

the summer. I found many of them dead, probably owing to the want of green grass.

"I collected a little Rainbow Pitta (*Pitta iris*), such a lovely bird. They are plentiful about here, usually in the thick jungle. Crows are not numerous. Curlews and Large-billed Stone-Plovers (*Orthorhamphus magnirostris*) are common at night."—EDWIN ASHBY. "Wittunga," Blackwood, S.A.

### From Magazines, &c.

ALEXANDRA PARRAKEET.—Mr. Herbert Astley writes from Italy to *The Avicultural Magazine* (May) that his hen *Spathopterus alexandræ* was then sitting on five eggs in a nesting-box in his aviary.

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BIRDS AT OLINDA.—*The Victorian Naturalist* for August contains a pleasantly written paper by Mr. C. L. Barrett on the "Bird Life of the Olinda Creek," near Lilydale, Victoria, illustrated with photos. of the dancing mound and nest of the Lyre-Bird (*Menura victoriæ*).

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THE YOUNG CUCKOO.—A note in *The Victorian Naturalist* for July states that on 16th October, 1905, Miss B. Keartland noticed two Superb Warblers (*Malurus cyaneus*) and two Yellow-rumped Tits (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) feeding a young Bronze-Cuckoo.

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THE LAUGHING JACKASS.—Mr. John M'Alpin, of Yea (Vict.), writing to Mr. Donald Macdonald ("Nature Notes," *Argus*, 31/8/06), states:—"I was not aware that the Jackass was fond of small birds until lately. A large Jackass caught and killed a Black-and-White Fantail, and flew off with it, followed by two other Jackasses. They evidently thought it a prize. If those birds are in the habit of killing the useful little birds it is about time the law was altered which protects them."

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ISOLATION v. NATURAL SELECTION.—A paper in *The Auk* for July, by Dr. Leonhard Stejneger, discusses the causes which have brought about the several sub-species of American Hairy Woodpeckers. His theory is that the existing differences were caused not so much by natural selection (the usually accepted origin of such differences) as by "environmental stress"—that is to say, isolation—acting on plastic materials. At the same time the writer does not deny that some auxiliary influence on the development of the various forms may have been exercised by natural selection.

BUTCHER-BIRDS.—Mr. Donald Macdonald, in his "Nature Notes" (*Argus*, 31/8/06), quotes a correspondent who states:—"Last Friday morning, hearing a disturbance amongst the Honey-eaters in the saplings, I noticed that a Butcher-Bird had caught one of them and killed it. Then, after warbling and kicking up a fuss for some time, he flew up into a large gum tree, and, placing the neck of the dead bird in a dry fork, hung on to the lower part of the body and tugged at it till the bird was a fixture, suspended by the neck. I have noticed this done on several occasions by this bird. Once it came back some hours later and devoured its prey."

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AN ILLUMINED MIGRATION.—The ornithologists of Philadelphia, U.S.A., had a unique chance of observing the movements of migratory birds on the night of the 27th March last, when a large lumber yard took fire, and burned right through the night. In the glare of the flames appeared hundreds of small birds passing steadily across the heavens, from south-west to north-east, on the spring migration. Mr. Witmer Stone, who records his observations made at the time in *The Auk* for July, says that he believes the migrants were not influenced by the fire as to direction of flight, but that probably it attracted them to a lower level than usual. Not all the birds passed the fire in safety. "Occasionally a bird would fly over at a much lower altitude than the main body, and if it happened to pass over any part of the burning area it seldom escaped destruction. Up in mid-air, apparently clear of flame and smoke, though evidently within range of the terrible heat, a slender thread of silvery smoke came trailing out of the unfortunate bird, like the unfurling of a skein of yarn; it would fly wildly, and then, bursting into flame, fall into the roaring furnace below. I saw twenty or thirty birds perish thus during the evening."

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LITTLE GREEN PIGEON.—In some notes on "The Green-winged Pigeons of the Genus *Chalcophaps*," in the July number of *The Avicultural Magazine*, Mr. D. Seth-Smith, F.Z.S., says:—"The Australasian species is far less often imported than the Indian form, and, I believe, has never been bred in captivity until this year. Early last January I obtained a pair of *C. chrysochlora* from New Caledonia, and later a male of the same species from Queensland. The latter specimen is a remarkably fine bird, somewhat larger than the first male, which he soon challenged for the possession of the hen, which was also a very fine bird. I had to remove the New Caledonian male, or he would have soon been bullied to death by his stronger rival, and the remaining pair soon set about selecting a nesting-site."

