

Stray Feathers.

Nesting of the Chestnut-eared Finch.—I found a rather unusual nesting site for a Chestnut-eared Finch (*Taeniopygia castanotis*). It was in a hollow fencing post; the nest was situated about 10 inches down the hollow, and had three fresh eggs in it. This is very late for this bird to be laying (10th March).

Stubble-Quail are breeding in this district. I have seen both eggs and chicks, but considering the abundance of feed it is rather surprising the small number of birds one sees.—N. GEARY, Mount Pleasant, Dalby, Queensland (10/3/27).

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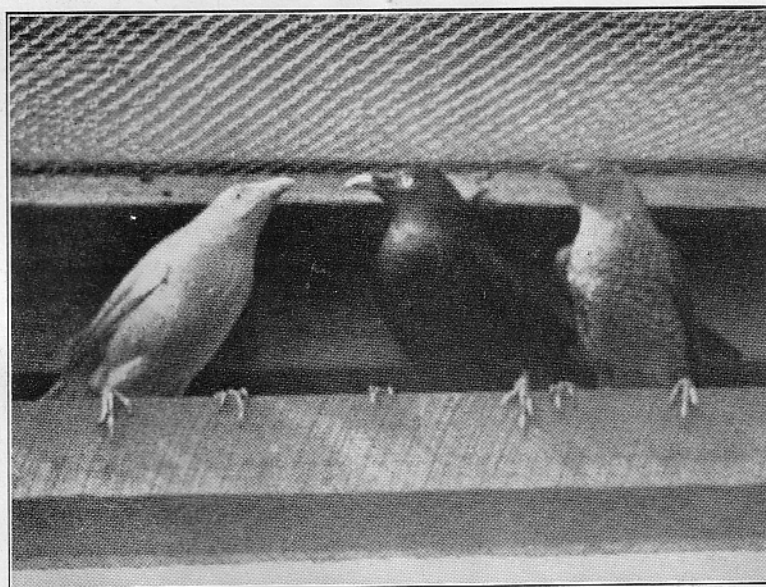
A Spotted Owl's Rapacity.—In July of 1926 our attention was claimed by a great commotion among birds in a large box tree, situated in a clump of timber near our house. Upon investigation it was seen that a large and ferocious-looking bird was the cause of the excitement. At the foot of the tree sat an old Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) in a very bedraggled condition. Having examined him I saw that he was seriously injured, so much so that he could breathe only with difficulty. The other bird was shot; it proved to be a Spotted Owl (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*). In his beak and talons were grasped feathers from the body of the unfortunate Frogmouth. He had evidently assaulted this harmless old bird, which I think was one of a pair that used a tree nearby to sit in throughout the day. I took the Frogmouth home and endeavoured to fix him up a bit, but he died the same day. One would expect the Spotted Owl to confine his operations to lizards, mice, etc.—ERIC H. LOHSE, Tarban, via Wallangarra, N.S.W. (4/3/27).

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A Bush Humorist.—The note regarding the White-throated Nightjar (*Eurostopodus mystacalis*) on p. 190 of the current *Emu* (Vol. XXVI., p. 190) interested me, for the following reason. Some years ago, when in east Gippsland, I stayed part of the time with people whose clearing was situated on the verge of a tract of forest country, and at night a series of light, laughing notes would sometimes be heard from the trees of this tract. No one about there seemed to know from what animal the sound proceeded, and on moonlight nights I used to go down into the bush to try to solve the problem. But the laughter had either the ventriloquial power highly developed, or was able to slip very rapidly and noiselessly from place to place, for no sooner was I under the tree from which the notes had proceeded, than they ceased there and were heard from another fifteen or twenty yards away, and when I arrived there the sound would come from the head of a third tree. Though never able to catch sight of the producer, I put it down, from the character



WHITE-CHEEKED HONEYEATER AND YOUNG. "A NOISY AND BRIGHTLY-PLUMAGED BIRD."
Photo. by H. C. Barry.



LEFT TO RIGHT : (1) ALBINO MALE SATIN BOWER-BIRD ; (2) NORMAL MALE ; (3) FEMALE. ALL IN THE AVIARY OF MR. MAURICE BALDWIN, BRISBANE. (See ante, p. 228).

Photo. by courtesy Brisbane *Daily Mail*.

of the notes, as either a Nightjar or an unlisted Owl, allied to the now-extinct Laughing Owl of New Zealand. In the books which I have consulted there is no reference to this remarkable "laugh," but the *Emu* editorial footnote to the effect that "the call of this fine Nightjar is singularly animated; it is sometimes called the Laughing Owl," at once removes the doubt. As to the note of another of the family, the Spotted Nightjar (*E. argus*), Mr. A. J. Campbell in his *Nest and Eggs* quotes G. A. Keartland that the call is "Caw-caw-caw, gobble-gobble-gobble," and Le Souef gives the call of the Large-tailed Nightjar (*Caprimulgus macrurus*) as "chop-chop." It is very remarkable that we have none of the family in Tasmania, where they would do so well.—H. STUART DOVE, West Devonport, Tasmania (28/2/27).

