

Several times in the course of the afternoon these long periods of absence occurred. Finally the female bird entered the nest and remained there. But she kept a bright look-out, as the position of the head and expression of the eye in the photograph indicate. It is not often that one has an opportunity of photographing a Scrub-Wren in its nest.—CHARLES BARRETT. Melbourne, 12/11/15.

Stray Feathers.

Birds Under Shell Fire.—The following is an extract from a letter written by a machine-gun man of the 21st Battalion:—“A rather curious incident took place a few days ago, which might well be termed, ‘in the midst of war we are in peace.’ Just at the first streak of daylight a rather lively artillery demonstration started. Three battleships and fourteen of our field-guns were shelling a Turkish position about 70 yards in front of our particular bit of breastwork. I happened to be observing at the time, and whilst I was crouching down on the parapet, trying to look as much like a sandbag as possible, two Sparrows flew along and perched on my wrist. They preened their feathers and chirped to each other for fully a minute before flying away. This was whilst high explosive shells were screaming overhead at only few second intervals and bursting less than a hundred yards away.”

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Hawks in Egypt.—Following is an extract from a letter written by Mr. Arthur Swindells, R.A.O.U., now on service at the Dardanelles:—“Yesterday three of us hired a gharry and drove round the old mosques and tombs. From the top of one mosque, with a most unpronounceable name, we had a grand view of Cairo. I counted 173 steps as I ascended, and then gave up, as the view claimed my attention. . . . What interested me more than anything about the great mass of masonry, now fallen into disuse, and over 1,020 years old, was the number of niches in the high walls, from which flew Hawks in dozens. The nests could plainly be seen, and I was sorely tempted to essay a climb, but, alas! when I suggested the idea to the guide he immediately became horrified and gesticulated wildly, calling on Mahomed and Allah to vent his wrath on the heathen who would dare profane the sacred walls. As he seemed to take the matter so badly, I thought it well to stifle my desires, but my fingers just itched to get at those nests. However, when on the parapets I did manage to elude his vigilant eye for a moment and skip along to a place where I could lean over and see a nest with downy young. The guide afterwards showed us bowls of water placed in various parts for use of the birds. Evidently they regard these Hawks with a special veneration. The Hawk is about the size of our Brown Hawk, and not unlike the Harrier. They are here in hundreds,

and around the camp one can count them in dozens. They have no fear of the city, and circle over the buildings and alight on the roofs unconcernedly. Another kind of bird is a Crow marked like our Magpie. Swallows are everywhere."

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Early Voices.—Being desirous of hearing what was astir in the early hours of morning now that spring has fully come, I turned out yesterday at 3.30 a.m., and at 4 o'clock heard from my verandah the loud, cheerful, whistling calls of the Crescent Honey-eater (*Lichmera australasiana*, Shaw). While residing in the bush some miles from Table Cape, North-West Tasmania, I always noticed that this species was about the earliest to be astir, although it was run very closely by our Dnsky Robin (*Amaurodryas vittata*, Q. and G.) The latter does not occur just in my immediate neighbourhood here, although it is found in the district, so that yesterday the Crescent "held the floor" at dawn, and from 4 until 4.40 was the only voice heard. At this period a Magpie (*Gymnorhina organicum*, Gld.) came into a white gum just at the back of the house and commenced warbling his love-ditty, which he continued almost without cessation until 5.20. He is a young bird of last season, as I know by his voice, and gives this performance each morning at about the same hour, lasting from thirty to forty minutes. At 5.20 a.m. the loud, penetrating calls of the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*, Lath.) were borne upon my ears, and continued, with the usual persistence of this species, for several hours. It is strange that this was the only Cuckoo heard; the Fan-tailed, usually very plentiful in this locality, is quite scarce so far this season, nor does the Bronze appear to be up to its usual numbers, although I have seen several individuals. Nothing fresh was noted, beyond the chirping of the ubiquitous Sparrow, until 6.50, when the Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus cinereus*, Gld.) made his presence known by a ringing laugh proceeding from a group of saplings; long before this it was, of course, broad daylight.

Of evening voices, the Pallid Cuckoo appears to be the latest. More than once this spring he has been calling not far from the house until 7.45 p.m., when it was practically dark. In the Table Cape bush I have heard the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*, Lath.) uttering its soft trill at intervals for several hours after dark, but the Pallid usually ceased when daylight failed.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U. West Devonport (Tas.), 23/10/15.

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Notes from Springfield (Tas.)—This season is remarkable for the numbers of Robins—Scarlet-breasted (*Petroica leggitii*) and Flame-breasted (*P. phoenicea*)—that are spending the nesting time here. The excessive rain seems to have deferred the nesting season, and many birds are only now attending to the first brood. Another

noticeable fact is the great number of clutches of eggs that are being destroyed. I think that the unusual amount of rain has flooded out the snakes earlier than usual, and the birds, being later in nesting, are suffering. Our swamps also are a great resort of golden-hellied water-rats, and their footprints may often be traced near nests, in which the animals occasionally curl up to sleep, no doubt after supping off the contents.

