

Stray Feathers.

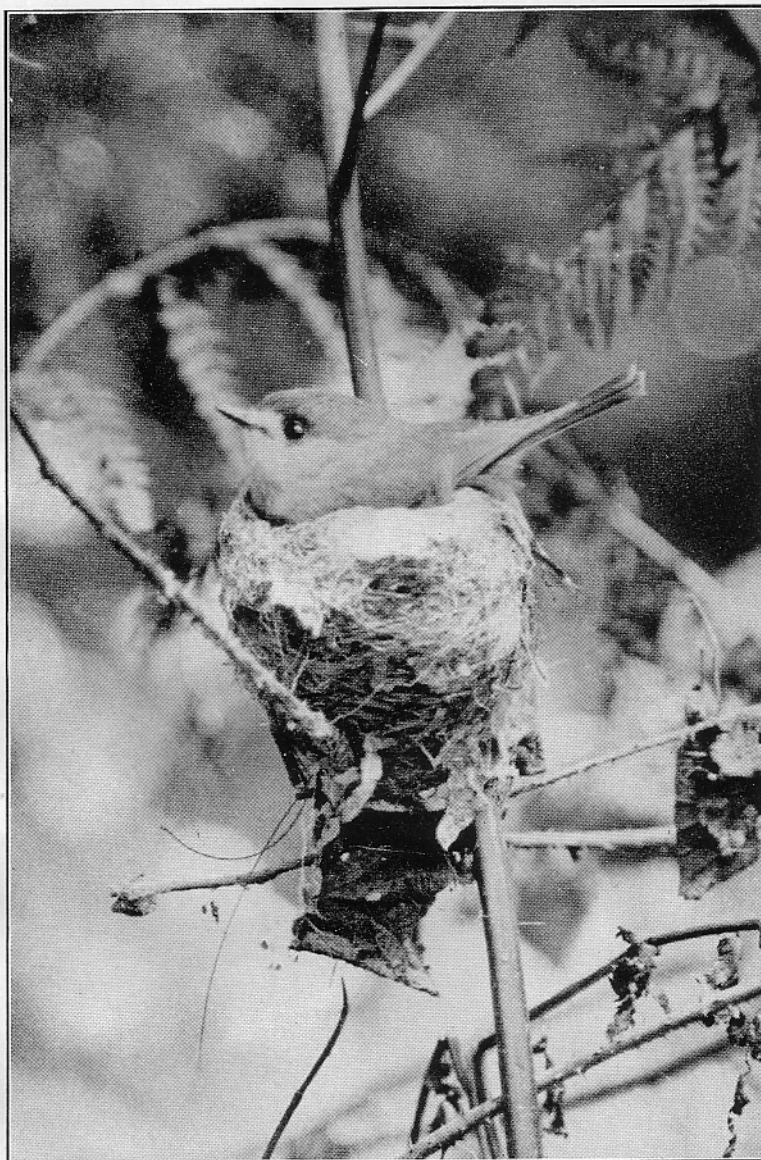
The "Rock-Pebbler."—Can any R.A.O.U. member state the origin of the term Rock-Pebble or Rock-Pebbler, applied to the Black-tailed Parrot (*Polytelis melanura*) of Australia? Dr. J. A. Leach in *An Australian Bird Book*, gives both these names, also "Smoker." The latter is easily understood, but why "Pebbler?" Is there any similarity in its calls to that of stones knocking together? Dr. Newton often gives the derivation of these popular names, but I can find no reference to *P. melanura* in his *Dictionary of Birds*.

The query is prompted by Lady Grey's article in *English Life* (October, 1926). It is entitled "The Rook," but notices several other birds tamed by kindness; for the writer, like her husband, Viscount Grey of Fallodon, is noted for her love of all kinds of animals, furred or feathered. Lady Grey is at present engaged in rearing a young "Rock-Pepler" (so spelt), which there is no doubt is our bird, for she gives its other name, the Black-tailed Parrakeet. It was taken from the aviary-nest when in down "with just a hint of lovely orange-coloured feathers showing from the quills." It is fed from its mistress' lips, taking bitten-up brown bread and raspberries, banana and gooseberry pulp, and sometimes biscuit moistened by a bite of a peach, varied with lettuce. The bird has learned to connect its mistress' face with the idea of nourishment, but is somewhat uncertain as to the "point of happy contact," sometimes making a dive for the ear-aperture. It will sway on a rope-neck, making the while a rasping noise with its brilliant persimmon-tinted beak held open.

Mr. A. J. Campbell mentions, in his *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*, the curious fact that a Rock-Pebbler in a roomy aviary at Reed-beds (S.A.) reared several clutches of Cockatoo-Parrakeets, which as soon as hatched by their parents were handed over, as if by mutual consent, to the larger bird.—H. STUART DOVE, West Devenport, Tasmania (12/11/26).

* * * *

Birds of Murrayville (Vic.)—There are two amendments I desire to make in my Murrayville Bird List in *The Emu* (Vol. XXV., pp. 293-295). The Red-winged Wren (*Malurus elegans*) is probably not in the Victorian Mallee. I have discussed the subject very fully with Mr. J. A. Ross, and have had the advantage of handling skins of both male and female of *Malurus assimilis*. The error arose partly through a very misleading inconsistency in the descriptions given in Dr. Leach's excellent *Australian Bird Book*. On page 145 of the fifth edition, *M. assimilis* is described as having "chestnut-red patch inner wing," whereas on page 219 *M. elegans* is said to have the "shoulder chestnut-red." (The italics are my own.) I mention this not to shift the blame from myself to the author of one of the most



PALE-YELLOW ROBIN (*Eopsaltria capito*) BROODING

(It is unusual to secure such a fine study of this jungle-loving species. It was recorded by the R.A.O.U. party on the Williams River, which is probably its southern limit. * (See p. 191).