They are both shy birds, and generally keep out of sight when anyone is near, and I had no idea that a nest had been built until one day in May, when I entered the covered aviary, the male dashed from a dark corner where, high up, a bundle of sticks and brushwood had been fixed, and disappeared through an opening into the outer aviary. Getting a pair of steps, I soon discovered a nest containing two creamy-white eggs. With this species, as with all of the Pigeon tribe so far as I am aware, the male sits during the greater part of the day, the female taking his place during the late afternoon and sitting throughout the night. One egg eventually disappeared from this nest, probably having been knocked out by one of the birds as it dashed from the nest. The other successfully hatched. I cannot say the exact date, as I was most careful to go near the nest as seldom as possible, but on 26th May I looked in the nest and discovered a plump black squab, evidently hatched two or three days before. When it left the nest (13th June) it appeared to be identical with the young of *C. indica*, but somewhat larger. As I write (17th June) it is able to fly well, though it still frequently returns to the nest."

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ECLIPSE PLUMAGE OF DUCKS.—In an article on this subject in the June number of *The Avicultural Magazine*, Mr. Frank Finn says:—"As far as I have been able to observe, Australian and South American *Anatidæ* have no eclipse plumage, whether there is a well-marked sexual difference, as in the Rosy-billed Pochard and in the Maned Goose (*Chenonetta jubata*) of Australia, or whether both sexes bear a handsome quasi-male plumage, such as the Chilian Widgeon (*Mareca chiloensis*) or the Grey Teal (*Querquedula versicolor*). The latter case is obviously like that of the Shieldrakes, which everywhere and always display a striking plumage. These, being powerful, intelligent birds, probably need protection less than the other Ducks, and it is to be noted, with regard to the South American and Australian waterfowl, that they inhabit a region where the survival of numerous primitive types is supposed to show that the struggle for life is less keen. This would, of course, be an argument in favour of the eclipse plumage as a protective one. Whatever its use may be, there is some foundation for Mr. Bonhote's idea that it is a weak phase, in so far as it is a reversion to a more primitive colour." Of our Magpie Goose he writes:—"There seems to be an impression abroad that all the *Anatidæ* lose their quills and become flightless when moulting. But there is at least one remarkable exception—the curious Pied Goose (*Anseranas melanoleuca*) of Australia—a bird remarkable for its peculiar feet, which are only half-webbed and have a well-developed hind toe, unlike the short, useless member of most of the family. This species was stated by that well-known

aviculturist, Mr. F. E. Blaauw, in a letter to *The Ibis* in 1898, only to drop its quills gradually, so that it always retained the power of flight, he having observed this peculiarity in birds of his own."

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BLUE WRENS IN CAPTIVITY.—In *The Avicultural Magazine* for March is an account by Mr. Reginald Phillipps of his experiences with the Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*). He got a pair in May, 1902. In July, 1902, they brought out a young male, which survived its parents and lived till 21st March this year. He is not satisfied that the male Blue Wren is polygamous. "In districts where there are not any spare females," says the writer, "each male might naturally be expected to be more or less contented with a single mate; but where there may happen to be a superabundance of females, especially in a hot climate, the reverse would not by any means be particularly improbable. Possibly, as I suggested in 1902, he may take them in turn, each cast-off mother, as in the case of my birds, being left to look after her own brood by herself. They are said to rear two or three broods between August and January, but perhaps each may be by a different mother; and sometimes, as suggested by Mr. A. G. Campbell, the supposed extra females, or some of them, may be simply young birds—members of the first batch." Of the moulting of the species he says:—"So far as the autumnal moult is concerned—the going out of colour—there seems to be no question. My birds, young and old, males and females, like Mr. A. G. Campbell's, have undergone a complete change of feathers in September and October, the British autumn commencing early in September and completing in October, which about corresponds with March in Australia—the Australian autumn. My young male, bred July, 1902, for the fourth year came into colour this March—the British spring—the process occupying about a fortnight; and each year the change has taken place in a 6-foot cage in my diningroom. One point is certain—there is no general moult at this season. In the autumn, while the blue feathers are being shed, minute though these feathers are, they can be found and identified owing to their bright colour. Far different is it in the spring, when the feathers shed, if shed they be, are plain whitey-brown things, for the feathers affected are so small it is most difficult to find them, and, if found, to say positively that they come from the Blue Wren. . . . I am of opinion it will be safe to say that *Malurus cyaneus* obtains his summer plumes by a direct moult of certain of the small feathers."

