

## Notes on the Lyre-Bird at Poowong, South Gippsland.

By L. C. COOK, R.A.O.U.

IN the early days in Poowong, when most of the land was covered with virgin scrub, the majority of Lyre-Birds' nests that came under my notice were built on the ground, presumably because they were as safe there as anywhere else, for the native cat was then their only enemy, and building in trees would not safeguard them from these climbing marauders. At a later stage these pests were exterminated, and for some years the birds enjoyed security; then came the fox, and gradually the practice of building up in the air increased, till at the present time the majority of nests now found in this district are built where the fox cannot get at them. This apparently points to the fact that through the agency of the fox, what was once an unusual occurrence has now become an established habit in this district.

The birds display extraordinary ingenuity in constructing their nests on leaning trees. One came under my notice built on the clean stem of a large musk that had only the slightest lean and no limbs; yet somehow they laid a secure foundation, and finished a very pretty nest. As an engineering proposition this was the cleverest I ever found.

The following instance will show how efficacious the high-building habit is in saving their lives:—My neighbour had a nice reserve containing two males and six hens, while the one at the back of our property at that time held only two males and four hens. When my hens nested on the ground their eggs were promptly removed as soon as laid, but my neighbour would on no account allow his to be interfered with. After six years the result was that I had eleven birds and five eggs, while my neighbour had only one male and two hens left.

Whether the male and female construct the nest together I am unable of my own observation to say, but I know that the female can manage it quite well by herself. A pair lived in a small and isolated patch of scrub, and in course of time the male disappeared; I fear he was shot. At all events, his beautiful tones were no longer heard, and for six years the hen lived in celibacy; yet three different seasons after losing her consort she built her nest, laid in it, and sat on the egg, finally deserting it. A young lady, knowing of the sitting hen, took her mother to see it. Creeping quietly to the nest, she threw her veil over the aperture, captured the bird, examined and released it; yet the hen returned and resumed her sitting. My experience has been that the hen will never desert her nest after the egg has been laid, but will readily do so before the egg is laid should the nest be touched.

Once, when some scrub was being felled near the homestead, the cutters found a nest with a chick in it. They bodily removed both nest and inmate to a safe position some distance away; the mother followed and resumed her maternal offices.

Concerning the mimicry of the Lyre-Bird, I find it necessary to modify some things I have said and written. Until about two years ago it had always appeared to me that they did not promiscuously imitate the extraneous sounds around them, but, instead, learned their repertoire from their parents. The ground for this belief was based on the fact that the present-day birds still reproduce the calls of those that have for fifteen years left the district, and fail to favour us with the calls of the new arrivals, such as the Starling and Whistling Eagle. Then, again, though I have been always within hearing of the call of these birds for over thirty years, only twice have they reproduced the sounds of any other than the calls of certain birds when I have been listening to them. On the well-remembered occasion when the male bird first demonstrated to me his power to improvise, Messrs. C. L. Barrett and G. Findlay were also present, and that day his whole performance was entirely different from anything I had previously heard from any Lyre-Bird. He commenced by reproducing the bark of a cattle-dog and its owner whistling him up; this was repeated again and again, sometimes quite distinctly, then dying away as though faint with distance. His power of modulation was superb. Then he gave us the squealing that half-grown foxes indulge in when playing together, and many other unusual sounds.

I find that when the chick is a few weeks old the hen does not stay in the nest at night, but, instead, roosts in the tree-tops close by.

Although the male always has several hens attached to him, it is quite open to doubt if they all lay, and my opinion is that they do not, and much evidence has come my way in support of this theory.

It is not uncommon in this part of the country to hear the Starling imitate the Lyre-Bird and his selections. This fact has been often remarked by my friends.

I would like to show the members a bit of the work of Mr. Chandler, who had considerable success in photographing the birds in my company in Poowong. There was one hen that had been photographed dozens of times, and was very tame, and when her chick was in her nest would always follow me through the scrub. I chanced to notice that whenever she lost sight of me she would spring up on to the nearest stump or bough to enable her to watch my movements better. It occurred to me to turn this habit to account; so when Mr. Chandler arrived I induced him to focus his lens on a pretty bush pedestal covered with drooping staghorns and lichens at the best distance to secure a perfect photograph, if the bird should sit on it. To Mr. Chandler the chance seemed very remote, as I had told him nothing of my observations. When all was ready, and Mr. Chandler well concealed, with the pressure bulb in his hand, I proceeded to the nest and caused the chick to squawk. The mother instantly appeared then, and followed me at a little distance. When she



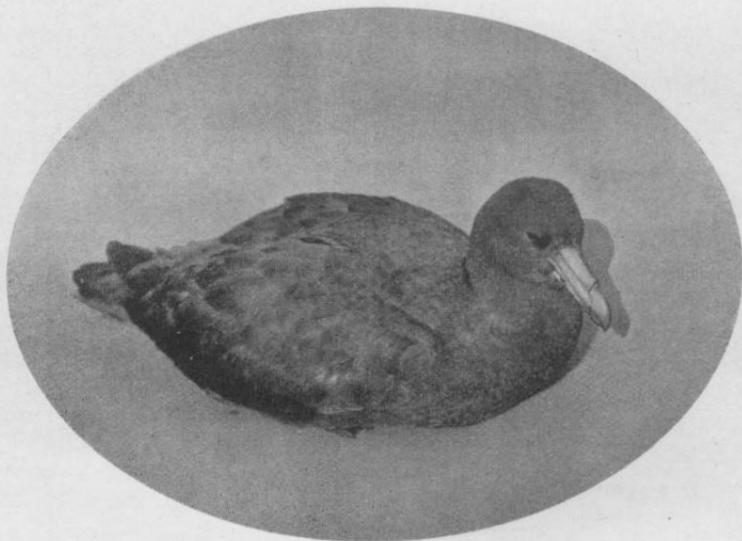
Female Lyre-Bird, Poowong, Gippsland.

was just opposite the camera I stopped; she did likewise, and began scratching about. As soon as her eyes were taken off me I lay down, while she, looking up a second later, and not seeing me, sprang quickly on to the bush pedestal to reconnoitre, and was immortalized by Mr. Chandler. The sun was shining right on her, and everything was favourable for a good photograph, for Mr. Chandler took an exposure, not a snap. Members will agree that he well deserved his success.

---

### Camera Craft Notes.

**Giant Petrel** (*Ossifraga gigantea*).—The bird photographed was caught in Port Phillip Bay, near Williamstown, and about 40 miles from the Heads. Mr. F. Lane and another were fishing near the lightship, and saw the bird swimming not far off. They threw it pieces of bread, which it promptly swallowed. They then baited a hook with some bread and threw it towards



The Giant Petrel (*Ossifraga gigantea*).

PHOTO. BY D. LE SOUEF, C.M.Z.S., R.A.O.U.

the bird, which readily took it, and so was captured. The hook, having caught on the bird's bill, was easily removed. It is interesting to note that this ocean bird should have come up the harbour so far from the ocean and close to the shipping. The photograph was taken in the Melbourne Zoo.—D. LE SOUEF. Melbourne.