Photo. by J. S. P. Ramsay.

valued of my books, but simply to warn any inexperienced observer of pitfalls which await the unwary who put their trust in books alone.

The last bird on my list should be *Neositta pileata*, and not *N. chrysoptera*. Any person who has seen the skins of the two birds together will note how appropriately the former is called the "Black-capped Tree-runner," although "Orange-winged" applies equally well to both species.

There are a few additions which might be made to the recent Mallee lists. On a visit to Ouyen a few weeks ago I noted at the township water reserves several Cormorants. I could not get very near and at the time lacked optical assistance. A solitary large bird I took to be the Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). Several smaller birds which always fished and flew together appeared to be either White-breasted Cormorants (*P. fuscescens*) or Pied Cormorants (*P. varius*). But the distance made it impossible to note the colour of the skin about the eye or to estimate the length of the bill.

At Boinka West on 19 August I noted a Fantail which I had never seen in the Mallee, and which I took to be the Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*). At the Cowangie railway water reserve on 24 September the White-browed Wood-Swallow (*Artamus superciliosus*) was noted for the first time this season. There were also large numbers of the Dusky Wood-Swallow (*A. cyanopterus*) which had been noted at Linga as early as 18 August, and at Cowangie by the 20th. Apparently associated with the Wood-Swallows was a small flock of the Crimson Chat (*Epthianura tricolor*). Another visit was paid to the same neighbourhood on 25 September. The ranks of the Wood-Swallows had been reinforced but the Chats had passed on.—(REV.) WALTER WALTERS, Cowangie, Victoria (27/10/26).

* * * *

Notes on Honey-Birds.—The notes on the Crescent Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*) by Mr. D. Dickson in the current *Emu* (Vol. XXVI, p. 120) gave me much pleasure, for we have been surrounded by the species for the past two or three months. The long spell of hot weather last summer must have given them a good breeding-season, for never have I known them to be more plentiful than at present; every garden which can boast of a flowering shrub or two seems to have its pair, and several pairs visit my own "patch."

The attraction here is the Viper's Bugloss, a perennial flowering plant which develops into a large bush and sends up tall spikes of blue florets with extruded pink stamens. There are several large plants here, the best of which has sent up over 70 flowering spikes, which make a great show and invite the Honeyeaters from near and far. The florets must secrete a good deal of nectar, for the birds and bees are at them all day; I hear the cheerful call of the Crescent Honeyeater soon after daylight, and it is almost dusk before the last one leaves. A Bugloss grows just outside one of the sitting-room windows across which a light curtain is drawn; through this one can watch the

birds at a distance of a couple of feet or so. It is a pretty sight to witness a Crescent working a spike, progressing upward and spirally somewhat after the manner of a Tree-creeper. The rapidity with which the bill goes from floret to floret is rather astonishing—almost as quickly as one could keep pointing with the finger, and yet in the fraction of a second accorded to each the tongue must be extruded, the nectar swept out, and the tongue brought in again. I do not notice small insects on the Bugloss flowers; indeed, the spring has so far been too cool for them, and the “sweets” must be the attraction to the Honeybirds. Sometimes a Crescent Honeyeater will hang with the feet to one spike while reaching across to dip into another.

Other birds, too, come to these attractive blossoms; yesterday I watched at close quarters a pair of Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) working the spikes with their tiny bills; they were as quick at it as the Crescents but more irregular in method, sometimes working downward instead of up, and often hanging head down like one of the English Tits (*Parus*). The fine Yellow-throated Honeyeater (*Meliphaga flavigularis*) an old friend here, often visits these flowering shrubs, and sometimes in the early morn I hear the strange calls of the Brush Wattle-Bird, with whom it seems to be a matter of conscience to make his presence known, even while taking an early breakfast!

A pair of White-beards (*Meliornis novae-hollandiae*) often dash into the garden during the day, and when these tyrants appear everything else has to flee; for the White-beard brooks no rivals on his feeding-ground, and will put to flight birds much larger than himself.

The Crescent Honeyeater is a species which seems to take a great deal of trouble to conceal its nest. Only once did I have the fortune to come across it, and then it was placed about 3 ft. 6 ins. from the ground in a thick growth of small swamp tea-tree (*Melaleuca ericifolia*) to the stems of which the structure was tied with strips of stringybark, of which bark also the nest was constructed. It was cup-shaped, deep, and contained three eggs of a delicate flesh-tint, with a belt towards the apex of pinky-red spots.

I would advise all those who are fond of birds and bees to have a few plants of Bugloss in their gardens; its botanical name is *Echium vulgare*. In a light soil it requires no care or cultivation, going strongly ahead on its own initiative.—H. STUART DOVE, West Devonport, Tasmania.

* * * *

Mr. Maurice Baldwin, of Brisbane, has acquired for his well-kept aviary at Ascot a fine specimen of a Satin Bower-Bird, pure white. This freak recalls the remarkable discovery made near Brisbane some sixty years ago by H. C. Rawnsley—a hybrid between the Satin Bower-Bird and the Regent-Bird. That bird was adjudged by Silvester Diggles to be a “splendid new species” and was named by him *Ptilonorhynchus rawnsleyi*. No other such bird was ever found, and “Rawnsley’s Bower-Bird” has long since been definitely regarded as a *lusus naturae*.—A.H.C.