

## Stray Feathers.

THE FRECKLED DUCK.—Mr. Sep. Robinson has noticed that when the Freckled Duck (*Stictonetta nœvosa*) is breeding its bill becomes quite red, like that of a Black Swan. He saw scores of them (the Duck) earlier in the year, but none with red bills.—D. LE S.

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BLACKBIRDS AND VINE CATERPILLARS.—A neighbour tells me he has lately been interested in watching both of these—the latter as a pest, the former (this is more than many of us do, I am afraid) as a friend. A vine which gave promise of about 1 cwt. of grapes was being ravaged by caterpillars. Soon after sunrise my friend saw a Blackbird bring one of the green and black caterpillars and lay it on an asphalt path, then another and another, until five were ready. Then it departed with them for its nest, and fed a brood therein.—H. KENDALL. 27/2/04.

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VARIABLE CLUTCH OF PARDALOTE'S EGGS.—Among the eggs taken by me this season are a set of *Pardalotus rubricatus*, one egg of which has a number of fine pink specks dotted over it, especially at the larger end. A second egg has a few specks, while the third is quite white. Another bird that is here now, and which I have not seen in this district before, is the Chestnut-breasted Finch (*Munia castaneithorax*). They are now breeding. Yesterday I also saw among the long grass near the place several of what, as far as I can make out from the description, are the Masked Finch (*Poephila personata*). This bird I have never seen before, and I trust they will remain and breed.—H. GREEN-SILL BARNARD. Duaringa, Q., 10/1/04.

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THE CHANNELBILL.—The Channelbill (*Scythrops novæ-hollandiæ*) has been unusually plentiful in this district during the spring, and has been as reliable as ever in the matter of weather changes—in fact, the shearers look upon the bird as a real prophet of evil. On 11th November I shot a female containing four immature eggs, the largest being half an inch in diameter, and am inclined to think that the *Scythrops* feeds at night, as the one I shot was flying past at 5 a.m., and its stomach was then full of wild figs, and I know of no figs growing nearer than ten miles from here. It was just sunrise when I shot the bird, so it follows that it must have been feeding before daylight.—H. L. WHITE. Scone, N.S.W.

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EXTENSION OF LOCALITY, SITTELLA LEUCOPTERA (GOULD).—Recently, whilst examining the skins of our Museum relating to the *Certhiidae*, I was surprised to find three skins of *Sittella*

*leucoptera*, obtained, as the labels disclosed, at the Blackwood River, in the southern portion of Western Australia. As the species is regarded as a purely tropical form, I, from motives of abundant caution, determined to await the return of Mr. J. T. Tunney (who collected them) from Northern Australia, and receive confirmation of the notes on the label before publishing the record. Mr. Tunney, having now returned, confirms the notes. The fact above recorded is just about as perplexing as the presence of *Petræca goodenovi* at Rottneest Island and its absence on the coastal side of the Darling Ranges.—A. W. MILLIGAN. Perth, W.A.

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PLUMAGE PHASES OF *PTILOTTIS LEUCOTIS*.—In an interesting article by Mr. Robert Hall, entitled "The Plumage Phases of *Ptilotis leucotis*" (*Emu*, vol. iii., pages 43-45) that gentleman records the measurements of a number of skins of the species from fledgling to adult, and concludes by giving the measurements of the largest example as follows:—Total length, 9 inches; wing, 4.05; tail, 4.03; tarsus, 1 inch; culmen, 0.5 inch; and of the smallest example as 7.5 inches, wing 3.2, tail 3.45, tarsus 0.85 inch, and culmen 0.5 inch. A comparison with the measurements of the largest example, which substantially corresponds with the measurements of skins in the Western Australian Museum obtained from Victoria, shows that the Western bird is not only materially smaller in every particular, but also smaller than an Eastern juvenile bird of the species.—A. W. MILLIGAN.

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TASMANIAN OÖLOGY.—We have had such a wet season that the lakes (Sorell and Crescent), which are usually separated by half a mile of good collecting country, have overflowed and now join, and this has driven all water-birds away. Nests with eggs were observed of the following varieties:—*Tribonyx mortieri* (Native-Hen), *Acanthochæra inauris* (Yellow Wattle-Bird), *Graucalus melanops* (Small-billed Cuckoo-Shrike), *Pachycephala olivacea* (Olive Thickhead), *Circus gouldi* (Swamp-Hawk), *Cracticus cinereus* (Grey Butcher-Bird), *Strepera fuliginosa* (Black Crow-Shrike), and several other smaller kinds. Last week I spent two days in the Sandford district, about 12 miles from Hobart, and collected eggs of the following birds:—*Platycercus eximius* (Rosella), clutch ten eggs; *Circus gouldi* (Swamp-Hawk); *Pachycephala olivacea* (Olive Thickhead); *Porphyrio melanonotus* (Bald-Coot), clutches six eggs each; *Cuculus pallidus* (Pallid Cuckoo); besides several others of the commoner varieties. While at the Lakes I took a nest of the *Gymnorhina hyperleuca* (Lesser White-backed Magpie) containing four eggs, three being the usual size and the fourth about the size of a Sparrow's egg, but as round as a marble—rather a freak.—W. A. ATKINS. Hobart, 17/11/03.