Most of the Lewin Rails (*Hypolaenidia brachyptus*) appear to have taken a season's freedom from family cares, or else they have migrated, for their nests are seldom found. In fact, this season I have discovered only two, each containing four eggs, and two with egg-shells. The nests with unhatched eggs I watched in the hope of obtaining photographs of young birds, but they appeared on wet days.

The Spotless Crakes (*Porzana immaculata*) have also been very dilatory, though most of the clutches have been exceptionally large, doubtless the favourable season for these birds ensuring an abundant food supply. In the two seasons during which I have been studying these birds the average clutch has been three eggs, occasionally four. Last year, on account of the drought, I found several birds sitting on two eggs. Early in November, 1915, I found one of the "two-set" Crakes sitting on a clutch of six eggs, and still later another clutch of six came under my notice. In this latter, strange to say, one of the eggs was twice the size of the others, being probably double-yolked. This spring I have also found several nests of this Crake containing five eggs, on which the bird was sitting. These observations show that a hard and fast rule cannot be laid down with regard to the number of eggs to a clutch in the case of these birds, which are dependent on the rain-fed swamps.

It is worth recording that twice I have seen a four-clutch of Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*) eggs—namely, on the 8th November, 1913, and on 7th December, 1914. The two clutches did not belong to the same pair of birds.—(Miss) J. A. FLETCHER. Springfield (Tas.), 20/11/15.

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Cormorants in Tasmania.—Tasmania, with its many fresh-water lakes, marshy lagoons, and quiet streams, its broad estuaries and secluded bays, teeming with food supplies, offers special attractions to the family of Phalacrocoracidae. Yet, notwithstanding these advantages, the birds, with the exception of *P. carbo* and *P. leucogaster*, are by no means so numerous as is generally believed.

In the quiet lagoons and inland streams, lonely, secluded, and far from the usual haunts of man, one occasionally comes across a company of four or five Little Black Cormorants (*P. sulcirostris*) quietly engaged in procuring a meal; and on the lakes, in company with *P. carbo*, the birds may also be found, but never in very great numbers. Rarely indeed are the birds seen near the sea-coast—

the big bays and wide, open arms of the sea possess no charm for them; they prefer backwaters of rivers, hidden nooks of lakes, and the lonely, silent lagoons. The species is unusually shy and somewhat difficult to approach. The slightest indication of human presence alarms and causes them to leave quickly for less-frequented waters. So far as I am aware, the nests and eggs of *P. sulcirostris* have never been found in Tasmania: but, in all probability, their breeding places are the swamps and marshes in the Lake district, or on river reaches far inland.

The Little Black-and-White Cormorant (*P. melanoleucus*) is very thinly distributed over the island, and is not often seen. Although occasionally noticed on inland waters, its favourite haunts are tidal rivers, sheltered bays, and the shallow lagoons of the sea. In such situations the birds may be observed diligently searching for food, which consists of fish, crustacea, and other small forms of animal life. The habits of this species differ from those of others of its genus, inasmuch as, during the day, it leads a somewhat solitary existence, preferring to hunt alone, after which it may often retire to some favourite perch on a post or dead branch, where, motionless, it sits digesting its meal. In the evening it returns to the society of its fellows, roosting with them in the low trees fringing the shore. In the various armlets of Recherche Bay I have frequently seen these birds, and also in the big salt-water lagoons at Southport, where, I believe, they breed in company with *P. carbo* on the tea-tree bushes and small trees on one of the islands.

The Black Cormorant, or Shag (*P. carbo*), is perhaps more widely distributed than any of the other species, for not only does it inhabit the islands adjacent to the coasts, estuaries, and inlets, but also frequents many of our rivers and lakes, where it is found throughout the year, and is supposed to breed. Few instances are known of its nest and eggs being found in Tasmania, although it is recorded that on some of the islands of Bass Strait small colonies have their rookeries. Eggs have been taken at the head of the Derwent River, and on the low-lying, scrub-belted islands in the lagoons near Recherche Bay nests and eggs have been observed. I am confident that the nesting haunts of these birds will be found at the lakes far inland, where birds in immature plumage have frequently been seen.—A. W. SWINDELLS. Hobart (Tas.)

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Birds Destroyed by Storms.—Two walks which I took along the beach north of Fremantle on 7th and 8th August, 1915, indicated that the stormy weather which had prevailed fairly continuously for several weeks past had resulted in the destruction of a number of birds. I found the remains of a Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*, Gmel.), a Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Diomedea chlororhyncha*, Gmel.), and three Prions of two different species. On 14th August, after more stormy weather, during which all

the remains of the previous week had been buried under the sand, I found another Prion of the same species as that found in the previous week, another Yellow-nosed Albatross, a White-headed Petrel (*Estrelata lessoni*, Garnot), and an Indian-runner Duck! The latter may perhaps have been blown into the sea at Rottnest Island, or else washed overboard from a ship.

