

Stray Feathers.

THE FEATHER FASHION.—It is discomfoting to bird-lovers to see bird feathers being used again so freely to decorate ladies' hats. Whole plumages of small, bright birds are to be seen, and even Lyre-Birds' tail feathers are worked up for the trade. Society has surely forgotten the example of Queen Alexandra, who, when the feather fashion took hold some years ago, refused to wear any plumes that entailed the destruction of birds. Apart from Ostrich and Cockerel feathers, all the ornaments required by the fashion fad do mean the taking of life. The Audubon Societies of the United States have produced some astounding figures in reference to the number of birds ruthlessly slaughtered for the market. Those who recognise the sound practical use of birds in nature, apart from any æsthetic value, should openly discountenance such unthinking and barbarous fashions.

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EAGLES AND RATS. — There have been very few Eagles (Wedge-tailed) about here, but the overseer of a station farther down the river (Flinders) told me they had been bad where he was, which he attributed to a visitation of rats (a mild plague). We had no rats at Spring Valley—never saw one. The Eagles were very partial to them—every nest that he examined which was occupied by a sitting bird or young was well supplied with the rodents. He told me that he found between sixty and seventy nests during the past winter with either eggs or young, and, on my asking him how often he thought both youngsters in a nest reached maturity, or at least an age able to fly, he said that seldom both survived, but this year, owing, he thought, to the superabundance of food (rats), there were decidedly more than usual. Not only that, but he found this year what he never saw before, and that was two nests with *three* eggs in and one nest with three big, strong youngsters.—FREDC. L. BERNEY. Spring Valley, Hughenden (N.Q.), 24/11/05.

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DO EMUS MIGRATE?—I am camped on the No. 2 rabbit-proof fence, about 120 miles east of Perth. The Emus are having a bad time of it here. They seem to migrate from east to west. Later they travel back from west to east, as soon as the dry season comes. When they strike the rabbit-proof fence they hang on it in the corners until they die of thirst. The boundary-rider on this section told me he could show me fifty dead Emus between my camp and Cunderdin, a distance of about six miles, and that on his length of 60 miles there are about 300 dead ones. I put one mob of 30 birds through a gate, but it is too risky to do this, as one is liable to get into

trouble if caught by an inspector. On the No. 1 fence I am informed that the Emus were much more numerous, and that when travelling along the fence one was hardly ever clear of the stench from dead birds. Do you think the A.O.U. can do anything in the matter? Of course the only proof I have personally seen was starved birds on the fence at my camp trying to get through. They have a "pad" beaten along the fence, and walk backwards and forwards, trying to find an opening. If one gets a fright and rushes the fence, and falls over it, it goes straight west when it gets up. I have never seen any on the west side of the fence except one bird, which had three young ones on the other side. The young birds were very weak, so I watched my chance, got them in a corner, and, rushing them, they made a dash into the netting, and then lay down, with their necks stretched flat on the sand. In size the young were as big as Wild Turkey, but I do not think the three would have weighed more than a total of 12 lbs. They seemed to be only bones and feathers. I believe if the Emus were on the west side of the fence they would be all right, as no one has ever seen them hang and perish on that side.—J. P. ROGERS. Cunderdin (W.A.), 14/2/06.

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DUNK ISLAND (N.Q.) NOTES.—It would appear that an alliance has sprung into existence between myself and certain birds of this island. The Drongo invariably gives warning of the presence of the cruel Grey Falcon, the note of detection and appeal for assistance being a peculiar discordant chatter, far more intelligible and significant than the clamour of domestic fowls. The Drongo will wait about until the Falcon is shot, and will then fly off with quite a pretty exclamation, no doubt expressive of satisfaction at the execution of a bold and notorious criminal. On three separate occasions when I have shot a Falcon which has fallen in the jungle, Varied Honey-eaters have directed attention to the exact spot where the body has lodged in the entanglement of vines and creepers. Now that I understand the call—a peculiar combination of hissing and chirping—I have no difficulty whatever in finding the dead bird, and when it is removed the Honey-eaters shout for joy. The other day a very pleasing experience was vouchsafed. Walking along the rear-guard of a dense mass of mangroves, my attention was attracted by an unusual commotion among the Varied Honey-eaters. Excited chattering, mingled with loud calls, evidenced the presence of something unwelcome, which I thought might be a snake. Peering about for some time, with the noisy birds fluttering from branch to branch, I at last saw—still as a statue in bronze—a Rufous Owl angrily glaring at the deriding intruders. As I approached he flitted

