

egg of the Pallid Cuckoo was in its place. The ground was fairly clear under and around the bush, but not a trace could I find of the missing egg, so I came to the conclusion that the Cuckoo had carried it away in her bill. The egg deposited was a good match for that of the Honey-eater in shape and tint, but was somewhat larger; the fraud was detected, however, and the Honey-eater deserted her nest.

The Golden Merops (*Merops ornatus*).*

BY JAMES SLOANE, MULWALA STATION, MULWALA, N.S.W.

THE sand-ridges near the Murray on Mulwala are a regular nesting-place of this beautiful migrant. It comes only during the breeding season, and as soon as the young are strong enough for the journey it goes back to its tropical forests. It had specialized in nesting in a way that resisted its habitual enemies, and its burrow used to fulfil its purpose in giving ample protection against ground foes. Twice only have I seen nests disturbed by them. But the fox came, specialized as a ground-hunter, with a cunning that the underground nest of the *Merops* gave no protection against; and the birds that came for countless ages to the Murray have in a few years nearly lost their place in the plan of Nature. Already they are almost gone, and in a few years will be unknown. The nest is at the end of a narrow tunnel about 3 feet long and a foot below the surface. The fox digs down on top of the nest. For some years the foxes did not interfere with the nests, but when they did every one was destroyed. The foxes seem to farm the birds, for the attack is not made till the young are about to leave. Several that I had under observation appeared likely to escape, but they were always taken. Sometimes the fox lives near the *Merops*' burrow, and must see it nightly. It is hard to understand why the nests are left till the young are well grown, for one would expect competition for them amongst the foxes.

Perhaps some of the birds are now breeding elsewhere, though, with their fixed habits, this is not likely. Wherever they go in Southern Australia they will not, while they nest on flat ground, escape the fox, even though the instinct of self-preservation does, as I have seen, occasionally help some pairs for a while. It is unusual for the nest to be near a human habitation, but one was made at the corner of our garden near the back of the house, on an open space where an untied dog slept at night. This saved the nest. The following year there were two nests, and last year four. This year two were made, but unfortunately a new enemy appeared; a brown snake came, and was killed in one of the burrows. It is clear that the birds realized that there was a protective influence at the spot, even though the first nest may have been put there by chance, and possibly they knew the protection came from the dog. The dog certainly took no interest in them.

* The Australian Bee-eater.

The *Merops* is a bee-eater. I think (though I have not given the subject attention) that it catches blow-flies. This bird uses bright objects as illuminants in its dark burrow. Small pieces of white bone, mussel-shell, and, in fact, anything bright. I have found a pearl shirt-button. Every nest has these natural lamps. In one I examined carefully they were placed at the end of the burrow. The nests are made in light forest country, on an open space, where the sun can shine upon them all day and where the drainage is perfect.

Foxes have made great inroads into our native fauna, and they have certainly come to stay and be an everlasting curse. Some settlers from the Old Land are never happy till they surround themselves with the pests they were used to. Some want still more. Some time ago I was asked to join a society whose one object was to introduce more beasts and birds from overseas that might be acclimatized here. I have not again heard of this society, but if it exists—and it may—it should be hunted up by the proper authorities and brought to reason.

Description of Eggs New to Science—*Notophoyx flavirostris* (Sharpe).

BY H. L. WHITE, M.B.O.U., BELLTREES, SCONE, N.S.W.

As far as I can learn, no complete description of Australian-laid eggs of this species of Heron has yet appeared. I claim my clutch, therefore, to be the type.

Gould does not mention the eggs; A. J. Campbell, in "Nests and Eggs," states the eggs are undescribed; A. J. North omits all mention of the bird; while G. M. Mathews gives no description of the nest, and queries the clutch of eggs.

Mr. William M'Lennan, who lately returned from a nine months' trip, on my account, to the coasts of the Northern Territory, has sent me several clutches of the eggs of the Pied Egret (*Notophoyx flavirostris*), together with skins of the bird. They were taken at an immense heronry on the Gulf of Carpentaria.

A detailed description of the nest will be given later. For various reasons it is inadvisable to define the exact locality of the heronry until Government action has been taken to protect it.

Clutch, three to four; long oval, some of the specimens approaching Cormorant shape; texture of shell smooth, glossy, and finely pitted. Colour bluish-green, much darker than is usual with Herons' eggs generally. Of two clutches, which may be accepted as fairly typical, the measurements, in inches, are as follows:—(1) *a*, 1.64 x 1.17; *b*, 1.67 x 1.18; *c*, 1.54 x 1.18; *d*, 1.6 x 1.2. (2) *a*, 1.64 x 1.21; *b*, 1.54 x 1.18; *c*, 1.58 x 1.18; *d*, 1.54 x 1.18.