

Stray Feathers

Effects of a Mild Winter.—The winter having been so mild in Victoria, birds have been nesting unusually early. I saw a fully fledged White-plumed Honey-eater (*Ptilotis pencillata*) in July, as one case in point. Then again at Kooweerup, where the country is rough and mostly lightly timbered, except for patches of swamp ti-tree, I found very early this season three nests of the Yellow-breasted Shrike-Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*); one had three eggs in, but one of these was taken, and the birds promptly disturbed the nest. I have noticed the same thing occur before. Magpie-Larks (*Grallina cyanoleuca*) nested freely in the pines. They seem to prefer these trees to the eucalyptus; possibly their mud nest has a better hold. Many Magpies (*Gymnorhina leuconota*) were nesting, but usually in eucalypts or blackwood trees, and I noticed one nest of the Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*) with three eggs in, and also not far off a pair of Kestrels (*Cerchneis cenchroides*) built their nest in a eucalyptus tree, but the other birds did not seem to be very scared of them. Their food is, I think, largely insectivorous. Possibly other members have also noticed early nesting this season, and probably many birds will rear two or three clutches this year. We saw a Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*) catch and kill a rabbit. It caught it by the head with its talons and carried it off.—J. CECIL LE SOUEF, R.A.O.U., Parkville.

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The Red-Eyed Bul-Bul.—Mr. Wolstenholme's note on this bird (*Otocornis jocosus*—Linn.) in the July issue of *The Emu*, following that by Mr. W. H. D. Le Souef in the issue of April, 1918, have prompted me to make some observations on the occurrence of this bird about Sydney. Its natural habitat is Northern India, Burma, South China, Andaman Islands, and the Malay Peninsula. In size it is somewhat smaller than our Crested Bell-Bird, for which I mistook it on the first fleeting glimpses, before the conspicuous red markings were noticed. The beak, forehead, crown, crest, nape and sides of chest are black, and a black line occurs below the cheek. The chin, throat, cheek and centre of the chest are white, as are the tips of the tail feathers beneath. A white feather also appears at the position of the bastard wing. The under tail coverts are bright red, and a patch of similar colour appears below the eye. The rest of the plumage is, roughly, brown above and grey beneath. The crest is a conspicuous feature, standing well up from the forehead and crown, the centre feathers being erect, while the anterior contour is concave. Often the crest appears bifid. I first noticed this bird in my garden at Double Bay, Sydney, in October, 1917, and observed it there constantly until my de-

parture in July, 1918. On one occasion I asked Messrs. W. D. H. and A. S. Le Souef to come out and observe it, but, unfortunately the day was windy and the birds were not visible. I regularly saw and heard this bird about Double Day, Edgecliffe and Darling Point, and have subsequently heard it at Rushcutters' Bay. Mr. A. S. Le Souef informed me that it frequented the Sydney Botanic Gardens, and I have heard but not seen it there. It has since been added to the collection at Taronga Zoological Park. In habit the bird is very restless, constantly moving or flying rapidly from place to place. At the same time it was not very shy or timid, and disported itself on the shrubs and trees close to the roadside, in full view of the passers-by. Building operations in an adjacent garden did not frighten it away. The birds were often seen on telephone wires or on the tops of tall trees, but also on the roses feeding on Aphides. They frequently drank from and bathed in a large earthenware saucer placed on my lawn for the use of birds. The posture adopted on perching is very erect. I mostly saw or heard this bird about daybreak or from 9 to 10 a.m., or in the late afternoon. The flight is rapid and straight, or somewhat undulating. The voice is clear, ringing and musical or softer and lower, as if the bird were chattering plaintively to itself. When uttered only a few yards away it often sounded far distant. Sometimes the direction of the sound could not be located, and the bird seemed to possess "ventriloquial" powers. The loud notes might be roughly likened to "Pretty creatures" or "Sweet creatures." I found no nests. How many individuals there were I could not state. I have seen two at the one time on a Robinia tree in our garden.