away a few yards, and all the little birds followed, chiding and ridiculing him. So great was the commotion that others came to look on—the Carinated Fly-catcher, the Masked Wood-Swallow, the Black-and-White Campophaga, and ever eager Drongo. A week later the scene was revisited, and the silent Owl still moped within a few yards of his first perch in the midst of a crowd of noisy witnesses to his strange appearance; or was the sage fowl sitting in solemn judgment on the frivolity of his fussy critics?—E. J. BANFIELD.

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ANNOTATIONS.—*Megapodius duperreyi* (Scrub-Fowl).—From Mr. E. J. Banfield, Dunk Island (N.Q.), I received a skin of a Megapode chick, together with the following note:—

“One of my dogs flushed it in the forest country twice, and before it got on the wing in the long grass on the third occasion seized and killed it. So strong was the flight and well sustained for about 200 yards that I can scarcely believe a Megapode chick so young as the size proclaims could accomplish it. Further, the nearest nest-mound is fully three-quarters of a mile away, and I have never before seen so young a Megapode so far away from its birth-place. Judging from the size and appearance of chicks that I have seen dug out of the mounds, I am convinced that if this is one it could not have been more than 24 hours old, and I fancy the colour is more pronounced (browner) than the Megapode of the age, which usually possesses a greyer tint.

“I have seen another bird similar in size and appearance, the cry of which, as it rose at my feet, was a brief, chattering ‘cheep.’ There was nothing in the crop.”

I am not aware that an Australian Megapode chick has been previously described. The general colour of the upper surface is rufous or rufous-brown, more or less barred transversely with black, the bars being strongest on the secondaries and wing-coverts. The head is dusky-brown; chin buff, shading into the darker (rufous) brown of the under parts. Primaries, which are fully developed, are blackish-brown. Wing, 4 inches; tarsus, 1.2 inches; bill, .4 in.

In general appearance the Megapode chick resembles that of the Lipoa (Mallee-Hen) rather than that of the Talegallus (Brush-Turkey).

Sittella striata (Striated Tree-runner).—In “Nests and Eggs,” p. 344, I stated that “the well-defined black head of some of the birds suggests that they are the males, but the point has to be settled.”

Mr. F. L. Berney, Wyangarie, North Queensland, has kindly forwarded me a specimen of a black-headed bird which he care-

fully dissected and proved to be a female.* Therefore Dr. Hans Gadow's description of the type (Cat. Birds Brit. Mus., vol. viii., p. 364) may be read for that of the female instead of male; while the description for the female—"Only the top of the head black," &c.—may be transposed for that of the male. Mr. Berney writes:—"I shot two birds, a black-crowned one, which proved to be a male—without any doubt (testes largely developed)—and the bird sent you herewith."

Mr. Berney has observed this *Sittella* breeding in March.

Cuculus pallidus (Pallid Cuckoo).—Adverting to the new foster-parents recorded for this Cuckoo (*Emu*, vol. v., p. 197), Mr. Sep. Robinson, Bathurst, N.S.W., has been good enough to furnish the following supplementary names from examples in his oological collection, namely:—

Satin Flycatcher (*Myiagra nitida*)

Grey-tailed Thickhead (*Pachycephala glaucura*).

Puffinus tenuirostris (Short-tailed Petrel).—My cousin, Mr. J. P. Campbell, informs me that when he visited Cape Wollomai, Phillip Island, on the night of 30th April last, he found all the young "Mutton-Birds" fully feathered, scampering about the grass and trying their new wings preparatory to following their parents on migration.

The oological collection of Mr. T. A. Brittlebank, Bonsal, Myrniong, is now a first-class one. I had the pleasure recently of examining the cabinets, which contain over 500 species of Australian eggs, in beautiful order and mostly in complete clutches. In the collection is a set of seven Musk-Duck's eggs—an unusual complement for this Duck. One might have ventured the opinion that it was a double set—laid by two birds—had not Mr. Brittlebank mentioned the fact that the same season he took those, and in the same locality, he observed several nests with large complements (five to seven) of either eggs or young.—A. J. CAMPBELL.

