

Stray Feathers

Pacific Gull at Play?—Recently along the cliffs at Parkdale, Vic., I watched an immature Pacific Gull holding in its beak what appeared to be a large mussel. The bird was battling against a very strong southerly wind and, every now and then, would release the mussel and catch it again in its beak, in a most dexterous manner, before the shell-fish had dropped very far. Five times the bird repeated this performance and on one occasion dropped and caught the mussel and released it again, immediately to catch it again. Another time the mussel fell almost to the shore, but a steep dive by the Gull recovered it again.

There are accounts of Pacific Gulls dropping shell-fish from a height on to rocks, in order to break them open, but this did not appear to be with that object.—ROY WHEELER, Elwood, Vic., 14/11/42.

Eastern Shrike-Tits Eating Cicadas.—A few pairs of Shrike-Tits (*Falcunculus frontatus*) inhabit the forest country near my home at Lane Cove, Sydney. On November 15 I watched both a male and a female catching cicadas, four of which were captured during about ten minutes. In each instance the bird first crushed, or bit off, the head of the cicada with its powerful bill. This decapitation, or crushing, seemed to be intentional on the part of the Shrike-Tits and a necessary prelude to the eating of the choicest part of the insect, the viscera, the rest of the body being mostly a hard chitinous casing. Having reduced the cicada to a state of non-resistance the bird held it against a twig, opened the wall of its abdomen and then proceeded to extract and eat the intestines. The body of the cicada was then abandoned. The heads of three of the cicadas recovered by me had been entirely removed, the fourth was badly crushed. The opening made into the abdomen was on the under-surface in three instances, and along the back in the fourth. All the insects were males, two being 'Double-drummers' (*Tropha seccata*) and two 'Green Mondays' (*Cyclochila australasiae*).

The cicadas were not drumming at the time of these observations as it was raining. The fact that those captured were all males may not have any special significance; probably females are not so common. In any case the female would provide more food as their abdomens are filled with eggs and not largely hollow as in the males, which have the intestines situated at the rear portion of the abdomen. It is interesting to note that one of the cicadas, a 'Green Monday,' continued to 'drum' and move its legs when handled, up to twenty-four hours after its capture—reflex nervous and muscular action, perhaps.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Lane Cove, N.S.W., 18/11/42.

Goshawk Feeding.—At East Brighton, one hot morning in March, 1942, I watched a Goshawk dive at a flock of Starlings and catch a straggler. The Goshawk appeared to catch the Starling by the head only, for when the hawk dived steeply for a clump of wattles, the body of the Starling parted from the head, which was left in the claws of the Goshawk. Calling in high sharp chattering notes, the hawk dived several times towards the body lying near the roadside, as if it expected the remains to fly off. It did not succeed in picking up the body. The Goshawk then flew slowly overhead, feeding on the head of the Starling, while on the wing.

The only other occasion that I have noted a member of the hawk family feeding on the wing was at Tuckerbil Swamp, Leeton, N.S.W., when a Whistling Eagle flew over one morning, feeding on what appeared to be a small rabbit. The claws holding the prey were thrust forward and the head bent down and under on both these occasions.—ROY WHEELER, Elwood, Vic., 14/11/42.

Mating of the Lyrebird.—Coming out from the inner portion of the Sherbrooke forest on July 5, 1942, I came upon an adult male Lyrebird scratching in a perfunctory manner, and repeating a call at intervals while facing south. He moved to a stump and burst into a tumult of song. Suddenly he moved quickly southwards downhill. I followed for 60 yards and found him starting a display on a log. The female had arrived.

The display finished and he jumped to the ground and displayed the tail again at an angle of 30 degrees, not fully extended, and commenced an extraordinary backward march for 40 yards, the tail shivering slightly. This was accompanied by a noise like 'click-clack,' not to be confused with the 'tick-tick' of the vertical tail shake. He negotiated several logs and trees with easy confidence and passed one mound and moved to the second, bringing the tail to the normal position when near the mound. I moved parallel to the proceedings. On the mound he commenced a display with song.

The hen was tardy but made pace quickly in the last 15 yards passing me with crest erect and obviously excited. The song stopped and the tail hovered over the female while she moved to the north of the male. The tail came back, and after slight wing agitation the tread commenced. The birds did not leave the mound in the same directions. I noticed fresh body feathers on the mound. A hurried search to locate the nest proved fruitless so I can offer no data as to arrival of the egg after this ceremony, which was, I assume, the culmination of the nuptial period.—ALEX. GRAY, Bentleigh, Vic., 12/10/42.

