

Stray Feathers

The Origin of Some Bird Names. The name *Regulus* was originally applied to the Wren in pre-Linnæan days, and took its origin from the fable, in which the birds agreed to accept the highest flier as their king. The Eagle was about to be proclaimed, when it was discovered that the Wren was perched upon his back, and was therefore made king of the birds. Linnæus first applied the name specifically to the Gold-crest as *Motacilla regulus*, perhaps mistaking it for the bird of the fable, or perhaps on account of the gold crest being likened to a crown. Cuvier, in the early part of last century, made a new genus for the bird, taking the specific name, and using it generically, as was so often done in those days. The name *Geobasileus*, meaning King of the Earth, was apparently applied from the association of ideas. The Genus *Acanthiza* was made by Vigors and Horsfield in a paper read before the Linnæan Society on June 21, 1825, and January 17, 1826, which was published in the Transactions of the Society in 1827. In this paper a number of new genera were formed, many still in use, but some obsolete. In each case the derivation of the name is given, the Greek being translated into Latin; no English rendering is given. They give the origin of *Acanthiza* as *Acantheon-dumetum-zao-zivro*. Riddle's Latin Dictionary gives *dumetum* as meaning a place set with bushes, a thicket, a brake. The meaning of the name is therefore Scrub Dweller, and has nothing to do with the beak.—(Dr.) A. M. MORGAN, 206 North Terrace, Adelaide, S.A.

Colour-Changes in the Silver Gull. The change which the bill of the Silver Gull (*Larus nova-hollandie*) undergoes each year, from red to black, appears to correspond fairly closely in regard to time, with the plumage-change of the male Blue Wren [*Emu*, Vol. XXII., page 323]. On 17th February there was a male Wren skulking in a native shrub at Mersey Bluff, in the throes of his moult; the beautiful cobalt-blue of the crown, cheeks, and mantle had become faded and dirty, and the whole plumage had a most disreputable appearance, of which the bird seemed quite conscious. On 26th of same month a party of Silver Gulls was floating on the water near the rock on which I sat; all members of the party had bills either black or, in some cases, midway between red and black, the change to dark being not yet complete. By July, and, in many cases, I think, before that month, these bills will all be red once more, and the Blue Wren, seen only a few yards from the same rock, will have assumed his beautiful nuptial attire. I can find no reference to this seasonal change in the Gull in the Australian books which I have, yet it must be widely known. If there is a change in the tint of the legs also, it must be far less pronounced than in the bills, for the legs of almost all the individuals of the group noticed were red, and are that colour also in winter. The one

or two members who seemed to have darker limbs were probably young birds of the season which had not yet attained the brighter tint. The Gulls were busily engaged, while floating about, in picking some small objects off the water-surface, probably shrimp-like crustaceans, which have been very plentiful of late off this coast.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., W. Devonport, Tas.

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Birds of a National Park.—In contrast with colder countries, there is no month of the year in Australia when one wild bird or another is not breeding. The present time, however—say, from February to June—is the slackest period for the bird-observer; and, because of this, we were doubly pleased on Sunday last (February 3) to find several birds' nests in active use at the Waterfall end of Sydney's National Park. Prettiest of all was the picture created by a Rufous Fantail that had a dainty nest—shaped like a wine-glass with the bottom broken off—placed in a tree beside a creek, on a small branch about four feet from the ground. The familiar Grey (White-shafted) Fantail is a graceful figure on its nest; to this grace the Red Fantail adds beauty—a really pleasing medley of white, black, and rufous on throat and head, blending into brown on the back, which in turn gives way to a broad expanse of rufous. And the dominating tail (which can be expanded as wide as any fan) folded and extended beyond the margin of the nest, seems to harmonise most amiably with the quaint "tail" that extends below the cup of the nest. Other nests noted were one of the cup-shaped, mossy homes of the cheery Black-faced Flycatcher, and two of the bulky cradles of the sprightly Yellow-throated Scrub-wren. Called by settlers in the north the "Devilbird" and "Black-nest Bird," the Scrub-wren of the yellow throat is notable for its fondness for dark gullies, where it suspends dark rootlets and twigs in untidy masses from vines or branches, usually overhanging watercourses. For all their unkempt appearance, however, these black nests are very cosy within; the babies in each of the two nests examined were very comfortable and healthy.

There was once (and probably still is) a common impression that the Lyre-bird, admittedly a master mocker, has to "take the knock" in respect of one particular bird-call, to wit, the laughter of the Kookaburra. It may be, of course, that some Lyre-birds have failed in attempting this (and good observers have testified to the failures, through only hearing the quaint cackle on rare occasions). At all events, we had abundant evidence that the Lyre-bird is not only able to mimic the Kookaburra, but can render that extraordinary vocal jumble created by two Jacks chortling together. Nor was this cleverness confined to one Lyre-bird; two birds, miles apart, performed the same feat. It was, indeed, a pleasant surprise to find the *Menuras* so voiceful in February; their best efforts are made in the early spring. Listening to one bird for five minutes or so, we jotted down the names of fourteen different birds which it mimicked

perfectly. There were the wailing of both the White and Black Cockatoos, the screech of the Crimson Parrot, the shout of the Currawong (Pied Bell-magpie), the cackle of the Kookaburra, the crack of the Whip-bird, and the calls of the Bower-bird, Grey Thrush, Pilot-bird, Butcher-bird, Brush Wattle, Leather-head, and Yellow-faced and Yellow-eared Honeybirds. To these another Lyre-bird added, later, imitations of the Scrub-wren, Black-faced Flycatcher, and Golden-breasted Whistler. In a third case the rollicking Lyre-bird was seen to be a female—proving, as Mr. Tom Tregallas has done in Victoria, that this lady is just as capable a vocalist, if not so consistent, as her regal mate with the lyre-like tail.—A. H. CHISHOLM, C.F.A.O.U., in *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney.