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SEA-EAGLE AND TREE-SNAKES.—Two days of rough weather, and the blue bay had become discoloured with mud, churned up by the sea, and the Eagle (rufous-backed species—*Haliastur girrenera*) found fishing poor and unremunerative sport. Even his keen eyesight could not distinguish in the murky water the coming and going of the fish. Just below the house there is a small area of partly cleared flat, and we saw the brave fellow roaming and swooping about with more than usual interest in the affairs of dry land. At this time of year green snakes are fairly plentiful. Harmless and handsome, they prey upon small birds and frogs, and the Eagle had abandoned his

* Obtained Flinders River, 30 miles below Hughenden, 15/3/06.

patrol of the sad-hued water to take toll of the snakes. After a graceful swoop down to the tips of a low-growing bush, he alighted on the dead branch of a bloodwood 150 yards or so away, and with the help of a telescope his occupation was revealed—he was greedily tearing to pieces a wriggling snake, gulping it in three-quarter of a yard lengths. Here was the reason for the trustfulness and respect of the little birds. The Eagle was destroying the chief bugbear of their existence, the sneaking greeny-yellow murder of their kind and eater of their eggs, whose colour and form so well harmonise with leaves and their branches that he constantly evades the sharpest eyes of them all, and squeezes out their lives and swallows them whole. But the big red detective could see the vile thing 50 and even 100 yards away, and once seen—well, one enemy the less. Briskly stopping his beak on the branch of the tree on which he rested, and setting his breast plumage in order as one might shake a crumb from his waistcoat, the Eagle adjusted his searchlights and sat motionless. In five minutes a slight jerk of the neck indicated a successful observation, and he soared out, wheeled like a flash, and, half turning on his side, hustled down in the foliage of a tall wattle, and back again to his perch. Another snake was crumpled up in his talons, and he devoured it in writhing, twisting pieces. The telescope gave unique advantage during this entertainment—one of the tragedies of nature, or rather the lawful execution of a designing and crafty criminal. Within ten minutes the performance was repeated for the third time, and then either the supply of snakes ran out or the bird was satisfied. He shrewdly glanced this way and that, craning and twisting his neck, and seeming to adjust the lenses of his eyes for near and distant observation. No movement among the leaves seemed to escape him. Two yards and a half, or perhaps three yards, of live snakes constituted a repast. At any rate, after twenty minutes passive watchfulness, he sailed up over the trees and away in the direction of his home in the same tree with a socialistic community of the Shining Calornis.

The Rufous-backed Sea-Eagle is a deadly foe to the pugnacious sea snake also. On the beach, just above high water mark, was the headless carcass of one that must have been fully 5 feet long, and while it was under inspection an Eagle circled about anxiously. Soon after the intruders disappeared the bird swooped down and resumed his feast, and presently his mate came sailing along to join him. The snake must have weighed several pounds, and apparently was not as dainty to the taste as the green arboreal variety, for after two days' occasional feasting there was still some of the flesh left.—E. J. BANFIELD. Dunk Island, North Queensland.

[Mr. Banfield intends publishing shortly a little but interesting book, entitled "The Confessions of a Beachcomber." It will

contain many "Nature Study Notes." The foregoing has been taken from his MS. by permission.—EDS.]

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SWALLOWS AND ROBINS.—After the incident of the Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) driving Dusky Robins (*Petræca vittata*) from the latter's nest and dragging out the two young ones,* the Robins retired to an outside verandah and built their second nest. The Swallows, after spending a few days fixing up the Robins' nest, left it and went back to their own old one. During the nesting season of 1904 the Robins returned to the verandah, but were driven off by the Swallows, who were early arrivals that year, so they built a nest in a hollow tree in an adjoining paddock. The Swallows reared one brood of four in their own old nest, and a second brood of four in the Robins' nest.