BUTTON-QUAILS IN QUEENSLAND.—The most noticeable feature of the half-year has been the great influx of Quails,\* which have apparently come here to breed, and have been doing so for six months. I took eggs on 22nd August, and saw plenty of young birds, and again on the 8th of this month (January) caught young just able to run and hide. In the 20 years I have been on the Peak Downs I can only remember them being thick about four times, though there are nearly always a few. Of course grass and herbage are very rank this year, owing to the dearth of stock and marsupials, but how did the Quails guess that? I rather think, but have no proof, that the years they have come have been when good rains succeed a period of drought. I know that certain grasses grow then which are not always here, although heavy seeders, and I think that the ordinary grasses grow stronger and seed more freely after the spell and sweetening of the ground that a drought entails, so that the birds are sure of ample food supplies and plenty of cover. They are so small that it is rather like "breaking a butterfly upon the wheel" shooting them with a 12-bore. But the flesh is very white and toothsome, and they are so numerous that it is not hard to walk them up.—F. B. CAMPBELL-FORD. Clermont, 15/1/04.

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SOME MURRAY SWAMP NOTES, 28/12/03.—A White Crane's or Egret's nest (*Mesophoyx plumifera*) with two large young ones was seen in a "shaggery" (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucus*), about 15 feet high, and situated in a small eucalypt, the large stick nest being easily separated from the Cormorant's nests around it, which were built with grass and eucalypt leaves. All seemed perfectly happy together, although the Cormorants perched within 18 inches of the Crane's nest. The number of young observed in Cormorants' nests did not exceed two per clutch. Wood-Duck, or rather Maned Geese (*Chenonetta jubata*), were remarkably few, and it appears from observation that these birds require greater protection, since they seem to be on the decrease. This is also the case with Bittern (*Botaurus pæcilopterus*). On the other hand, Nankeen Herons (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) appear to be increasing. Teal (*Nettion gibberifrons*) and Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) were plentiful, as also Spur-winged Plover (*Lobivanellus lobatus*). Landrails (*Hypotaenidia philippinensis*) were found nesting, and as many as 11 eggs were counted in some nests. In an orchard close by, Leatherheads (*Philemon corniculatus*) and the small Sanguineous Honey-eaters (*Myzomela sanguinolenta*) waged ceaseless war on the ripe figs.—A. MATTINGLEY.

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NEW MUTTON-BIRD ROOKERY.—To those who are interested in Mutton-Birds (*Puffinus tenuirostris*), either from appreciation of

\* Chiefly *Turnix velox* and *T. pyrrhotorax*.

the edible qualities of the young birds and eggs or from a desire to have the birds periodically visiting our coast for breeding purposes, it will be satisfactory to know that within the last few years a rookery has been formed on Griffith Island, near Port Fairy. It is formed on the sand dunes to the south-westward of the island, which is covered with tea-tree and undergrowth, the highest point being 74 feet above sea level. When on a visit last month to the lighthouse situated on the easterly point of the island, I observed that there appeared to be tracks cut in the tea-tree scrub running towards the summit of the dunes, which, viewed from a distance, appear to have curious notches in their sky-line, similar to what might have been formed by surveyors cutting away the undergrowth for lines of fences. These tracks have been formed by the birds running to the summit of the dunes each morning for the purpose of taking flight in accordance with custom during the nesting season. This rookery should increase in extent if it remain undisturbed, as the island appears in every way suitable as a breeding-place for the birds.—C. W. MACLEAN. Ports and Harbours Office, Melbourne, 30/12/03.

