 27th February (Mr. W. Duffy); earliest spring record is 4th September, on which date a bird was seen by myself. It permitted a near approach, and I was able to perceive the rufescent tinge on the breast and the tothing of the tail feathers. When at rest on a branch the bird maintained an erect position, with the tail pendent; when it alighted it jerked the tail upwards, but not so much as the Pallid Cuckoo does.

Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*).—One was observed feeding on small crabs, which were swallowed whole. It obtained them in shallow water, either by dipping its head into the water or by jumping out of the water and taking a little dive. As is the case every winter, many Seagulls visited the grass fields, but this did not occur in stormy weather only. Thus on the 10th of July about 100 Seagulls appeared in a field on a fine morning with a gentle southerly breeze blowing. Adolescent birds, having the wing coverts more or less speckled with stone colour, accompanied the adults, but were fewer in number than these.

Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*).—I take this opportunity of qualifying some of my remarks regarding this species which appeared in *The Emu* of April, 1904.\* The downy covering of a pair of young birds, which I called "nestling down," might be better named a second growth of down. It is what Gould has called "the downy dress of immaturity."† This down grows among the blue feathers of the back, and conceals them wholly or partly. But I do not think that the down in question has its origin earlier than the blue feathers, for the dorsal surface even of the fœtus has a covering of embryonic feathers which have some resemblance to the feathers which cover the back of the perfect bird. I have read that at the time of moulting the plumage of Penguins sloughs in patches, so that in not a few respects the processes connected with the growth and moulting of feathers differs amongst Penguins from these processes amongst other birds. The latest date on which I saw Little Penguins in the Derwent was the 17th of July. On the 11th of the same month I had seen two birds swimming side by side and diving simultaneously, and had inferred that the mating season had commenced.

Shieldrake (*Casarca tadornoides*).—A duck was shot at Pipeclay Lagoon, South Arm, about the 11th of March (Mr. W. Richardson).

Grey Teal (*Nettion gibberifrons*).—One bird (a drake) had the stomach full of the shells of a minute mollusc resembling a *Cantharidus*.

Freckled Duck (*Stictonetta nœvosa*).—Two birds (duck and drake) were shot near South Bridgewater in the third week of March (Mr. A. Dickenson).—JAMES R. M'CLYMONT. Sandy Bay, Hobart.

\* Vol. iii., p. 237.

† "Handbook to the Birds of Australia," vol. ii., p. 521.