

a zone. The eggs of *Hylacola* appear to have an affinity to those of *Sericornis*, and also to those of *Calamanthus*. The nest, too, belongs to the same class as those of the two latter kinds. As a field naturalist, therefore, I should be inclined to place the three genera very near together rather than admit other intrusive genera in the present classification obviously less related."

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### Australian Ibises.

BY W. H. D. LE SOUËF, C.M.Z.S., HON. SEC. R.A.O.U.

THE Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) is a comparatively rare bird in Australia, except possibly in certain localities, when compared with the White (*Ibis molucca*) and Straw-necked Ibis (*Carphibis spinicollis*). Glossy Ibises nest in single pairs in trees, usually overhanging water, and not in rookeries like the other species.

The Australian White Ibis is closely allied to the Egyptian Sacred Ibis, and is just as useful as that bird is in destroying locusts and other troublesome insects; that is evidently why the Egyptians made this bird sacred, and mummified it, over 3,000 years ago. In a wet season, when there has been sufficient water to fill the swamps with surface drainage, these birds congregate in thousands to construct their nests; but should the season prove dry, which it frequently does, they will not nest, apparently knowing that there would be no food or water when the young birds hatched out. Also, should they start nesting, and the water in the swamp dry up before the young birds hatch out, the parent birds will frequently desert the nests and eggs and leave a feast for the Crows. On one rookery alone in Riverina, New South Wales, over one hundred thousand Straw-necked Ibises were computed to be nesting. The normal clutch is three eggs, although occasionally two or four may be laid. The nests are built of twigs on the trodden-down lignum or other bushes which grow in the swamp, and the nests are frequently lined with fresh eucalyptus leaves, probably to drive the insect pests away from the sitting birds and young. The birds come to the swamp where they have decided to nest in various-sized companies, sometimes only a single pair or possibly 30 pairs, and they choose a bush that will take all the nests of the company; therefore, the single pair chooses a very small bush. The first-comers naturally choose the centre of the swamp to nest in; therefore you will frequently find young birds in the middle almost ready to fly, and fresh eggs at the outskirts, and all stages in order in between.

When disturbed by human beings the young of two adjoining companies will often scramble into the water and swim over to one another; I presume they return to their right quarters when danger is past. It is a little difficult for us to tell how the parents can distinguish their own young, say, in a group of 60 young birds all mixed up together. To us they all appear alike.



Flight of Ibises at Widgiewa, N.S.W.

PHOTO. BY MRS. OTWAY FALKNER.





Young of Straw-necked and White Ibises near Kerang.

PHOTO. BY W. R. PENNYCOOK, ESQ., BENDIGO.



Nest and Eggs of the Straw-necked Ibis (*Carphibis spinicollis*) at Widgiewa, N.S.W., January, 1917.

PHOTO. BY MRS. OTWAY FALKNER.



Although both species nest in separate rookeries, yet as a rule odd couples of the other variety nest with them; probably they could not locate their own company—anyhow, they agree together.

Their food consists mostly of grasshoppers, as well as fresh-water snails (which are frequently the host of liver fluke), beetles, and caterpillars. The enormous amount of insect life that is eaten by these useful birds is difficult to realize, as by actual counting I found that the contents of the stomach of one of them contained 2,410 young grasshoppers, 5 fresh-water snails, several caterpillars, and some coarse gravel, in all weighing  $4\frac{1}{2}$  ounces.

It is impossible to estimate the value of the good work these birds do for the grazier and farmer; it is beyond our comprehension. Last season was a wet one in southern Australia, and the Ibis took full advantage of it and nested in many places—probably considerably over one million of these splendid birds were added to the Ibis population of Australia. The birds fly well and strongly, and often at a great height, and they are probably, without exception, the most useful birds Australia possesses.

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### White-winged Black Terns in Western Australia : a Remarkable Visitation.

By W. B. ALEXANDER, M.A., R.A.O.U.

THE White-winged Black Tern (*Hydrochelidon leucoptera*, Temm.) breeds in the lakes and marshes of Southern Europe and Central Asia, from Spain to China. In winter it migrates southwards into the tropics, and is met with on the coasts and lakes of Africa, India, and the Malay Archipelago. The first record of its occurrence in Australia was made by Gould in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society* in 1866, he having received specimens said to have been obtained at Cape York. Some doubt was thrown on the authenticity of this record, but the fact that the bird was an occasional visitor to Northern Australia was established on the publication of the "Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum," since, in addition to Gould's specimens, the Museum contains a skin obtained at Cape York by Captain Stanley on the voyage of the *Rattlesnake* in November, 1849, and two skins obtained by Elsey on the Victoria River, Northern Territory, in March, 1856. There are also in the British Museum skins of a pair from Nelson, New Zealand, procured on 12th December, 1868. Mathews, in his "Birds of Australia," gives his opinion that the authenticity of these New Zealand birds and of one of Gould's from Cape York must be rejected, since they are in full breeding plumage, and he states that after examination of a long series of skins he has found no other birds shot in the winter (of the Northern Hemisphere) in the breeding plumage.