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KURRAJONG (GLADSTONE, Q.) NOTES.—This is a splendid year—plenty of grass and water, and everything rolling fat. We have had about 20 inches of rain so far, and I think they have had more at Coomooboolaroo. The common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*) has laid right through this year, as I found a nest on 22nd February with small young ones; on 9th May a young bird on the nest just able to fly; on 16th August I took a perfectly fresh egg from a nest in a leafy ironbark; and again on 21st October I saw a bird sitting, but did not climb the tree to investigate. I have at last seen a Wonga's (*Leucosarcia picata*) nest. It contained two heavily incubated eggs, in a tall brigalow (acacia), about 40 feet from the ground. Both birds were at the nest. On the same day, 7th October, I rooted a Brush-Turkey's (*Talegallus*) nest, and found sixteen eggs in various stages of incubation. Most probably there were more in the nest, as I only burrowed about three-quarters of it; but I considered I had a very fair share, so left the rest to hatch. I found a Black-throated Grebe's (*Podiceps novæ-hollandiæ*) nest attached to a snag in a dam, only about 7 or 8 feet from the bank. On wading in I discovered three tiny fluffy chicks in the nest, covered over in the same manner as the bird covers her eggs when an intruder approaches. They were too frightened to keep still, hence betrayed themselves by jumping off the nest into the water as I drew near. Although they were very young (we judged them as being about two days old) they were able to dive about 15 feet; and as the water was very shallow and clear, we were able to keep them in sight the whole time.—E. D. BARNARD. 17/11/03.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE EGGS OF TWO TITS (ACANTHIZA).—The reinstatement of the Ewing Tit (*A. ewingi*) as a sound species in the list of Australian birds has led collectors to examine critically their skins and eggs of Tasmanian Tits. The skins of *ewingi* are easily differentiated from those of *diemenensis*, but it would be risky to separate the eggs until thoroughly typical eggs have been taken of each. Mr. Charles French, jun., at a meeting of the Field Naturalists' Club held 18th January last, exhibited a pair of eggs reputed to be those of *A. ewingi*. They were collected during the season of 1892, and were from the collection of Mr. E. D. Atkinson, C.E. These specimens may be described as elliptical in shape; texture of shell fine; surface glossy; colour white, lightly and sparingly spotted (thickest on the apex) with chestnut or reddish-brown. Dimensions—(1) .68 x .5; (2) .67 x .5 inches.

Mr. A. W. Milligan has described the nest of *A. robustirostris* (see *Emu*, vol. iii., p. 102), from which nestlings were secured. He has now kindly forwarded me a clutch of eggs of that species collected by Mr. Fred. Lawson, at Wurarga, on the 9th September last. They differ from the eggs of most Acanthizas by their bold and bright colouring, almost as boldly marked as, for instance, those of some *Maluri*. Technically described the eggs are:—Oval in shape; texture of shell fine; surface slightly glossy; colour warm or pearly white, blotched and spotted with bright chestnut or reddish-brown and purplish-brown, the more blotchy and heavier markings as usual forming a strong band around the apex. Dimensions—(1) .69 x .47; (2) .68 x .48; (3) .67 x .47 inches.—A. J. CAMPBELL.

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LITTLE PENGUINS IN THE RIVER DERWENT.—Little Penguins (*Eudyptula minor*) frequent all the approaches to the Derwent, and also the river as far at least as the Bellerive Ferry, where they may be seen darting away from the steam ferry-boats. Mr. Arthur R. Reid informs me that he has seen them at Austin's Ferry, which is about eight miles above Bellerive and about twenty from the mouth of the river. The water at that point is but slightly salt. Amongst islands to which they resort to breed may be named Woody Island, in Norfolk Bay, Wedge Island and Bruni Island in Storm Bay, also Green Island in D'Entrecasteaux Channel. Laying commences in September, or possibly in August; October, November, and December appear to be the months in which it principally takes place. The eggs, two in number, are laid in a hollow amongst rocks near the water's edge, or under a bush distant a stone's throw or more from the sea. I do not know at what age Little Penguins take to the water; the opportune moment may be determined by the growth of the stiff tail-feathers. A pair of young birds from Woody Island, on which the nestling down still appeared in small patches, swam with perfect ease (21st October), although on land