Wilson Storm-Petrel in Western Australia.—On May 29, 1926, after a storm, Dr. Serventy picked up two specimens of *Oceanites oceanicus* on the beach at Cottlesloe. Although the species occurs, apparently commonly, in Western Australian seas, no further specimens have been found on our beaches until I picked up one on the beach at Bunbury on May 8, 1942. That so few specimens have been found on the beaches here, after storms, is possibly due to the birds not being in these waters during the months when westerly gales are in force—July to September. It is remarkable that the only three specimens obtained as yet on the coast of Western Australia were all picked up in years when there happened to be stormy weather as early as May. The bird nests on the Antarctic continent, at Cape Horn, on the South Shetlands and South Orkneys, and on Kerguelen Island, and it is when the breeding season (December to February) is over that it ranges north in the Atlantic, Indian, and Antarctic oceans. It has been recorded from as far north as Labrador and, on several occasions, from Great Britain. For some reason—possibly water temperature—it does not go far north in the Pacific Ocean.

It would be interesting to know what further specimens have been obtained on coasts in other parts of Australia. A specimen picked up in Victoria by two schoolboys is recorded in Dr. Leach's *An Australian Bird Book*.

The breeding organs of the Bunbury bird were considerably enlarged.—F. L. WHITLOCK, Bunbury, W.A., 12/9/42.

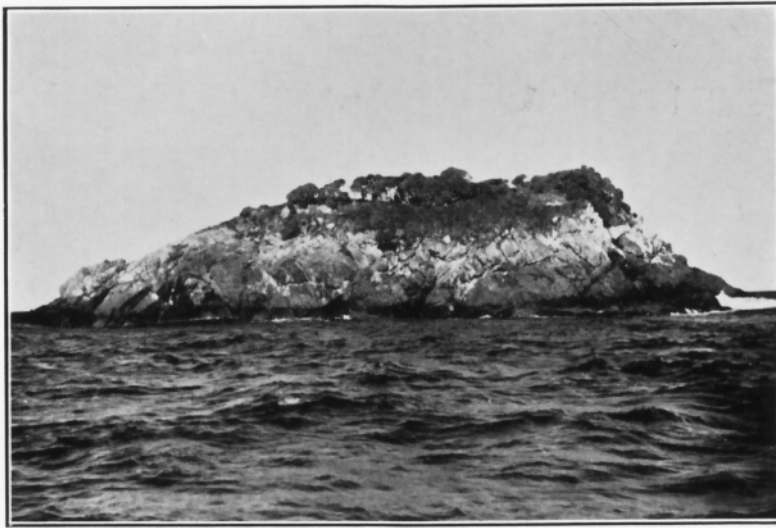
Whose Nest Was That?—On August 30, 1942, I noticed a Spinebill Honeyeater (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) building its nest in the leafy top foliage of a gum sapling at Lane Cove, near Sydney. Closer investigation revealed that the nest was about half completed. The following week-end I was surprised to see the nest of a Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) where the Honeyeater's nest had been: the new tenants were busily occupied carrying grass to their bulky home. On September 20, a Little Thornbill (*Acanthiza nana*) was seen flying to the Sparrow's nest and leaving with feathers, a performance repeated several times in about half an hour. The Thornbill was building about fifty yards away. Once both Sparrows were seen to leave the immediate vicinity of their nest while the Thornbill was 'requisitioning' material. It was not possible to see much of the nest from the ground, but, as far as could be judged, the Thornbill appeared to be taking the feathers through the wall of the nest. This bush comedy had its sequel a week later. On looking at the spot I was astonished to see not the slightest trace of a nest. Presumably the Sparrows, resenting the activities of the Thornbill, had removed all the nesting material to more congenial quarters.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 15/10/42.

Whero.—The accompanying pictures portraying scenes on Whero should have appeared in the last issue of *The Emu*, but, owing to the uncertain mails, the blocks did not arrive in time for publication. Since my Whero paper was written observations on the island have been continued for a period from December 20, 1941, to March 14, 1942. During that sojourn almost 300 burrows belonging to five species of petrels were under observation, resulting in the discovery of additional interesting information.

