

## Stray Feathers

**Bird Territories.**—In *The Emu* for April, 1922 (vol. xxi., part 4, pages 258-9, Mr. Charles Barrett states that, in studying the Warblers, Eliot Howard "became aware of the fact that each male isolates itself at the commencement of the breeding season, and exercises dominion over a restricted area of ground." "Here" Mr. Barrett interpolates, "is an untilled field for Australian observers." Also, quoting again from Eliot Howard, "Often enough the males fight after they have mated, or a male with a nest building may attack an unmated bird which ventures into his territory. The evidence in support of the theory of territory in bird life is lucidly discussed in Eliot Howard's work."

I dealt with the subject of bird territories in the story of the Blue Wren, or Superb Warbler, in my book, "Friends and Foes in the Australian Bush," published in London and Australia by Messrs. Whitcombe and Tombs in 1914. The story was first published in *The Sydney Mail* in 1911, and reappears in "Spotty the Bower Bird" published last year. I have not seen Eliot Howard's book, but believe that it was published only recently.

When following this matter, many years ago, I found that even Crows hunted over restricted areas. One marked bird I had under observation in the north-west corner of New South Wales led to the discovery of a roosting tree. The marked Crow was always with one small company, and that company roosted every night in one particular tree, though there were hundreds of similar trees about. The birds hunted over miles of country

through the day, but always made home at night. Some of the members at times did not reach the roost tree till a good while after nightfall. The benighted ones called frequently on their homeward flight, and were answered by those that were already home. Other birds have special roost trees as well as Crows.

Every squattage homestead in the back country has its own flock of Crows. Individual members sometimes become so well known to stockmen that they are known as Joe and Jerry, and so on. I have often seen a small company, or a couple, chasing another Crow through the air, evidently an intruder. But when a dead beast was discovered, Crows were called to the feast from every point of the compass. When the banquet was over, generally about sunset, each group departed the way it came. Some of these groups, after a late meal, travelled twenty miles or more to their home camp. In the open western regions, where their flight can be followed for miles, and many camping places are known, their movements are easily noted.—E. S. SORENSON, R.A.O.U., 104 Sydenham Road, Marrickville, N.S.W.

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**Owl Calls.**—While reading lately an anonymous article in an English journal on "Spring's First Footfall," I was interested in this part: "The sibilant note of the Barn-Owl, the sad cry of the Wood-Owl, the *cat-call* of the Little Owl," because our small Spotted Owl of Tasmania has at times, when excited, a note just like the mewling of a cat. Are these "cat-calls" characteristic of the small Owls all the world over? The Spotted Owl (*Ninox novæ-zealandiæ*) is fairly plentiful in my locality, which is well-timbered, and I often hear him at night through the open window; he frequently announces his approach by a series of calls, "Ohhh! Ohhh! Ohhh! Ohhh!" like a person much surprised or shocked. One summer night a pair came into a gum just back of the cottage, and apparently sat close together on one of the branches. He called, "More-pork" rapidly about sixty times in succession, but in a somewhat subdued tone, while she kept up a sort of droning accompaniment. This little insight into Owl courtship was rather entertaining, although too brief. Not long ago I saw it stated in an Australian paper that no bird calls "Morepork!" but that the call should be represented as "Morepoke!" or "Boobook!" This is a mistake as far as our island is concerned, for the Spotted Owl says "Morepork!" as plainly as a human being could pronounce the words.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U., Tasmania.

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**The Birds and the Crops.**—A Story of the Egret in Egypt.—Did you ever hear the story of how Major S. S. Flower, director of the Egyptian Zoological Service, saved the beautiful

Egret from Extinction in Egypt? "In 1911, when the last little colony of Egrets was in danger of being wiped out by plume hunters, guards were placed around the one last nesting-place, and Major Flower organised a great series of village meetings, where the following lesson was well rubbed in: 'Egrets kill the cotton worm that ruins your crops. The plume hunters kill the Egret for gain and take the money out of the country. See to it.' The appeal succeeded.

