

Stray Feathers

Albinos.—I notice that Mr. Marc Cohn desires information about albino birds. In the Nature Notes of some months ago in the *Brisbane Courier*, a correspondent from Kilcoy, Queensland, reported an albino Grey-crowned Babbler, and in the same notes, of a later date, Mr. Dunn, of Laidley, Queensland, states that one bird of a brood of four young Swallows was an albino, and that the previous year three out of four young Swallows were albinos. The birds nested beneath his house, but he does not say if they were Fairy Martins or Welcome Swallows. In 1923 I saw a white Welcome Swallow and at the same time a white Leather-head (*Philemon corniculatus*)—both were about for only a short time, and probably fell victims to Hawks. A partial-albino Peaceful Dove had a much longer life, but disappeared late last summer, after having been observed about the one locality for six years.—E. A. R. LORD, R.A.O.U., Murphy's Creek, Qld., 4/12/33.

Gliciphila albifrons.—On April 23, 1933, whilst out for a walk, I heard the whistling notes of a bird strange to this locality, and, after searching around a little, I found a flock of *Gliciphila albifrons* feeding on the nectar of the mistletoe and wax-bush flowers. They were calling to each other with a note resembling that of the Long-billed Honey-eater, as they travelled along from one bush to another. On April 27 I saw some more about 20 miles away, feeding and calling the same as the first birds referred to. I saw them or heard them up to June 15, when they seemed to have totally disappeared. On August 3 I was surprised to hear an odd pair whistling to each other, but never saw them. This was the last I heard of them. It is the first time I have seen or heard them here.—ANGUS ROBINSON, R.A.O.U., Onslow, W.A.

An Owl under Suspicion.—At Huntly, during June, 1933, I saw a Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*), and on August 5 two nests of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga melanops*), one containing two eggs, and the other one egg and one newly hatched chick so young that it was still wet and the egg-tooth was visible on the bill. I was surprised at the prominence, in so young a bird, of the part which would eventually support the bastard-wing. These Honeyeaters usually nest in September in Bendigo, but the weather was very spring-like in August.

A week later the nest containing the chick was empty and tilted as though a heavy bird had perched on one side. The other nest now contained two young birds. I heard a Boobook Owl nearby. On August 19 the second nest was empty and tilted in the same way as the first, and the Owl was heard again in the same clump of trees, but I was unable to see it.

On August 26 I found a third and a fourth nest, each containing eggs. By September 9 the fourth nest was empty and tilted, but number three was safe, being in a thick *Melaleuca* bush and about two or three hundred yards away from the other nests. I saw the Owl on this date. Of course the Owl may have been innocent, but circumstances were suspicious. Frequently I have found stump-tailed lizards at the foot of bushes containing Honeyeaters' nests, but these nests were tilted away from the centres of the bushes, whereas had a lizard been guilty it would have crawled up the inside of the bushes and along the branches thus tilting the nests towards the centre.—MARC COHN, R.A.O.U., Bendigo, Vic.

Occurrence of Membranaceous Duck in Ireland (From *The Zoologist*, 1853-54, pp. 4213-4).—Mr. Andrews made the following observations on this recent addition to the ornithology of Great Britain:—"This handsome species of duck was shot in the month of February on the east side of Inch Island, Dingle Bay, in Castlemain Harbour, by a person who was in the habit of looking for waterfowl. There had been previously severe gales from the south-west, and he had noticed some birds which he considered were Teal or small Brown Widgeon. A flock of six birds were feeding in a muddy creek at low water, and firing among them the present specimen was the only one shot. He preserved the bird for Mr. Ross Townsend, the chief officer of the Coast Guard stationed at Cromane, Castlemain Harbour, who is well experienced, and has long been familiar with the varieties of waterfowl visiting that coast. Mr. Townsend at once saw that it was a species perfectly new to him, and he very kindly forwarded it to me in June last. After a most careful examination, I could not identify it with any of the

described birds of Europe or America, but fortunately having had the opportunity of visiting the British Museum in August, I readily recognized it as the Membranaceous Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*), of Sth. Australia. On further enquiry, Mr. Townsend informs me that numerous small Teal were seen feeding in the same locality, and that the person who shot the bird imagined the flock to be Teal, and was therefore not led to examine them carefully; but the impression was that they were all the same. After being fired at they flew to the eastward. . . . It is not probable that a solitary stranger among a flock of either Teal or Widgeon would be the victim."

