

Further excursions and receptions are listed for Paris between May 14 and 19.

The Sections will be as follows: (1) Taxonomy and zoogeography; (2) Anatomy, physiology, paleontology and embryology; (3) Biology (ethology, ecology, migration, oology, etc.); (4) Applied ornithology (economic ornithology, taxidermy, observations and experiments on birds in captivity).

In addition to representatives of governments, museums, scientific societies, etc., all persons interested in ornithology will be welcome as members of the Congress. The fee for each member is £1 and if accompanied by a lady 10s. extra. Names and addresses of those wishing to become members of the Congress should be sent to the Secretary as early as possible in order to receive the final programme with full information concerning hotels, excursions, etc.

All correspondence should be addressed to the Secretary: Monsieur Jean Delacour, Chateau de Clères, Clères, Seine Inférieure, France.

## Stray Feathers

**Birds of Wilson's Promontory.**—Two lists have appeared in *The Emu*—volume XIX, page 288, and volume XXIX, page 297, recording the number of native species observed as about 140. During a week's walking tour recently I was able to add another ten, namely: Fairy Prion (*Pachyptila turtur*), Red-capped Dotterel (*Charadrius ruficapillus*), Australian Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*), Spotted Owl (*Ninox novæ-seelandiæ*), Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), Flame Robin (*Petroica phoenicea*), Pink Robin (*P. rodinogaster*), Striated Field-Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*), Brown-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*), Bell-Miner (*Manorina melanophrys*) (introduced), and Beautiful Fire-tail (*Zonæginthus bellus*).

The Lyrebird is stated to have been introduced in 1910-12 when seven birds were liberated. A rough calculation will show that, theoretically allowing ten young as the progeny of a pair of birds and not allowing for accidents, there should be a population of Lyrebirds numbering about 140. But I neither heard nor saw any sign whatever. However, two lads who know the birds told me they heard one singing at Sealer's Creek in September last.

There are not many spots left where the birds could find seclusion and food. The forests of the west coast are gone and the forests of the east are doomed owing to the ravages of fire, which have reduced these natural assets to a minimum. Even common sorts of birds are nowhere plentiful and the abovementioned lists will in another twenty years'

time make an interesting record of the primal conditions before "the impious hand of man" took charge. The almost unbelievable destruction by fire presents a weird and depressing spectacle. Thousands of acres of gaunt dead skeleton trees point like fingers of scorn and derision at passers-by. The utterly senseless waste of the natural assets of this national park can only be termed a satire upon the methods of those in control.—A. G. CAMPBELL, Kilsyth, Vic., 21/8/37.

**A Roosting Habit of the Tree-Martin.**—During the summer months in the Perth area vast numbers of Tree-Martins (*Hylochelidon nigricans*) gather towards evening preparatory to roosting for the night. Favourite places for the purpose appear to be the beds of rushes in the numerous swamps on the coastal plain. It is a striking spectacle as the birds assemble over a swamp just before sun-down. They fly in from all points of the compass and after circling around for a while accumulate in a swarm like bees and then the whole dense mass of birds suddenly dives into the rushes with considerable speed, appearing as if pouring in through an invisible funnel. I have frequently observed the process at Shenton Park Lake, Subiaco, and last January watched it with Mr. C. B. Palmer at a swamp at Bassendean. At that place the birds were startled out of the swamp several times and they obliged us with frequent repetitions of the performance. The din from the concerted twitterings of so many birds was terrific. Nor did it cease with the descent into the bed of rushes. One could see with the glasses in the dim light that the restless birds were skipping about actively, noisily changing roosting positions. Gradually the clamour subsided and the flock sank into repose for the night.—D. L. SERVENTY, University of Western Australia, Perth, 4/8/37.

**Notes on Swifts.**—The summer of 1936-37 was chiefly remarkable here in the central-west of New South Wales for the abnormal visitations of Swifts and, to a lesser extent, for the length of time to which the district was subjected to the inroads of "locusts." These latter made their presence felt in early spring when eggs deposited in the previous autumn hatched from local egg beds. With the waning of the tide of local infestation, wave after wave of these tireless wanderers arrived from farther west, and these inroads continued in varying degrees of intensity throughout the summer and early autumn. The Swifts (both *Micropus pacificus* and *Hirundapus caudacutus*) were observed at irregular intervals from early November, 1936, until February, 1937. Late on the afternoon of February 26 they appeared in an unusually large flock, flying low between the orchard trees. This particular flock arrived from the

north-west and moved slowly away to the south-east just before dusk. On the next day Swifts were again present between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. and again just after midday. Thereafter the visitations continued every day until March 12. After that date they were noted only on one occasion—March 17, when they passed quickly over from north-west to south-east. Not always did the birds travel from north-west to south-east, but sometimes from the opposite direction and more rarely from east to west or vice versa.

