



The Grey Thrush (*Cyanerodactylus leucophaea*)

Photo. by D. F. F. Thomas, R.A.O.U., Canterbury, N.Z.

Notes on the Harmonious Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*)

By DONALD F. F. THOMSON, R.A.O.U., Canterbury, Vic.

There are probably few creatures so altogether charming as the Harmonious Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*). Not only has it won its way into the heart of all bush folk by the wonder of its soft mellifluous notes, its shy coyness, and its confiding disposition, but it is one of the most economically valuable of all our birds, destroying, as it does, great quantities of insects—especially the larvae of wood-boring lepidoptera and beetles.

Though it is said to be a stationary species, the Harmonious Thrush appears to lead a somewhat nomadic existence, and actually wanders great distances at certain seasons of the year. It is fairly common, and well distributed, and is especially abundant in timbered and hilly country. Though frequently met with in the mountains, it is not at all partial to the denser gullies, preferring the more open forest.

The Grey Thrush is of a more or less solitary disposition, and appears to mate for life, as it is almost invariably met with in pairs, or in little family groups, when the young have just left the nest and are still with their parents.

There is some irregularity as to the breeding months of the Grey Thrush, some of the birds nesting as early as the month of August, or even earlier, and rearing at least two broods in the season. Others, again, do not appear to breed until well into October, when some of the earlier broods are already on the wing.

In the choice of a nesting site, the Grey Thrush shows a greater degree of impartiality than almost any other bird. A hollow tree, a ledge on the face of a cliff, a dense bush, or even the deserted nest of some other bird, are all equally acceptable.

The nest, which is open and cup-shaped in form, varies very much in composition. Sometimes it is a very model of neatness, and is concealed in a cranny with the greatest of cunning; at others, it is merely a loose, untidy mass conspicuous by its very bulk and untidiness. Often it is outwardly composed of long strips of bark, woven together and lined with finer bark and grass. Feathers or any other such lining are not used. On one occasion I observed a nest which was built partly with *mud* and lined with finer materials. This nest, found near Montrose, Victoria, in the spring of 1922, was placed in a rather unusual situation—about three or four feet high in tall, coarse "cutting grass" in a swampy locality.

Similar nests recorded by Mr. Robert Hall from the Box Hill district were put down by him as old nests of the Song Thrush

(*Turdus musicus*—acclimatised). Mr. A. J. Campbell supports that explanation. However, during a residence of many months in the Montrose district, and in observations extending over several years, I have no record of having observed a single English Thrush, though the Blackbird (*Turdus merula*—acclimatised) is moderately abundant.

Although from the *situation* the nest might have been that of a Blackbird, it was quite unlike the nest of that bird, and resembled in size, general composition and appearance the nest of the Grey Thrush. Moreover, knowing the locality very well, I do not think that a Blackbird has nested there during the previous season. *It would thus appear that the Harmonious Shrike-Thrush does itself sometimes use mud in the construction of its nest.*

Though so tame and confiding, both in the bush and at the farmhouse door, where it has won its way to the heart of so many bush-women by its trustfulness, at the nest the Grey Thrush is very shy. The accompanying photograph is one of a series obtained after much labour, several long waits and many disappointments.

In addition to the rich flute-like notes, the Harmonious Thrush has an exceedingly harsh, grating cry with which it scolds trespassers in the neighbourhood of its nest or young.

When brooding, the Thrush sits fairly tightly, but when the nest is well hidden from view, the sitting bird frequently discloses its position by its curiosity, craning its neck to see the intruders.

As is the case with many immature birds, the young of the Harmonious Shrike-Thrush has not the dove-grey colour of the adult, but shows quite distinctive striations on the breast. Unlike many birds, such as the Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*) the young of the Grey Thrush do not remain long with their parents, but are soon left to fend for themselves, whilst the parents seek a new nesting site and busy themselves with the cares of another brood.