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KANGAROO ISLAND BIRDS.—It is learned from *The South Australian Register* (9/8/06) that an adjourned meeting of the

South Australian Ornithological Association was held at the Adelaide Museum on Tuesday afternoon, 7th August, for the purpose of investigating by daylight a number of species of birds from Kangaroo Island to ascertain their affinity or otherwise with those of the mainland. Mr. J. W. Mellor presided. Considerable time was spent in the critical examination of a number of species concerning which doubt exists. The meeting was greatly assisted in its deliberations by copious notes written by Mr. A. J. North, F.L.S., Ornithologist of the Sydney Museum; also by type specimens from that museum, which were forwarded by permission of the Curator, Mr. Robert Etheridge, F.G.S. The species examined were:—The Blue Wren (*Malurus*), which proved to be identical with the mainland one, previously known as *M. cyaneus*, and later as *M. superbus*, but Mr. North points out that both these names are synonymous for the Tasmanian bird, and he prefers the title of *M. australis*. Several Honey-eaters were examined, notably the Crescent (*Meliornis australasiana*) and the Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*), the former being, with slight differences, the mainland species, while the latter presented a smaller appearance, with a slightly shorter bill, the variations hardly warranting separation, in Mr. North's opinion. In the *Melithreptus* family of Honey-eaters further study of the birds was required to ascertain if constancy existed between the Large-billed (*M. magnirostris*) and Brown-headed (*M. brevirostris*), as both types of birds were from the Island, although the former predominated. The Thickheads were proved the same as those of the Adelaide hills, the Southern Thickhead (*P. meridionalis*) being a connecting link between the Western form (*P. occidentalis*) and the eastern (*P. gutturalis*). A small Tit (*Acanthiza zietzi*) from the Island differed from its near ally of the mainland (*A. pusilla*), being more grey on the upper surface and altogether less distinct in its markings. The beautiful Crimson Parrakeet, known on the mainland as *Platycercus elegans*, was of a brick-dust colour, and the upper surface had more black and less red on the feathers. A suggestion by Mr. North to call it *P. melanoptera* was thought by the meeting to be a good one, but it was considered more specimens should be examined to ascertain if this characteristic in the Island bird was fully established. The White-eye appeared to be the same as the ordinary species of South Australia (*Zosterops caeruleascens*), the slight difference of colouration being attributed to seasonable changes.

It is obvious that Mr. North's paper was a covert criticism of the official report of the A.O.U. "On the Birds of Kangaroo Island."\* "The study of native birds" being one of the chief planks of the Union and of its journal, Mr. North's remarks are

\* *Emu*, vol. v., pp. 139-145.

welcomed. The pages of the journal are open for Mr. North's criticisms *in extenso* if he will permit the hon. secretary of the Adelaide Association to forward them to the editors of *The Emu*. In any case ornithologists would like a reference for the alleged prior claim of *Acanthiza zietzi* over *A. halmaturina*. And it will be observed that, while deprecating the "hair-splitting" of species in the Union's report, Mr. North has himself, apparently on even more slender grounds, suggested the separation of the Island species of *Platycercus elegans* from the mainland form. However, these differences of opinion will, no doubt, be welcomed as expert evidence by the committee of the proposed Australian "Check-List" when its labours commence.

### Obituary Notice.

THE LATE SIR WALTER BULLER, K.C.M.G.

ALL naturalists, more particularly Australian, were deeply moved when they learned that Sir Walter Buller, New Zealand's great native-born ornithologist, had passed away, somewhat suddenly, in London, where he had just completed a two-volume supplement to "The History of the Birds of New Zealand," his beloved country. His life came to full fruition, and his mission, so far as ornithology is concerned, was completed by the issue of the supplement—a work which for all time will remain a standard authority.

The memorial services in connection with the deceased ornithologist took place at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, on Thursday, 19th July, in the Chapel of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, of which Sir Walter Buller was a Knight Commander. The services, which were attended by many notable New Zealanders then in London, were conducted by the Ven. Dr. Sinclair, Archdeacon of London and Honorary Chaplain to the King.

Sir Walter Buller's ornithological work has made an enduring name for him throughout the civilised world. As early as 1865 he obtained the silver medal of the New Zealand Exhibition for an "Essay on the Ornithology of New Zealand." In recognition of his researches in the bird-life of his colony, and on the publication, in 1875, of his splendidly illustrated work, "The History of the Birds of New Zealand," he was created C.M.G. The year following he was elected F.R.S. on the same account. In 1882 he prepared for the Government a "Manual of the Birds of New Zealand," and in 1888 brought out a second edition of his standard work.

From *The Lyttelton Times*, 21st July, 1906, we learn that Sir Walter Buller was a son of the late Rev. James Buller.