Between February 26 and March 12, a period of fifteen days, we were constantly delighted by the aerial acrobatics of these remarkable birds. The “slap” of the wings on the leaves of the trees in the orchard heard occasionally, betokened a too intent concentration on the pursuit of insect life. Their wonderful sight, or perhaps intuitive sense of the nearness of danger in the shape of fence wires, tree limbs, etc., was brought vividly home on more than one occasion. In company with my brother I have watched Swifts passing between the wires of a fence around the orchard. This particular fence was of ordinary black wire (10 gauge), the posts spaced ten feet apart, and the wires, six in number, eight inches apart. On several occasions the birds were seen distinctly to pass above the second wire and below the third. The degree of skill needed to accomplish such a feat can well be imagined. During the whole period of this remarkable visitation I found no evidence of birds colliding with wires. Although composite fences of netting and wire were in close proximity to the orchard wire fence it was fairly clear that, in spite of the high speed at which the Swift is accustomed to travel, no mistake was made in attempting to fly through the netting fences.

It was not until March 1 that I came to associate the presence of the Swifts with the “locust” plague in the light of anything more than pure coincidence. On that day, just after mid-day, when passing across an open paddock, a Swift passed within a few feet of me and, with a lightning-like sideways thrust of the head in my direction, took an insect eighteen inches or two feet from the ground. Intrigued by this unusual performance I watched for some time and was rewarded by the re-enactment of the feat on several occasions at varying heights from the ground. On subsequent days corroborative evidence was available and reliable witnesses were able to prove beyond doubt that the Swifts were feeding on the “locusts.”—GEO. W. ALTHOFER, JUN., Dripstone, N.S.W., 28/8/37.

**Ducks in Mallee Scrub.**—Nesting facilities for Ducks frequenting the tanks and smaller dams in the mallee are very poor, consequently nests are frequently found in most unusual and unexpected places. In the accompanying

photograph a well-concealed nest situated in the large clump of porcupine grass directly beneath the dead stick in the dense patch of mallee scrub contained eleven eggs of the Grey Teal.

On September 23, 1936, I pulled up on the roadside about four miles west of Red Cliffs to follow a Chestnut-backed Ground-Thrush which had just crossed the road in front of the car. I followed the bird over the railway line for a distance of approximately twenty yards when, to my astonishment, the Teal flushed from her nest at my feet. Had she not done so the nest would not have been discovered for it was very cleverly hidden from view. The eggs were obviously quite fresh. The depression containing them was ten inches over all and quite deep, well lined with down plucked from the bird's breast. The nearest permanent water was some miles distant from the site.

Two other nests situated in similar country are worth recording. Some years ago, I am informed, a Black Duck's nest was found by Mr. J. J. Pedder on his property, south of Benetook. It was placed under a small bush about 200 yards from his dam; the other nest was that of a Grey Teal discovered under a dillon bush on Mr. Dickinson's property, north of the Benetook station. The distance between the two nests would be about two miles, and the only water available would be in the small dams used for watering cattle.

Around Lake Hawthorn, in the Mildura district, it is not uncommon to find nests of the Black Duck in the tall grasses growing along the headlands between the vines. In 1935 several nests were found on Mr. Gibbs' property, and last season two more were discovered, and the eggs, which were fresh, used for cooking.

Station owners from the north have often told me that the Ducks remained on their tanks and bred in the mallee scrub and that it was no unusual sight to see the parents leading their young broods to the nearest water.

Judging from the number of young birds which I have seen on many occasions on the tanks further inland there can be no doubt that the amount of breeding that must go on in mallee scrub is considerable, despite the fact that foxes are common in such localities.—N. J. FAVALORO, Mildura, Vic., 31/7/37.

**White-headed Stilts Nesting.**—Bird photographers and those with aspirations in that direction realize that different birds of any given species often act very dissimilarly with respect to the presence of a camera, concealed or otherwise, near their nests. Wading and water birds are, in any case, amongst the most shy at the proximity of photographic apparatus, but one Melbourne photographer, at least, found that a White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*),



Porcupine grass country—site of Grey Teal's nest

Photo. by N. J. Favaloro.



