

mirror to reflect the light upon the subject is often a solution to overcome the difficulty. In many cases a snapshot is necessary, for the least breeze will vibrate the down on a nestling, and if a time exposure is attempted a blurred picture is the result. At a later stage in the growth of the young bird it is possible to obtain very pretty and interesting photographs, but it is advisable to enlist the aid of a friend, for very few young birds will remain perched in one position while the photographer is engaged in focussing and adjusting his camera. The best method with a nervous subject is to focus on a matchbox, set the shutter and draw the dark slide, then place the young bird or birds in position, and at a favourable moment release the shutter. Care should be taken not to allow the direct rays of the sun to fall upon a tender nestling. Subdued sunlight is productive of the best photographic results. On a bright, sunny day a fine piece of cloth may be used to advantage, as a medium between sun and subject, to diffuse and soften the light.—L. G. CHANDLER, R.A.O.U. Malvern.

### Stray Feathers.

**Fish-eating Duck.**—On 17th May I shot a pair of White-eyed Ducks (*Nyroca australis*). One had an unusually large neck. Closer investigation disclosed six fish (carp), averaging 2 inches in length, which the bird had evidently just caught.—F. C. MORSE. "Coocalla," Garah (N.S.W.)

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**Drought and Birds.**—A dry season in various parts of Australia makes a considerable difference in the ordinary movements of our birds, the want of both water and food causing this. For instance, last season was very dry in the inland districts of Queensland and New South Wales, consequently in this district many birds put in an appearance fully a month earlier than usual. Even take the Channelbill Cuckoo (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*). It was first noted on 28th August, 1918, whereas we generally first see it towards the end of September. Another interesting thing is that it almost invariably seems to arrive at night. We have had several strange visitors on account of the dry season further inland.—JOHN HOPSON, JUN. "Dalkeith," Eccleston (N.S.W.)

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**Pacific Gulls.**—It is interesting to notice that on the canal that runs through Koo-wee-rup, in Victoria, and goes inland for a considerable distance from the sea, Pacific Gulls frequently fly up along its course. Only last week I noticed a company of six of these birds flying to the canal headquarters. We have to remember that it is all fresh water, and is a good many miles from the sea. In the evening they returned; two were carrying

something in their beaks, but I could not detect what it was. The Silver Gull, we know, is frequently found inland, by fresh water and also uncultivated land adjacent, looking for grubs, &c. I have not noticed Pacific Gulls doing this before, but possibly members may have done so.—J. CECIL LE SOUEF. Melbourne.

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**Notes from Mackay (Q.)**—The birds in this district seem to be slowly recovering from the effects of the cyclone last year, but some species are very rare, and often extinct, as far as we can judge. The little Brown Honey-eater (*G. ocularis*), which used to be so plentiful, is now rarely seen or heard, and the Sun-Bird (*C. frenata*) is quite wiped out as far as we can judge. I have inquired from people all over the district, and cannot hear of one having been seen since the blow. We have formed a local Bird Protection Association here, and hope to do good work in the direction of having the close season properly observed, and also in the guarding of our local sanctuaries.—E. M. CORNWALL, R.A.O.U. Mackay (Qld.)

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**Birds in Winter.**—A charming little scene was witnessed on one of the fine, mild afternoons of this week. A paddock near Mersey Bluff was being turned over by the plough, and 30 or 40 Silver Gulls (*Larus nova-hollandiæ*) had congregated for the sake of picking up grubs and worms from the furrows. They were very bold, following close to the ploughman's heels and squabbling with each other for tit-bits in true Gull style. This is the first time that I have seen so large a number at the game in Tasmania, although the English Gulls are well known for their proclivities in this direction. Doubtless our graceful little "Silvers" learnt it from their habit of coming into the flooded paddocks in the winter and spring months to feed on the worms which have been washed out of their burrows. On the occasion cited above, there were noticed, besides Gulls, Robins, White-fronted Chats (*Ephthianura albifrons*), a Pipit or two (*Anthus australis*), and, in an adjoining wet paddock, a pair of Herons (*Ardea nova-hollandiæ*).—H. STUART DOVE. West Devonport (Tas.), 12/7/19.

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**Bega (N.S.W.) Bird Notes.**—After a large surface pool left by the flood of February last had been drained, I counted over 40 Black-fronted Dottrels feeding on the mud flats thus exposed. This bird is fairly common about south coastal (N.S.W.) rivers, but usually in couples or small companies. A few Pigeon-Gulls, White-breasted Cormorants, and Magpie-Larks shared the spoils with the Dottrels, while in a shallow lagoon close by a splendid White-necked Heron stalked solemnly to and fro. Some few weeks ago I marked a company of 12 or 14 of these fine birds wheeling over the town of Bega in slow, majestic flight, and in two tiers,

each bird about 3 feet above its fellow. Almost without any perceptible motion of the wings, and sweeping upwards at intervals with wonderful unanimity, the Herons progressed slowly towards their destination. They gave one the impression of mourners slowly following an invisible hearse.

