

Stray Feathers.

IN addition to the Blue Wren and Red-browed Finch, mentioned elsewhere, the Barnard Parrakeet (*Barnardius barnardi*) and the Black-ringed Finch (*Stictoptera annulosa*), owned respectively by Mesdames Johnstone and Williams, England, have bred, it is believed for the first time, in the United Kingdom.

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A "LOVELESS" PARRAKEET.—My Alexandra Parrakeet has laid four lovely eggs, on the 18th, 20th, 22nd, and 24th December respectively. I have had this bird in my possession for about seven years, and this is the first occasion she has produced eggs.—C. FRENCH, JUN. Richmond, Vict., 25/12/02.

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COOMOBOOLAROO (Q.) NOTE.—I have no bird news to tell you except that our little "Shepherd" (*Rhipidura tricolor*) is still bent on fighting his shadow in the window. (See *Emu*, vol. i., p. 147.) Fourteen months he has been at it now with scarcely a break. I think it constitutes a record. The other birds seem a little inclined to breed, and the Scrub Turkeys are just beginning to lay. I haven't taken one egg this year of any kind. We can reckon the drought is broken—at least for a time.—ERNEST D. BARNARD. 18/12/02.

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TERANG (VICT.) NOTES.—Ibis came into the district about the beginning of April in immense flocks, attracted by the grubs, which were very bad about that time. The birds stayed on till the beginning of December, though in fewer numbers. I saw a few White Ibis on the 23rd of this month feeding about a tea-tree spring. The first Common Snipe was seen here on 1st September. There were very few about this year, owing to the drought. A Painted Snipe was seen nearly a month earlier, but it left before I could get a look at it. A Land Rail was living about the

garden from the beginning of July till the end of October. A flock of Sandpipers appeared on 8th August, but left when the water dried up early in the spring. A pair of Bronze-winged Pigeons came to the plantation (wattle and eucalyptus) in the beginning of April, and stayed on till the middle of October. I heard the first Pallid Cuckoo of the season on 31st August, but saw a Bronze Cuckoo nearly a month earlier. We usually have a large number of Robins through the winter; from the beginning of April till end of August is about the length of their visit. I have seen very few Wood-Swallows this year. The first pair appeared on 10th September.—C. L. DENNIS. Kolora (Vict.), 30/12/02.

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NATIVE COMPANIONS.—In November last, near Echuca, Victoria, I noticed a few flocks of Native Companions (*Antigone australasiana*) travelling westward towards the lakes at the mouth of the Murray River. They were coming in from the lakes further north, where they are to be seen in hundreds in the winter time. The reason so many flocks often travel at the same time is because of the hot weather coming on suddenly, although I have seen some flocks a week behind the leaders. There were very few other Waders about last year, but other birds were as plentiful as ever, despite the drought.—A. J. SIMPSON. Cornalla, N.S.W.

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WOOD-SWALLOWS.—I had no idea till quite recently that the Wood-Swallows were honey-eaters, or perhaps it would be more correct to say eaters of honey. Two of the species (*Artamus personatus* and *A. superciliosus*) have been flocking lately on the baubinia trees, which are just now in full bloom. I watched them quite close, there being no need for the glasses, for in their eagerness to gather their breakfast of honey they crowded round me within 8 feet of my head. They make an animated scene, seven or eight hundred in a tree, continually shifting from flower to flower, at the same time keeping up an incessant twittering and chirping. I wanted some of these birds for examination, so, walking back 40 yards from the tree on which they were flocking, I fired into the middle of them, bringing down one or two, when the mob rose in a cloud, circled round a couple of times, and then settled again in the same tree under which I was. Picking up the fallen birds, I took their descriptions and measurements, and dissected them to find out their sexes. Ovaries in the females contained only very small eggs indeed, while the testes in the males were also very small (this was 13th August). The stomachs of all contained ants, and one had a small beetle.* I have since watched

* Does this not suggest that the birds were capturing insects rather than seeking honey, the insects being attracted by the nectar-laden blossoms?—EDS.