This small duck, the *Malacorhynchus membranaceus*, now recorded as visiting this country, has hitherto not been known outside Australia. It is termed "Wrongi" in New South Wales, and is by no means of common occurrence. The colonists of Swan River call it the pink-eyed duck, from an oblong mark of rose-pink being immediately beneath the dark patch surrounding each eye; the irides are a dark reddish brown, and the tarsi a yellowish brown. It is remarkable in having the neck, breast, and all underparts crossed by numerous dark brown fasciae."—A. E. BRIDGEWATER, R.A.O.U., Mansfield, Vic.

Birds of a South Queensland Scrub Patch.—During a visit last week-end to the residence of Mr. E. G. Lawrence, Maleny, Blackall Range, South Queensland, we had some delightful bird experiences. Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence are keen nature students, and their beautifully-situated home, on a narrow spur of the range, has a glorious view to the north-east over the Nambour country to the sea. To the south and west the home is bordered by a steep and narrow gorge filled with virgin rain scrub that falls nearly 1,000 feet to a boulder-strewn permanent creek, which at the time of our visit was decorated with large specimens of the striking Queensland ground orchid, *Calanthe veratrifolia*, in full bloom. This scrub is fairly thick and is difficult to traverse owing to the masses of lawyer cane and lantana that have invaded it, and in consequence is a splendid haven of refuge for birds. Years ago the pine haulers were through it for logs and left two 'snig' tracks which are now so overgrown as to be impassable. They were apparently the last persons through it excepting for a very occasional visit of the present owner, who proposes some day to cut a zigzag path through the gorge in order that visitors may have access to the creek without the strenuous effort now necessary to reach it.

As stated, present conditions make it a wonderful natural sanctuary for birds, and all day we could hear, from the house, the call of the Rifle-bird, Cat-bird, Fruit-

Pigeon, Whip-bird, Harmonious Thrush, Black-faced Flycatcher, Lewin Honeyeater, Scrub-Wren, Treecreeper, and Pitta. Mentioning these last birds reminds me that one night, at a time when the moon broke through the clouds for a short spell (it was dull and raining most of the week-end of our stay), we heard a Pitta whistling "walk to work" from somewhere down in the gorge. We only heard it three or four times, and although we whistled in reply, it is fairly certain it would not have heard us above the roar of the water near it.

A Podargus had a young family on the wing and early in the evening they would come about the house on the fence posts and with the aid of a torch we could walk up to within arm's length and observe them at leisure. They would gaze fixedly at the torch, but never cease the regular broadcast of their whereabouts to their parents. This call resembles a sort of hissing gurgle which reaches a crescendo when the parent arrives. Further "music" at night was provided by Spur-winged Plovers, Curlews, and an occasional Owl. Other birds evident in the day, although not among the songsters, were Satin Bower-birds, Magpies, Red-backed Wrens, Yellow Robins, Silvereyes, etc. Not one Accipiter was seen during the visit.

This particular patch of scrub is rich in fig trees that have started life parasitic on other trees and have gradually squeezed the life out of their hosts and established themselves with large flying buttress roots at frequent intervals through the forest. At the foot of one large specimen near the house Mr. Lawrence has cleared a little amphitheatre with a ring of bush seats. This he calls the Cathedral, and the huge buttressed roots form the walls of an auditorium wherein he places a gramophone and tells me that usually a number of birds are attracted by the music, and, like canaries, join in the chorus. To our disappointment, the weather was not propitious for the experiment at the time of our visit. It is possible that this place may later on become a guest house, and if that does happen R.A.O.U. members who can make an opportunity to visit it will be charmed with their stay, be it long or short.—GEO. H. BARKER, R.A.O.U., Brisbane, Qld., 5/2/34.

Petrel Notes from Bunbury, W.A.—The late winter of 1933 was marked on our local coasts by an absence of any severe gales of long duration, and apparently the oceanic birds escaped the ordinary loss of life through the violence of the elements. There was one curious exception, however. At one time, about mid-winter, I found no fewer than nine dead bodies of that powerful flier, the Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Diomedea chlororhyncha*) whilst patrolling only four miles of our local beach. I know that others were

washed ashore at Busselton, which is 32 miles to the south. It seems reasonable to assume that a proportionate number would have been found in the intervening distance. I can only attribute this mortality to a lack of some special food in the adjacent waters, as very few Prions perished at the same period.