Just lately I have noticed two examples of the Delicate Owl lying dead near a main road, and two or three Black-throated Grebes about the lagoons—wantonly shot, evidently. As regards the little Grebe's powers of flight, although these birds are slow to use their short wings, they are, in fact, capable of considerable aerial journeys. I have observed a company of about 30 Grebes leave a lake where Duck-shooting was in progress and head for a river about two miles distant. They rose gradually to an altitude which would about clear the highest tree-tops, and then went full speed ahead.—H. V. EDWARDS. Bega (N.S.W.)

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**The Black-cheeked Falcon as a Duck-Slayer.**—Two of us camped for the night of 8th September, 1918, at the edge of one of the big Gwydir sag-beds. We were up before daylight next morning disturbing many sleeping Ducks from the edge of the water close to our camp. We then started off for a walk through the sags in quest of White Ibis. Ducks by this time were flying round in great numbers. Then we noticed a Black-cheeked Falcon (*Falco melanogenys*) swoop in among the flying birds, and a Black Duck came falling to the water; then another Duck came tumbling down. We stood still and watched, and in about a quarter of an hour he accounted for *twelve birds*. Apparently all were killed. Those that fell within reach of us were quite dead, but several fell in the sags, and we did not investigate. Although he killed several birds within 100 yards of us, we could not see clearly how it was accomplished. He used to skim just over the top of his victim, and it would crumple up and tumble over and over to the water. Apparently this was just a little morning's exercise, as he did not attempt to pick up any of the "kills." Once he got three Ducks in succession without stopping his flight. Every now and then he would rest on a tree for a few seconds and then off again to the chase. The Black-cheeked Falcon is a rare bird here, and, judging by the exploits of this one, it is fortunate for our wild game that he is so rare.—F. C. MORSE. "Coocalla," Garah (N.S.W.)

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**Black Cockatoos as Storm Prophets.**—It is several years since I saw any of the Black Cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus xanthonotus*) in the neighbourhood of Devonport, but on the 28th April their once-familiar wailing notes reached my ears, and soon afterwards a flock of about sixteen individuals was noted, flying fairly high, in two almost parallel lines—a long and a short. They were leaving the coast and making south, or inland, to the hill country.

The weather was clear and warm, as it had been for some time. Two days afterwards, on the afternoon of 30th April, a thunder-storm came up from north (the quarter from which the birds had been flying), and lasted until evening, with very vivid lightning and heavy rain. When I lived in the Table Cape district (Tas.) these birds were very plentiful in the forest country, and it was a maxim among the settlers that when they made their appearance in the clearings rain was not far away. Their mournful notes, well represented by the native name, "Wa-ee-lah," were frequently heard, and the peculiar noise, much like crosscut saws working in a log, which they kept up all the time their powerful beaks were tearing off the bark from the ringed trees in order to get at the large wood-grubs underneath. The ability of the Black Cockatoo to foretell an approaching change appears to have been noted by early settlers on the Australian continent, as William Howitt, in a little book published in the fifties of last century, says that they were regarded there as proclaimers of rain.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S. West Devonport (Tas.)

### Correspondence.

(Read at R.A.O.U. *Conversazione*, 6th August, 1919.)

DEAR "Birds of a Feather,"—The Ornithologists' new year—August—has again come round, and, happily, in the "year of Peace." What are you going to do for the science?

Mr. Mattingley, Mr. Barrett, and myself have been appointed a sub-committee to encourage specialization. I would commence by asking you who are "collecting-observers" not to take any Cuckoos' eggs this season, but, instead, let the eggs hatch out, and make observations for the proper identification of the parents. I think none of us has yet proved things, but has much "taken it for granted" which species has laid the strange eggs in the foster-bird's nest. For instance, which Bronze-Cuckoo lays the speckled egg and which the olive egg? I think this has not been proved since the days of the Ramsay Brothers, of Sydney, and we should have our own confirmatory evidence. Then let us make a start this season.—Yours, &c.,

A. J. CAMPBELL.

Surrey Hills (Vic.), 1/8/19.

### THE UNIDENTIFIED PETROICA.

To the Editors of "The Emu."

SIRS,—In *The Emu* for July Mr. Frank E. Howe credits me, in my description of this bird, with the statement that the Petroicas "do not nest in immature plumage." However, in stating that they (the Petroicas) "do not nest in this peculiar