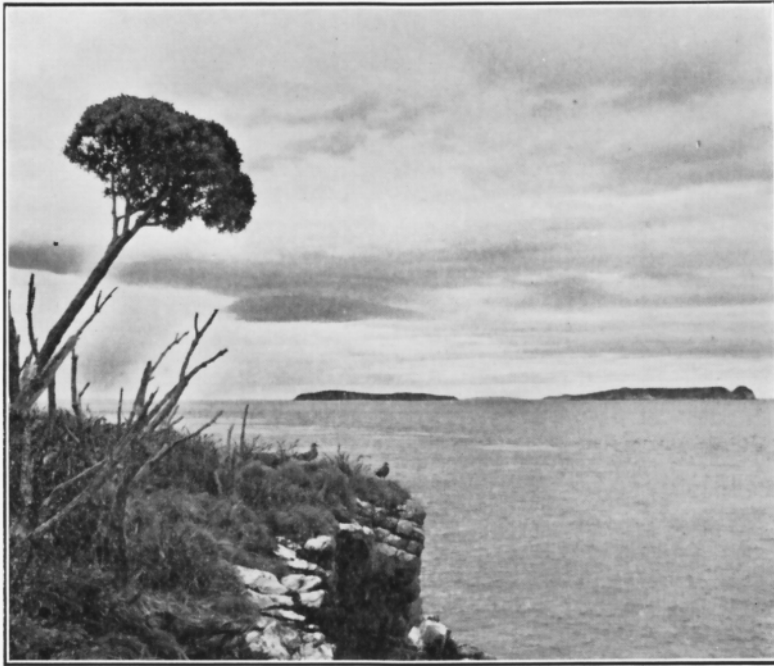
The return or otherwise of breeding birds to their burrows of the previous season was recorded. The result of further studies on population statistics indicated that those already published are an under-estimation. The departure procedure of the Titi Wainuis and of the Storm Petrels, which it was not possible to observe in 1940-41, was worked out in 1941-42. Finally I was able to note the behaviour of Mutton-bird chicks during their first eight weeks ashore, an impressive factor being the irregularity of their meals. In some cases these chicks were compelled to fast as long as ten days. Incidentally, the Mutton-bird season for 1942 was one of the poorest on record, yielding approximately 50% of the usual catch. That, however, according to my observations on Whero, was not due to the lack of the presence of adult birds. In Table II, p. 97, of my last paper I have given the nightly arrival of Mutton-birds in 1940-41. A count undertaken in the succeeding year indicated that at least a similar number of adult birds was using the island in 1941-42.—L. E. RICHDALE, Dunedin, N.Z., 12. 11/42.

Mimicry by the Pipit.—I am inclined to agree with the author of the article reviewed in *The Emu* some time ago (vol. XLI, p. 166) that many records of mimicry are not accurate, and I usually think many more times than the regulation two before deciding that a bird actually is mimicking. In that way I have discounted the efforts of several birds I have heard lately, but an experience to-day left no room for doubt of the powers of a Pipit (*Anthus australis*). I have listened eagerly to Lyrebirds, Scrub-wrens, Bower-birds and sundry others of our master mimics—and have travelled several hundred miles to do it in a number of cases—but I had to journey much less than half-a-mile to-day to add the new name to my list—a name that will, however, be bracketed, in future, with the best of the mimics I have heard.

I had a hide set up at a nest of a Little Quail, and less than ten minutes after I had entered it, rather early, this morning, a bird perched on one of the sticks supporting the hessian. It commenced to sing there, and I placed it as a Pipit, when a strange note crept into its voice and left me wondering, for the note was that of a Red-backed Parrot,



Whero, showing sedge area on west side.



Looking north, north-east corner of Whero. Herekopare on the right and Jacques Lees on the left are in the background.

Photos. by L. E. Richdale.

followed several seconds later by that of the Yellow-tailed Thornbill. However, within a minute it left the hide and perched on a clod seven or eight feet away, and right in front of my 'spy-hole.' From that position it sang for at least five minutes, and never have I been privileged to hear such an artistic mimic at work. The list of birds imitated in that short space was—Red-backed Parrot (including the medley of calls when several birds are flying overhead), Zebra Finch (or Banded Finch), Black-fronted Dotterel ('twink' call), Wagtail ('sweet-pretty-creature'), Brown Tree-creeper, Yellow-tailed Thornbill, White-browed Wood-Swallow, Magpie (warning call).