(Dr.) JOHN MACPHERSON, Sydney.

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Lyre-Birds and Lyra.—When writing in *The Emu* (vol. xx., p. 222) concerning Prince Edward's Lyre-Bird (*Menura edwardi*), I remarked that the first intimation of the presence of a *Menura* in the granite belt of Queensland-New South Wales came from a lad living at the small township of Lyra, and that he had remarked that the place received its name from the bird. This was an erroneous assumption, but its appearance in print has served the useful purpose of discovering the real origin of the name in question. The information came from Mr. R. Hoggan, a veteran resident of Lyra, who stated that Lyre-Birds are still to be found in the locality, but they had nothing to do with the name of the town. The place, he says, was formerly known as Accommodation Creek. This mouth-filling name did not strike him as being fair to bushmen; accordingly, early in the nineties, he called on the then Commissioner of Railways (Mr. Gray) to seek a change. Together they looked through a small dictionary of aboriginal words, and discovered that the native name for creek was "lira." "Well," said Mr. Hoggan, with a sense of poetic fitness, "why not spell it 'lyra'?" The

Commissioner agreed, and so Lyra is on the map of Queensland to-day. That Lyre-Birds should be in the district is apparently merely a pretty coincidence. — A. H. CHISHOLM, R.A.O.U., Brisbane. 1/8/21.

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Stray Feathers from The Steppes (Tas.).—This district is situated some 3000 feet high in our Central Highlands, being on the road to the Great Lake from Bothwell. In common with the rest of Tasmania, this winter is notable for the heavy fall of snow which occurred during the first week of August. Here, at the Steppes, the snow kept on falling, day after day, till all the fences were covered. Icicles, five feet long, hung from the eaves of the dwellings, whilst a cold wind moaned through the trees.

In circumstances like these, one wonders how the birds fare, so these few notes from my correspondent at the Highlands may prove of interest. She says: "Such numbers of birds come to us to be fed. The Black Magpies (*Strepera fuliginosa*) have been coming for food for some years, but this winter we have had a flock of seventy (counted). Besides these, there are five ordinary magpies (*Gymnorhina leuconota*), and one Black Jay (*S. arguta*), the only one of its kind that ever makes friends with us. These will all eat almost anything. We generally give them meat, apple peelings and bread. They are fond of milk too.

Between twenty and thirty Noisy Miners (*Myzantha garrula*) make this their home, and are regaled with sugar and crumbs. Seven Rosellas (*Platycercus eximius*), and a number of the Green Parrots (*P. caledonicus*) pick up oats and walk round the cows' feed boxes on the look out for dropped grain. They spend much of their time in the willows, whose tiny buds they eat.

Numbers of Wrens (*Malurus longicaudus*) and Tits (*Acanthiza diemenensis*) haunt the verandah and enjoy their meal of crumbs. The above birds come regularly for their meals. The Black Magpies are very quick at catching anything thrown to them. I saw one the other day fly away with a whole apple held by both its claws. Six Spurwing Plovers do not come for meals, but they spend their time with the fowls, and are not in the least afraid of us. It is strange to see them trotting about with the hens. I had almost forgotten the Grey Butcher-Birds (*Cracticus cinereus*). They prefer meat.

This fall of snow has taken a heavy toll of the birds, and many of all sorts have been picked up dead in the snow. We generally have a great many Bald Coots (*Porphyrio melanotus*), but they left when the lagoon dried in the drought last summer, and have not come back. I hope they do. The lagoon is very lake-like now, and many ducks are about it.

Later on in the year, I hope to spend a few weeks with my friends at The Steppes, and look forward to making some interesting observations. — (Miss) J. A. FLETCHER, R.A.O.U., Woodbridge, S. Tasmania.

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Old Sydney Bird Notes.—The following items of interest to ornithologists were forwarded to me by Mr. H. Selkirk, of the Department of Lands, Sydney, and are very old "stray feathers":—

"A neat aviary is building by the Surveyor-General, Major Mitchell, at his new residence on the Woolloomooloo Hill for the purpose of domesticating a number of Australian birds. This is the first erection of the kind in the colony." *The Sydney Herald*, 18th April, 1831.

