

careful description of the bird and noted down any striking features. In my "Birds of the Richmond District, N.Q." (*The Emu*, Vol. VI, p. 43), I mentioned this specimen and wrote, "The feet are quaintly chubby and well earn for the bird its generic name; the toes, being thick and swollen at the base, taper rapidly to their extremity." I took it for granted at the time that *Podargus* came from *podagra*. The swollen appearance of the feet was very striking and suggested at once three carrots tied in a bunch. It is hardly likely that I chanced on an abnormal specimen, and the bird's feet appeared quite healthy.

What puzzles me is the fact that I have turned up all the leading authors on Australian birds without finding any reference to anything unusual in the feet of the *Podargidæ*. I would be greatly interested in hearing the opinion on this matter of any ornithologist who has handled these birds in the flesh, and would ask those who may have the chance of doing so in future to take careful note. Possibly the peculiarity may not show in the shrunken feet of a dried skin, or so little as to be overlooked.

Stray Feathers.

Nesting Habits of Lyre-Birds.—At a recent meeting of the R.A.O.U. in Melbourne the nesting of *Menura* was discussed, and its habit of making a "platform" or skeleton nest, to be used later on, appeared to cause some astonishment. I believe this has been mentioned before by other observers, but it has been known to myself and friends since 1917.

Our first experience was a photograph taken of the mere outline of a nest built into the bank of a creek at Selby, in the Dandenong Ranges, during 1917. This platform or skeleton nest was photographed by Mr. Tom Tregellas, and during the winter of 1918 it was still in the same condition; but on July 13, 1919, the nest was perfected and contained an egg.

During the winter months of 1925 I was visiting another gully near Warburton, and close to a nest built into the creek-bank a platform was built up on the top of a large, conical rock on the bank close by. Then came disastrous fires and this gully was absolutely gutted as the second fire, which swept it, completed the destruction of anything the first had missed. When we visited it during July and August of 1926 we were surprised to hear the calls of numerous Lyre-Birds all over the hillsides. There was not a vestige of greenery anywhere. Both hillsides and the gully itself were bare, with the exception of hundreds of fallen trees, mostly mountain-

ash. The hazels, musks, blanket-wood and ferns were all charred black, but the Lyre-Birds were still there.

How did they escape destruction? It has occurred to us that possibly they took refuge in wombat-holes. We noticed many after the fires that had probably escaped our attention before. Also, the most remarkable thing was the fact that the birds were all in their original haunts. For instance, one female laid a light biscuit-coloured egg with a very dark zone of large, blackish markings. She used to place her nest on the side or top of old dead tree-stumps, but, of course, these went in the fires. However, her nest was found built on a bank and backed up against a dead or burnt sassafras-tree, and the identical egg was in it.