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New and Strange Scavenger Moth, discovered by Ornithological Collector.—*Emu*, xxiii., p. 146, contains a note by Mr. J. R. Kinghorn, Zoologist, Australian Museum, on an entirely new and large venomous snake, *Oxyuranus macleayana* (Kinghorn), discovered by Mr. Wm. McLennan while collecting on the Cape York Peninsula for Mr. H. L. White.

On the same expedition Mr. McLennan discovered an extraordinary Moth living in the nests of the Golden-shouldered Parrot (*Psephodes chrysopterygius*).^{*} Mr. White handed the material to Dr. A. Jeffries Turner, Brisbane, who deemed the discovery so important that he communicated his description and deductions to the Entomological Society of London,^{**} naming the insect *Neossiosynoecca scatophaga* (literal meaning, "dung-eater, living nestling birds"). The nests of the Parrot are excavations in the termitaria or white-ant-hills. These nests are devoid of lining. McLennan found the larvae in nearly every nest examined, and was struck by the cleanness of the nests and the absence of excreta from the young birds. On further investigation, he observed the larvae actually devouring excreta as soon as they were voided, even cleaning the feet and feathers of the young. The grubs (stout, greyish and about 32 mm. in length) were present in large numbers in silken galleries matted together with larvae, dust and fragments of earth in the bottom of the nest. Dr. Turner states:—"These habits appear very remarkable. Not all *lepidopterous* larvae feed on foliage, not even on vegetable matter. It would be possible to compile a considerable list of eccentric feeders, but among these I doubt if any are more curious than the species I here describe."

It would appear that the field is still open to the enterprising collecting Naturalist. In the trip just mentioned, in addition to many ornithological novelties obtained, a new reptile, 9 feet long, "undoubtedly the most dangerous snake in Australia," and a

^{*}See White, *Emu* XXII., p. 110.

^{**}Trans. Ent. Soc., Lond., 1923, p. 170.

wonderful *lepidopterous* scavenger, have been added to scientific knowledge.—A. J. CAMPBELL, F.A.O.U., Box Hill, Vic.

Reviews

["Willis Island."—A Storm Warning Station in the Coral Sea, by John King Davis, F.R.G.S., author of "With the *Aurora* in the Antarctic," Director of Navigation for the Commonwealth of Australia. With an Introductory Chapter by Griffith Taylor, D.Sc., B.E., B.A., with 37 photographs and 12 maps and line drawings. Critchley Parker, Melbourne, 376 Flinders-lane; 1923.]

This small but important work is a record of simple facts, written in a breezy style. It is historical, reminiscent and informative.

Willis Island is 250 miles off the coast of North-eastern Queensland. To this isolated spot Capt. Davis set out with 15 willing assistants to form a meteorological station, and did it in six months. He incidentally established an ornithological observing station, and was the first bird observer there. In the appendix, "Short Notes on Birds frequenting Willis Island" are given, while such notes as the following are taken from the body of the work:—

March 22nd (1922).—The Noddies are here in great numbers. This is the nesting season. They perch on the bushes, which have now grown to a height of 3½ feet. Some are busy transporting shells, bits of dry coral, grass, etc., as material for the nests; others remain perched on the bushes—superintending! During the afternoon the greater number settle on the beach, leaving only a few nest-builders at work.

March 24th.—The Terns keep up a ceaseless chatter on quiet nights. At times, it is difficult to get to sleep with such a din.

April 2nd.—The whole island is littered with nests and eggs, those of the Noddies being the most numerous.

April 4th.—I found the nests of some fresh arrivals, Crested Terns (*Sterna bergi*). The Sooty Terns are mustering in great force during the nesting season.

April 8th.—The following birds are nesting at present:—White Masked Gannet, Red-legged Gannet, Terns, Noddies, Crested Terns, and Brown Gannets. The birds are the attraction here, although the ceaseless screaming is not "an added charm," but it is a real pleasure to see the wild bird in its natural environment and to see the means provided by Nature to enable the young to reach maturity.

April 9th.—I have just returned (9 p.m.) from a moonlight walk round the beach. On the northern side of the island it was just black with birds. There must have been some thousands.

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["How to Study Birds: A Practical Guide for Amateur Bird Lovers and Camera-Hunters," by Herbert K. Job, Member of the American Ornithologists' Union, etc. Published by The Macmillan Company, New York].

This useful and interesting volume, from the pen of an author already well-known to Nature-lovers, is a striking indication of the trend of modern bird-observation. In its pages are