

the birds nor to rob their nests. When all surface water had about disappeared, towards the end of last summer, many wild birds, particularly grain-eaters, came to drink at a large camp-oven which held water for the fowls, and many of the smaller ones were being drowned in their eagerness to get at the water. Stones were placed in the oven to prevent this, and very soon the birds came in such numbers that three more receptacles for water were put down, each holding three gallons, making four in all, and yet all four had to be replenished two or three times before mid-day every day. The Mulga trees about the house were so crowded with birds, mostly Chestnut-eared Finches (*Taniopygia castaneotis*) and Budgerigars (*Macopsittacus undulatus*), waiting their turn to drink, that no part of the trees could be seen. These two species and the Crested Bronzewing (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) formed the greater number. But for Mr. Osman's humane consideration for these creatures, great numbers must have perished.

Mr. Clive Conrick, of Nappa Merrie station, tells me that four of the extremely rare Spurfex or Night Parrots (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*) were seen on the station early this year—the first noted for many years.

Although rain has fallen over most of this district since April, only in places has it been sufficient to fill dams, and all lakes are still dry. The Darling River is now in flood, and it is expected that the waters will almost reach the level of the last big flood, in 1890, when Boolaboolka Lake, on Tolarno station, a favourite nesting-place for Pelicans, was last filled. When filled this lake holds water for about seven years, and the Pelicans resort to an island in the lake to breed. Since they last nested there the fox has invaded this district, and it remains to be seen whether he will make a difference to the number that nest.

It has been lately quite a usual thing to see numbers of Ravens and Short-billed Crows waiting about the schools for the scraps of food left from the children's lunches.

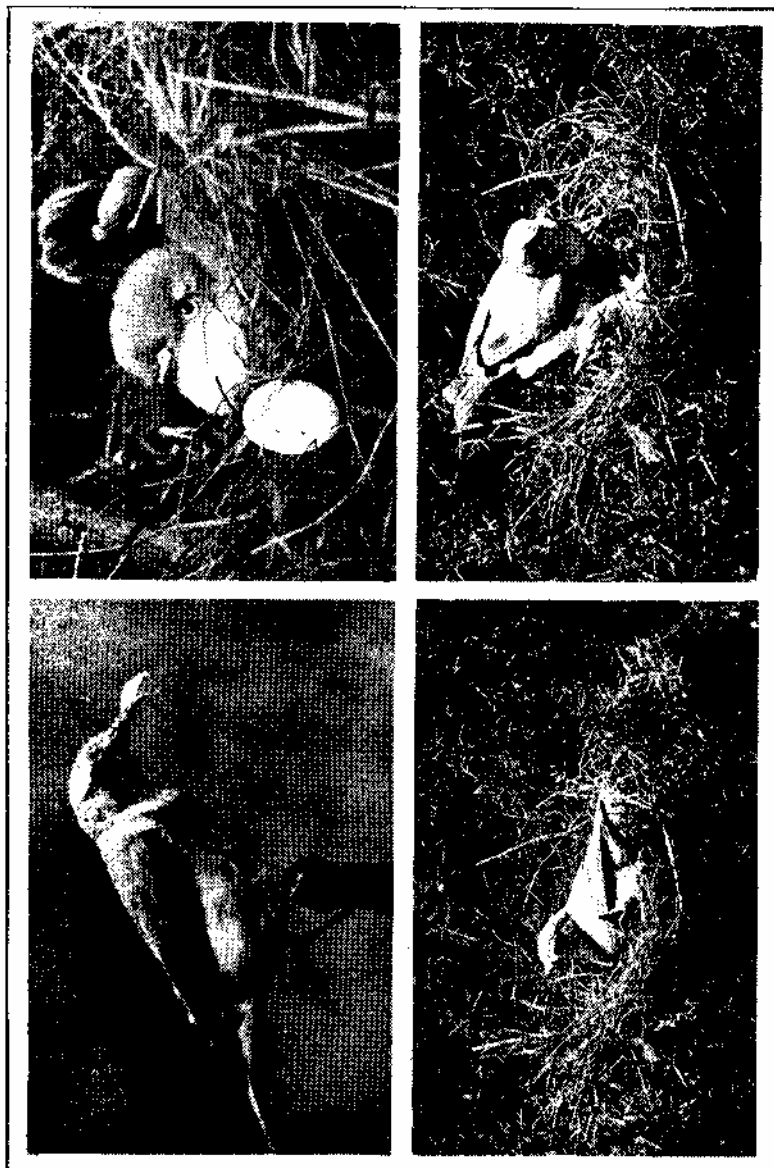
### The White-fronted Chat at Home.

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

DURING the past season I spent a good deal of time in the haunts of the White-fronted Chat (*Ephthianura albifrons*) on the quiet, grassy slopes which border the Yarra near Kew. Here the extensive open paddocks, studded as they are with numerous clumps of reeds, coarse grass, and dense thickets of gorse, form an ideal home for this singular little bird—at once interesting and useful. Apparently the White-fronted Chat is especially partial to that acclimatized pest, the gorse.

Even before reaching the usual nesting-site—a bush in an isolated clump of gorse—the birds would fly out into the open paddocks, uttering their peculiar wheezing note and circling with

PLATE VIII.



Female Chat about the Nest.

1. Female with insect.
2. Young Cockoo and Egg of Chat.
3. Female protecting young from heat.
4. Female removing excreta.

