

**Sturnus vulgaris.** Starling.—Plentiful. Another grasshopper eater and insect destroyer generally. Sometimes it attacks orchard fruit, but does good work otherwise. Not popular on account of its robbing other birds of their nesting sites, and being the host of vermin.

Two other introduced birds I have been expecting to see have not so far been noted. These are *Passer montanus*, the Tree Sparrow, and *Carduelis carduelis*, the Goldfinch. Both these were fairly common 100 miles farther east eighteen years ago and one would have expected them to have extended to this district by now.

In September of this year (1937) Messrs. Sharland, Everitt and Moore, three Sydney ornithologists, passed through here from a combined camp of ornithologists and Gould League of Bird Lovers members held on the Murrumbidgee River near Darlington Point at Cooba sheep station. They were on their way to the mallee, about nineteen or twenty miles north of here, to study the birds there for a day or two. From there they recorded having seen one of the rarer birds not mentioned in my list, namely *Pachycephala inornata*. I spent one day with them there, and we had an interesting time when two fresh Mallee-Fowl mounds were noted and a bird itself was seen at one mound.

The Pink Cockatoo (*Kakatoë leadbeateri*) is stated to have nested here fairly recently. The Horsfield Bush-Lark (*Mirafra javanica*) has been recorded from here, but not by me personally. It is a disputed point whether the Friar-bird (*Philemon corniculatus*) occurs here; it is said that it has been seen. The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) is stated definitely to be here, although not seen by me personally. The White Ibis (*Threskiornis molucca*) is recorded, but not noted by me. The Orange Chat (*Epthianura aurifrons*) is reported to have been seen, but very rarely. Any of the foregoing birds I should expect to see at any time.

The birds recorded as having been noted by myself were found within a radius of ten miles of Barellan, except the Wedge-tailed Eagle, which was seen within twenty miles, and the list is the result of seventeen months' observations.

*Editor's Note.*—Dr. Chisholm considers the frog *Limnodynastes dorsalis* var. *tasmaniensis* a full species.

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## Camouflage of the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater

By EDITH COLEMAN, Blackburn, Victoria

Although birds exhibit remarkable powers of concealment, both of themselves and their nests, it is not always clear that a camouflage is consciously adopted. There is often a suggestion, rather, of an involuntary response to

some hereditary impulse. In the case of certain Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*) at Sorrento, east of Port Phillip Bay (a new nesting locality, I am informed, for this species) there seemed little doubt that the brooding bird was conscious of being invisible to me, in the position she invariably adopted when aware of my proximity. Although a plump bird, it was surprising to note how much of her body she managed to conceal.

There was no concealing foliage on the side of the nest next to the camera. Not once did the sitting bird face in that direction when the camera was in position. Always her bill pointed in one direction. In that position her long tail ran up among the leaves of a small branchlet, its white shafts appearing like streaks of sunlight. The tell-tale, pinkish part of her bill was hidden behind foliage, its dark tip, only, being visible. Through these leaves the large dark eye was strikingly beautiful. Although not of the same colour, the just-visible top of her head was of the same gradation of colour as the edge of the nest. Often, although within a few feet of the nest, I could not feel certain that she was there.

Three nests were observed at close quarters (November, 1937, December, 1937, January, 1938). I saw two other pairs of adults, the nests of which I did not locate, as well as two empty nests with much scale in the egg-cavities. The characteristic call, heard in various directions, suggested that these birds were nesting in other parts of Sorrento. The owners of the January nest were so much larger than those of the November and December nests that I assumed they were a year, perhaps two years, older. They were less shy. The male bird was much larger than the female and more richly coloured.

In this nest three lusty nestlings were almost fully fledged when I left Sorrento on January 31. I watched the feeding of nestlings from behind a bough. In the morning and late afternoon they were fed at intervals of five minutes and less. Frequently both parents arrived together, alighting low down on the bough. One of them, usually the male bird, would then advance, running up the limb in three stages, a cautious pause between runs. Bills were loaded with dusky larvæ, large moths and other insects. Huge beakfuls of fruits were fed, always one kind at a time—either white fruits of the coast beard-heath (*Leucopogon parviflorus*), red fruits of the African boxthorn (*Lycium ferrocissimum*) and the sea-box (*Alyxia buxifolia*), or the wine-red fruits of the aptly-named sea-berry saltbush (*Rhagodia baccata*). After feeding the nestlings an adult would often perch so close to me that I could see the silver tongue as it cleaned its bill on the bough.



Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater approaching nest.



Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater on nest.

Photos. by Edith Coleman.

This pair of birds rarely uttered the characteristic, plaintive trill, which, in a minor key, is one of the most haunting of bird calls: "It hath caught a touch of sadness, yet is not sad. It hath tones of clearest gladness, yet is not glad." It can hardly be called a trill, I think. Staccato notes of a xylophone, or a bell with wooden clapper, rung swiftly, perhaps partly describes this one of the "Spiny-cheek's" many calls. But the November-nesting birds frequently gave this call. Both pairs were very shy. In each instance the sitting bird betrayed its nest by flying off when people passed. Both nests were in exposed positions. The one illustrated was in a tea-tree branch on a main ocean-road, hardly more than a stone's throw from the cliffs. The road was often swept by strong, southerly winds. I was anything but comfortable in my shelter, yet the brooding bird sat calmly, head down, tail up, body deeply sunken into the nest, while the branch dipped and swayed alarmingly. In the case of these November-December birds, the male bird did not feed the young while I was near, but frequently uttered his alarm calls from a few yards away. The female fed the nestlings with dark-coloured larvæ and large white masses of what appeared to be scale insects. I often saw the adults probing the boles of tea-trees. At that date fruits were not abundant, as they became later on in the season.

Disaster overtook the nestlings in the two early nests. In one of them there were three five-day old nestlings on November 27. Two seemed less vigorous than the third. Next day at 8 a.m. I saw that two of them were dead. The female parent sat on the nest most of the morning. I looked again at 2 p.m. The dead nestlings had been removed to one side of the nest. The third one was very much alive. At 4 p.m. the dead nestlings had been removed, by the parents I assumed. Owls were not active at that hour. A Butcher-bird, or a cat, would have taken the living nestling, too. I have noted many instances of the removal of one dead nestling, but only twice have I known two to be removed. I regretted not having examined the dead nestlings for native fly, as suggested by Mr. A. G. Campbell. Butcher-birds were blamed for the loss of the other nestlings.

The deep, cup-shaped nests, woven of pliant grasses, spider silk and egg sacs, with an odd piece of string or cotton, were suspended hammock-wise between two branchlets, from six to ten feet from the ground. The egg-cavity was lined with "possum" fur. That of another nest was lined with severed, silvery spikes of "pussy-tail" grass. The fourth I have not yet examined.

Excrement, taken at every second or third visit, was carried some distance from the nest—I did not see it dropped—a feature in nest hygiene which should be of real survival value where ants and flies are numerous.