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How Cuckoos Operate.—Anything noted at first-hand regarding the manner in which Cuckoos foist their eggs upon other birds is of some importance. That is why I have been greatly interested in letters on the subject sent to me by youthful readers of *The Boys' Weekly* (Sydney). The lads were not asked especially to deal with Cuckoos; they were merely invited (all over the Commonwealth) to forward good Nature stories from their own experience; and three out of some thousands who wrote offered notes upon Cuckoos. I accept these lads' statements as broadly authentic. Australian boys are keen observers, and, moreover, when put upon their honour (as in this case) they are not given to romancing.

The first lad, living at Canberra, wrote as follows: "It has been a great question as to how the Pallid Cuckoo gets her eggs into other birds' nests. Some say she lays them in the nest, but how could she get into a Tomtit's nest? Well, one day last spring, as I was walking through the bush, I saw a Cuckoo carrying an egg in its beak. I watched it, and saw it fly on to a hanging limb, in which I discovered a Tomtit's nest. The Cuckoo hopped on to the branch in front of the nest and put her head through the hole. Then she drew it out again, but without the egg. She sat there for a few moments looking around, and then put her head into the nest again, and, taking an egg out, she dropped it on the ground. She did this again, and then flew into a tree a little distance away, where she was accompanied by another Cuckoo. I then went to the nest, which was not very high, and found that the Tomtits were not at home, and that the Cuckoo had left one Tomtit's egg with its own; but the other two on the ground were broken. Perhaps the Cuckoo waited until the Tomtits left their nest."

A second letter, from a lad living at Doncaster East, Victoria, comments upon a Cuckoo (species not given) parasiting a Pipit (*Anthus*): "My brother and I were crossing some ploughed land when we startled a Ground-Lark and then discovered her nest, which was closely concealed and probably would not have been found had we not seen the bird. A few days later we were passing the same place when we saw two Ground-Larks chasing a Cuckoo. While thus engaged another Cuckoo made for the nest (how it knew it

was there is a wonder) with an egg in its beak, and placed it in the nest. Having done this, it took one of the other eggs from the nest, carried it a short distance, and sucked it dry."

The third letter is even more striking. Its writer, a boy living at Burwood, N.S.W., claims to have seen a Cuckoo sit on a nest to lay an egg and to have watched also while the owners of the nest threw the egg out. This is the letter: "While I was walking in the bush I saw a Cuckoo fly into a tree where there was a very neat nest built. The owners were not at home, so the Cuckoo got into the nest and laid an egg. Then it flew away. The owners soon came home, and made much fuss over the big egg. Then the father-bird made a hole in the side of the nest, and they both pushed the big egg out and it was smashed on the ground. I waited to see what they would do next. They flew about the branches and gathered some twigs, and in half an hour the hole was mended."

It is this last letter that calls for cogitation. There seems to be no doubt that the larger Australian Cuckoos (the Channel-bill and the Koel) sit on nests to lay their eggs, but is there any other record of one of the smaller Cuckoos ever doing so? Fosterers have been known to throw out Cuckoos' eggs, others have been known to cover them with fibres and feathers, and others have been known to destroy the nest. But is there a case of birds being seen to open their nest to eject a Cuckoo's egg and then patch the dwelling again. On several occasions I have found nests of White-throated Warblers (*Gerygone olivacea*) with a ragged hole in the rear; and now I wonder if this was done by the owners in order to eject a Cuckoo's egg.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney (3/3/27).

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Kookaburra as Raider.—I have long been of opinion that the Kookaburra, behind a smug exterior, hides the character of a raider. At all events, in well-cleared districts such as ours, where "Jackasses" are not decreasing in numbers, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to obtain natural fare without being a menace to all the little birds about. From his outlook on a dead tree or upon a post, Jack watches his surroundings with keen eyes. There are no snakes now, and few lizards or mice, so he takes small chickens that venture out of the coop; and he can capture the wily sparrow, belaboring the victim into a pulp before swallowing the catch. In its depredations among the Australian birds, the "Jackass" reveals an ugly trait. One would think the Magpie-Lark could look after its home and offspring, but on one occasion at Mt. Dandenong I witnessed a Kookaburra carry off a small nestling from the mud nest, while the two brave parents were driving away another "Jackass," its companion. Residents told me the siege had gone on for a couple of days, and I have no doubt ended only when the young Magpie-Larks were eaten.

There is much circumstantial evidence that the "Jackass" destroys many native birds while in the nestling stage. In an open, park-like paddock near where I live, I made the following observations three years ago: Visiting a nest of the Speckled Warbler, one of the nestlings partly feathered moved out of the nest a foot or two

away; a "Jackass" swooped down out of nowhere and would have taken it had I not thrown my hat at him. Within a few chains' compass were the nests of a Yellow Robin, with newly hatched young, a Scarlet Robin sitting, and a Blue Wren with eggs. Next day the Speckled Warblers were gone, and the nest had every appearance of being forcibly opened. Within a week the contents of all the other nests disappeared in the same way. The Wren's nest in particular, was half pulled from its site.

