

the neighbourhood. Any small mischief which is done in this way can be readily forgiven both on account of the beauty and grace of the bird and the good which it does in destroying large quantities of thistle and other weed seeds.

While watching our little friend feeding at the cornflower in the suspended manner just described, one could not help speculating as to whether a second species of "Humming-Bird" was in course of development in our island.

Stray Feathers.

Finches and Grass-Parrots.—It is interesting that Finches seem to prefer the hot drip from sun-heated pipes to reservoir water. They come in hundreds to the hot pipe, though the big water-hole is but 200 yards distant. It is evening as I write; about 500 Bee-eaters are all flying up and down around a tree close to the home, evidently going to roost in it. At the reservoir, in the dry weather, thousands of Warbling Grass-Parrots (Budgerigars of the trappers) watered in large flocks. The Black-tailed Native-Hen is sometimes around the water-holes. The season is dry, but patchy rains have fallen, which are not sufficient to warrant the birds going back to the rivers.—J. R. CHISHOLM. The Plains, Prairie Table-land, North Queensland.

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Cuckoo Seen with Egg.—Arthur P. Ingle, late of Rosedale, Victoria, who was a keen bird-observer and enthusiastic oologist, was killed while fighting with the Australian troops at Passchendaele, in Belgium, on 12th October, 1917. His collection of eggs, by the generosity of his father, passed into my possession. It contained a clutch consisting of two eggs of a Blue Wren-Warbler (*Malurus cyaneus*) and one egg of a Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx basalis*), which he had taken, and which is worthy of special notice because of the rare instances of authentic records of a Cuckoo being seen with an egg. The notes with this clutch contain the following particulars:—"I saw the Cuckoo take the Wren's egg away in her bill after having deposited her own in its place."—J. A. Ross. Malvern, 1/3/19.

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The Spine-tailed Swift (*Chaetura caudacuta*).—The variation in number of these fine birds in different seasons is very remarkable. During January, February, and March, and great part of April, 1917, they were seen in numbers, appearing at all altitudes—from 20 feet to the limit of visibility. Last summer (1918) not a bird came within my ken, although I was constantly on the look-out. Some were seen by a friend in April, apparently just about to leave for the North. This summer the same non-success

has, so far, attended observations; one individual was noted on 12th January, flying at a tremendous pace, as if seeking companions, but none has been seen since. The season has been dry and windy, with a cold snap during the fourth week of January, when snow fell on the Tiers within sight of Devonport; since then we have had a good deal of heat.—H. STUART DOVE. Devonport, Tas.

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Snakes and Young Birds.—A tragic episode, as far as the Orange-tipped Pardalote (*Pardalotus assimilis*) was concerned, was perpetrated by a Brown Snake (*Diemenia textilis*), 4 feet 6 inches long. On the 13th October, 1917, at Blacktown, N.S.W., I was walking along the bed of a dry creek when I came upon a male darting down and up again, and on looking over in its direction I saw the tail end of a snake dangling from a hole in the bank. I promptly despatched the snake, and on examination I saw that it had gorged two young Pardalotes which were fully fledged; the third was in the process of serving the same fate, the fourth was dead in the nest, and the female was dead in the burrow, she evidently being crushed in her struggles to escape. There is not the slightest doubt that many of our small ground-frequenting birds succumb to these insidious and lethal reptiles.

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Rare Birds.—Owing probably to the drought in other quarters, certain rare nomadic birds have visited the Bega (N.S.W.) district this summer. The Great White Egret and Yellow-billed Spoonbill have appeared about the lagoons and ponds, and, on the outskirts of the town of Bega, I observed a White-necked Heron feeding about a mud-hole excavated for water in the bed of a swamp. The Regent-Bird (also very rare in this quarter) appeared in January, and also the "Barley-Bird," or Fantail-Warbler. The latter sometimes appears on Monaro highlands in summer. I have found the cosy nest in Californian thistles, then grown tall and crowned with perfumed purple flowers. Of South Coastal (N.S.W.) birds I think two of the rarest are the Little Bittern and the Pilot-Bird. I have observed the latter twice in dense scrubs near the sea, and the Little Bittern once only, on the mud flats of an estuary. About two years ago a Painted Snipe was shot on the margin of a Monaro river, but it is very rare in that quarter.—H. V. EDWARDS.