Eggs of White-headed Stilt.

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.

upon which he had photographic designs, returned readily enough to its eggs. With that in mind I tried conclusions with a bird of that species.

The Stilt was formerly abundant in small flocks around Melbourne. North states that he had frequently shot it between Albert Park and St. Kilda. On the western side of Port Phillip Bay, approximately a corresponding distance from the city, a few birds still occur. These are probably the closest in of birds found thence southwards to Altona where numbers of observers have recorded them. A member, Mr. Jack Jones, discovered a nest with four eggs at North Williamstown in November, 1935. I accompanied him there at 7 a.m. one morning and remained until 10 a.m. The pair of Stilts, after a somewhat tardy approach to within about 20 feet, did not appear to be interested in our operations. On the following Saturday I arrived at about 1 p.m. There were then only three eggs. Possibly a Raven had taken one. The birds had apparently become reconciled to the proximity of a dummy tripod made of three sections of iron spouting and left near the nest, for, from a distance, I saw a bird move away from the eggs. Although, however, I remained until about 5 p.m., neither of the Stilts came to the eggs. The birds fed along the margin of the pond nearby but except for an occasional glance did not appear to be interested in the eggs. Musketry practice at adjoining rifle butts kept all birds on the pond with the exception of Swans—Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, White-faced Herons, Marsh Terns and other Stilts—in the air over much of the afternoon, and occasionally my pair of birds left the locality, flying out of sight and returning after about half an hour. The thread from the camera to me extended for nearly 200 yards through "eyes" at the tops of stakes driven into the ground to support the thread, the whole appearing like a miniature telegraph line.

The greater portion of the next Tuesday was spent at the pond by others on my behalf, but again without success. On the following Saturday I spent from 10 a.m. to about 3 p.m. at the pond in a final effort, but the Stilts were as unconcerned as before. During the whole time the weather was good and the sun hot and the Stilts apparently recognized that there was no need for them to brood under the circumstances. The only photograph I was able to obtain, therefore, was of the eggs.

Very little material had been used for the nest, the eggs being placed on a few wisps of grass in an area grown with *Cotula coronopifolia*, the button-like flowers of which appear in the illustration.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, 10/9/36.

**Satin Bower-birds.**—Some Bower-birds are extremely lackadaisical in the progress of bower building. Of three bowers built around the house here, two were destroyed as

soon as built. The third is still in good condition, in fact the birds are improving it all the time. Some birds commenced a bower in a quince thicket right against the house, but never could get on with the work. They built the platform, stole a few sweet peas for decoration and added a couple of blue parrot feathers. Then they removed the flowers and feathers and added a yellow everlasting flower. After abandoning it for weeks they straightened up the platform again and commenced to build the bower. The work went on intermittently, and sometimes a few feathers were placed at the entrance. However, it was never finished and they finally destroyed the walls. Only a few weeks ago I noticed a fresh blue feather and a *Banksia* leaf on the remnants of the platform, but now it appears to be utterly abandoned. Being so near the house it is possible that the dogs hear the noise they are making and go to investigate. I have not noticed the dogs chasing them, but their very presence would naturally disturb the birds.—(MRS.) MARGARET HARDCASTLE, Carney's Creek, Qld., 11/8/37.

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## Reviews

[*Check-List of Birds of the World*. By J. L. Peters. Vol. III. Harvard University Press, and Oxford University Press (Humphrey Milford), 1937. Australian price, 25s.]

The reconstitution of the R.A.O.U. Checklist Committee with a view to a new edition of the *Checklist* adds a particular interest to Australian ornithologists in the volumes of Peters' *Check-List of the Birds of the World* as they are published. The third volume is of especial interest as it includes, besides the Sand-Grouse in which we are not concerned, two groups which are plentifully represented in this continent—the Pigeons and Parrots.

Before proceeding to examine the method Mr. Peters employs in dealing with those two groups, mention should first be made of some remarks which he makes on the question of nomenclature. Regarding the large number of sub-species which have been proposed in recent years, Mr. Peters sorts them under two heads:

(1) Those which are actual discoveries, the result of ornithological exploration of regions hitherto imperfectly known. (2) Those which are the result of the growing tendency for finer subdivision of already well-known forms, where the value of further naming is, at least, questionable.

Mr. Peters has dealt with any proposed sub-species as follows:

(a) In default of material he has accepted it at its face value. (b) If material has been available, and an