The calls were all woven into one song, with scarcely a pause, and were punctuated by the bird's own calls. The change in tone, volume and intensity, between calls such as those of the parrot and the finch, was remarkable, and the notes were quite exact. In fact each call was perfectly rendered, even that of the Wagtail, and I have never previously heard any species attempt to mimic that 'sweet-pretty-creature.' I have heard that the Bush-Lark is a capable mimic, and thought, at first, that this really must be *Mirafra*, but there was no doubt of its identity, and so the Pipit, or that particular Pipit, is entered in my notebook on the page reserved for the best of the mimics. To cap the experience—when the bird flew, and I remembered that I was supposed to be trying to take photos., I looked at the nest, and there was the Little Quail, brooding peacefully, with feathers all fluffed out, in an attitude for all the world like that of some dignified old domestic hen. I laughed out loud, and the quail disappeared behind the nearest stook of wheat.—P. A. BOURKE, Biddon, Gilgandra, N.S.W., 7/12/41.

Unusual Nesting Places of Kookaburras.—Two unusual nesting-places of the Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*) have recently come under my notice. The first concerns a pair of birds that nested in a hollow, narrower at the mouth than the actual nesting chamber, in the side of an earth cutting bordering a bush road, near Robertson, New South Wales. The sitting bird was flushed from the nest, which contained three eggs, on November 6, 1942. Mr. H. A. Blakeny, who found the nest, sent a note to Mr. J. S. P. Ramsay, who kindly passed it on to me. A somewhat similar nesting-place was recorded in *The Emu* (vol. XXVI, 1926, p. 196) wherein it is stated that Kookaburras chose a hollowed-out ledge on the cliff-face of a deserted quarry at Spring Vale, Victoria, and reared their brood in safety.

The second instance refers to a pair of birds at present nesting on top of a stone pillar supporting the corner of a verandah. The Kookaburras have used the space between the joists separating the column from the floor of the

verandah. This is enclosed on the two outer edges, with an opening facing inwards, and is about twelve feet from the ground. When examined on November 14, the nest, if such it can be called as no nesting material was used, contained two blind nestlings, one much larger than the other, and an addled egg. The address of this interesting Kookaburra family is c/o Mr. Smith, 9 Norfolk Road, Longueville, a suburb of Sydney.

Some years ago Kookaburras successfully nested in one section of a pigeon loft at Edgecliffe, near Sydney (*The Emu*, vol. xxv, 1926, p. 288). Perhaps the strangest nesting-place recorded is that of a pair of birds that nested high up in a hole in the wall of a building right in the heart of Sydney. They established themselves in the rear portion of premises at 56 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, in a space from which bricks had been taken with the intention of installing a ventilator. This opening abutted against a room, not then occupied. In due course three eggs were found in the recess, and later two young birds appeared. One of these fell out of the nest, but the other was successfully reared in a box situated in the room adjacent to the opening, and placed there by the caretaker. The adults entered the room without hesitation. The above facts are recorded in the Annual Report of the Wild Life Preservation Society for 1927, p. 5.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Lane Cove, N.S.W., 20/11/42.

Further Mallee Notes.—At Manya, north-west Victoria, in September, 1942, the Chestnut-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficeps*) was breeding freely in the taller mallee growing on the sand-ridges. Five eggs appear to be the maximum in this locality.

One day I flushed a few Little Quail (*Turnix velox*). I quite often saw the Diamond Dove (*Geopelia cuneata*) on the road south of Roy Ribbons's block, though I could not locate the sitting bird.

In the same locality we twice saw, also, a Delicate Owl (*Tyto alba*). I could not find the mate.

On September 26 I found a nest of the Purple-gaped Honeyeater (*Meliphaga cratitia*) built about three feet from the ground in a small mallee. The female (presumably) was brooding. As I was admiring it a Scrub-Robin (*Drymodes brunneopygia*) called. A very soft answer close behind me lurched me away from the honeyeater and I flushed the Scrub-Robin off its nest just 25 yards away. It contained a fresh egg.

Along the roads we found two species of *Malurus*—*M. assimilis* and *M. melanotus*—fairly common and nesting. Both species had maximum sets of four eggs, fresh in most cases. On September 30 a nest of the latter ready for eggs was found. A Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*) was flying

about it. A few pairs of the Striated Grass-Wren (*Amytornis striatus*) were nesting, both young and eggs being found. Full sets of three were the most common.

Both mallee species of pigeons—the Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*) and the Crested Bronzewing (*Ocyphaps lophotes*)—were found breeding, only one pair of the former, the latter common.

