

to be laid. The nests were placed at heights varying from 5 to 9 feet, and well hidden in the masses of leaves of the green suckers growing from the bases of ringbarked coolibar and bibble box trees (eucalypts). The nests and eggs closely resemble those of *Gerygone albigularis*, except that they are somewhat smaller."

Notes on the Native-Hen (*Tribonyx mortieri*).

By (MISS) J. A. FLETCHER, TASMANIA.

THE grassy flats along the banks of the South Esk and Macquarie Rivers are favourite resorts of the Tribonyx, and to observe the birds is somewhat easy, provided the observer remains quiet. The Native-Hens appear to dread movement more than they do noise. I remember a certain flat along the Esk with an area of about 10 acres. Except on the river frontage, this strip was bounded by low, rocky, barren hills, with an anabranch of the river running in a semicircle at their base. The creeklet had a great number of water-weeds, reeds, and rushes growing in it. Here the Native-Hens were present in great numbers at all periods of the year. When disturbed they ran for shelter to the bracken ferns on the hills. Very rarely they attempted to escape by crossing the river. Presently a few of the older birds, presumably males, would return and begin to eat the grass. By degrees the others also returned, though there were always a few individuals ready to run at the slightest movement.

Several of these Native-Hens were very pugnacious, and chased intruders from the particular patch of ground they considered to be their own. They would run at the trespassing bird with head held low and wings partly down, uttering at the same time a noise resembling the grunt of a pig. At other times there would be a general chorus of their "saw-sharpening" call, the birds darting backwards and forwards in an apparently senseless manner. I have watched them crossing a river when wishing a new feeding ground. Once I counted a dozen birds which had been feeding on a low hill and were returning home. They swam one behind the other, but appeared rather to "tread water" than to swim, and to keep their bodies below the surface.

Once I saw a Native-Hen try to escape observation by walking beneath the water. Amid a bank of ferns I knew that a Tribonyx had her nest. Below this bank was a hole in the river, 4 feet deep, with a pebbly bottom. I stood on a log and with a long stick probed the ferns above the nest. Instantly there was a splash, and, looking down, I saw the bird sink to the bottom and run along the river's bed up stream a little distance and then dash out and race with full speed across the opposite flat. I jumped down among the ferns, and, parting them to view the eggs, saw a snake making its way slowly across the nest. I was soon back on the log again.

Both sexes assist in the making of the nest. Should the birds be disturbed when carrying material they immediately drop it and run to cover. If the watcher hides they will return, pick up the dropped material, and trot off to the selected building site. Along the edges of the lagoons and rivers large open nests of these species are often to be found during the nesting season. They are generally placed in conspicuous places, on large stones, flat rocks, exposed edges of the bank, or in solitary tussocks. The nests are made of soft tussocky grass, the hollow centre being about the size of a dinner plate.

Between 70 and 80 nests were inspected by me in 1910, and in one only did I see a clutch of eggs. Extra nests are built, I believe, to deceive Hawks and Ravens, and my experience with Bald-Coots (*P. melanonotus*)* and Bitterns (*B. paciloptilus*) points to the fact that these birds also construct dummy nests. Generally speaking, a broody Tribonyx, when disturbed, slips off her nest and runs away. The crouching attitude when running, and the frequent backward looks which the bird gives, usually betray ownership of a nest or hidden offspring. On one occasion I found a nest and three fledgelings were hiding head downwards in the tussock grass around it. A fourth chick, whose down was not yet dry, lay in the centre of the nest squeaking feebly. The chicks had a patch of down on each wing; legs and bills were black.

The nest sites are most varied, ranging from a hollow in the ground to a willow tree (6 feet above the ground) and flood *débris*. In the Scottsdale district I have seen nests built in the centre of a tree-fern. Ravens (*Corone australis*) destroy the eggs of the Tribonyx. Occasionally the Ravens hunt in pairs. One will frighten a bird off her nest and chase her while the other attends to the eggs. When the Tribonyx is sufficiently far off her pursuer returns to assist in devouring the eggs, which are sometimes eaten in the nest, sometimes carried away.

Once while eating my lunch near a lagoon I heard the hunting call of a Harrier (*Circus gouldi*) to her mate, which flew across from the far side of the lagoon. I watched the two birds swoop down in turn and strike at some creature with their claws. Presently I heard a cry of pain, and knew that a Native-Hen was in trouble. So intent were the Harriers on their prey that I was able to approach closely, and saw blood-stained feathers on the hunted bird's back. I frightened the Harriers away, and the Tribonyx quickly concealed herself in a thick tangle. I have seen Native-Hens sitting on clutches of from three to nine eggs, and in exceptional cases of twelve, fourteen, and sixteen eggs respectively. The nest containing fourteen eggs appeared to be owned by two pairs of birds, while in other instances the eggs were uniform in appearance.

*Mr. Gregory Mathews deems the Bald-Coot of Tasmania to be sub-specifically different from the mainland form, and has named it *P. m. fletcheri*, in honour of the writer of this article.—EDS.