Artamus cinereus honey-eating, but they never, so far as I can see, mob with the two previously mentioned. Gould makes no mention of this habit of the Artami.—FRED L. BERNEY. Richmond (N.Q.), 18/9/02.

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VARIED LORIKEET (*Ptilosclera versicolor*).—I am forwarding a skin of a Lorikeet (female) obtained on the river here, where during the past month it has been numerous, feeding on the honey of the baubinia blossoms and the river gums. Never saw it on the ground except when down at water. It apparently lives almost entirely on honey. One we caught, and which has taken very kindly to captivity, is reported never to eat seed, but to subsist on sugar and water, with perhaps now and again a small portion of bread soaked in sugar and water. I examined three specimens recently that suicided in a well. They were all females, and, like the one I skinned, contained in their ovaries only very minute eggs. The bird sent fell into the sheep water-trough. I rescued it (only to make a specimen), when it squealed so vigorously that in an instant I was standing in a cloud of the Parrots, which settled on my arms, hands, shoulders, and hat till they weighed down the broad felt brim of the latter, almost to shut out my sight. There must have been two or three dozen on me. It was a wonderfully pretty sight, and I should much have liked to have caught the picture with a camera.—FRED. L. BERNEY. Richmond (N.Q.), 2/11/02.

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FLY LARVÆ IN LIVING SQUABS.*—At Distillery Creek, about three miles from Launceston, a New Holland Honey-eater built in a tea-tree, about 6 feet from the ground. The nest contained three young, a few days old, with small pin feathers in the wings, the body being still bare. On first looking in the nest I thought one of the young birds was deformed. On closer examination this was found to be due to large maggots—one across the front of the bird's head, over the eyes, another on top of its head, several under the skin on its body, and one on its foot; there were also two in the legs, which gave them a very deformed appearance. These maggots were just under the skin, with the larger end out, and when touched would draw themselves in. I removed nine from one bird by pressing near where they were situated, and making them protrude, then passing a pin through them. When removed the wound discharged blood and a watery fluid. Two out of the three birds were affected, yet appeared quite as healthy as the remaining one. On going a few days after, one from which I

* This occurrence is not uncommon among frogs and lizards. The larvæ are deposited by a different species of *Diptera* from the ordinary blow-fly.—EDS.

had removed the maggots was dead, and the larvæ had disappeared from the other, which was doing well. Later in the season we found another nest with the young in a similar state; also that of a Grey-tailed Thickhead, with 11 large maggots in one of the young and four in another. In each case one young bird was free. I had not an opportunity to see if the latter lived, as someone took the nest and young. A friend of mine also found the young in a Goldfinch's (introduced) nest afflicted in like manner. Those he removed the larvæ from died. We have only observed this in one district, and would be glad to know if others have noticed the same thing.—H. C. THOMPSON. Launceston.

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MORE ABOUT MUTTON-BIRDS.—When coming out of Otago Harbour on Sunday, the 26th November, some of these Petrels, in immense numbers, were settled on the water and feeding on what is locally known as "whale-feed"—small shrimp-like creatures about an inch long, and which at times are so numerous as to colour the water for acres brick-red. It was almost calm, and as we drew up to the birds a passage was opened up through them as we passed. It was amusing to watch their efforts to escape—many of them were so filled as to be unable to fly, and attempted to escape by diving and paddling frantically away from the vessel. It was noticed that many, in their efforts to escape, ejected the reddish substance they had been feeding upon. They appeared to extend several miles north and south of Otago Heads. We also noticed birds off Cape Farewell Spit lighthouse, but not in such great numbers as the preceding. After leaving the Bluff we noticed them in Foveaux Strait, and came across large numbers 30 or 40 miles westward of Solander Island. There were also with this last lot a number of Whale-Birds, or Prions.—(CAPT.) WM. WALTER, S.S. *Westralia*.