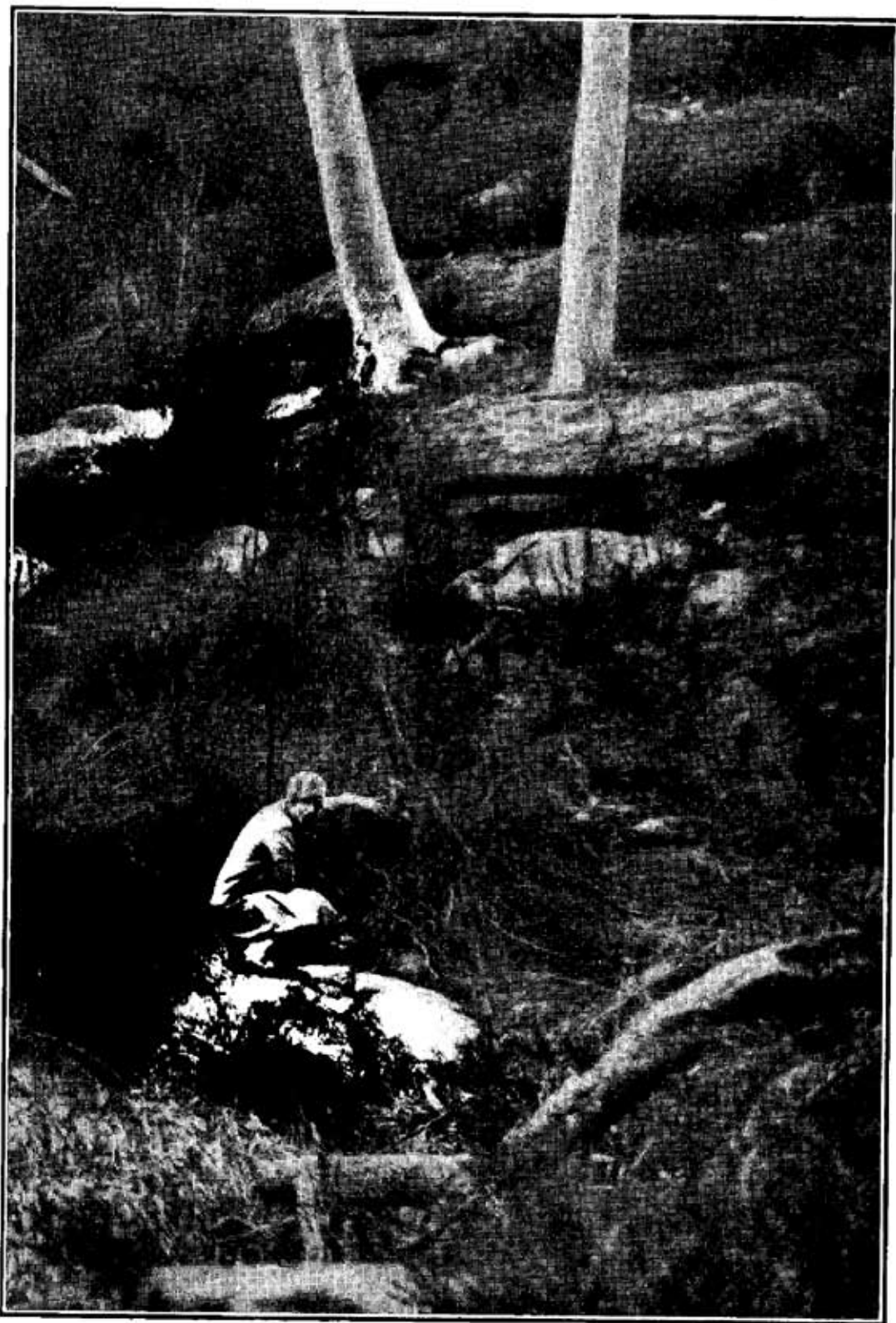
But to get back to the platform on the large, conical rock. When the fires came, of course, this platform was destroyed, but on August 1, 1926, when the site was visited, there was the completed nest with its reddish-coloured egg.

Other gullies were visited and the birds were found to be quite as numerous or even more so, because we could get over more country. We had always reckoned that a certain gully held six pairs of birds, but after the fires eleven nests were observed.

Last season two platforms were found in a short gully, and in June last we drove straight to them. The first was built up and ready for the egg and the second was added to, and I would wager it is finished and the egg deposited in it next season.—F. E. Howe, Melbourne (August 24, 1927).

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The Strange Penguin.—The strange Penguin which I reported in *The Emu* (Vol. XXV) appears to make occasional visits to this coast. Mr. Clemes, of Clemes College, who has a summer residence here, told me that some years ago a large Penguin spent the day on one of the ledges inside Tasman's Arch. When I asked for a description he could not remember details, but the size impressed the bird on his memory. Some school-children asked me the name of the big Penguin which, to quote their words, "stood nearly as high as Chickie" (one of the little girls, which allows a bit for childish conception of height), and had a long white patch at the back of its head. "It was crabby and wouldn't let us touch it." Questions elicited that they came on it one day on the shore and saw it standing on a shelf of rock. If, as has been suggested (*vide The Emu*, Vol. XXVI, p. 137), this should be the Rock-Hopper of the New Zealand region, it is interesting to note the long journey the bird had taken. Did it come this way for food; or does a remnant of some far-off call of instinct still find response in an occasional bird?—(Miss) J. A. FLETCHER, Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania (August 30, 1927).



LYRE-BIRDS' NEST IN AN UNUSUALLY OPEN SITUATION, NORTH SYDNEY (August, 1927). This nest, which was much better built than those placed in cavities of the Hawkesbury sandstone, is now in the Australian Museum.

Photo. by A. H. Chisholm.

