

Stray Feathers.

DOES THE FEMALE EMU EVER INCUBATE? At Anlaby, the beautiful estate and home of Mr. Henry Dutton, a small paddock, adjoining the gardens, is set apart as a home for deer, kangaroo, and Emu. This season (1901) the female Emu made a nest in a secluded corner amongst the gum trees, and deposited there five eggs, upon which she sat contentedly for nine weeks. During this time she was fed daily by one of the gardeners, and in due season marched off with three young birds. They all kept by themselves, aloof from the other birds. The two eggs that proved to be infertile have had small punctures made in them, and will be taken by Mr. Dutton to England as a curiosity from his Australian home.

Of course, I have always heard that the male Emu helped in sitting on the eggs, &c., but not entirely. On my old wild run in Port Lincoln they were very plentiful at certain seasons; but a few times that I actually saw the bird run off the nest it was a female. In this case, the gardener says that the female bird kept to the nest all through the sitting, and walked off with the young ones, and they kept entirely together for some weeks, until the other big birds, male and female, gradually joined them; and one day he pointed out to me the Emu with her brood, and it was a female bird. Many a time, when mustering sheep on wild heathy hills, we have seen a mob of Emu 5 to 17 in number. On slipping off our horses, and whistling plaintively, the birds would come around us, full of curiosity, within a few feet. They are such noble, majestic birds, so harmless, and reminding one of the Arabian Desert, not forgetting the wonderful and rather sad expression of their eye, that it always seemed to me a wicked and cursed thing to kill them.—HENRY HOLROYD. Tarlee, S.A.

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A ROOKERY OF NUTMEG PIGEONS (*Carpophaga spilorrhoea*).—Being informed that pigeons were plentiful along the Seymour River, a few miles north of the Herbert, and also that they were supposed to breed in the mangroves at the mouth of the river and in Hinchinbrook Channel, I availed myself of the first opportunity which presented itself of paying them a visit. On 28th December last I went down the Seymour by boat, arriving near the mouth late in the afternoon. Pigeons were just beginning to arrive in small flocks from their feeding grounds up the river, but later on, as sunset approached, they appeared literally in hundreds, all making for the islands in the mouth of the river. We accordingly headed for the largest island, and moored our boat close in shore for the night, intending to investigate the birds early in the morning. By this time the clamour of the roosting Pigeons was tremendous, and was added to by the notes of countless small birds, continuing for