Last year the winter was late and the spring very wet, so all birds were late in their nesting. The Swallows returned at the beginning of September, but did not begin to fix their nest until late in October, at which time the year before they had a brood just ready to fly. They completely discarded their own nest, and spent nearly a fortnight doing up the Robins' nest with mud and lining it with feathers. Here they reared one clutch of four, and did not rear a second one this past season, although our summer weather extended into March, and the migratory birds did not leave us until towards the end of April. The Dusky Robins built a nest in the shed last November. It seems strange that these birds should regularly come to the school ground to build their nest, in spite of the presence of the children.

Another interesting fact worthy of note occurred last year. A pair of Scarlet-breasted Robins (*Petræca leggit*), which constantly frequented the garden, built a nest in a corner of the front verandah, where it was boarded up at the end. I used to watch them through the window. Unfortunately, during a strong gale, the nest was partially blown down, and they deserted it. I was very sorry, as I think they do not commonly build in such close quarters to mankind.

A most extraordinary phase of Swallow nature was shown by a pair of these birds at the house of some friends of mine who live a few miles from here. A pair of Swallows had built a nest and the female was sitting. No particular notice was taken of the nest or its owners for some time, when one day it was observed that two Swallows were busily engaged bringing in mud. An examination was made, and it was found that the female bird was entirely built round with mud, and was quite dead. Regret was then felt for not having watched the nest.

* *Emu*, vol. iv., p. 16.

It is a curious question why the sitting Swallow was walled in. Was she an interloper, and did jealousy cause the others to punish her? Or did she die on the nest?—(MISS) J. A. FLETCHER. Wilmot, Tasmania, 29/5/06.

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SPRING IN AUTUMN.—When Mr. Hubert Thompson and myself were recently taking a walk through the bush, we could not help being struck by the springlike spirit which seemed to animate the birds, especially the Honey-eaters, which flew in and out among the branches, chasing each other with great vivacity, as if mating, flashing their bright colours, and uttering cheerful, rapid notes. This phase of a second spring in the fall of the year has frequently struck me during a bush residence of several years in the north-west of our island, and a few extracts from my journal, kept at Table Cape, will exhibit my meaning more clearly :—

"15th March, 1893.—Many of the smaller birds appear as if mating afresh towards autumn, and after maintaining comparative silence during the hottest part of summer, their notes may again be heard about this time, fresh and sprightly as in spring. Young Fire-tailed Finches (*Zonæginthus bellus*), quite recently fledged, were lately observed.

"11th April.—Heard the pleasant trilling notes of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*C. flabelliformis*) this morning, although none have previously been heard for nearly two months. The Wood-Swallow (*Artamus sordidus*) is still numerous in the plains, and a few Welcome Swallows may also be seen.

"31st May, 1894.—Winter is now beginning, but I hear grasshoppers still chirping in the paddocks. Numbers of Robins are about with a red patch on breast—females, and some, perhaps, young males, of *Petræca leggii*. The females of the Flame-breasted Robin (*P. phænicea*) are devoid of colour on breast. Our Derwent Jackass (*Cracticus cinereus*) is making the hillsides resound with his joyous, ringing notes.

"19th April, 1896.—The weather now, after a very disturbed summer, has settled down for a fine spell, and we are enjoying beautiful warm days, with a clear atmosphere. The birds seem to imagine that spring has returned, for the Honey-eaters are clad in their brightest plumage and utter joyous, inspiring notes, while both yesterday and this morning I heard the trilling notes of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo again, and when I expected that they had departed to the mainland. Possibly those heard now are young birds hatched late in the season and left behind by the main body.

"2nd May.—The 'Whistling Dicks' or Shrike-Thrushes (*Collyriocincla rectirostris*) are very lively just now, their loud, cheerful notes resounding in the morning and evening about the

hut, on the roof of which they often alight and hop along. Perhaps they are seen more now in the clearing because the autumn rains have softened the dead wood and bark and enabled them better to obtain the grubs concealed therein.

"8th May.—The weather is now quite warm and sunny again after a cold and stormy interval. Several large dragon-flies were seen on the wing, and the butterfly *Heteronympha merope* was observed sunning itself upon the stem of a small gum. Some of the males of the Superb Warblers or Long-tailed Wrens (*Malurus gouldi*) look as beautiful as Humming-Birds just now, with the vivid blue patches on the sides and back of neck and top of head; the long almost perpendicular tail is dark blue in front, lighter blue behind, and is continually flirled. The beak is nearly black, but in the hens is reddish-brown, the same tint extending to the eye and encircling it; they are otherwise very soberly attired in greys, the legs being reddish.

