

From the figures quoted above it could be imagined that the Stipituri were the commonest of our birds, but so dense are the swamps which they frequent that only a bird observer would notice the birds.

Note re Food in Rushes.—Examined at my request by Mr. Frank Littler, F.E.S.:—Spiders; ants; coleopterous larvæ, probably aquatic; remains of coleoptera (fragments too small to identify with certainty); evidences of lepidopterous larvæ, belonging to either or both the families *Æcophoridæ* or *Elachistidæ*.

Stray Feathers.

Maternal Instinct Strong.—Some years ago I mentioned in *The Emu* the fact of a Black-and-White Fantail (*Rhipidura motacilloides*) being found dead on her nest, which contained young ones, after a flood had subsided, in the Western District, Victoria. The parent bird would not desert her young as the flood rose, and she therefore died with them; her claws were fastened into the web of the nest, which kept her from being washed away. A similar instance was noted not long ago by Elwyn Allender, of Mount Cole Creek, near Ararat, Victoria. It is interesting to note the strong maternal instinct in these birds; possibly some members know of similar cases. I am reminded of a hen, which was found sitting on the ground, dead, after a bush-fire had passed over the country. She was partially burnt, and when she was picked up her little chicks were found under her, uninjured. She had given her life to save her brood, as she could easily have escaped herself.—D. LE SOUËF. Melbourne, 5/1/15.

* * *

Nankeen Night-Herons.—I have perused Mr. H. L. White's "Notes on the Nankeen Night-Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*)."^{*} This bird has been a visitor for years past to the Maitland district, coming from Cabbage-tree Island, Port Stephens. I have frequently seen Nankeen Night-Herons on branches of trees, particularly willows, growing on the river banks, near the town of West Maitland. They have never, however, assembled in such numbers as Mr. White observed. In a boat I have approached them very closely. I think that all the swamps between the Hunter River and Port Stephens have been drained, and the swamps between Maitland and Newcastle would be nearer to the Heronry than the Myall River swamps. We have this year been visited by many wading birds that have not been seen around here for very many years. Amongst them were the Greater and Lesser Bitterns and the Pacific Heron.—W. J. ENWRIGHT. West Maitland, N.S.W., 13/3/15.

^{*} *Emu*, vol. xiv., part 3, pp. 174, 175.

Swifts and Weather.—In a paper read before the Royal Society of Tasmania a few years ago, I endeavoured to trace a connection between the appearances of the Spine-tailed Swift (*Chaetura caudacuta*), both in this State and in Victoria, and disturbed weather conditions, showing that, in all cases which had come under my observation, the appearance of this Swift meant atmospheric change. This was again strikingly demonstrated on 27th February, 1915, when, in the morning, I saw 50 or 60 of these fine birds coursing insects over the paddocks near the Don road. The day was sultry but fine. Soon afterwards, I met a friend who spends most of his life out of doors, and, like myself, takes pleasure in noticing natural objects. I told him that I had seen a large party of Swifts for the first time this summer, when he remarked—"Then rain is not far off." That very evening a light rain began to fall, and practically the whole of the following day was wet. Not only so, but for several days afterwards we had high winds and showers, culminating on 7th and 8th of this month (March) in a tremendous north-westerly gale, which did a good deal of damage. All this disturbance came after months of fine, settled weather. Yesterday, 9th inst., the Swifts were migrating, passing in twos and threes every few minutes, from S.E. to N.W., during the afternoon from 2 until 4 o'clock. I consider this early departure means cold and rough autumn weather. The Tiers, which are in view from my ground, are already white with snow.—H. STUART DOVE. West Devonport, Tas., 10/3/15.

* * *

Notes from Springfield (Tas.)—The Long-tailed Wren-Warblers (*Malurus longicaudus*) are now in heavy moult, and have been so for the past fortnight. The males have only the remnant of blue on the back of their heads, and brown feathers are showing throughout the black velvety patches of their spring dress. A family of these birds has spent the last eighteen months in the back garden here. They nested in the blackberries on the other side of the fence, and brought their brood along as soon as the young birds could fly. They all hop about the back verandah, pick up bread crumbs thrown to them, and also search the fuchsias on the window stand. If crumbs are placed on the window-sill the female will take them, even if anyone is sitting near by. These little birds enjoy a few morsels of fat. As both broods reared this season have been brought to the verandah, there is often a flutter of brown wings when anybody runs up the steps quickly.

A Yellow-throated Honey-eater (*Ptilotis flavigula*) lived in the school-ground last winter. He would eat the jam from crusts thrown down by the school children, and enjoyed a lolly very much, provided that it had been sucked or wetted with water before being thrown to him. This bird has now returned. Evidently nesting responsibilities have ceased. The Lesser White-backed

Magpies (*Gymnorhina organicum*) reared their young as usual in the big gum-tree in the school-ground. One pair brought three fledgelings to the play-ground, where their constant calling for food was not always the sweetest music during school hours. The members of this family, with one exception, have now sought a wider range. One young bird keeps about, and comes close when hungry. It stands a few feet away from one, and eats bits of meat, holding them with its claws. The other day, during dinner recess, I saw the bird standing in front of three little boys, who were giving it scraps from their sandwiches.—(Miss) J. A. FLETCHER. Springfield (Tasmania), 6/2/15.