they had seemed bewildered and incapable of movement. A younger bird from Bruni Island did not attempt to swim. This was one of a pair of nestlings covered with down even to the flippers, and still without tail-feathers. The irises of the pair first mentioned were pale green, whilst those of the younger birds were grey, so that apparently the colour changes with age. The down on the upper surface was grey and fluffy, on the under surface dull white, and somewhat close in texture. The length of the young birds which were still clad in down was 14.25 inches. The little creatures extended their flippers and agitated them precisely in the same manner as that in which young flying birds open and flap their wings, for the muscles which in the latter case must be trained for flight must in the former case be trained for swimming. They also snapped at one's fingers and at one another, and at times uttered a sound which resembled the hiss of an angry kitten. When a Little Penguin is catching small fish it darts hither and thither through the shoal, and causes the small fry to scatter in all directions, and sometimes to leap completely out of the water in their eagerness to escape. On one such occasion a Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) was, like myself, an observer of these proceedings, and whenever the Penguin reappeared, the Gull flew quickly to the spot, as if in anticipation of a meal. If this were so, it must have been disappointed, for it obtained nothing. Once only did I observe the Penguin return to the surface with a small fish in its bill, which was thereupon quickly swallowed. Immersion lasted about half a minute, after which the bird floated on the surface for a few seconds. Numerous thorn-like protuberances on the tongue and palate are inclined slightly towards the gullet, and may assist the Penguin to hold its prey and to swallow it. In two fresh skins of adult males which I examined, the basal halves of the feathers of the throat and fore-neck were in one specimen strongly washed in the other lightly washed with black. In the same skins, when preserved, the washes of black had disappeared. Perhaps the disappearance of the grey colour might be attributable to starch, which was employed in the process of cleaning.—JAMES R. M'CLYMONT. 12/1/04.

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BIRDS OF THE LAMU ARCHIPELAGO (EAST AFRICA). — Since writing to you I have spent some time amidst the ancient ruins on the many islands of the Lamu Archipelago, and made several most interesting trips up the Tana River, on the mainland, through country very little if ever trod by white man. I say ancient Lamu, for it is first known to history as a vast kingdom in the year 914 A.D., and was known to the Phœnicians B.C., but with all its antiquity, its buried cities, its vast Persian ruins, the ornithology of this Archipelago is as little known as that of Central Africa. I have lived amongst it, waded up to my waist in its swamps to collect and study its aquatic birds—result (of

course, one has to pay for everything in this climate with the pound of flesh) sunstroke, followed by fever, and with great difficulty I was brought back to Zanzibar, when, with a good doctor and good nursing, thank God! I am becoming myself again. Now to give you some little glimpse of what the feathered tribes are like which inhabit this vast collection of islands, which are separated by more or less narrow channels lined with dense masses of mangrove trees, growing up straight in many places to the height of 150 feet. There are a rise and fall of tide here from 12 to 16 feet and when the tide goes out vast banks and marshes are laid bare, or partly so, and it is now that one can study the wader family as they busily traverse the banks and shallows (where there are thousands of huge sea-slugs) for their food. Vast flocks come from the sea-shore, others from the tops of the stunted mangroves, where they have been awaiting the going out of the tide. Most conspicuous amongst these birds are the Sea-Curlews—one of giant proportions, and the other species seems almost identical with our own Australian bird. Their shrill call is heard at all times during the day as they fly up or down the channels, and in the quiet of the night their shrill note cuts the atmosphere like a whistle. A bird associating with the last is one that by observation through powerful glasses was evidently our common Greenshank. Unfortunately they were very shy, and no matter what ruse I played I could not get within decent range. I collected four varieties of Sandpipers. Some of the smaller species were in great numbers. Tall and stately Cranes (Egrets) of a pure white, yellow bills and legs, could easily be distinguished amidst the merry throng. Then there is a Crane 4 feet high, jet black, with very long white neck; a slate fellow very much like our White-fronted Heron of Australia; and last, but not least, great numbers of the pretty little White Egret. I am told by the natives that there are three species of Duck, but I only saw, and shot, one species, with a white face—a very elegant bird, and fairly good eating. I may add here that on some of my trips through the channels I have seen small islands on which stunted mangroves grow quite white with the Little Egrets, which get up like a white cloud, without a sound. Leaving the water and taking to the island of Lamu, we find it sandy and covered very thickly with cocoanut trees, but still there are vast thickets of tangled vines and shrubs, also dwarf fan palms, and in these thickets are many birds. First I must mention the small Vulture, which finds its way into the narrow streets of the villages and is exceedingly tame, the natives never molesting these birds, for they are such great scavengers. The White-breasted Raven also helps in the work, and one becomes quite accustomed to its dismal croak. The little black Crow is not such a bold bird, and although he is met with on the outskirts of the villages he is not nearly so trustful. A very familiar bird on the islands is a little black Shrike (Drongo?) with forked tail; it has rather a pleasing note, and is to be seen on the