"From a few captive Egrets in the Zoological Gardens fifteen Egrets were hatched in 1913. Major Flower estimates that these fifteen have now 5000 living descendants, and the fifteen ancestor birds are still alive and breeding. The one protected colony has grown to 200,000, and the birds have gone back to the old nesting-places from which the plume hunters exterminated their forebears. The most wonderful part is this: The 200,000 birds have saved the Egyptian cultivators £2,000,000 in the past season alone by keeping down the cotton worm. Major Flower pointed out that it would seem as if each bird were worth £10 a year to Egypt. They work across a field hunting down the pest."

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**Is Albinoism Connected with Sex Characteristic?**—A specimen of the Small Yellow-tailed Tit-Warbler (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) was recently obtained by me at Parwan, Victoria. Its plumage first attracted attention when the bird was seen feeding on insects on the ground with several other members of its own species. Its coloration indicated that its plumage was metamorphosing to a phase of albinoism. When dissected, two experts were unable after minute examination to sex the bird. It would be interesting to know whether there is anything abnormal with the sex organs in cases of albinoism in birds to prove whether this alteration in the colour of the plumage is a perverted sex characteristic, and that nature hoists the danger signal in the altered coloration of the plumage.—A. H. E. MATTINGLEY, C.M.Z.S., Melbourne.

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**Birds Seen on the Sydney-Melbourne Train Route.**—Having had the opportunity of travelling this route fairly often, I think that there has been, during the last year or so, a very distinct increase of the birds seen from the train. In one hour's run on the southern side of Goulburn, I noted the following species from one side of the train only, covering about 35 miles of country:—Magpies were particularly numerous, and well distributed right along the line between the two capitals. White-fronted Heron (*Notophox nova-hollandia*) (9); Nankeen Kestrel (*Cerchneis cenchroides*) (5); Rose-breasted Cockatoo (*Cacatua roseicapilla*) (This species was fairly numerous fur-

ther south; they appeared to be feeding on the ground, and small flocks were often disturbed by the train); Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*) (21); Red-backed Parrot (*Psephotus haematonotus*) (55); Laughing Kingfisher (*Dacelo gigas*) (11); Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*) (8); White-winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) (10; isolated flock, only ones noted on journey); Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) (31).—A. S. LEE SOEUF, C.M.Z.S., R.A.O.U., Taronga Park, Sydney.

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**Mantis and Young Birds.**—The following remarkable story was told me quite recently by a man in whose testimony I can place every reliance.

A pair of (what I take to be by his description) Yellow-rumped Tits (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) had built a nest in a vine growing round the verandah of his house, on the Barwon River.

The distressed state of the birds attracted his attention one morning, and looking into the vine he saw a large mantis with a tiny naked bird securely grasped in its spiked arms and apparently eating at its head. Thinking the occurrence most unusual, and needing a second witness to the act, he jumped on his horse and rode after a friend who had just left. Together they came back and made further investigation. The mantis had gone, but had dropped its prey, which they found lying under the bush with three other tiny birds, each one of which had a tiny round hole in the top of its head and all the brains extracted therefrom.—F. C. MORSE, Moree.

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**Mortality amongst Swallows.**—During the heavy storm of wind and rain in December last, about 30 Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) that usually frequent the homestead all perished. Dr. Bradby and myself brought six into the house and tried to bring them round by warmth and food, but they would not eat by hand, and all died. They had not a particle of food in the stomach when opened, and evidently died of starvation through there being no insects on the wing owing to the very wet and cold weather with gales of wind. Great numbers of these lovely little birds must perish in heavy, wet and cold weather during the summer months.—J. F. H. GOCERLEY, R.A.O.U., Ellerslie, Wallis Lake, N.S.W.

