

## The Rare Black-Breasted Quail.

BY C. H. H. JERRARD, R.A.O.U., Gayndah, Queensland.

IN *The Emu* for October, 1925, I was able to report the discovery of this nearly extinct species (*Turnix melanogaster*) in one of the "scrubs" here, during the winter of 1924. My next observation was made on 13th June, 1925, when, at nearly the same time of the year, and at exactly the same spot in the scrub, I again saw two of these Quails. They were running from me and I could not see their breast-markings clearly, but I believe they were males.

From that date to the time of writing this note, two or three of these shy jungle-dwellers have inhabited a small space of a few acres in an extensive softwood and vine scrub, being discoverable there by patient search at almost any time. The dense undergrowth and prickly-pear, however, make observation of such timid birds very difficult. More than once I have tracked them closely by their low, booming calls for an hour or two, without catching sight of them. On July 26th, however, I had a good view of a female scratching in characteristic manner, *i.e.*, turning as she worked, so as to leave a slight, saucer-like depression about a span in diameter. These little shallow pits, which thickly dot their feeding-ground, are good signs to look for when one is after the birds. On Nov. 19th I noticed them at a second place, deep in the scrub but more than a mile from the other habitat. At the same time I heard one or more of the birds calling, but could not see them.

The latter observation points to the existence of a second community of the same species, though of course the possibility of their wandering from place to place must be admitted. This is less likely, however, as they seem to me to have a very restricted habitat. Even when pursued they will not leave their little preserve, but double back and forth over it.

This Quail hardly ever flies. It will run a few yards ahead of you, carefully keeping out of sight. Only once have I flushed one. That was at nightfall, when the bird was probably "camped." It rose suddenly just in front of me and flew only a few yards. When I followed it made another short flight. This use of its wings may have been due to the confusion and semi-darkness. An inference worth noting is that they spend the night in the scrub at the place where they feed in the daytime.

Needless to say, I was keen to find a nest or other evidence of breeding, but up to the end of the year nothing of the kind was noticed. Considering the thoroughness of my search, I think it improbable that breeding took place, at least in the area under observation. The bevy of females which I saw on 10/7/24 has apparently dispersed, for I have seen only one black-breasted bird this season.

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Bearing on the foregoing subject, Mr. D. W. Gaukrodger, R.A.O.U., writes as follows in the *Brisbane Daily Mail* of 16th January, 1926 :—

" Much interest has of late been taken by Queensland ornithologists in a recent discovery by Mr. Jerrard, of Gayndah, of the appearance of the Black-breasted Quail, which it was feared had become totally extinct. The last previous official record seems to have been made by Messrs. Barnard Bros., to the effect that these birds disappeared, and have not since been seen at Coomooboolaroo station (central district of Queensland) for 25 years. Whilst 'talking birds' to Mr. Hall (manager of Barambah station), he said definitely that this particular species of Quail still existed more numerous than Mr. Jerrard's 'bevy of three or four' indicated, and related that there is strong evidence that they are still breeding at the sources of the Brisbane, Burnett and Mary Rivers, about 75 miles south-east from where Mr. Jerrard observed them. Mr. Hall says they are essentially a scrub Quail, and he knows of one particular breeding-ground on Manumbar station. Messrs. Jerrard and Hall are both bird-men, qualified and reliable in their observations, and there is little danger of their making any mistakes in these instances, and so one begins to wonder whether there are not more of our so-called extinct birds still in existence if the many remote districts of the State were examined by similar careful observers."

Supporting Mr. Gaukrodger's note, Mr. J. O'Neil Brennan, R.A.O.U., writes :—The only time I saw the Black-breasted Quail was in a scrub on the side of a ridge at Moggill, near Brisbane. It was a very long time ago. I was looking for Top-knot Pigeons when I came across three of them. My gun was loaded with large shot, which would have smashed them to pieces, and so I did not fire. The three birds kept quite close together as they ran, and of course disappeared quickly in the dense scrub. About 27 years ago the late Messrs A. MacDowall and Henry Donkin told me that there was a Quail with a light-coloured eye in Beard's bird shop, Brisbane, that they did not know. I went to Beard's and found it was a Black-breasted Quail. Where it came from I do not know, and I have not seen one since. Previous to that, a bird-catcher, named Francis, more than once brought one or two in. They were well known to all the scrub shooters of that time, but always considered rare birds. A friend of mine had one mounted sitting on her clutch of eggs. She was shot in one of the scrubs about Moggill.

**Strange Nesting-site.**—Kookaburras (*Dacelo gigas*) have made themselves quite at home in our suburban gardens, and many are fed regularly by householders. A pair in the vicinity of Mosman come every afternoon about five o'clock, and make a good meal of about half a pound of beef. Sometimes a pair of Butcher-birds put in an appearance as well, and these are very clever at catching bits of meat thrown in the air. Last spring a pair of Kookaburras took possession of one section of a pigeon loft in Mr. A. Waddell's garden at Edgecliffe. Two eggs were laid and one fine youngster hatched and reared. The birds were remarkably tame and showed no resentment if the baby was handled.—A. S. LE SOUEF, Taronga Park, Sydney.