The "major" was doubtless he from whom the cockatoo derived his vernacular name.

Another item:—

"The species of owl peculiar to this island, vulgarly known by the name "Mope-hawk," is held in high veneration by the blacks. When it is heard near their encampments at night, they put various questions to it, and interpret the notes which it utters in reply as a sort of augury of their future fate."—(Extract from the *Sydney Gazette*, 9th April, 1829; reprinted from the *Hobart Town Courier*).—F. A. D'OMBRAIN, Sydney. 7/9/21.

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The John Burroughs Memorial Association is making the first appeal for contributions for the fund with which to purchase Riverby, the Bark Study, Woodchuck Lodge and Memorial Field, and to provide for their maintenance and that of Slab-sides, the plan for which is set forth in an accompanying circular. It is not believed there is any need of urging the value of this plan to acquire and preserve the homes and haunts and the final resting place of the poet-naturalist. Indeed, we should do him scant honour were we to urge contributions.

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Black-breasted Plover and Young.—A few days ago I had occasion to be in one of my back paddocks shortly after sunrise, the scene being an open grassy flat devoid of timber. In the middle of this I suddenly noticed a Black-breasted Plover to all appearances attacking four young Plovers not yet able to fly. This bird, uttering the usual Plover warlike cry, would swoop first at one youngster and then at another. These would duck, and sometimes squat for two or three seconds before moving on. The old bird seemed very cross, and kept them travelling in one direction all the time. A hundred yards away from where I had seen them first were some very thick rushes.

As soon as the young birds reached this spot the old roover flew away, and did not chase them again. Evidently it was one of the parents driving the young to a place where they could hide from enemies.—BRUCE W. LEAKE, R.A.O.U., Cardonia, Woolundra, W.A. 5/9/21.

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A "South-coastal Selborne."—*The Emu*, July, 1921. In my list of birds found in a very limited area on the far South Coast of New South Wales, I inadvertently omitted the White-naped Honeyeater, or "Blackcap" (*Melithreptus atricapillus*), and the White-shafted Fantail (*Rhipidura albiscapa*), both very common, also the Friar Bird (*Tropidorhynchus corniculatus*), seen occasionally, but commoner further inland. The White-shafted Fantail, by the way, occasionally lays again in the same nest after being robbed of its first clutch of eggs, which few birds do. The addition of these three birds brings the total number of species observed in the above-mentioned quarter to 165.—H. V. EDWARDS, Bega, N.S.W.

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New Zealand Birds in Captivity.—I lately obtained from New Zealand two Paradise drakes and one duck and four wekas, which soon made themselves at home in my three-acre zoo, as I call it. The Paradise Ducks are evidently a Sheldrake, and very like our Mountain Duck in shape, colouring and note, except the female, which has a white head. One of the wekas, has made a nest, and I am hoping that she will lay. My pair of Black Swans (I hope they are a pair) have made a nest, and so far laid four eggs in five days. I am hoping they will be fertile, and that she will hatch them out safely.

ERNEST G. AUSTIN, R.A.O.U., "Borriyalloak," Skipton.

Library Notes

By F. ERASMUS WILSON, R.A.O.U., Hon. Librarian.

Owing to lack of space, library notes were not published in the last two or three issues of *The Emu*. Since the last notes were given, the following publications have been received:—

The Victorian Naturalist, vol. xxxvii., parts 4 to 12; vol. xxxviii., parts 1, 3-5.

Science and Industry, vol. ii., parts 1 to 12.

The Australian Naturalist, vol. iv., part 11.

The Ibis, vol. ii., 11th series, parts 3, 4; Vol. iii., 11th series, parts 1-3.

Bird Lore, vol. xxii., parts 2-6, vol. xxiii., parts 1-3.

The Avicultural Magazine, vol. xi., parts 3, 5-12; vol. xii., parts 1-6.