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**Nesting of Grey Duck.**—Herewith you will find two photographs of a white pine (*Podocarpus dacrydioides*), in which, evidently, a Grey Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) built its nest at a

height of not less than forty-five feet from the ground. At about 6 a.m. on November 20th, 1921, I noticed a Duck fly from the tree in question, and upon proceeding towards it perceived some object fall from the tree. It was a duckling, but recently hatched. Six more followed; one in falling struck a branch, but reached the ground unhurt. It was really amusing to see them tumble down, one after the other, and then after a few seconds commence a "queek, queek, queek." I caught them and placed them in my hat, and after admiring the pretty creatures, liberated them. They were soon led off safely by the female, which flew around the whole time. I watched this interesting scene in a good-sized patch of bush, not far from the Ruamahunga River, Te Whiti, near Masterton.—R.H.D. STIDOLPH, R.A.O.U., Masterton, N.Z.

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**A Strange Nesting-place.**—Bird lore is full of stories of strange nesting-places, but perhaps the most singular is that chosen by two sparrows who reside, apparently, somewhere near the Ashburton, N. Z., railway station (says the "Guardian"). They have selected the ventilator of the guard's van used on the Mount Somers train, and there they have built their nest, laid the eggs, and hatched their young. As the van goes with the Mount Somers train to Springburn (a distance of about 30 miles) every evening and returns every morning, it is something in the nature of a puzzle how the fledgelings were hatched. Possibly the mother travelled with the eggs. At the moment, the guard says, the youngsters are very well voiced, and make a chatter on the journey to Ashburton each morning but are quiet at night. Full crops is his explanation of the peace at eventide, and hence he deduces that the parents' permanent place of residence is at Ashburton, N.Z.—R.H.D. STIDOLPH, R.A.O.U., Masterton, N.Z.

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**The Red-crowned Pigeon in Tasmania.**—On May 15th, 1922, a specimen of the Red-crowned Pigeon (*Ptilinopus regina*) was received at the Tasmanian Museum. As far as we are aware there is no previous record of its occurrence in Tasmania, and it would at first appear as if it was an escapee. It must be remembered, however, that the Purple-crowned Pigeon (*Ptilinopus superba*) appears as an "accidental" on the Tasmanian avifaunal list, and the Top-knot Pigeon (*Lopholaimus antarcticus*) as a "casual." Certain storms may cause these forms to be blown far from their natural geographical habitat, and a percentage of such may reach Tasmania. Unfortunately, the particular specimen which was forwarded to the Museum had been considerably damaged when it was shot and some days elapsed before it was

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received in Hobart. It was not possible to make a skin, but, in view of the interest attached to the specimen, it was preserved in spirit. The bird was shot at Bothwell by Mr. H. C. Slater, and it is due to the interest shown by Mr. B. H. Edgell, of "Dennistoun," Bothwell, that the specimen was forwarded to the Museum. Particular attention was paid to the specimen in order to trace any signs of captivity, but none could be observed. It would therefore appear as if the bird was a true "accidental" and worthy of a place as such on the Tasmanian avifaunal list.—CLIVE LORD, F.L.S., R.A.O.U., and J. ARNOLD (The Tasmanian Museum, Hobart).

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**Late Swallows.**—On Empire Day, when about two miles east of Latrobe, which township is six miles or so inland from Devonport, I noticed with some surprise two pairs of Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neorena*), sitting on the overhead wires by the roadside, evidently enjoying the genial sunshine of the late autumn. As all the Swallows had left Devonport seven weeks before for the mainland, it was an unexpected pleasure to find these still making themselves at home in our island, and probably intending to winter with us. The spot where they were seen was close to the Mersey River, and adjacent to large patches of scrub and gum-saplings, so that it was sheltered and warm. Not far away are the old shale-oil works, with sheds and retorts still *in situ*. It is quite probable that the birds roost under some of these, in the same way that a pair or two of the Welcome Swallows roosted in crevices of an old stone-quarry at Launceston for several winters, and probably do so still, coming out on sunny days to catch flies under the shop verandahs. —H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., R.A.O.U., W. Devonport, Tasmania. 8/6/1922.

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