* * *

A Nesting Record of the Red-capped Robin.—A pair of Red-capped Robins, *Petroica goodenovii* (*Whiteornis g. goodenovii*), have nested and hatched four clutches of eggs. These are the second pair of Red-capped Robins that I have noticed on the plains near Glenelg in 30 years. These pairs seemed to have adapted themselves to the altered environment. The young left the first nest on 19th August; it was built facing north, on a low branch about 2 or 3 feet from the ground. Very few leaves were on the tree at that time of year. On 4th September three eggs were in a second nest built in a fork about 8 feet high. On 6th September the young were just out of the eggs. On 29th September they left the nest. It was very amusing to see the old birds playing tricks to draw me away from the young ones. On 20th October the female bird was sitting on her third clutch. On 26th October the young Robins were out of the eggs. While I was watching the young, the female bird came to feed them with a spider, flying within a foot of my face; the day was very hot. On 8th November the young Robins were sitting on the edge of the nest. On 27th November the female bird was sitting on her fourth clutch of two eggs. This is the third time she has used the same nest. 5th December saw the young Robins out of the eggs; they left the nest about the 16th. The weather was very hot while the young were in the nest. When watering fruit-trees I made a trench round the trees to run the water in; this made insects and spiders run. The Robins took advantage of this, and, perching on the lower branches, they darted down on the insects. Though it was very hot at this time, I never saw them drink or touch the water. I never noticed the male bird sit on the eggs or young, but he was as active as the female bird in feeding the young ones. I would like to hear from bird-lovers or ornithologists if it is unusual for native birds to have four broods in the same season and to rear all the young ones. The old birds seemed to drive the nestlings away from the breeding-ground. I put barbed wire around the trunk of the almond tree to keep the cats away. Did the birds notice if the wire was to protect them? — SAML. SANDERS. Sturt, South Australia, 19/8/14.

Photographing Shy Birds.—During three or four years' experience of bird photography one learns many things; but the fact which has caused us most surprise has been the difficulty experienced in photographing some of the birds that we had anticipated would be easy subjects. We found that the confiding Yellow-tailed Tit-Warbler (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) and the White-fronted Bush-Chat (*Ephthianura albifrons*), when faced by a camera 18 inches from their "front door," showed a degree of obstinacy more than worthy of many of the most retiring birds. When dealing with the Little Grass-Bird (*Megalurus gramineus*) and the Speckled Warbler (*Chthonicola sagittata*), however, we expected trouble—and got it. It was in December, 1912, that we first located the nest of a Grass-Bird. We waited till the young had left the nest, and then had to spend half a day hidden among the rushes to catch them. After five or six hours' waiting, a few exposures of the parent birds were made, but by that time the light was bad, and no presentable negatives were obtained. In the following year we were more fortunate when a nest was discovered. The parent birds persisted in approaching the young ones by way of all the depressions and under all the reeds available. An elaborate barrier made of white handkerchiefs and the like induced them to come into the open. The young, when they left the nest, so closely resembled the rushes in colour, and were so quick in their movements, that we were obliged to take them home with us overnight; we could not have caught them again. From October, 1913, onwards we have, on several occasions, set the cameras before a nest of the Speckled Warbler, but it was not till October, 1914, that we were able even to make an exposure on the parent birds. In that month we tried about five different pairs, and were fortunate enough to find one somewhat less timid than the rest. A few photographs were obtained. On account of the distance at which the cameras had to be operated (about 40 feet of cotton being used to release the shutter), a piece of stone was placed in front of the nest in the hope that a bird would hop on to it and thus indicate when it was in a correct position for an exposure. We soon found that the birds were using the nest and our piece of stone to screen themselves from the camera. It was only when the entrance to the nest had been blocked up and the stone removed that a clear view was obtained. The removal of the stone meant that it was largely a matter of chance whether or not the photograph would be "sharp." Of about 25 birds that we have photographed, two only avoided prominent points when approaching the camera. This made them specially difficult to deal with. In most cases we are able to set our cameras in anticipation of the bird perching on the highest object within a reasonable distance of the nest or young. Although this point may be avoided at first, owing to its being directly in front of the lens, it is almost certain that it will be used as soon as the bird has gained sufficient confidence to approach so near.—S. A. LAWRENCE and R. T. LITTLEJOHNS. Melbourne, 26/2/15.



Little Grass-Bird.

FROM A PHOTO. BY S. A. LAWRENCE.



Speckled Warbler.

FROM A PHOTO. BY R. T. LITTLEJOHNS.