

Stray Feathers.

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN NOTES.—*Hirundo neoxena*.—A brood was raised under the North Perth Ferry jetty during winter. The young birds were flying about and resting on the hand-rails of the jetty, and on board the ferry boats in last week in June.

Cuculus pallidus.—Noted first arrival 5th July, following some heavy gales. Simultaneously great numbers of hairy caterpillars made their appearance in the bush land and gardens.

Zosterops gouldi.—Obtained a nest containing two eggs at Greenmount, Darling Ranges, near Perth, on 30th August. Saw another nest on 7th September, at South Perth, containing one egg.

Glycyphila fulvifrons.—Captured one of two young ones at Greenmount on 30th August. The fulvous front and black chest lines were not apparent.

Meliornis longirostris.—Discovered nest at South Perth on 1st September; no eggs. Two days later visited nest, found two eggs.

Pardalotus striatus.—Saw fully-fledged young in old "red gum," South Perth, 1st September.

Ptilotis sonora.—Last month (August) saw a Singing Honey-eater fly on to the road, Mends-street, South Perth, and pick at a piece of orange peel, after the manner of a sparrow.—ALEX. WM. MILLIGAN. Perth, 9/9/02.

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LAUGHING JACKASSES IN THE WEST.—The Jackasses (*Dacelo gigas*) turned out here are thriving and breeding well, especially about the cultivated districts.—ERNEST A. LE SOUËF, Perth.

ROCKHAMPTON NOTES.—No part of Australia has suffered more from the drought of the last three years than Central Queensland, and among all classes of birds the distress and mortality have been unprecedented. Bushmen on downs and timbered country report finding the dead bodies of common kinds. There has been some difference of opinion as to whether the deaths were due to starvation or to eating poisoned food laid out as baits for 'possums. Some, perhaps, died from the latter cause, but out on runs where no baits were placed this could not have been the case. There was a terrible want of food, because the pastures were completely burned up, and in many places trees which had attained to a considerable size perished for want of rain. Insect food there was none, and honey-bearing blossoms were few and far between. Lagoons and waterholes were dried, especially in the western country, and a migration of birds to the coast country took place. Wild Turkeys were most conspicuous, and were shot on sight. Quail took refuge in some of the Keppel Isles, but were followed and shot without mercy. As the waterholes decreased in number those remaining were the resort of wild animals and pot-hunters. Scrub Turkeys (*Talegallus*) and Duck became common in Rockhampton shops. Wild Geese, Teal, Pigmy Geese, Cranes, Stone Curlews, Plovers, &c., were deemed fair game by the unemployed. There are really few birds left, those who could, while they had strength, having moved to happier quarters. There are a few Kites about the meat works, and White-breasted and White-headed Sea-Eagles appear, soaring over the River Fitzroy. Crows are numerous in the outskirts of Rockhampton, and are very impudent. A few Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes remain. The Pied Crow-Shrike came here in June, and a few are still here; it is a winter visitor. Laughing Jackasses are in diminished numbers. The Magpie Larks or "Pi-wis" are about as usual, only there seems to be a predominance of males. Bee-eaters are very sore on bees—there is little else for them. Butcher-Birds polished off an incredible number of canaries hanging in cages on verandahs; now the latter have to be protected by close wire-netting apart from the cage. A few House Martins remain. Diamond-Birds, Honey-eaters, and Finches are rarely to be seen. The lagoon at Gracemere station, four miles or so from Rockhampton, is a wild bird reserve, and is well frequented, though the water is only a couple of feet deep. I send two photo. snapshots of Pelicans taken from a boat. The birds of all kinds are very tame there.—WILL. McILWRAITH. 5/9/02.

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MALE LYRE-BIRD INCUBATING.—On 28th August, when in a fern gully at Gembrook, I found the nest of a Lyre-Bird (*Menura victoriae*) in the steep bank of the creek, and the male

bird was sitting on the egg, the hen bird being nowhere in sight; and on two other occasions this season I have heard of male birds being disturbed off the nest; in most of the nests I have before found it was the female sitting, but we now see that both parents assist in the incubation.—D. LE SOUËF.

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GROUND-LARKS IN TASMANIA.—I have watched the movements of Ground-Larks (*Anthus australis*) for two successive seasons, and find they arrived here on 25th August of the year 1901, and 20th August, 1902, respectively, and generally commence to breed about the beginning of October. They leave this locality again about the first week in April the following autumn. Is this movement only local, or do these birds migrate to the mainland of Australia?

It is quite noticeable the scarcity of some of our common birds this spring, and also the lateness in arrival of some of the migrating kinds. For instance, the Satin Flycatcher (*Myiagra nitida*) and the Wood-Swallow (*Artamus sordidus*) were quite a month late in putting in an appearance.—E. W. DEAN. Stirling, Tasmania, 5/11/02.