Notes on the Kookaburra.—The status of the Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*) has been much discussed in Victoria of recent years, owing to its alleged habit of pilfering nests containing young birds. Those who are opposed to this bird being kept on the protected list contend that there is no greater evil amongst the smaller forms of bird-life than the "Laughing Jackass." It is true that Fantails and similar birds display consternation at the presence of a Kookaburra near their nests, but this may be due to its large size and not from the actual experience of having their nests robbed.

The best evidence as to the value of the Kookaburra may be gained on an examination of a nesting hollow containing young Kookaburras a few weeks old. It is then possible to ascertain the staple diet of the bird. In the course of twelve years I have inspected ten nests, most of which contained young birds in various stages of growth. In not one instance can I recollect finding bones of any birds in the nests, though the nest floor represented a mass of legs and wings of numerous varieties of beetles, etc. This fact alone clearly shows the infrequency with which young birds are used for food.

Like most birds which nest in hollows, the "Laughing Jackass" will resort to the same hollow for many years in succession. A pair in the Warragul district used the same hollow, in a tree by a roadside, every year from 1909 until 1924, when the tree was blown down in a storm. The enormous increase of Starlings is depriving the Kookaburra of many of its old nesting-sites, for, once these are used by the imported birds, the Kookaburras appear to forsake them for all time.

At Bayswater in October, 1917, it was my good fortune to see a "Laughing Jackass" with a snake dangling from its bill. The bird, being unable to fly very far at a time, was followed, and it eventually dropped the reptile, which proved to be a copperhead, 27 inches in length. The snake had not long been killed; there was still movement in its body. The only blemishes on its body were at the back of the neck, where it had been severely pecked by the bird. On another occasion, some years before, I had watched another Kookaburra with a small object in its beak. The morsel was dropped after the bird had been disturbed a few times, and was found to be a sparrow denuded of its feathers.

The accompanying photograph was taken at Upper Beaconsfield on January 4, 1927, at a hollow containing two young birds almost fully grown. Although the hollow was in the dead portion of the trunk and over 60 feet from the ground, I was able to fix the camera to a branch opposite the nest, and while thus engaged the old birds came quite unconcernedly with food to their young. Once the camera was arranged I had no trouble in securing the photos without

having the tedious task of climbing the tree after exposing each negative.

At that time of the year the forest was thronged by myriads of green cicadas, and upon these the adult Kookaburras fed their young, as indicated by the mass of wings and legs upon the floor of the nest.—D. DICKISON, Melbourne (August 28, 1927).

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The Neophema Parrots.—I read with interest the various notes appearing in the last issue of *The Emu* on the *Neophema* Parrots. Though I cannot add any more details relating to their family history, a few notes on their distribution, so far as they have come under my notice, may be of interest.

Neophema chrysostoma.—In February, 1907, Blue-winged Parrots were numerous around Cleveland and Conara, three miles apart, and both places in the confines of the Epping Forest referred to in two of *The Emu* articles. These Parrots spent much of their time on the common to the east of the school eating the seeds of the native grasses, which in that dry area ripen early. Later they frequented the bases of the briar bushes, breaking open the fallen briars. They remained several months in this strip of country.

Associated with these was a smaller flock of the beautiful Orange-breasted Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*). They were very friendly, and as they quietly sought for food within a short distance of the observer their distinctive colouring was easy to note. My sister, cycling to and from her school duties at Conara, was the first to report to me the presence of these latter birds, and later I frequently saw them on the common. I was particularly interested in both these species, because this was the first time I had come into such close touch with them. Both appeared to eat the seeds of the native cranberry (*Astroloma humifusum*).

I met with the Blue-winged Parrot at Tunbridge when spending the Michaelmas holidays of 1908 with some friends, whose place lay at the foot of the Tiers. At that time I was suffering from an injured foot and could get about only with difficulty.

On King's Birthday holiday, 1909, I stayed a couple of nights at the same place and found that the Blue-wings were present, and also that several pairs had chosen their nesting-trees. This tract of country is eminently suitable for these Parrots, but, unfortunately, Starlings have increased to such numbers that they are a serious menace to those of our birds which prefer clean nesting-holes.

During my residence at Springfield, in the north-east, I saw Blue-winged Parrots running along the side of the road, where they appeared to be feeding on the fallen seeds of cocksfoot grass. I also saw the species on the flats near the



FEMALE LYRE-BIRD REMOVING EXCRETA. (Same nest as shown
in Plate 19.)

Photo. by A. H. Chisholm.