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WESTERN PORT NOTES.—Real Curlews made their appearance early in August, and were fairly numerous by middle of September. Their numbers were considerably increased during October, and by the end of November they were to be seen all over Western Port Bay, at the spots favoured by them. On 14th September a nice flock of a score of Whimbrel was observed, together with Bar-rumped, Godwit, Sooty Oyster-catchers, Pelicans, Sandpipers, &c., on "Bird Rock." Golden Plover, Marsh Tringa, and Greenshank were noticed in October, but in limited numbers as compared with some seasons. Swans were numerous and Ducks scarce; neither nested locally, owing to all swamps being dry or nearly so. A few Snipe made their appearance early in September, but, owing to scarcity of water, were only seen in isolated pairs. I visited the rookery of Pied

Cormorants previously mentioned (*Emu*, vol. ii., p. 32) on 14th and 15th September, and secured nine sets of eggs. The birds had built about 100 nests, many containing one egg only, some two eggs, and again others with three eggs, one nest alone having four eggs. All were fresh. Many of the birds were flying overhead, carrying branches of the mangrove bushes, of which alone the nests were constructed. I secured a typical nest and forwarded to the Museum. The birds seem to roost and rest also upon the nests during construction, as all the structures are very foul, and have the appearance of being white-washed. On our leaving the rookery the birds quickly returned to the nests and took their places upon them. A good many flocks of Straw-necked Ibis were occasionally observed during last winter and early spring—an unusual occurrence, owing probably to the dry condition of the interior. The first Pallid Cuckoo made its appearance on 28th August, being just two days earlier than the previous season (1901). I have always noticed that the first birds of this species arrive from exactly the same quarter—viz., north-east—and fly south-west. On arrival they may be seen on the top of the tallest dead tree, and after giving a few notes fly off to the next tall tree, usually a distance of two to three hundred yards, again piping a few notes and away again, but not deviating from the south-westerly course. This advance bird or birds seem to continue on their course, leaving the later arrivals to locate themselves as they may desire. All our northern visitants, as regards land birds, are much less in evidence than usual. Orioles, Caterpillar-catchers, Kingfishers, &c., all show diminution of numbers, whilst the Wood-Swallows are conspicuous by their absence, only one pair of the White-browed being seen and none of the Masked. In September, 1900, I had occasion to remove a large tree in which a pair of Pardalotes (*P. striatus*) had nested for several seasons. The tree was situated near my house, and the birds were observed hopping upon the picket fencing, apparently in search of a fresh nesting site, soon after the tree had been destroyed. They found a small opening at back of a chimney, and reared one brood. This season they returned to the same place on 15th August, and commenced to build a little later. They reared a brood of four, which left the nest second week in November. They now have a second brood nearly ready to fly (date, 3rd January). I saw a single Spine-tailed Swift on 28th December, but have not noticed any others so far.—GEORGE E. SHEPHERD. Somerville, 3/1/03.

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CENTRAL QUEENSLAND NOTES.—July to 20th August.—At Cairdbeign, in the Springsure district, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos fairly plentiful, and feeding a great deal on the seeds

of the Bathurst burr. Numbers of dead and apparently starved Jackasses. Absence of usual bird life very marked.

22nd August.—Back to Clermont. Great number of Bronze-winged Pigeons being shot round township; forced in long distances by failure of usual watering places. The majority appear to camp the night near water, and drink before leaving in the morning.

26th August.—At Wolfgang head station, about 7.30 p.m., heard smash of crockery in pantry, and found *Podargus* on top shelf. The bird suffered itself to be caught and thrown out. Forgetting that the surroundings did not assimilate, it assumed a rigid attitude, with beak and tail in a straight line, to resemble a piece of dead wood, and was evidently under the impression we could not see it. When seized it did not struggle, and only uttered one feeble "squawk." This was a repetition of a similar performance on the previous evening, but, luckily for the bird, it did not happen a third time to be attracted by the moths round the lamp.

8th September.—Last occasion on which I saw Red-capped Robin.