PHOTOS BY D. THOMSON, F.A.C.S.

erratic flight as they escorted me to the clump of gorse in which the nest was hidden, where their alarm was at once manifested. Very often they betrayed their nests by their alarm alone, for they would go through the most amazing antics. Both birds, but more especially the male, simulated injury, and, settling close to me, would ruffle their feathers and flutter along the ground with every manifestation of the most acute injury, seeming as if they had lost their powers of flight. When these attempts to lure me away proved unavailing, they would fly back to some point of vantage, only to recommence their antics, going through them again and again at intervals.

The nest, which is open and cup-shaped, is fairly deep, and is composed chiefly of fine grass-stems woven together and lined with finer grass and horsehair. I do not think that feathers are ever used as a lining material. The nest is usually placed low down, amongst dense herbage. Three eggs form the usual clutch, but I have rarely, if ever, met with more than two well-grown young birds in a nest. The ground colour of the eggs is pure white, spotted (especially around the longer end) with reddish-brown. As the nesting period commences about August or September, several broods may be reared in a season.

As a rule I found the males a little shyer than the females, and more inclined to the simulation of injury mentioned before. Although both birds feed the young, I have never observed the male to take any part in the cleaning of the nest; this was invariably done by the female. The latter, after feeding a nestling, would sit on the side of the nest and pick any excreta from the lining, and would carry it several yards away before dropping it. It has sometimes been my good fortune to watch this and the feeding operations from a position only about 4 or 5 feet from the nest. Most of the accompanying photographs were taken thus. Sometimes while we were observing the male would sit close at hand while the female, with an insect in her beak, would fly from one point to another, as if uncertain whether to feed the young ones or not. The male apparently did not reassure her, for he would constantly utter his wheezing alarm note as she approached, perhaps varying this programme with his acrobatic simulations, till finally the female overcame her fears.

One very hot day in December there were two fully-fledged young birds in a nest. The old birds would attempt to call them away from the glowing eye of the camera until I was tired of replacing one of them in the nest. The other bird, exposed to the sun, felt the heat intensely, and the female, although she too felt it acutely—her beak was gaping wide open, and although, on the previous day, she had been very shy—came to the nest and brooded over the young bird. I was able to remain within a few feet, and neither my presence nor the rattling of the shutter seemed to frighten her, although the changing of the slides would cause her to leave the nest for a few seconds.

The White-fronted Chat is a favourite foster-parent of the

Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcococcyx basalis*). On one occasion last season I came upon two nests on a hill, in adjacent clumps of gorse, one of which contained a Cuckoo's egg and two of the Chat's, while in the other was a well-grown Cuckoo nestling, probably of the same species. This youngster, when hungry (and this is a chronic state with young Cuckoos), kept up the monotonous whining cry which is so well known in the bush. No matter how much food the two birds brought, or how long they worked, he was always ready for more, and still more, which disappeared with alarming rapidity down that cavernous yellow throat. What an amount of insect-life must be devoured by one young Cuckoo in a single day! One of the accompanying photographs shows this young Cuckoo in the nest, with an egg of the foster-parent in the foreground. This egg had evidently been ejected by the young Cuckoo.

When nesting duties are over the White-fronted Chats associate together in small flocks or family parties, which roam the open paddocks in search of insect-life, of which they must in the year destroy an incredible amount. Thus passes a year in the life of one of our most useful birds—so familiar, yet so little known.

### New Species of Australian Birds Since the Time of John Gould.

BY GREGORY M. MATHEWS, F.R.S.E.

THE following is of interest as showing the advance in Australian ornithology this century. From Gould's time to the end of 1899, 22 species had been added to the Australian list (see *Austral Avian Record*, vol. iii., pp. 74-77).

The following species had been added to the Australian list from Gould's time to the end of 1899:—*Corvus cecile* (Mathews), Sharpe, "Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.," vol. iii., p. 38 (1877); *Prionodura newtoniana* (De Vis) (1883); *Bowyerea boweri* (Ramsay) (1885); *Orphryzone lorealis* (De Vis), *Sacramela heartlandi* (North) (1895); *Leucotreron alligator* (Collett), *Petrophassa rufipennis* (Collett) (1898); *Oreoscopus gutturalis* (De Vis) (1890).

Of regular Australian visitors or sub-species of extra-limital species we have:—*Mattingleya griseiceps* (Gray), Ramsay, *Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond.*, p. 604, as *Eopsaltria inornata* (1874); *Leptophaethon lepturus* (Daudin), Ramsay, *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, vol. ii., p. 203 (1878); *Stercorarius parasiticus* (Linné), Campbell, "Nests and Eggs Australian Birds," p. 65 (1883); *Virago gibberifrons* (Müller), Ramsay, "Tab. List Austral. Birds," p. 22 (1888); *Lamprococcyx lucidus* (Gmelin), Shelly, "Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.," vol. xix., p. 296, *Chlidonias leucoptera* (Temminck), Saunders, *ib.*, vol. xxv., p. 10, *Reinholdia reinholdia* (Mathews), Salvin, *ib.*, p. 381, as *Puffinus gavia*, *Neonectris griseus* (Gmelin), Salvin, *ib.*, *Rhyacophilus glareola* (Linné), Sharp, *ib.*, vol. xxiv., p. 499