In addition to these finds on the beach, a Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*, Gmel.) was picked up at Fremantle in an exhausted condition at the beginning of July, and died soon after it was found. It was presented to the Museum by members of the Fremantle Fire Brigade. A Reef-Heron (*Demigretta sacra*, Gmel.) was also blown inland, and was presented to the Perth Zoo, where the director, Mr. E. A. Le Souëf, showed it to me.

This is doubtless only a fraction of the havoc wrought by the stormy weather in the immediate neighbourhood of Fremantle—say five miles of the coast-line. Multiply it to take into account the 1,000 miles of the coast-line of the State over which such storms are felt, and we shall have a faint idea of the terrible destruction of sea-bird life produced by a strong blow.

Brief notes on the birds mentioned are appended:—

Pied Cormorant (*Hypoleucus varius perthi*, Mathews).—This is the common "Shag" of the Swan River. There seems to be some doubt as to how much further south its range extends, the species found in the Recherche Archipelago, off the south coast, being the White-breasted Cormorant (*Hypoleucus fuscescens*). It would be interesting to know whether the ranges of the two species overlap, and, if so, where. The birds on the Swan River are all immature, or, perhaps more correctly, in non-breeding plumage; presumably at the breeding season they go out to sea to nest on the various islands off the coast, and at their breeding-grounds they are found in the bright nuptial plumage. A sufficient number remains on the river throughout the year to prevent the absentees being noticed, which would point to their not breeding in the first season.

Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Diomedea chlororhynchus*, Gmel.)—The two specimens noted above are of interest as showing that the species is not uncommon on the west coast in the winter months, and supplement the remarks I made in a previous article (*Emu*, vol. xv., p. 25).

White-headed Petrel (*Estrelata lessonii leucocephala*, Forster).—I cannot ascertain whether this bird has been obtained in Western Australia before. All the works I have consulted follow the British Museum Catalogue, and give "Australian Seas and Southern Indian Ocean," with the exception of Hall's "Key," which gives this State in the distribution. The reference to Southern Indian Ocean might have been the reason for this, but the specimen referred to in the British Museum Catalogue was captured in S. lat. $40\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$, E. long. $125\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ —nearly 500 miles south of the Western Australian coast-line.

Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*, Gmel.)—Mr. G. M.

Mathews * quotes an extract recording the capture of a bird of this species at Fremantle. The writer states :—"Two islands here are the home of the Giant Petrel." It certainly seems probable that the species nests somewhere off the coast, as it is frequently met with. We have in the Museum specimens from Busselton, Bunbury, Fremantle, Cottesloe, and the Abrolhos Islands.

Species of Prion.—When writing my note on *Heteroprion desolatus* I had not noticed that under *Prion vittatus missus* Mr. Mathews states that there are two other Prions shot in Western Australian waters in the British Museum, "one of which seems to be an immature specimen referable to *H. desolatus*, but not agreeing exactly with *H. d. mattingleyi*, while the other is near *H. belcheri*, but again not exactly matching the type of that species." The four Prions referred to above are almost certainly referable to two species, there being two specimens of each. Of these, the broader-billed form is referable to *H. desolatus*, and the other appears to be near *H. belcheri*, but the bill is not quite so narrow (10 mm. broad against 8 mm. in *belcheri*).

It is obvious, as Mr. Mathews has frequently insisted in his book, that the Petrels found on the Western Australian coast would well repay study, and it seems quite probable that nesting colonies of some of them await discovery.—W. B. ALEXANDER, Keeper of Biology, Perth Museum. 17/8/15.

From Magazines, &c.

Cuckoos in New Zealand.—"The Shining Cuckoo, apparently, is plentiful in many parts of the Dominion now" (writes Mr. J. Drummond, F.Z.S., in the *Lyttelton Times* of 30th October, 1915). "Mr. W. W. Smith, curator of Pukekura Park, New Plymouth, writing on 26th September, reports that the first specimen noted this season sang in the park at 1 p.m. on 24th September. 'I have been waiting for this bird's arrival this season,' Mr. Smith states, 'in order to ascertain if the remarkably early and warm spring we have experienced here would bring it earlier than usual. As you will see by reference to your records, it is three weeks to the day earlier than in any other season during the past seven years. Nests of several native and naturalized birds have been obtained in the park for nearly a month. Many species of native plants are flowering about two weeks earlier than they have flowered in any previous year since I came here, seven years and a half ago.'"

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Magpies in England—In the May, 1915, issue of the *Avicultural Magazine* Mr. B. Theo. Stewart writes interestingly on "The Australian Piping Crow," which, he says, figures so largely in prose

* "Birds of Australia," vol. ii., p. 188.