"27th May.—The delightful 'spring-in-autumn' still continues. The nights are cold, the days clear, warm, and sunny, with a delicious crispness in the air. A 'Whistling Dick,' apparently the father, from his very defiant attitude, was chaperoning a *young* one about the maze of fallen timber (proving that some at least of the birds breed again in late summer or autumn). The elder 'Dick' would frequently stretch out his head and neck very rigidly in an almost vertical direction, and then, lowering it a little, would utter loudly three or four defiant whistling notes, as if inviting combatants to enter the lists. The young one, rather a heavy-looking 'cub,' hopped quite close to me without manifesting the least alarm, at which the parent grew greatly excited, and, flying to a distant log, invited the fledgling, in very forcible language, to follow him. Numbers of young Robins are also to be seen now, pulling up worms from the moist ground. They probably belong to both the Scarlet and Flame-breasted species."

"31st May.—One of the first sounds heard in the morning now, as in spring, is the double note (dropping nearly an octave from first to second) of the Dusky Robin (*Petræca vittata*), or "Sad-Bird," just outside my window, while at night, as darkness falls and the little bat flits to and fro in front of the hut, the Crescent Honey-eater's (*Lichmera australasiana*) loud, cheerful call resounds through the belt of young tea-tree which borders the sandy track."

"2nd April, 1897.—The wild birds are becoming very tame on my little place, as they are never shot at or disturbed. Besides a large flock of green Parrakeets (*Platycercus flaviventris*), which disport themselves among the fruit trees, or whiz by close to one's head in their arrowy flight, the compact little Brown Quails (*Synæcus diemenensis*) are becoming familiar, and a covey of them even ventures into the patch of grass immediately

surrounding my bush hut, where they can safely pick up a good deal of food. Of the smaller birds, the graceful little Spinebills (*Acanthorhynchus*) are very bold, hanging to the slender stalks of the Cape gooseberry bushes just outside my windows, and thrusting their long needle-like bills into the yellow flowers in search of nectar and insects. They make short, intensely rapid flights, the quick wing-vibration causing a most peculiar rut-ut noise as they fly or chase one another among the bushes. The tiny White-eyes (*Zosterops caeruleus*) and Long-tailed Wrens are also constant visitors to the same bushes, whose soft, thick foliage affords them ample shelter and at the same time plenty of insect food.

"13th April.—The yellowish-green birds with beautiful primrose patch at throat, *Ptilotis flavigularis*, which used to build regularly in the small tea-tree scrub here, are now again making their appearance about the garden, but the pugnacious Dusky Robins, though smaller, chase them away."

"1st June.—It is quite interesting to watch the Shrike-Thrushes, which are very bold, familiar birds, cling to the dead gum trees and to the stumps which plentifully adorn our bush paddocks, and wrench off with their straight, powerful beaks great chunks of decaying wood in their eager search for grubs. They make quite a litter at the foot of the trees by this performance, reminding one of the old saw that "a carpenter is known by his chips." After I had split up a semi-decayed log which was full of White Ants (*Termes*), a Shrike-Thrush sat upon the wood and gobbled up the soft white insects as quickly as he knew how, while I worked close by. A Fire-tailed Finch sat upon a stump near at hand, and whistled often a plaintive note."—H. STUART DOVE. West Devonport, Tasmania.

[Mr. Dove has in the press a work entitled "Wild Life in Tasmania," which deals with the furred as well as the feathered tribes of his State. The work will be illustrated.—EDS.]

Forgotten Feathers.

THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN BIRD-OBSERVER.

BY E. SCOTT, MELBOURNE.

(Read before the Bird Observers' Club, 12th February, 1906.)

THOSE who find pleasure and profit in the study of Australian birds must be interested in the first Englishman who observed them on this continent, and who recorded what he saw. Dampier was not a naturalist, but when he found a bird which he had never seen before it gave him genuine pleasure, and, if he could procure a specimen, he took home its skin to be examined, classified, and described. He did not trouble himself