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NOTABLE MIGRATION OF NATIVE COMPANIONS.—On 12th June Mr. A. C. Frankham, of Adelaide, when driving from Balranald to Swan Hill, Victoria, noticed large numbers of flights of Native Companions (*Grus australasianus*) travelling in a south-westerly direction, at a good height above the ground, and each flock preserved a distinct V formation; he first noticed the birds in the middle of the afternoon, and from then until sundown there was hardly a time when one or more flocks were not visible. It is curious that such numbers of these birds should be migrating towards the lakes at the mouth of the Murray at the same time. Of course, the drought was the cause of their travelling southward, but that would hardly account for them going simultaneously.—D. LE SOUËF.

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CAIRNS NOTES.—15/9/02.—The season promises to be a good one for birds in this district, owing principally, I believe, to the fearful drought prevailing in other parts of the State. The Calornis has been back several weeks, and yesterday I noticed them very busy building in their usual haunts. The Nutmeg Pigeons (*Myristicivora spilorrhoea*) are also coming down the coast in goodly flocks, and already I hear of several projected murdering expeditions to the neighbouring islands.

8/10/02.—The dates in Mr. Le Souëf's paper in last number of *The Emu* bear out what I have observed, that there are individuals of some species breeding in North Queensland the whole year round. Going carefully into the dates one notices that December and January are the main breeding months. A

sudden drop is noted in February and March, probably because of the very heavy rains during those months. April, May, and June show a revival of activity, which almost dies out in July and August, to come again in September, increasing in October and November. . . . I would like to see our Union do something for the preservation of the Nutmeg Pigeon. To my mind the whole of the Family Islands should be proclaimed a permanent reserve, so that the Pigeons could breed undisturbed. Some of the islands are visited every season by shooting parties from Townsville, Cardwell, &c.* As for the Cassowary, I fear he is doomed. He cannot live away from the jungle, and gradually but surely his haunts are becoming narrower and narrower. Sugar, bananas, and corn must occupy the land, and the lovely scrub must go. I very much fear that in another ten years the Cassowary will be a rare bird indeed. . . . We have had a very dry time here lately—not a drop of rain for six or seven weeks—and the consequence is the vegetation is scorched up, and bush fires are burning in every direction. To one who has lived for years in a dry climate like Townsville the rapid effect of a little drought here is most marked. Vegetation is so pampered usually with rain and humidity in these localities, that it cannot survive even a few weeks' dry weather.—E. M. CORNWALL.

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THE NUTMEG PIGEONS.—I am glad the Aust. O.U. Council are taking action *re* the Nutmeg Pigeons, and trust their efforts will bear fruit. Shooting during September, October, and even the early part of November, does little harm, as the birds do not as a rule settle down to breeding in any numbers until after that time, and so are not on the islands in any numbers during the day. Just before sunset they begin to arrive from their feeding grounds on the mainland, and the flight is continuous until nearly dark. As soon as day breaks they begin to stir again, and soon after sunrise the main flocks have left, only odd ones who have started breeding extra early remaining. The shooting is thus limited to a very short period during the morning and evening, and does comparatively little harm. Later on—that is, after the middle of November and through December and January—it is quite a different matter. The birds are then breeding in countless thousands on these very limited areas; every bush and tree bear their burden of nests, and many eggs are laid on rocks or even on the bare ground. Then there are hundreds of birds on the islands all day long. Eggs and young birds are destroyed wantonly, and thousands of birds shot which are never used, simply because they go bad before they reach the pot. Some years ago Green Island, which lies a few miles outside Cairns, was a favourite haunt of the Pigeons, but the

* The Council of the Union have already taken action in this matter.—EDS.

shooters were too much for them, and now only a few pairs visit it during the season.—E. M. CORNWALL. Cairns, 5/11/02.

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SOME NOVEMBER NOTES.—About Melbourne, this season is marked by the scarcity of migratory birds. In early spring the Cuckoos, of three species, arrived, though very few in numbers; but they all seem to have passed on, and the familiar whistle of the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) and the high notes of the two species of *Chalcococcyx* are seldom or never heard. Two other species, however, *Cacomantis flabelliformis* and *C. variolosus*, are not so scarce in certain localities. They are, strictly speaking, mere local species, and I believe often stay the whole winter with us. The Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*) appeared in the willows and sedges along the Yarra during the third week in September—about its usual time; while for quite two months, until about 20th November, when presumably they left for some breeding haunt, a party of silvery-plumaged Marsh Terns (*Hydrochelidon hybridus*) were daily to be seen flying up and down the reaches of the river about Burnley. This is a species never before noted in this locality, and surely these beautiful birds must be among the starvers driven by the drought from the northern part of the State. Some of their companions in their inland quarters, the White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) and the Marsh Tringa (*Heteropygia acuminata*), now on its winter holiday in the Southern Hemisphere, are also to be found not far away, on lagoons near Werribee. Of the Wood-Swallow (*Artamus sordidus*) very few pairs are to be seen in the timber around Melbourne; both the wandering species, however, *A. personatus* and *A. superciliosus*, have been noted passing overhead. The Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sanctus*), always a familiar bird, is, strange to say, almost absent this year, only two or three being noted, and they did not arrive till the last week of October. The Oriole (*Oriolus viridis*), whose distinctive notes are usually to be heard in the secluded areas of box-tree, has not appeared at all this season; neither has the rowdy Caterpillar-catcher (*Lalage tricolor*), though its larger relative, *Edolisoma tenuirostre*, may be noted on the wooded saddles of the Dandenongs. One fine afternoon a trip was made to a creek running out of the western side of these ranges, where the rare and beautiful Honey-eater (*Ptilopus cassidix*) used to have its home; but though this was not seen, another species, unfamiliar in the country near Melbourne, the Bell Miner (*Manorhina melanophrys*) was identified. The clear, bell-like notes of the male are frequently answered by a chuckling call from the female. Near by, a Tasmanian Finch (*Zonotrichia bellus*), rare on the mainland, was seen carrying long pieces of grass to its bulky nest, high up in a bunch of mistletoe on a tall eucalyptus sapling. Several trips were made to some

