

The Powerful Owl

By E. A. R. LORD, Murphy's Creek, Qld.

It was on November 15, 1945, that I made the acquaintance of *Ninox strenua*—two adults and one young bird. My next visit to them was on April 16, 1946, when I located the two adult birds some two hundred yards down Copper Gully from where I had seen the three birds previously. They were perched close together in a large lilly-pilly tree that was growing in the gully bed. As the young bird could not be found it seemed quite possible that the parents had driven it away and that the nesting period was not far distant. There was a quantity of 'white-wash' beneath the tree, and remains of possum-gliders made it evident that the tree had been much used.

Some sixty feet from the camp tree there is a large grey gum with a hole facing the west at a height of about fifty feet from the ground. This looked a most likely place for them to choose for nesting. I examined the ground, but could find no trace of bones or pellets from the previous nesting season. That, however, was quite as one might expect, as the tree is almost in the gully bed and the unusually heavy summer rains had caused flooding which would have removed any waste matter. The steep hillside on the eastern side of the gully carries a moderate number of eucalypts of several species, but on the western side there is a small, open, grassy flat of about half an acre which gives a clear view from both the gum and the lilly-pilly.

Though I was eager to keep in touch with the birds during the winter months I was not able to do so. On August 21, 1946, however, a chance came for me to visit the area and it was with keen interest that I made my way to the birds' haunts. When I reached the spot I found the male bird camping alone in the lilly-pilly in which I had found the pair in April, and from the whitened state of the rocks and ground beneath the tree it was very evident that the tree had been used frequently. A horizontal limb of the gum tree reaches out over the gully bed a little below the large hole that I had suspected as being the home of the Owls. The ground beneath the branches of the limb was well white-washed and there was much glider-possum fur and several portions of tails of gliders lying there. From the evidence before me I could not doubt that I had found the nesting place of the birds. Beneath the lilly-pilly tree I found many pellets of fur, some containing bones. In one pellet I saw portion of a jaw-bone and teeth of a small animal, probably a ring-tail possum.

As the male was alone there is little doubt that the female was inside the tree and that young birds were with her. The fact that both birds were near the nesting tree in April

leads one to believe that eggs would have been laid in May or June.

In Mr. David Fleay's very interesting article in *The Emu*, October 1944, he records the dates on which eggs had been laid by the birds that he had under observation. In 1942 the date is June 1, and in 1944 it was June 6. Mr. Favaloro, in his equally interesting article, 'Eggs of the Powerful Owl,' *Emu*, July 1946, states that his set was collected by Mr. Fleay on June 4, 1945. These dates show that the birds are very consistent in their nesting.

One might expect that there would be some variation in the nesting period between Victoria and Queensland, but from my recent experience it would seem that my birds differed little from those of the south.

I am interested in Mr. Favaloro's remarks concerning the set of eggs in the H. L. White collection. Kingaroy is about one hundred miles by air-line from here and it seems very unlikely that there would be any difference in the breeding time between Kingaroy and Murphy's Creek. It seems evident that Bertling had made some error when he gave the date of collection as November 23.

Stray Feathers

The Lemon-breasted Flycatcher in Western Australia.—The Lemon-breasted Flycatcher (*Microeca flavigaster*) was first described by Gould in 1843 from a specimen collected at Port Essington in the Northern Territory. It was subsequently recorded from north Queensland, but has not been reported previously from Western Australia.

The musical notes of the bird first attracted my attention and, as I had no previous experience of the species, a specimen was shot for examination. Several pairs were observed along the banks of the Ord River at Ivanhoe Station, but one specimen only was obtained. This is at present in the collection of the Western Australian Museum and the following details appear on the label:

No. A5936, *Locality* — Carlton Reach, Ord River, E. Kimberley, *Date* 30/5/44.

Length — $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches. *Iris* — Black? (eye damaged).

Bill — Black, *Feet* — Black.

Sex — Female.

There appears to be some mistake in the measurements given by Gould for the Port Essington bird, as he records the total length as $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches and the tail as $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches (*Proc. Zool. Soc., Lond.*, 1842, p. 132). It seems likely that $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches was the measurement intended by Gould, as that would be more comparable with the 135 mm. quoted by Mathews (*Birds of Aust.*, vol. VIII, p. 74) and the $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches of the Ord River specimen.