On Hockey's block, on September 16, a Spotted Nightjar (*Eurostopodus guttatus*) was flushed from its egg by Ribbons. On September 27 Ribbons was to show us a nest of the shy Ground-Wren (*Hylacola cauta*) which contained two eggs. Close by I found the nest of a Brown Weebill (*Smicrornis brevirostris*) nearly ready for the eggs. Within a few yards of the Ground-Wren's nest another Spotted Nightjar was flushed from its egg by Mr. Chas. Bryant and me—he and Mr. Ray Littlejohns having come to the district just as we were about to leave, and having joined forces with us that day. We nearly walked on the bird. All three nests (treating the Nightjar site as one) were within twenty feet of each other.

A nest of the Hooded Robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*) was found by Master Gordon Ribbons on September 29. It contained three eggs, which is, I think, a new record.

Budgerigahs (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) were plentiful, particularly at Cowangie, where we proceeded after leaving Manya, and on October 1 a pair was seen inspecting a small spout. I understand that Messrs. Bryant and Littlejohns found several pairs breeding along the Victorian-South Australian border.—F. E. HOWE, Mitcham, Vic., 28/10/42.

Grey-crowned Babbler Near Sydney.—About 7 a.m. on the morning of September 20, 1942, I heard a strange bird calling from the sandstone forest about two hundred yards from my home at Lane Cove, five miles north-west of Sydney. The bird gave its call—loud double whistles followed by chattering—several times. Within a few minutes I was in the forest but could not locate the songster, if such it could be termed, nor was it heard calling again that day. The notes had a vaguely-familiar sound, but it was not until the following morning, when I saw the bird, that I realized I had heard the same call three years ago at Leeton.

At 6.40 a.m. on September 21 the bird was calling from some trees nearby, and on going out into my back yard I had an excellent view of my 'new' species—a Grey-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus temporalis*), a common bird in many parts of eastern Australia but, to my knowledge, not previously recorded so close to Sydney. The bird has not since been seen or heard.

John Gould recorded the species when visiting the pasture lands of Camden in 1839 (*Handbook*, vol. 1, 1865, p. 480).

J. R. Kinghorn listed 'small flocks' from Wheeny Creek, Colo River, on October 14, 1923 (*Emu*, vol. XXIV, 1924, p. 140). P. A. Gilbert recently informed me that on September 23, 1928, he observed three birds sheltering in a gully at the foot of the Blue Mountains, north of Emu Plains: a fierce westerly wind was blowing at the time. Norman Chaffer has seen the Grey-crowned Babbler in the Megalong Valley, Blue Mountains. The above four localities are respectively 35 miles south-west, 45 miles north-west, 40 miles west, and 60 miles west of Sydney. The paucity of records of the species within a 50-mile radius of Sydney indicates that it is a rare bird within that area. It is apparently new for the County of Cumberland as there are no previous published records.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Lane Cove, Sydney, N.S.W., 6/11/42.

Crested Bellbird.—When preparing the notes on the occurrence of the Crested Bellbird (*Oreoica gutturalis*) in eastern coastal Australia, published in *The Emu*, vol. XLII, 1942, pp. 119-121, I overlooked the following references indicating the occurrence of the species at Melton, about twenty miles west of Melbourne, Victoria, and at Peel Island, near the head of Moreton Bay, Queensland—

Victorian Naturalist, vol. XII, no. 9, December, 1895, pp. 100-101—"... the bell-like note of the Crested *Oreoica* was heard. The latter bird, I may mention, was shot near the same spot, Melton, in June, 1894." (G. A. Kearnland). *Handbook of Melbourne, Austr. Assn. Adv. Sci.*, 1900, p. 90—"Crested *Oreoica*. The singular bell-like notes of this species are occasionally heard in the Melton district." (G. A. Kearnland).

The above observations are probably concurrent and may refer to the period 1894-5. Has the Crested Bell-bird since been recorded from Melton? The occurrence of a mallee type of vegetation in parts of the Melton district may attract the species.

The Emu, vol. XXI, 1921, p. 134. 'Further Notes from Peel Island, Moreton Bay, Queensland.'—"*Oreoica gutturalis*. Crested Bell-bird—Migrant; winters here; generally seen in pairs, and hard to stalk, being restless birds: Arrive 9/4/17; April, 1918 and 1919. They depart during July." (Noel V. I. Agnew).

I understand that some of Agnew's identifications have been questioned; therefore confirmation of the above is desirable.

My thanks to Mr. A. H. Chisholm for drawing my attention to the above references. Mr. Chisholm expresses the opinion that the Agnew note is entirely erroneous.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Lane Cove, N.S.W., 4/12/42.

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand has carried out an investigation of the Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*).