12th September.—About 250 Ibis visited the well I was camped at near the Peak Range. The flock stopped the night and left early next morning, and were, I think, prospecting for young locusts, which until this drought were bred in millions about the foothills of the range.

15th September.—Five Emus at well, looking very drought-stricken and ragged; living for the most part on the stony fruit of the Emu apple tree.

5th October.—On Clermont township lagoon saw Teal, Shovellers, White-eyed, Black, and Wood Ducks; very tame, as if realizing they were within the bounds of the municipality. Bee-eaters, Fairy Martins, and Wood-Swallows fairly numerous.

15th November.—At Langton, 2 p.m., solitary Swift circled round house several times and departed eastwards. No others noticed or reported.

10th December.—Langton. Got Grallatorial bird on small puddle hole left by thunderstorm; skinned and forwarded for identification.* Three similar birds were reported to me from Clermont on the 9th inst.

14th December.—5.30 p.m. Very large flight of Swifts, travelling west and in a great state of excitement, judging by their rapid movements and constant cries. They made a very interesting sight, with a dense black thundercloud as background, and just as the last of them disappeared the storm burst and gave us a very welcome 46 points of rain. The most noticeable features of the six months have been the almost total disappearance of the Jackasses, which are usually plentiful, and

* Greenshank.—EDS.

the fact that nearly all the birds refrained from nesting. Perhaps now that we have had some thunderstorms the birds will start to build, as the red-flowering bauhinia (Hooker's, I think), various mistletoes, and some eucalypts are in blossom, and fairly alive with Honey-eaters—Friar-Birds, the ubiquitous Miner (Garrulous Honey-eater), and a striped one with flesh-coloured bare patches being the most common. Dwellers in tents, like myself, always know when the Friar-Birds are building, as they have a decided fancy for threads from one's towels and the loose frayed ends of the tent ropes.—T. B. CAMPBELL FORD. Clermont.

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MORTLAKE (VICT.) NOTES.—For some years, until, I think, the last one, a large number of Night Herons made the garden of a Mrs. Stevens their home, and also bred there; but they left, and I have not been able to learn whether they have returned or not. Red-capped Dottrels and some Sandpipers were first noticed by me the 1st or 3rd of August. Wild Turkeys have been in this district the whole of the year, and towards the end have been very numerous, flocks of 10 to 30 not unusual. Owing to the growing scarcity of timber, nests of the following birds have been found in unusual places:—A Raven's in fire furrow, Rosella Parrot's in a rabbit's burrow, and a Red-backed Parrakeet's in bunch of grass; this parrot a few years since was very numerous, and always nested in hollows of trees. On 29th August two Robins were seen in the town. In the second week of November I had a White-browed Wood-Swallow (dead) brought to me, and was told they were very plentiful about 14 miles from here.—H. QUINEY. Mortlake, Victoria, 13/1/03.

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NESTING NOTE ON THE HARRIER (*Circus gouldi*).—An interesting phase in the nesting of this bird lately came under my notice in Tasmania. Last October Mr. R. W. Legge, of Cullenswood, found a nest of this Harrier situated among some rushes growing in swampy land. The nest contained three fresh eggs, and he took one for Col. Legge, his father, leaving the other two. In December following, I paid the nest a visit with Mr. Legge, and we were surprised to find that the female bird had laid another clutch of three eggs, and that two were hatched out. Of the first clutch of three, one was taken, another was addled, and the third hatched out, but when the youngster was about a fortnight old the hen bird had again laid another clutch of three, of which two hatched out, and the other was also close on hatching; consequently, when one of the parent birds was sitting on the second clutch, the feeding of the young one must have devolved on the non-sitting bird. One would naturally have thought that the young one, about a month old, would



.. Nest of Harrier (*Circus gouldi*).

FROM A PHOTO. BY D. LE SOUEF



Nest of Rufous Bristle-Bird (*Sphenura broadbenti*). Found by C. F. Belcher at Apollo Bay, 27/12/02.