borders of an open glade, and early in the morning on the top of a dead branch, and seems to be the first bird in the morning to make a stir, for his voice is heard long before any other, and strange to say, like our Australian Black and White Fantail, on moonlight nights I have often heard its soft note up in the thick foliage of some huge mango tree. Of Kingfishers there are three which came under my notice—one a very elegant bird, somewhat larger than our *Halcyon sanctus*, throat and chest pure white, abdomen rich chocolate, wings most lovely shade of blue Prussian, black tail, same coloured blue also back, back of the head same bright blue, bill and feet coral red. One is a pied species, the third a small and sombre-coloured one. I found amongst the brushwood a very elegant Thrush, resembling the Olive Thrush of the Cape, but much more richly marked. Sun-Birds are very numerous; a very handsome jet-black variety is one of the most conspicuous. The little orange-bellied one was very numerous. Of *Merops* there are two species—one small and sombre-coloured, but the larger species is a most handsome bird. Their habits and even their notes are identical with the Australian *M. ornatus*. The Finch tribe is very strong here, as in every part of Africa. The Weaver Finch here is quite a different bird from the one on Zanzibar Island; it is of a saffron-yellow, with black back and tail, and the entrance to its dome-shaped nest is much more elongated and made more neatly, being woven closer and of finer material. There is a most elegant little scarlet variety, and a blue one with long tail; again a very small black one, but I have shot this bird at Zanzibar. A very large brown species with a massive bill draws one's attention, for it is always chattering, and moves about in large families. I am much interested in this Finch family, for the numbers of species I have collected over Africa (I mean in the South and on East Coast and islands) is wonderful. Guinea-Fowl are very plentiful in the thick undergrowth, also a brown hen called Spur-Fowl, on account of the spur on the wing like our Spur-winged Plover. Nocturnal birds are not at all plentiful, and I did not see one single species of the Owl family. The only bird I saw, and shot, was one of the Nightjars. There are three species of Swallows—a small brown one, a large Swift, and a very pretty little one with white breast with black band and steel-blue back. This is but a brief sketch of the birds of Lamu, for I have made many notes and specimens, from which later on I may be able to give you a more detailed record. I am hoping that this sun-stroke will not prevent my visiting Madagascar this trip.

I forgot to mention a very fine Fish-Hawk which is often to be seen perched quite motionless on a mangrove tree overhanging one of the channels. It has white head, neck, back, and breast, wings rich brown. Another Hawk which is very familiar up the coast is a small brown one which hovers over the waters of the bays like a Gull, and picks up any refuse thrown from the ship.

I met with two species of the order Columbæ—one a fine large



Pigeon, which I saw twice, but unfortunately was not able to get a specimen; the other was one of the small Doves, and I feel sure it is the bird Woodward describes as *Chalcopelia afra*, and as having met it down the coast to the south. I found them very sparsely distributed over the Archipelago in pairs, and I not only procured specimens, but took their eggs, which are deposited on a few twigs, like all the Dove family, and are of a dirty-white colour. The nest is generally placed in an acacia tree, about 6 feet from the ground. The birds seem to keep to the thick undergrowth.—(CAPT.) S. A. WHITE. Zanzibar, East Africa, 24/9/03.

### From Magazines, &c.

*The Victorian Naturalist*, vol. xx., pp. 133-139 (February, 1904) contains some "Ornithological Notes on the Grass-Wrens (*Amytis*)" by Mr. G. A. Keartland. His personal field observations on *A. textilis*, *A. striatus*, and *A. modesta* (of which he was the discoverer) are very interesting and valuable.

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MAGPIES AS WEATHER PROPHETS.—It is noted as a remarkable fact that these birds are this year building their nests on the ground instead of on the limbs of trees as formerly. The statement is vouched for by several old residents, who add that there used to be a tradition among the blacks that when Magpies built in this manner it was a sure sign of a phenomenal visitation of wind in the spring.—*Hamilton Spectator*, 5/9/03.

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PROTECTION TO BIRDS OF PARADISE.—Sportsmen in British New Guinea, whenever they see a Bird of Paradise, shoot at it. The Lieutenant-Governor of the territory has issued a notice prohibiting the destruction of these birds in most portions of the possession, so that they may not become extinct. Very few feathers taken from the Bird of Paradise are imported into Australia from New Guinea. It is stated that they are sent to Paris, treated there, and then forwarded to the Commonwealth if required.—*Argus*, 1/10/03.

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BIRD "CHARMED" BY SNAKE.—Mirboo North.—A miner at the Iron Syndicate's mine was standing outside his hut, when he noticed a bird on the roof whose actions he thought rather peculiar. The bird dropped almost at his feet. On looking down he saw a big snake making all manner of contortions with its body, and its movements seemed to hold the bird spell-bound. When in the act of seizing the bird the snake reared itself up, and, seeing the man, made towards him. The snake seemed to charm the bird by its contortions and movements, and not, as is generally supposed, by its eyes. On being killed it proved to be a 4-foot tiger snake.—*Age*, 29/1/04.