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Powerful Owl and Ring-tailed Possum.—During my frequent visits to the hut at Selby, I had heard the call of this bird, but seldom saw it. What was my joy, on a recent week-end, when investigating the excreta under the big trees in the gully, to see a pair of these birds in the early afternoon perched about 40 feet above ground in a rough-barked messmate! Closer investigation

showed that one of the birds held in its claws the remains of a ringtail possum, which it had evidently caught the previous night and retained for another meal. All attempts by shouting failed to make it fly, and it was only by hammering the tree-trunk with a big stick that it was induced to vacate its position. The possum was not dropped in its passage to another tree, but remained dangling from its claws during flight, and was placed on another limb and again stood on by the bird. The third and even fourth flushing had a like result, and, when my boy and I left the bird to its own reflections it was to see it bowing and nodding sedately as we took our departure, as if to say, "Now are you satisfied?"—TOM TREGELLAS. 27/1/19.

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Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) and its Nest.—Only 14 yards from the back door of Mr. Hammond Brown's house, near Baltimore, one of these Woodpeckers had made its nest. I was interested in watching it go in and out of its hole. The hole was bored in a dead bough about 40 feet from the ground, was circular (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter); it goes $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in a horizontal direction, and then 12 to 18 inches down, somewhat enlarged at the bottom. The eggs are laid in the chips. The chips were sound wood, and Mr. Brown told me that the bird occupied only $1\frac{1}{2}$ days from start to completion of this nest—truly, I thought, a remarkable feat, considering the hardness of the timber. The bill strikes one as shaped like a narrow chisel, sharper in this species than is the case with many American Woodpeckers, but blunt compared with a carpenter's tool, and yet the bird I was watching had done all the work in the brief time quoted. I met with four or five species of Woodpecker in the Baltimore (Maryland) woods, and in every case the blows, instead of being sledge-hammer-like, were extremely rapid; nevertheless, the method seems to be effective.—EDWIN ASHBY. "Witunga," Blackwood, S.A.

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City Observations.—We have been interested during the past few months in a pair of Blue Wrens which have just reared their fourth brood for the season in a small garden in the grounds of the old Treasury, Spring-street. The positions chosen for the nests were not more than 30 feet from perhaps the busiest tram-line in Melbourne, and separated from it only by a picket fence. All four nests, though in different positions, were built of the same material, which was removed by the female after the departure of each brood. The male did not assist in the work of incubation, but, up to the last nest, took his share of the feeding duties while the young were in the nest, and assumed full control of them when they left it. While he fed the fledgelings in the gardens about, the female laid and incubated the next clutch of eggs. The last nest we watched closely from day to day, and also