gullies on the opposite or eastern end of the Dandenong Ranges, and there some charming glimpses were obtained of the bird inhabitants of these humid and ferny recesses in the mountain side. In spite of the raging bush fires of six years ago, which must have destroyed bird life on an alarming scale, it was pleasing to find that such unique birds as the Lyre-Bird (*Menura victoriae*) and the Pilot-Bird (*Pycnoptilus floccosus*) were still at home in these fast-disappearing retreats. At more than one spot were the strong-throated and peculiar calls of the male Lyre-bird noticed. One place in particular, where the bird was whistling alongside a noisy waterfall, offered an opportunity to creep up and see the antics of the shy performer; but so keen is its sense of sight as well as of hearing that the venture was not a success, and the bird was found surveying the intruder—only for a moment, however, for it turned and disappeared like magic along a log. Young birds in rusty-coloured plumage and the females are not so shy, for offspring and parent were seen one evening quietly walking along a beaten track, and at another place were discovered going to roost, just one hour after sundown, in a tall blackwood (acacia) tree. This they ascended by walking measuredly along one branch and hopping to another until they felt themselves high enough to be safe from their enemy the fox. The Pilot-Bird, rowdy, active, and yet shy, is one of the remarkable small forms of Victoria. It appears to be somewhat irregular in its nesting habits. Though birds have been seen feeding fledged young during the first week in November, yet eggs have been taken at the end of January. Besides the Rufous Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*), which can usually be found during the breeding season frequenting the shady gullies or offshoots, where it builds its neat nest overhanging the water, on a dead twig, there are two species of Robins, which can always be seen during a ramble in a fern gully, and without which no description of the inhabitants of such a cool retreat would be complete. Particularly is the *Petroica rosea* associated with the shady patches of musk-tree and blackwood. The other species, *P. phoenicea*, is, properly speaking, Tasmanian. It is the common Robin about the city in winter, but when in September the greater number congregate and migrate across Bass Strait to nest in Tasmania and the adjacent islands it was thought that all had left. But of late years it was found that a few pairs retire to the highlands of the Dividing Range and its spurs, and there rear their young, as proof that all the species do not migrate. These birds, though they are found nesting in the more open eucalypts near the crests of the saddles, generally are found feeding among the fern trees. The smaller Rose-breasted Robin, however, is rarely found outside the gully, where it rears its young in the cosiest of nests, built of green moss, lined with fern down and fur, and ornamented with bits of lichen, placed on a horizontal bough, or, perchance, in an upright fork, near the stream. The nest itself

vies in excellence with the naturally moss-bedecked and lichen-covered boughs of the tree in which it is placed, and perhaps not very far away is found growing the somewhat rare tree-orchid (*Sarcophilus parviflorus*), emitting a delicate fragrance from its small flowers. (See illustration.) The Rose-breasted Robin, hereabouts at least, is the chief foster-parent of the Square-tailed Cuckoo (*C. variolosus*), whose egg, a little larger but with markings remarkably similar to those of the Robin's, has been several times taken from this beautiful, cosy nest, with two eggs only of the foster-parent. From observations it appears that the Cuckoo's egg is deposited after or previous to the first of the Robin's, and the owner of the nest then lays only one other egg to bring the clutch to the full number of three. Further, it was noticed in one favourable instance that the Cuckoo's egg was the first to hatch, when the two eggs of the Robin, though advanced in incubation, were immediately thrown out. Further, it seems that one pair of birds is doomed for some time at least to be the foster-parents for a certain pair of Cuckoos, which undoubtedly watch the nest after their egg is deposited, for should the contents be taken they deposit a second egg in the second nest the Robins usually build. It has yet to be discovered whether it is parent or foster-parent which turns out the rightful eggs when the little stranger is hatched.—A. G. CAMPBELL, Melbourne.