An interesting bird was noted towards the close of the winter. When near the mouth of the estuary I observed a large white bird swimming amongst the Gulls and Terns. It presently came near to the jetty on which I was standing, and I was enabled to identify it as a white example of the Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*). Except for an occasional brown tip to the feathers it was pure white with the usual drab beak. It swam buoyantly, but was, I think, in distress, as I saw it swallow some floating newspaper. The "wreck" of the ordinary brown type of this species was cast ashore lower down the coast about the same time.

On October 4 I secured my fourth example of the rare Blue Petrel (*Halobæna cærulea*). The bird was very fresh when I found it, but it lacked the pink stripe on the culmen and the overlying pink glow on the legs and feet. From dissection and these facts, I diagnosed immaturity. This specimen is now in the Adelaide museum.—F. LAWSON
WHITLOCK, R.A.O.U., Western Australia.

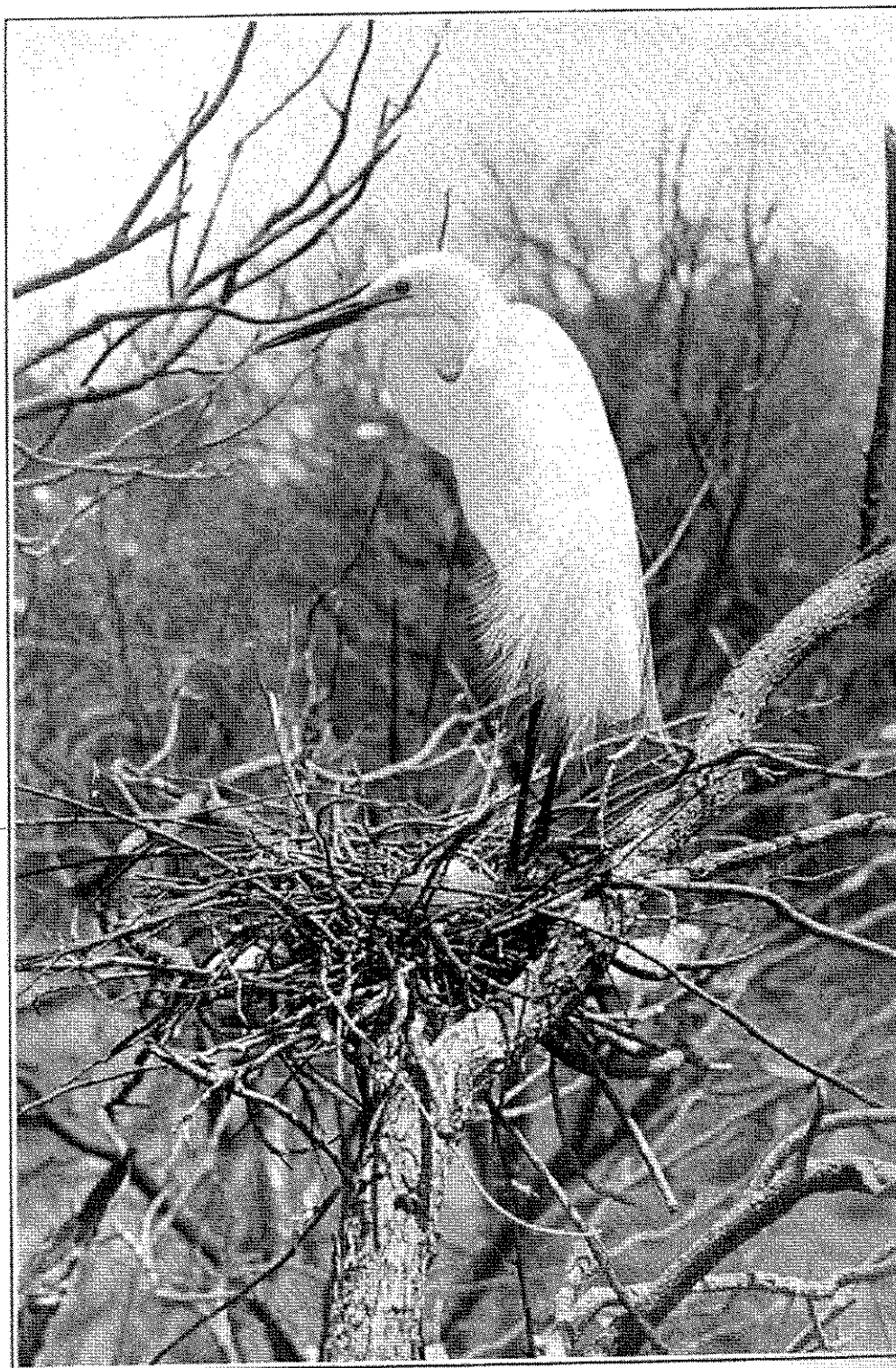
Crested Penguin at Cape Naturaliste, South-west Australia.—The straying of *Eudyptes cristatus* to the south coast of South-Western Australia is not as rare as the few printed records of its occurrence would appear to indicate. One was taken at Hamelin Bay in 1889; two were taken at Albany in 1896, while another has been recorded at Denmark in 1931. In 1909 one occurred as far north as Rott-nest Island. I do not quote references for the above records as that was done in *The Emu*, vol. XXXI, page 240, by Mr. D. L. Serventy when recording the occurrence of the bird at Denmark. In 1931, in the same month that the bird occurred at Denmark, another individual was on the beach further west near Point D'Entrecasteaux. Some friends who were camped on the coast used to carry it from the beach to their camp each evening, where it remained around the camp at night, being carried back in the morning to the beach, when it would swim about till carried back to camp. It was very friendly with them, but would snap at the dog. When leaving the camp they left the bird on the beach, where it was found dead when they returned a few weeks later. The two yellow feathers were in fine condition.