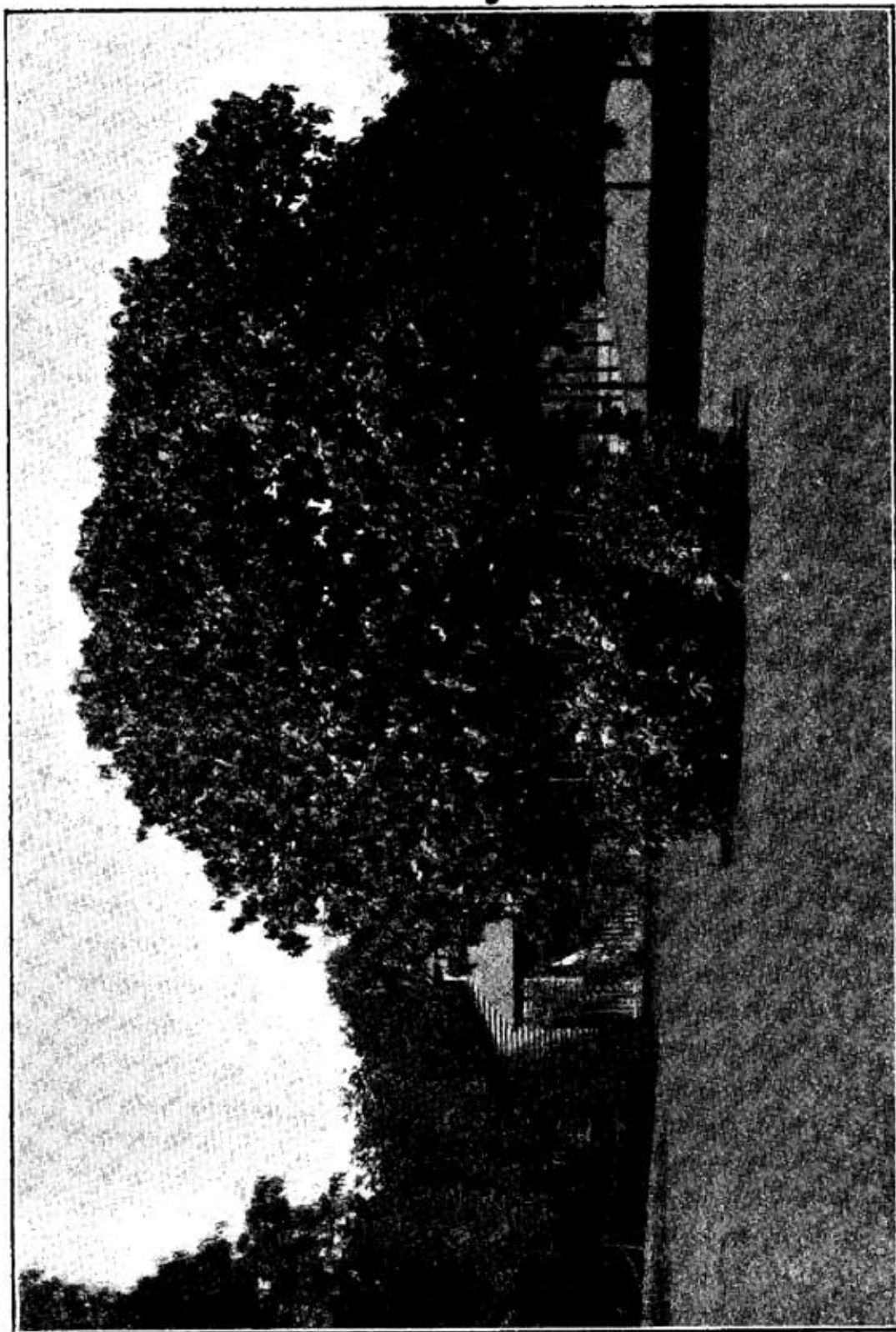


Fig-tree at Belltrees, N.S.W., which provides food for many birds during drought.

FROM A PHOTO. BY SID. W. JACKSON, R.A.O.U.

obtained a couple of photographs early one morning. When three of the four eggs in the last clutch hatched we were surprised to find that, in addition to the female parent, three surviving young ones from the first two broods assisted in feeding, while the male fed the young from the third brood, and was seldom seen near the nest. The three young ones first mentioned appeared to have just as deep an interest in the nest as had the parent—in fact, we were quite unable to say which was the parent. When faced with the camera all four brown birds became very noisy and excited. Altogether, the pair successfully reared seven birds—two from the first nest, one from the second, three from the third, while one only survived from the last nest. We may add that, although we have had considerable experience of the Blue Wren, our observations have not led us to believe that the male has more than one mate, as appears to be the popular idea. We rather think that the sociability of the birds, both with members of their own family and with others, accounts for this belief.—R. T. LITTLEJOHNS and S. A. LAWRENCE. Melbourne, 30/1/19.

