

## The Nesting Habits of the Grass-Warbler (*Cisticola exilis*).

BY DONALD THOMSON, R.A.O.U., CANTERBURY (VIC.)

DOWN among the grassy river flats which border the Yarra River for many miles of its upper reaches, where acres of tall seeding docks and luxuriant grass lands are studded with innumerable quiet lagoons, whose margins are hidden by a wealth of tall bulrushes, sedges, and other water plants, the little Grass-Warbler (*Cisticola exilis*) delights to have its home.

Even before one actually reaches the home of this beautiful little bird, its sharp, wheezing, but not piercing call is plainly audible, wafted to the ears by soft spring breezes. At first it appears to come from the clear azure above, then from the right or left, and then when the bird at last is seen it will probably be in quite a different direction from that from which it at first appeared to come. Thus it would seem that this bird has the wonderful natural gift of ventriloquism.

Approaching carefully, seeking cover among the tall docks, and keeping very still, the birds at last are reassured. Then from the shelter of a clump of reeds a bird flits and settles near at hand. His colour is a dark rusty brown, with darker markings of black on the head, back, and wings, and the pale buff of the breast, fading almost to white on the throat, is clearly seen. Seeing that all is safe, the bird has a high flight in the air, at the same time uttering the loud wheezing cry, and finally alighting on a clump of rushes not far away from his starting-place. The aerial journeys are taken very often during the hot spring days and in the quiet stillness after sunset. These birds seldom enter the clump of vegetation in which their nest is hidden by direct flight, even if certain of security from observation. They alight some little distance away and then "creep" from stalk to stalk, always low down, until the nest is eventually reached.

At last, as the November sun sinks to rest over the western gums which border the river, a still quietness reigns everywhere. Even the little Grass-Warblers are not so noisy now. On almost every clump of finely-grown reeds a bird sits, swaying on the topmost seed-head. As if conscious of the presence of a watcher—I shall not say enemy—they flit from clump to clump uneasily, always selecting a tall plant on which to alight. Slowly, very slowly, a bird approaches my "lair." He flies to within a few feet of my hiding place, always to make a short aerial journey, landing a little further away. Returning slowly once more, he at last evidently makes up his mind to take the risks and return "home," for, diving into the undergrowth, he is lost to view. Soon a bird would appear close at hand once more, this time with some "down" or other building material in its mouth, and, flitting about, would finally vanish below. Most of the nest-building appears to be done at sunrise and just about sunset—that is, in the cooler and quieter hours of the day.

Judging from the action of the birds that a nest was being built close at hand, I began a thorough search in the long grass. This search soon revealed the wonderful domed, cradle-like nest, low down amongst the green herbage. It was placed about four inches from the ground, and was composed of fairly coarse grasses felted together and lined with fine white thistledown and seeds. From a short distance this nest had the appearance of being quite white, studded with dark spots, which were the seeds, the surrounding grasses and leaves of the plants being drawn down over the nest and fastened with cobweb threads. The opening in the side was large for the size of the bird, and faced the east. So frail was the whole structure that it appeared quite incapable of supporting the weight even of the tiny owner, much less withstanding the heavy summer rains or breezes. The nest contained four eggs of a blue ground colour, spotted towards the larger end with brown markings, and quite oval in shape. By the actions of the birds it would appear that, although the eggs were far incubated at that time, the nest was being added to by the birds, in the evenings chiefly.

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### A Bush Walk.

BY H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U., WEST DEVONPORT (TAS.)

AT the beginning of the fourth week of September I took a day out in the bush near Devonport in order to see what spring migrants had arrived and which were still to come. The growth hereabouts consists mainly of stringybarks and white gums, under which is a scrub of prickly and varnish wattles, *Pultenæas* of various species, tea-trees of several kinds, *Cassinias*, and an occasional honeysuckle bush. The prickly wattles were a beautiful sight on that sunny morning, being loaded with "spikes" of pale yellow blossom. The notes of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) rippled pleasingly from various trees, the sound seeming to be permeated with the very soul of spring. The somewhat plaintive series of notes (usually eight in succession, then a pause) uttered by the pretty Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx plagosus*) was also frequently heard, although this bird does not thrust itself upon our notice as does the larger Fan-tailed Cuckoo. The Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo (*C. basalis*) is also plentiful here, but whether its call is exactly similar to that of *C. plagosus* is a moot point. I think not, but there is a great likeness in the notes of all the *Chalcococcyx* genus. For instance, the cry of the Shining Bronze (*C. lucidus*), which visits New Zealand each year, is well described by Sir Walter Buller, and his description would apply equally well to those of our Tasmanian visitors:—"The cry is a remarkable one, the bird appearing to be endowed with a peculiar kind of ventriloquism. It consists of eight or ten long silvery notes quickly repeated.