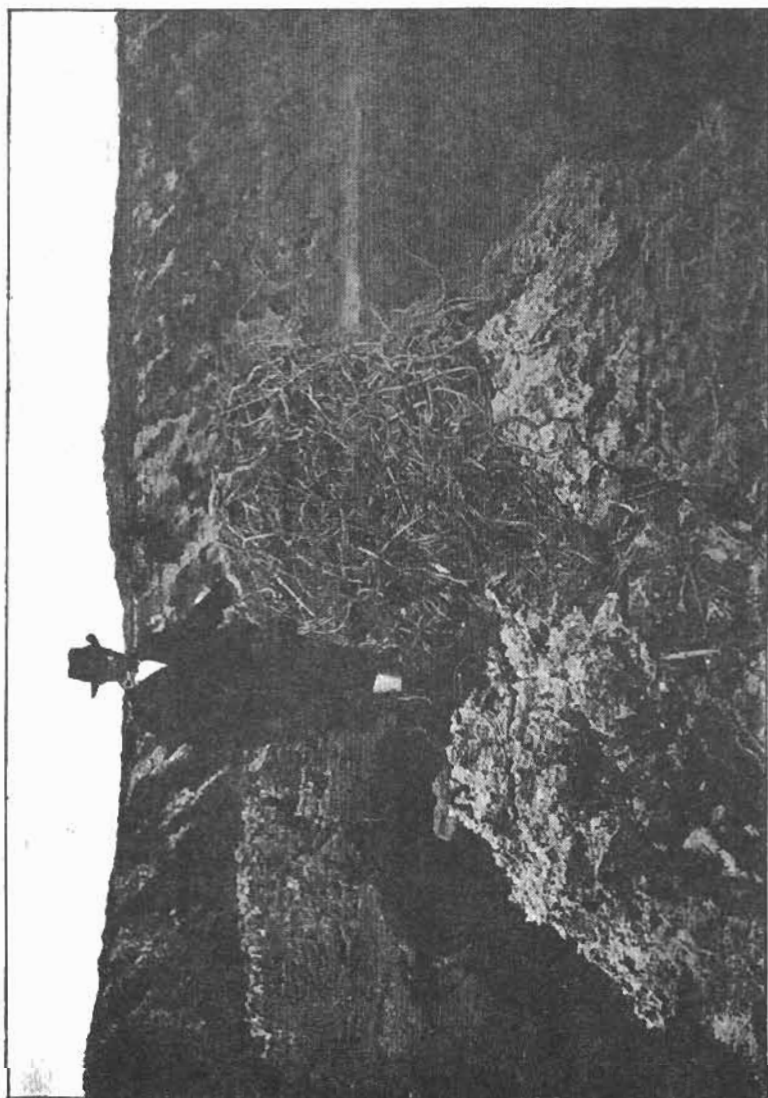
some time after dark. With the first flush of daylight we were ashore, and speedily shot what Pigeons we wanted for the pot. On pushing across to the east end of the island, where the greater number of birds seemed to have congregated, we came upon their nests. The first one I found contained an incubated egg, which I could see plainly through the nest, which was of the scantiest description, perfectly flat, and hardly large enough to contain the single egg. It was placed on a horizontal fork in a "red mangrove," about 15 feet from the ground. I afterwards found upwards of thirty nests, nearly all containing young or incubated eggs, but no nest with more than one egg or young bird. They were all of the same frail build, some consisting only of about 20 twigs roughly interwoven. On one occasion we found two nests in the same tree. We explored the remainder of the island, walking knee-deep in slimy black mud all the time, but there were no more nests. We then visited two of the smaller islets, but only on one did we find nests—two altogether, both containing young. It was now about 7 a.m., and the Pigeons were leaving in great numbers, and as we could find no more breeding places, we soon afterwards took our departure. A young bird which we took from the nest is now quite tame, and will take food from the hand. The eggs are pure white, smooth, and slightly glossy—in form oval as a rule, but some are more lengthened than others, and the measurements show considerable difference. One egg I took is visibly much larger than any of the others in both measurements. I give the measurements of four specimens:—(a) 1.95 x 1.24 inch; (b) 1.81 x 1.2 inch; (c) 1.75 x 1.17 inch; (d) 1.7 x 1.23 inch.—EDGAR H. WEBB. 15/1/02. "Macknade," Herbert River, N.Q.

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A FLIGHT OF MUTTON BIRDS.—Captain Waller, of the s.s. *Westralia*, when passing near Eddystone Point, on the east coast of Tasmania, on his way from New Zealand to Melbourne, on 26th January, 1902, passed, early in the morning, an immense flight of Mutton Birds (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) from seven to nine miles long, going due south, probably on their way to some favourite feeding area. They had evidently left the extensive rookeries on the Furneaux Group of islands in Bass Strait at daylight, after having spent a night on shore, as the nesting was then in full swing. When we think of the vast host of birds seen, that probably each one had left a mate behind sitting on an egg at the bottom of their burrow, and remember that both birds are sometimes in the burrow together (so that even half the birds belonging to this particular colony would not be included in the flight seen), a little idea of their incalculable number can be formed. It can also be understood how 600,000 young birds can (as asserted) be taken from the rookeries, and yet plenty be

The Emu.

PLATE IX.



An Osprey's Nest.

FROM A PHOTO. BY G. P. CONIGRAVE.

left to make up for losses that must occur during the year. As these birds only lay one egg, it is evident that they cannot have many enemies except man, and when one bears in mind the fact that both eggs and young birds have been taken from the rookeries to the number of many hundreds of thousands every year for the past forty or more years, and that during that time the number of young birds taken alone would number probably considerably over 24,000,000, the length of time it must have taken to bring these birds up to their present immense numbers is apparent. The eggs taken also would not fall far short of the number mentioned. There are large rookeries besides those in Bass Strait—for instance, those on the islands to the south of South Australia, near Kangaroo Island, and also many others off the coast of New Zealand.—D. LE SOUËF.