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Birds and Drought.—The present disastrous drought, one of the worst experienced in the Upper Hunter River district, is having a curious effect upon the habits of many native birds. Budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), previously very rare visitors, are now with us in thousands, while the White Egret (*Herodias timoriensis*) and Pacific Heron (*Notophox pacifica*), scarcely known before, are plentiful along the river. The large Black Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), usually confined to odd birds, are very numerous, and playing sad havoc with fish. Streams being low and water clear give the Cormorants every opportunity for capturing fish of all sorts. I have lately examined dozens of *P. carbo*, and in every case found fish, chiefly perch and mullet of various sizes, in the birds' stomachs. One partly-digested perch (*Lates colonorum*) weighed $\frac{3}{4}$ lb., while another of the birds disgorged an 18-inch eel. Whatever may be the habits of *P. carbo* in salt water, there is not the slightest doubt that it does an immense amount of harm in inland streams during dry seasons. My most interesting visitor of the drought season was a single specimen of the Red-crowned Fruit-Pigeon (*Ptilinopus swainsoni*); a female was found disabled near the tennis court, having flown into the wire-netting, apparently. The stomach was full of pepper-tree (*Schinus molle*) berries. During the present drought birds practically cleared the orchard of all fruit except grapes, which were protected by paper bags. The Yellow-mantled Rosella (*Platycercus splendidus*) commenced operations on the unripe stone fruit, and, though about 150 of the birds were shot, they fully accounted for apricots, peaches, nectarines, and plums, afterwards finishing off the apples, pears, and quinces. *Myzantha garrula*, *Ptilotis penicillata*, *Zosterops*

caerulescens, and *Corone australis* likewise caused trouble. The imported fox was in evidence, eating water-melons, tomatoes, and any low-hanging fruit; however, a Rosella baited with strychnine was irresistible, and baits of this sort soon accounted for six of the animals. By the way, a Rosella is, in my experience, the most attractive of all baits for foxes. Foxes were the means of Choughs (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) learning another bad habit (they already take toll of newly-sown wheat and ripening maize) by teaching them the value of water-melons as a food in time of scarcity. During the raid of foxes upon our melons, numbers of White-winged Choughs were noticed on the melon patch, but no importance was attached to the fact. After the destruction of the foxes by poison, Choughs were still observed feeding on something, an examination proving that they bored neat holes into the fruit and completely extracted the contents. About the same time they attacked fruit growing on a large mulberry tree near by, and assisted the imported Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in clearing the crop. Overhanging my office is an immense fig-tree of the Purple Turkish variety, said to be nearly 100 years old. It was almost destroyed in 1901 by a gale, but has since re-grown to a height of 30 feet, with a spread of branches 50 feet in diameter, the trunk measuring 10 feet 6 inches in girth at four feet from the ground (see photo.) It bears great crops of most luscious fruit, the season lasting from early in January until April, and is naturally a great attraction for birds. Finding that Starlings were invading the tree in numbers, I determined to try the effect of poison. For the purpose I baited a number of figs, tied them to sticks, and placed same near the top of the tree. The first twenty-four hours gave the following results:—Two possums, three flying foxes, four Magpies, two Peewits (Magpie-Larks), one Harmonious Thrush, five Orioles, several *Ptilotis penicillata* and *Zosterops*, with one Starling. I abandoned the experiment and resorted to the .22 rifle, which gives excellent sport and results.—HENRY L. WHITE. Belltrees, Scone, N.S.W., 11/3/19.

Camera Craft Notes.

The Australian Goshawk (*Astur approximans*).—These fine birds are found all over Australia and Tasmania, as well as in New Caledonia. The young are very differently marked from the adults, and much confusion was caused in originally naming them as a different species. The adult birds have fine pencilled markings across the brown breast, whereas the young have somewhat radiated lines, through each feather being crossed by two bands of dark brown, the lower one having a triangular form. These birds, being swift on the wing, are naturally destructive to bird-life, which they frequently take unawares when swiftly gliding through the timbered country where they are naturally