One morning I watched a Tree-runner at its nest. It had just fed the young and was hanging head down peering at its offspring, when it suddenly, with a movement too quick to follow, dropped on its nest and sat tight. The reason was soon apparent when a "Jackass" flew into the tree. When the danger was past the little mother resumed her search for food. During the same season I saw another "Jackass" flying with a Silvereye's nest in its bill, the contents of which I have no doubt were young birds.

Last year in my garden was a Thornbill's nest which provided some interesting notes and photos on the rearing of a Cuckoo; but one day, when the Cuckoo was about a week old, and Jack could see from his wayside perch the little birds busily feeding the nestling, the whole thing disappeared. A search in the open ground revealed the identical nest torn open and rifled lying beneath a tree. This year, within two chains of the same spot, another Thornbill's nest was rifled in the same way.

In October last a Shrike-Thrush built a nest in an unusual place, the spouting at the corner of a building. A "Jackass" was often seen on his observation-post within sight of this nest, and I have heard the sitting Thrush scolding him. But when almost ready to hatch, one egg disappeared, then another, and the bird deserted; then the last egg went. Only the Kookaburra remained.

If this sort of thing continues it is serious for the little birds, which I contend are far more valuable in gardens and orchards than many "Jackasses." Black-and-White Fantails and Brown Flycatchers, instead of being common, are getting scarce in our district. Two pairs of Restless Flycatchers, which nested by the roadside several years in succession, have now disappeared, as also has the Hooded Robin. I venture to say the reason is they all nest in exposed positions and their young are snatched from them by this raider.—A. G. CAMPBELL, Kilsyth, Victoria (3/1/27).

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Sericornis ocellatus in Victoria.—In the Checklist, under No. 488c, *Sericornis ocellatus*, Gould, is treated as a sub-species of *S. frontalis*, and the type locality given as Port Adelaide, where it does not occur; it was described from the Mt. Lofty Ranges. Mr. A. G. Campbell has expressed the opinion that *ocellatus* should be considered a good species, and I consider there is a good deal to support his contention. *S. ocellatus* from the type locality, Mt. Lofty Ranges, has a white throat with centres of feathers streaked with black, whereas *S. frontalis* has the ground colour of the throat cream, with

centres of feathers more or less dark but not black; *S. frontalis* has the sub-terminal tail-band very obscure and only on the inner webs, whereas the sub-terminal band in the tail feathers of *S. osculans* is black and very marked and extends to the outer webs.

As before stated, the examples from the Grampian Range correspond with specimens from Mt. Lofty Range, in South Australia, in all but the sub-terminal band in the tail feathers, which does not in these extend to the outer webs. In the event of the ultimate acceptance of *S. osculans* as a full species, I would suggest the adoption of *grampianensis* as a sub-specific name of the form of *S. osculans* occurring in the Grampians, the distinguishing character being the non-extension of the sub-terminal band to the outer webbing of the tail feathers. But for the present, in conformity with the R.A.O.U. Checklist, the birds from the Grampians must be known as *Sericornis frontalis osculans* Gould.—EDWIN ASHBY, Blackwood, South Australia (5/1/27).

From Magazines.

Egg-collecting.—According to the *Ibis* for January, the result of the special meeting of the B.O.U. called for 8th December last to deal with the case of Mr. Edgar Chance and the Crossbill matter (mentioned in the January *Emu*) was that a motion was proposed condemning the action of the Committee in requesting Mr. Chance to resign his membership; this motion, after some discussion, was rejected by a large majority, only 12 members out of 103 present voting for the motion.

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White Birds.—In a recent article entitled "Snowbirds" in the *Illustrated London News*, Mr. W. P. Pycraft, F.Z.S., refers to the change of plumage of the Ptarmigan of the highlands of Scotland from the brown in summer to snow-white in winter, and of the Willow-Grouse of northern Europe, which becomes pure white in winter. These changes, he says, we are justified in assuming are "in direct response to the need of a protectively-coloured dress, a mantle of invisibility to enable the wearer to escape its enemies." In support of this Mr. Pycraft points out that most northern animals turn white in winter, and some, like the Polar Bear and the Snowy Owl, are white all the year round, though the Owl has inappreciable dark markings. He goes on to say that there are cases of white liveries that cannot be "attributed to the need of harmonization with a snow-covered landscape," and instances the White Goshawk, of Australia, a White Mexican Hawk and an Egyptian Vulture. He also points out that all the Swans of the world, even the strange, goose-like Coscoroba Swan of South America, are white, except the Australian Swan and the Black-necked Swan of southern South America. He concludes: "So, then, while we can be quite justified in regarding a white dress as a specially developed and protective dress in all cases where it is associated with a long winter season with an unvarying mantle of