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NOTE.—NANKEEN HERONS.—When in company with Mr. A. J. Campbell one evening in the middle of January, in the Melbourne Zoological Gardens, we heard a European Starling crying out as if in great distress, and evidently caught by another bird. On approaching a thick willow tree by a lagoon to find the cause, we heard the cries repeated some distance off in another tree, showing that the bird in distress was carried further away by its captor. Again following the noise, I caused a large bird to fly close to where Mr. Campbell was standing, who then saw it was a Nankeen Night Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) that had the Starling in its beak. When the Heron saw Mr. Campbell it dropped its prey, which fell dead, and flew off. This is the first time we have noticed these Herons performing the part of a bird of prey when wild, although we have known them to devour Quail and Dottrel that were confined with them in the same enclosure.—D. LE SOUËF.

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EFFECTS OF DROUGHT.—Last year took the record for minimum rainfall, and the absence of rain may somewhat explain the lateness in the hatching of birds. For instance, to-day I have two nests of Black and White Fan-tails, or Shepherd's Companions, with young just come to light. I never knew them to be so late as this. All the swamps have been dry during last 18 months, so no large birds are about.—C. W. BRUSH. Boondara, Booligal, N.S.W., 2/1/02.

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DROUGHT IN QUEENSLAND.—There is nothing much to mention about the birds now, consequent upon the doleful drought. We have a drought-stricken family of 10 little Water

Crakes here. They are brown, with a little white spot on the wing. We also have 8 common (Brown) Quail about the garden, which are so tame that they will hardly get out of one's road. A Black and White Fan-tail fights its own reflection in the window glass. It has been at it steadily from the beginning of November, and seems quite gay, though a trifle ragged. He shapes at it first thing in the morn, and is sometimes there till dark.—ERNEST D. BARNARD. Coomooboolaroo, 22/1/02.

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WHITE IBIS.—Under date of 1st February, 1902, Mr. M. Gubbins Roche writes:—"Whilst driving through the forest last week between Heywood and Dartmoor (Vic.) I came across, in a secluded swamp, a flock of 200 White Ibis. Their only companions were two Yellow-legged Spoonbills, some Crested Grebes, and a wisp of large Snipe. I have never seen the White Ibis before in such numbers, usually only a few birds in flocks of Straw-necked or Glossy Ibis."

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DO MUSK DUCKS FLY?—Mr. Chas. G. Hamilton, Perth, W.A., states:—"It is mentioned in Mr. A. J. Campbell's book, 'Nests and Eggs,' that there is considerable doubt about the Musk Duck flying, and letters are given from people, some affirming, others denying, that it does so. Till recently I did not think the bird could fly more than very short distances along the surface of the water. However, we had a shooting trip lately, and I was with a friend when he shot one in mistake for a Black Duck. The bird was flying high over us, and was going very fast. It must have come from another swamp, which is about a mile distant. This occurred *just at dusk*."

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CAIRNS NOTES.—*Shining Starling (Calornis)*.—24th November, 1901.—I examined a series of 14 nests, which all contained young birds; three of these had four birds each, and one four birds and one addled egg; the balance held twos and threes.

Long-tailed Kingfisher.—22nd December, 1901.—Few birds; several nests ready for eggs. 29th December.—Birds plentiful, also many nests, but only one egg. 5th January, 1902.—Birds plentiful, also nests; eggs taken; clutches, 3, 3, 3, 2. One nest contained young birds, one nest just vacated, and two ready for eggs. 11th January.—Birds very plentiful; eggs taken; clutches, 3, 3, one slightly incubated. Several nests just ready for eggs. Same day, 3 eggs Scrub Turkey.

Black-backed Quail.—19th January.—Took clutch 4 eggs.—E. M. CORNWALL.

A LUSUS NATURÆ.—I saw an extraordinary Magpie the other day while cycling from Yinnar to Morwell, Gippsland. It had light chocolate-brown markings instead of black, and at a distance, when flying, it appeared almost white. The bird was evidently young, with other Magpies, and was in a wattle tree close to another bird when I examined the markings from a distance of about 50 feet. I took a $\frac{1}{4}$ -plate photo of the freak, but it will be too small for any practical purpose.—J. P. CAMPBELL. Murrumbena, 7/2/02.