When visiting Augusta, near Cape Leeuwin, in October, 1932, I was told of three Crested Penguins that had been on the coast there about the previous month of May. This year (1934), when at Busselton in January, I was told that



Little Pied Cormorants nesting at "Boree", Moree.

Photo. by A. J. Elliott, R.A.O.U.



White Egret at nest. Photographed at the Watercourse, Moree.
Photo. by A. J. Elliott. R.A.O.U.

some other friends had a crested Penguin at their camp at Bunker's Bay, near Cape Naturaliste. I tried to get into communication with them, but had no time in which to do so, as I had to leave for home the next day; they were 28 miles away, and were also leaving their camp immediately. However, hearing that they had taken a photograph of the bird, I obtained a copy. The bird was in camp with the party for a week, and was very friendly.

The description that Mr. H. M. Browne, who photographed the bird, gave to me, was that it was from 18 to 24 inches high, and that it had a small ear tuft on either side of the head, the feathers being yellow and green, and only about half-an-inch long. The back was black, the breast pure white. The feathers of the back were very hard, making the coat feel like hide. It was very heavy for its size, and must have weighed 8 to 10 lbs. When it wanted to move quickly it hopped, and in doing so was in the habit of falling forward on to its breast. A particular point I wish to note is that this particular bird is reported to have had pink feet, whereas the bird reported by Mr. Serventy from Denmark is reported to have had yellow feet.—H. M. WHITTELL, R.A.O.U., Bridgetown, W.A.

Little Bittern at Moree.—Mr. A. J. Elliott, whose photographs of the White Egret and Little Pied Cormorant are here reproduced, has written:—"Concerning my record of the Little Bittern, it may interest you a little if I were to describe it more fully. As I came from the "sags" at the swamp near "Bullerana," it rose from the water weeds about 15 yards in front of me. The most conspicuous features noted were the typical Bittern build, the yellowish chest and dark upper parts. In size of body it approximately equalled the Apostle Bird. I described it to Mr. Iredale, and he considered there could be little doubt about the record."

Behaviour of Little Grebe during Heat Wave.—Centennial Park, Sydney, with its lagoons and ponds, is an ideal spot to observe the habits of many species of water-birds. Some of the larger ponds have recently been drained, deepened, and cleared of vegetation. From the viewpoint of the naturalist that is unfortunate, for those places were much frequented by Moorhens, Coots, Gallinules, Rails, and such-like birds, which, perforce, have since sought a more congenial environment.

Early this year (1934) I had under observation a pair of Little Grebes (*Podiceps ruficollis*) which were nesting

on one of the smaller untouched pools. I happened to visit the nest at mid-day on January 24. This was one of Sydney's hottest days, the maximum temperature being over 100 degrees. The nest, which was fully exposed to the sun, contained eggs. When I arrived the bird was on the nest, but left it soon afterwards. She—assuming the bird was the female—returned on two occasions with damp water-weed which was placed on the nest. The second bird then came to the nest and both of them brought weed to it simultaneously, after which the newcomer disappeared and left the original bird to carry on alone. The next time she brought weed she stood above the eggs, drooped her wings and "shivered" them as though allowing moisture to drip on to the nest. Every few minutes she would come back with vegetation, stand above the eggs, shake her wings and then go away for more weed. This happened some twelve times in about half-an-hour when, unfortunately, I had to leave. The performance was occasionally varied by the bird's stopping on the nest a little longer than usual and re-arranging the material. Once she delayed for some time, preening herself. On previous, and also on later, visits, I often saw the birds bring weed, but I never noticed the "shivering" of the wings again. It appeared to me that the birds were, on this occasion, endeavouring to keep the eggs cool because of the excessive heat.—(Miss) DOREEN HORDERN, R.A.O.U., Darling Point, Sydney.