FROM A PHOTO. BY D. T. SEELEY.

have eaten his small brothers and sisters, but apparently he didn't; he looked very comical, sitting on the edge of the nest in a defiant attitude (see Plate XII.), and the two little ones in the centre trying to hide one behind the other, and rolling the two eggs about in their efforts to do so. The parent birds must have had a very busy time of it keeping their two broods supplied with food. I subsequently learnt of a second case near Avoca (Victoria), which was almost similar, except that there were no eggs in the nest, only one young one about a month or six weeks old, and three about a week old, which shows that these birds do occasionally rear double clutches. It would be interesting to hear if any other Aust. O.U. members have observed the same thing.—D. LE SOUËF. 12/1/03.

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TOOTH-BILLED BOWER-BIRD.—On the 28th December, 1902, I spent a very pleasant and instructive morning examining the playgrounds of this strange bird. Under the guidance of Mr. A. Elgner, of Kuranda, who is an enthusiastic bird-lover and very close observer, I had the opportunity of inspecting five playgrounds, all within a few miles of Kuranda.

No. 1 was situated in a dense tangle of lawyer cane, and the loud call of the bird was heard long before we reached the locality, but, though we crawled as silently as possible towards our objective, the bird was disturbed by our approach. We lay down within a few feet of the playground, and in a few minutes our friend came back and perched on a twig about 2 feet above the chosen spot. We were then treated to a wonderful display of the bird's powers of mimicry, and by the way in which he stretched and peeped in our direction one judged that he was quite aware that he had an interested audience. The first effort was the whistle of the Rusty Shrike-Thrush, which he imitated really well, though one might notice that though the note was strong it lacked the melody and roundness of the original. Then came the rolling note of the Black Butcher-Bird, a call very much resembling that of the Chough, and which might be an imitation of either or both. After that the scream of the Blue-bellied Lorikeet was reproduced, followed by that of the Spotted Cat-Bird. Although the last-named call was a splendid imitation, it seemed to require a considerable effort to produce it, and was followed by a low after-note, to hear which one had to listen carefully. Perhaps the bird's masterpiece was the call of the Drongo-Shrike, a harsh, grating note. Possibly he gave us that just to prove that his repertoire was a varied one. After watching and listening to the bird for a considerable time, we reluctantly disturbed him, as we wished to closely examine the playground. The cleared space was about 6 or 7 feet long by 4 wide, and was swept as clean as one could do it with a broom. Twenty-five large leaves, all fresh, were placed

irregularly about it, all turned upside down. A careful inspection disclosed five distinct varieties of leaves, samples of which were taken for future reference.

At No. 2 we had no opportunity of watching the bird, as he left at our approach, and seemed reluctant to return to treat us to a sample of his musical abilities. Here the leaves were of a different variety to any of those previously found, being with one or two exceptions those of the native ginger.

No. 3 was a very much more extensive ground, being ten or twelve feet long, but pinched in at the middle like a figure 8. Possibly it was a sort of combination playground, and belonged to two birds, and it might have proved of interest if we had waited for the bird or birds to return. The leaves were all of one kind (native ginger), and were about 20 in number.

Soon after leaving No. 3 a call led us to No. 4, and there we had opportunity of watching the bird again, though at a greater distance. His songs were not so varied, though the quality was good. An examination of his playground disclosed a rather sad state of things. The bird was either a poor housekeeper or had slept late that morning, for the floor was littered with dead leaves of the previous day's gathering, only two or three fresh ones being amongst them.

No. 5 was situated close to a timber-getters' track, and, being in slightly more open scrub, was made the subject of a photo. The leaves were 24 in number, and excepting four or five, were those of the native ginger.

Mr. W. T. White told me of the following interesting trick he played on one of these birds. Finding one of their playgrounds, he removed all the leaves and replaced them with others closely resembling, but of a different variety. Returning a few hours later he found that the bird had thrown out all the leaves he had put there and replaced them with others of his own choosing.—E. M. CORNWALL, Cairns.