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AUSTRALIAN BIRDS AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE.—At the exhibition of the London and Provincial Ornithological Society, held at the Crystal Palace, November last, the best bird in the Parrakeet class was a female of the Golden-shouldered Parrakeet (*Psephotus chrysopterygius*). In the class for Waxbills, &c., a pair of Red-faced Grass Finches (*Bathilda ruficauda*) received first award; a pair of White-breasted Grass Finches (*Munia pectoralis*) being second. In the mixed class for seed-eaters the first prize was won by a pair of Long-tailed Grass Finches (*Poephila acuticauda*), the second by a pair of White-eared Grass Finches (*P. leucotis*). The class for insectivorous birds included Wood-Swallows (*Artamus personatus* and *A. superciliosus*) and a Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sanctus*).

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AWARDS FOR AVICULTURE.—The Avicultural Society awards a bronze medal to any of its members who succeed in breeding, in the United Kingdom, any species of bird that has not been known to have previously bred in captivity in Great Britain or Ireland. The following Australian birds have brought success to their owners, viz.:—Long-tailed Grass Finch (*Poephila acuticauda*), in 1897, owner Mr. R. A. Todd; Green-Leek (*Polytelis barrabandi*), in 1900, owner Rev. C. D. Farrar; Masked Grass-Finch (*Poephila personata*), in 1900, owner Mr. L. N. Hawkins; Pink Cockatoo (*Cacatua leadbeateri*), in 1901, owner Mrs. Johnstone; Red-faced Grass-Finch (*Bathilda ruficauda*), in 1901, owner Mr. A. E. Nicholson.

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EMUS IN NORTH AUSTRALIA.—From casual observation I think the full-grown Emu in North Australia attains a larger size than in the southern parts of the continent, and is usually darker in colour, and the striping in the young lasts to a greater age than in the New South Wales Emu. Probably this is due to climatic and local causes, and not to any variation of species. Since I explored and settled my present holding on the Victoria River, North-West Australia, Emus have increased in numbers,

owing to the poisoning off of the dingoes and the supplying of regular work and food to the natives.—JOE BRADSHAW, St. Kilda, Victoria.

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SNIFE ON MIGRATION.—I observed two flights of Snipe (*Galinago australis*) passing over Sorrento, going north, on the 25th January. They had evidently crossed Bass Strait from the islands there or from Tasmania. They flew very low for snipe. They seemed to be heading towards Mud Island. I saw them at about 5 a.m., whilst I was making for a distant spot to fish off the rocks facing Bass Strait. There were in the first flight about 20 birds, and in the second lot about 10 or 12, which passed about seven or eight minutes after.—A. MATTINGLEY.

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MIGRATION OF SWIFTS.—A flight of many hundreds of Spine-tailed Swifts (*Chætura caudacuta*) passed over Bass Strait on 7th February, apparently from Tasmania, making their way due north. They were flying low and catching insects as they went, and were evidently migrating to the Northern Hemisphere, where they breed. I should be glad to know if any member of the Aust. O.U. has ever seen one of these birds resting either on a tree or on the ground.—D. LE SOUËF.

A severe whirlwind passed through Richmond and Burnley, suburbs of Melbourne, on the afternoon of 24th February, 1902. As it advanced, a party of Swifts was observed circling high up among the *débris* that was drawn up, finding there probably a number of insects caught up in the aerial whirlpool.—A. G. CAMPBELL, Armadale.

From Magazines.

IN the first (January) number of the *Agricultural Journal of Victoria* Mr. Charles French, F.L.S., Government Entomologist, contributes a chatty and useful article on "Economic Entomology and Ornithology," dealing chiefly with the former science, upon which he is so well able to write. He mentions that "the fruit-growers of Victoria and elsewhere are partially indebted for the large increase of insect pests, all and sundry," to so-called sportsmen—"pot-hunters," &c.—who have shot and "still continue to shoot down our valuable insectivorous birds." This is true, but may not the inevitable reclaiming of forested and bush lands for cultivation by orchardists and farmers themselves—thus destroying the natural domains of these birds—have also contributed in some measure to the decrease of valuable insect-eating birds?