A Change of Name for the Whiskered Tern.—As it has been proved that the work of Pallas appeared in 1811 the following change is necessary in the *Systema Avium Australasianarum*, p. 134:—

Chlidonias hybrida. Whiskered Tern.

Distr. Europe, Asia, Africa, and south to Australia.

Chlidonias hybrida hybrida (Pallas).

Sterna hybrida. Pallas, *Zoogr. Rosso. Asiat.*, Vol. 11, p. 338, 1811, South Volga and Sarp.

Chlidonias hybrida fluviatilis (Gould).

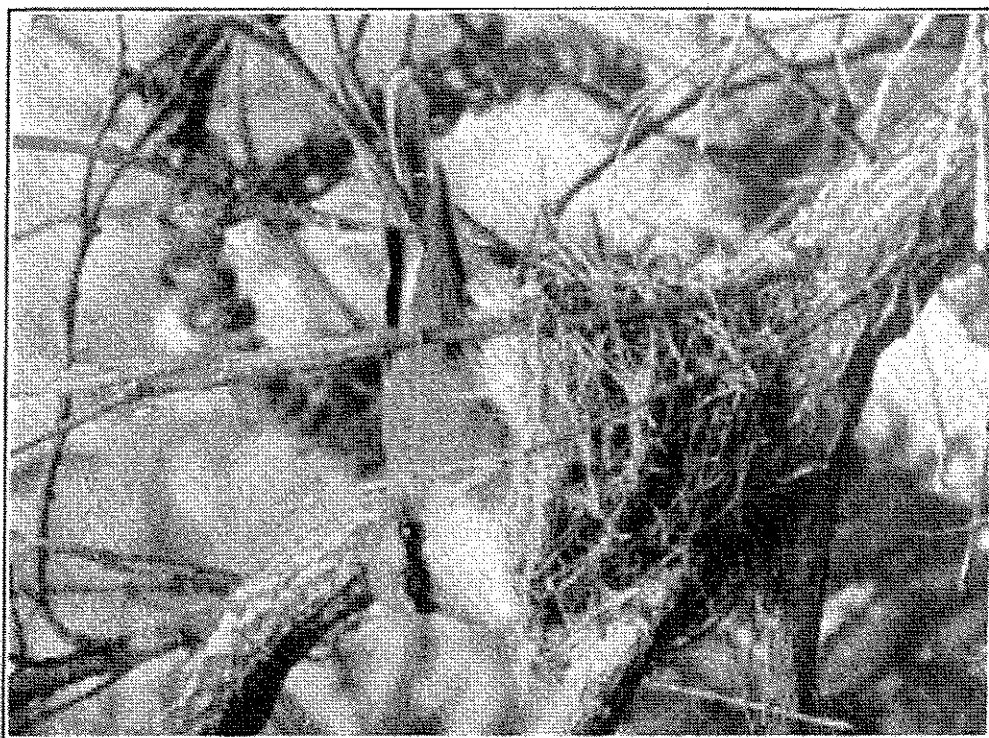
Eastern and southern Australia.

Chlidonias rogersi (Mathews).

Northern Australia, New Guinea, Moluccas to the Celebes.

—GREGORY M. MATHEWS, Meadway, St. Cross, Winchester, Eng., 5/12/33.

White-breasted Robin.—I made one of my main objects of the breeding season of 1933 the obtaining of photographs of the White-breasted Robin (*Quoyornis georgianus*), and started early searching for nests suitably situated for



Female White-breasted Robin on nest.



