

height at back, 4 inches across front over all, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter of entrance, 3 inches depth of egg cavity. Nest No. 2 (ordinary type), in *Xerotes*.— $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches length over all upper side, 5 inches length over all lower side, 4 inches height in front, 3 inches height at back, 4 inches across front over all, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter of entrance, 3 inches depth of egg cavity. Nest No. 3 (short type), in *Xerotes*.—5 inches length on upper side, 4 inches length on lower side, 4 inches height at front, 3 inches at back, 4 inches across front over all, $2\frac{1}{2}$ x 2 inches dimensions of entrance, 3 inches depth of egg cavity.

On Albatross Island.

BY W. J. T. ARMSTRONG, HEXHAM.

I RECENTLY spent a week cruising among the islands of the western archipelago of Bass Strait; my companion was Mr. E. D. Atkinson, and our itinerary included a call at Albatross Island, where we were successful in effecting a landing. After lying up for a couple of days, owing to adverse weather conditions, in Shepherd's Bay and Hunter Island, an opportunity came with the morning of Saturday, 6th November. Leaving our anchorage at 5 o'clock we drifted 10 miles with the outgoing tide, covered the last mile with the sweeps, and reached the rock at 10 o'clock. There was a considerable swell chafing round the base of the cliff, but by exercising a little judgment our skipper made it possible for us to land from the dinghy dryshod. A quick passage was made to the rookery.

Albatross Island is an isolated rock of conglomerate formation, about three-quarters of a mile long and averaging 150 feet in height. Situated in the Southern Ocean, it receives the long roll that comes across a thousand miles of sea without a check. The colony of White-capped Albatrosses (*Thalassogeron cautus*) is planted on either side of a cleft saddle about the middle of the island. The situation seems to have been admirably chosen, as the higher ground behind the "villages" affords good shelter from the frequent south-west gales, and there is a gentle inclination to the abrupt "take-off" on the cliff side. I estimated roughly that about 200 birds were nesting in the main rookery, and there were many nests on the cliff-sides on projections, singly and in clusters. On approaching the nests we were greeted by a loud cackle from many of the bird—a noise closely resembling the neighing of a foal. The Albatross is a tight sitter, and, when you come near, glowers, and clashes its powerful bill. When robbing a nest I used a forked tea-tree stick; putting the prong into the nest, I held the head away while I slipped my disengaged hand under the bird. In no case did an Albatross fly from its nest while we were in the

rookery ; each one that lost its egg would, on being released, put its head between its legs and look for the egg, and, although failing to find it, continue sitting.

When you have robbed an Albatross, and are carrying off the spoil, sometimes you will be followed by a jet of green oily liquid from the bird's throat.

Nests are placed in many instances about 3 feet apart. They are composed of a mixture of earth and tussock-grass cemented by excrement. Measurements as follows :—Diameter, base, 22 inches ; diameter over all—top 18 inches, hollow $11 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, height from 3 to 9 inches. The nest is small for the size of the bird, which when sitting covers the top with her breast-feathers. Observations lead me to believe that the nest is built in the following way :—The Albatross, seated on the ground, digs all round with her bill, and then draws the loosened earth into a circular ridge, later adding grass. The domestic arrangements of the Albatross family are such that this modest beginning grows yearly into a fair-sized pyramid. The annual additions to the nest, I think, are tussock and excretion, no earth. The egg is of a dull white colour, rough surfaced and minutely pitted, having generally a zone or cap of specks of reddish-brown, though some specimens are pure white. Measurements of three— $4\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{8}$ inches, $4\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{5}{8}$ inches, $4 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The laying season must begin about the end of September or early in October, as most of the eggs taken were far advanced in incubation.

After spending an hour on the island we were compelled to leave to catch a favourable tide—in the absence of wind, a consideration. The craft in which we made the voyage was the *Dart*, an 8-ton fishing smack, $38 \times 8 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ feet, which was ably handled by our skipper, Wm. Freeburgh, of Stanley.

In addition to the White-capped Albatross, I have notes on the following birds :—

PELICAN (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*).—A few nests were seen on Penguin Island, and five had fresh eggs ; there were 32 birds present, and other nests were preparing.

WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*).—I had the pleasure of examining a new nest of this fine bird, and though both Eagles were about the nest, which was placed on a flat rock on the top of a bold, jutting promontory, and was newly lined with green leaves, there were no eggs.

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE (*Uroaetus audax*).—The season seemed "out of joint" with Eagles. A new nest (I flushed the bird from it) of this species was examined, and seemed just ready for eggs.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*).—Not so numerous as in the Furneaux Isles. Two nests, with fresh eggs, seen on 2nd and 3rd November.

PACIFIC GULL (*Gabianus pacificus*).—Plentiful ; many nests seen ;

BLACK OYSTER-CATCHER (*Hæmatopus unicolor*).

PIED OYSTER-CATCHER (*H. longirostris*).—Numerous and evenly distributed; many nests.

SILVER GULL (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*).—Some small rookeries examined. Appeared to be a very large one at north end of Albatross Island. The eggs of this species are taken in numbers by islanders and sailors, and eaten.

LITTLE PENGUIN (*Eudyptula minor*).—Great numbers everywhere.

REEF-HERON (*Demigretta sacra*).—I was delighted at finding the nest of this, to me, rare bird; only one bird, a white one, was seen at the nest, which was situated under a leaning rock, well hidden and sheltered on what was practically a tidal island. The eggs (two) were partly incubated. The nest was a fairly thick ply of tussock-grass mixed with seaweed. According to the experience of the lad who was with me and found the nest, two eggs constitute the full clutch. Colouration of Reef-Herons is remarkable. Mr. Atkinson, who has had many years' experience with the species, has seen blue and white birds mated, but never a pied one. His opinion is that a Reef-Heron carries its first dress all its life. The islander agreed with this, and stated that, though birds of mixed colours have been seen mated, such an occurrence is rare. He knew of localities where three pairs, all white birds, nested. In other places the birds are all of the blue variety.

SOOTY CROW-SHRIKE (*Strepera fuliginosa*).—Very numerous on all the large islands, where its loud, raucous notes were frequently heard, more especially in the morning. We examined about 20 nests, but, in most cases, were too early.

WHITE-FACED STORM-PETREL (*Pelagodroma marina*).—Two fresh eggs were taken on 3rd November, on Penguin Island.

HOODED AND RED-CAPPED DOTTERELS.—Several nests of these little trippers were seen, in the usual situations.

[Messrs. Armstrong and Atkinson were fortunate in obtaining a landing on Albatross Island. It will be remembered that the members of the A.O.U. expedition last year were unable to land there through stress of weather (*Emu*, viii., p. 197, and Plate XVI.) An interesting account of the Albatrosses on this islet, by Mr. D. Le Souëf, C.M.Z.S., was published in *The Ibis* (1895); and subsequently another account, by Mr. J. Gabriel and the late Mr. H. P. C. Ashworth, appeared in *The Victorian Naturalist* (1896).—EDS.]

First Bird Day in the Commonwealth.

BY H. W. WILSON, MELBOURNE.

THE value of birds to a country, and especially to an agricultural country, cannot be too highly estimated, but it cannot be said that sufficient interest is taken in our avifauna by the community as a whole to prevent its suffering through the ignorance or thoughtlessness of both young and old. The vast amount of good accomplished in arousing in the children an interest in the study of trees and care of gardens by the institution of Arbor Day in State schools led members of the A.O.U. to the conclusion that the institution of a Bird Day might probably produce a similar result with regard to bird life. The