

As regards the choice of nesting material of a certain tint, I was interested last season in watching a Black-chinned Honey-eater fly down again and again from a tall gum-tree in which it was building and tweak a beakful of hair from the back of a creamy pony. Bay and black horses, also feeding about, the bird passed by, nor have I previously seen a Honey-eater—as this one did—calmly alight on a horse's back, though the Black-and-White Fantail, of course, often does so.

Bird Notes from Prairie Table-land, North Queensland.

BY J. R. CHISHOLM, R.A.O.U., THE PLAINS (Q.)

THE home blackboy had just returned from the horse paddock. "I bin see um 'Awk killen um Turkey," he said. "Well, why didn't you fetch the Turkey?" "I no bin tinkin' about him." Perhaps I should not have blamed him. Through life it is good to have one job at a time. I sent him away, and he soon returned with the Turkey (Wild Bustard), weighing 16 lbs. A hole had been eaten in the flesh of the breast. The Hawk is a little tawny Sparrow-Hawk—I am disposed to believe rather smaller than the Kestrel described by Dr. Leach; at any rate, a diminutive chap, but a born criminal.

Another observation lately is a Jabiru in an out-of-the-way place, inducing the belief that these birds fly as high as the Stork. The bird was at windmill water supply in high, dry table-land country many miles from any surface water, and could only have seen the water in the tank if flying at high altitude. It was a male bird, with brilliant plumage sheen of blue, green, and bronze on its head and neck.

On a sheep station it is difficult to see eye to eye with Mr. Froggatt, who would protect the Crow. And, having fish in my reservoirs, my vision is oblique with those who would protect the Cormorant.

My other note concerns the sense of smell once shown by a Boobook Owl. One of a pair was shot, and carried home in the darkness—a fourth of a mile. The other followed, and came to perch on the verandah rail, calling sadly. My wife was much concerned at what seemed uncanny, and foreboding evil.

Amongst the Birds in Out-back Moree, N.S.W.

BY T. H. CLEE, R.A.O.U., MOREE.

A DELIGHTFUL example of the economic value of our bird friends is under notice just now. A severe drought is with us, and every vestige of edible vegetation is of great value to the grazier, and, through him, directly to the people. Large areas here are quite

denuded. Some holders were lucky enough to get isolated storms and a consequent crop of short grass. Such a place is Kooroogama Station, almost adjoining the township of Moree. Conducting building and water-service operations on different parts of the run, we have a fine opportunity of noticing the birds at work. A few weeks back, fat, egg-laden grasshoppers made their appearance in ever-increasing numbers, and this, of course, is the preliminary to millions of them eating out the vegetation in a face. However, the Straw-necked Ibis appeared, and within a week there were thousands spread across the paddocks like workmen, cleaning up the grasshoppers with great energy, their long, sickle-like bills enabling the birds to pull them out of cracks and hiding-places in a most businesslike way. A few are still engaged cleaning up the stragglers, but, as far as one can see, the job has been completed. We wonder what it would have cost the proprietor to clear 25,000 acres so thoroughly of grasshoppers without destroying a blade of grass, and if the children and townspeople of Moree realized, as the birds flew overhead to their roosting-places at night, the good work they had been engaged in all day? When one thinks of the vast areas all over the continent this bird clears in like manner, we realize the economic asset they are, and an excellent reason for the R.A.O.U. to insist on efficient protection for these and other insectivorous birds throughout the Commonwealth. Can we wonder that the ancient Egyptians protected the Ibis and regarded it as sacred?

The proprietor of this station, Mr. R. A. Read, pays the *employés* a £1 bonus for fox scalps, and as a result this murdering enemy of all our ground birds is kept down, and hundreds of the beautiful and useful little Black-breasted Plover are here nesting and rearing their young. We noted three nests, with four eggs in each, within 150 yards of the shed outbuildings. The male bird disappears during incubation, but the little mother sticks to her job till all are hatched, and in a few hours the little stilted mites toddle away with her. During the last 24 hours of incubation the male is back on guard, and attacks Hawks, Crows, Butcher-Birds, Magpies, or any bird that comes near, with the utmost ferocity, until they are glad to beat a speedy retreat. Under these partial sanctuary conditions hundreds of young have been reared during the last 10 weeks; but on places where the fox is not so vigorously hunted probably not 5 per cent. are reared. The Stone-Plover or Curlew, and the Bustard or Wild Turkey, both vigorous insect-eaters, have almost disappeared from this district since Reynard's advent.

The Starling apparently finds this part suits him. Two years since we saw a small flock here for the first time, very wild and wary, keeping well away from houses. Just now they are nesting in hollow trees all around, and flocks of probably 100 are quite common.

The town of Moree is favoured with an annual visitation of

Friar-Birds, both large and small. Amongst other trees planted in the streets are many Queensland silky oaks (*Grevillea robusta*). Just now they are in full bloom, and a blaze of golden glory, with scores of honeycups, and the Honey-eaters are here in hundreds. The Green-backed Oriole's sweet note and mimicry is heard on all sides; but the Friar-Bird is predominant, and is worth coming some distance to hear. After the early morning meal they devote their whole energies to vigorous song and noisy chatter in all languages. An election conference is quite a mild proceeding to the racket amongst the Leatherheads.

This year, for the first time we know of, the Blue Martins or Wood-Swallows (*Artamus*) are drinking at the nectar cups in the silky oaks. They rise in a cloud from the trees, uttering their single note and sweet call, and, after circling a while, settle again. In previous years these birds frequented the open country, nesting on myall stumps, fence-posts, and any convenient spot at a little height from the ground, but we have not seen a nest this year; probably the drought has interfered with their regular habits.

Your reprint, in the October number of *The Emu*, page 151, of Mr. Taverner's views and the *Canadian Fisherman* on the balance of nature is very interesting, and we should be pleased to read other contributions on the same subject. At present it looks as though judicious thinning of Cormorants as well as foxes is advisable in this country, for it is quite indisputable that both Cormorants and Pelicans are making serious inroads on the nation's fresh-water fish supply.

Variation in the Albatrosses and Petrels.

By LEVERETT MILLS LOOMIS, F.A.O.U., SAN FRANCISCO.

It is part of the work of the systematist to determine the range and character of the variations occurring within the limits of species. That large series are required in these determinations is well illustrated in the Galapagos Albatross (*Diomedea irrorata*). The bill variations of sexually mature individuals of this species are especially notable. Independent of sex, thirty-three breeding birds, taken at the same rookery during the same season, display marked differences in the basal width of the bill and the concavity of the culmen (see Plate LVIII.) The nasal tubes also vary in shape. Even in the same individual the shape of the tubes may be dissimilar. A like discrepancy in the form of the nasal tubes is found among eighty-one specimens of the Black-footed Albatross (*Diomedea nigripes*) obtained on the high sea. So far as ascertained, the bill variations of the Galapagos Albatross, described above, are individual variations, the examples in which they occur being sexually mature. Obviously, it is idle to assume