Hen White-breasted Robin at nest.
Photos. by H. M. Whittell, R.A.O.U.

photography. Early in the season no occupied nests were located and, after being out of the district from August 27 to September 2, on my return I found that I was late, as in several places young were seen on the wing. Knowing that the bird was, at any rate in some instances, double-brooded, I continued to keep under observation at Hester, three miles from my home, a pair which earlier in the season had raised a couple of young. On November 4 I visited this pair again and found they had two newly-hatched young in another nest about five feet from the ground in a tea-tree in a dense thicket on wet ground. The nest was within a few yards of the one used earlier in the season. The bird being so fearless when young are in the nest no difficulty was found in taking the photographs which I have much pleasure in now publishing. They are, I believe, the first photographs of this bird ever taken.

A postcard-size folding Kodak was used and set up 5½ feet from the nest; alignment was by view-finder. The photographs were taken under difficulties, as, whilst the day was sunny, fast-moving clouds frequently obscured the sun, and the light in the thicket was never very bright. In order to let more light on to the nest I cut a branch off from a bushy tree which was growing up overhead. I am indebted to Kodak Ltd., Perth, for making enlargements of the central portion of each film showing the birds and nest. The nest, incidentally, happens to be a particularly small one.

One photograph shows the hen bird standing on the edge of the nest shading the young from the sun and keeping off flies. Another picture was taken in an attempt at showing the cock bird whilst he was feeding his mate, but the shutter of the camera was released just too late. The other accompanying photograph shows the hen settled in the nest on the young birds. She is gazing straight at me as I was then standing just two feet away from her. The time taken in setting up the camera and taking the photographs was well under half an hour.—H. M. WHITTELL, R.A.O.U., Bridgetown, W.A., 14/12/33.

An Unusual Avian Parasite.—Early last year (*The Emu*, Vol. XXXII, p. 222), I recorded an instance of tick parasitism in birds, and now, from almost the same locality, I am in the position to record another avian parasite—a land leech of undetermined species. At Era, a small and secluded beach slightly south of Sydney's national park, a companion (Mr. E. Austen) and I were camping—each day patrolling the various beaches searching for interesting pelagic forms which so frequently come ashore after heavy seas have been running. Mr. Austen captured a juvenile *Grallina cyanoleuca* near our fireplace

when we returned to camp, and upon examining the bird we were amazed to find that its eye-sockets were bulging with blood-sucking land-leeches! The bird was wet, emaciated, and the distorted appearance of its eyes was noticeable at some distance. Only the tail-tips of the leeches were visible; the remainder of their swollen bodies were esconced between the eyeballs and the sockets. It seemed that it was the surrounding tissue, rather than the eyes themselves, which was attacked by the parasites.

Four large leeches were removed from one eye, and two from another, without undue difficulty. One of the "Pee-wee's" eyes was discharging, so the bird was treated with eye-lotion that my companion happened to have in camp! The bird was then freed, and flew without difficulty to a nearby tree, where it remained for some minutes. It later flew to another tree, and an hour later seemed quite happy again. The date of the occurrence was January 28, 1934.

The circumstances out of which the incident arose seem fairly obvious. One can easily visualize the young *Grallina*—the yellow gape was still much in evidence—foraging amid the thick rain-dampened grass where land-leeches are often extremely abundant. The dampened plumage would ensure the leeches easy progression, and they would quickly reach the eyes—probably the bird's only really vulnerable spot. Once in occupation, the bird would have scant hope of evicting the leeches, and an agonizing and lingering death would almost certainly result.

Mr. W. Boardman, Invertebrate Zoologist, of the Australian Museum, considers this probably the first recorded occurrence of its kind in this country, although there is no reason why it should not be a fairly common happening in bush where leeches are prevalent. It is only after witnessing incidents such as this that we begin to realize what tragedies are probably being enacted, quite unknown to us, day by day in our bushlands.—A. J. MARSHALL, R.A.O.U., Penshurst, N.S.W.

The following has been received from Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain:—The Eighth International Ornithological Congress will be held at Oxford from July 2 to 7, 1934, and the Rhodes Building has been placed at the service of the Congress by the Trustees. The President is Dr. Stresmann of Berlin Museum, and the Hon. Secretary the Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain of Whitekirk, Southbourne, Bournemouth. It is hoped to arrange a long excursion after the Congress to the Pembrokeshire Islands, where there are breeding places of Manx Shearwater, Storm Petrel, Gannet, several species of Auks and Gulls. Shorter excursions will take place during the Congress to other places of

interest. It is hoped to secure accommodation for men attending the Congress in the Colleges of the University. The Secretary of the Oxford Reception Committee is Mr. B. W. Tucker, University Museum, Oxford.