Brid River, but as far as I could observe this bird did not remain all the year.

Both in the Epping Forest and Steppes district I have spent much time examining tiny holes in fallen trees for nests of these Parrots, but finally I concluded that such situations were not favourites. At The Steppes I found one nest of a pair, the site being a small hole in the main trunk of a tall, dead gum. The parents were engaged feeding the young. Both flew to the nesting-tree together. One waited on a small branch whilst its mate slipped into the tiny aperture; then, as it emerged, the waiting bird entered for its share of feeding duties. This was in the afternoon, between four and five o'clock. I took a photo of the tree, but the birds flew away and did not return before I had to leave the spot. That was on January 1, 1921. At a later visit in the spring of 1922 I saw several flocks of *Neophema*, one near The Steppes, one on St. Patrick's Plains, and another on the way to Arthur's Lakes. Last year I noted the Blue-winged Parrot near the Tasman Arch end of this district. But the destructive bush-fires destroyed the grass early this year, so it is not likely that these Parrots will appear here until the new grass ripens its seeds.

One of the many bird-victims of the February bush-fires was a Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*), and another fell a victim to a neighbour's cat.

Unfortunately, as is the case with all settlements where mills alternately open and close, there are numbers of wild house cats, and these take a heavy toll of bird-life. One of these brutes, recently trapped, weighed 10 pounds, was in plump condition, and had a beautiful fur. There are several plots in my garden richer for the burial of these beasts.—(Miss) J. A. FLETCHER, Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania (August 30, 1927).

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The White-winged Triller (*Lalage tricolor*).—These nomadic birds are generally found in isolated pairs throughout the lightly-timbered areas of southern Victoria, where they usually arrive in October to breed. Though their numbers here are at no time very great, last year proved an exception, for something approaching an irruption of these birds occurred in the rural districts around Melbourne during November. Such a visitation had not previously been known of recent years. Nesting operations were commenced immediately, and broods were reared. By January practically all the birds had disappeared. In one small paddock, less than seven miles from Melbourne G.P.O., no fewer than three pairs built their nests, all within fifty yards of one another. When two of the nests were almost completed the birds, for some unknown reason, commenced building new nests in neighbouring trees, and using the material from the deserted nests. Both birds

took turns at brooding, but by far the greater share was done by the male, who at times bitterly resented the female coming to take her turn on the nest. In fact, the males which I had under notice were most quarrelsome birds, not only amongst themselves but with other birds generally. Each pair kept to its own territory, but sometimes a male would venture into its neighbour's confine, upon which it would be driven out by the rightful owner. Once the pursued male got within a certain distance of its nesting-tree, it would turn on the pursuer, who, in turn, would hasten back to its own tree.—D. DICKISON, Melbourne (August 28, 1927).

* * *

The Charming Lotus-Bird.*—One of the prettiest sights on the lagoons and water-holes about parts of the North Coast, N.S.W., is to see Jacanas, or Lotus-Birds, pattering about among the damp vegetation on the edge of the water, or, as more frequently happens, wandering with careless grace across the mats of lily-leaves or water-weeds.

Standing very upright, one of these birds, with its long toes and scarlet comb, makes an arresting picture poised on a raft of floating leaves that looks all too frail to bear its weight. Its graceful stateliness of bearing, together with the shining, well-groomed appearance which it invariably presents, makes the onlooker feel that this is indeed an aristocrat of the bird-world.

Although this bird is said to possess weak powers of flight—and, personally, I have never seen one fly more than a few yards, as, when uttering its shrill note, it flits to some other spot upon the floating vegetation where it wanders—yet upon several occasions, shortly after heavy rain, I have seen specimens wandering about the edges of water-holes or lagoons that had been dry for months, and in one or two cases for years. And these lagoons may be situated several miles from any other water where the birds might have lived, a fact which indicates that they can fly well.

Although usually to be seen wandering across the floating weeds and leaves, Lotus-Birds will sometimes be seen walking on the mud or sandy banks at the edge of a water-hole. There they pick up small insects, just as the Dotterels do. Most of their food appears to be gathered from the aquatic plants and leaves, and not in the water itself.

They are most fascinating little birds to watch. Never long still, they flit from spot to spot, uttering their shrill and not unmusical call the while, their legs, with long toes folded together, outstretched behind them, giving the idea of a long, pointed tail. Owing to this, in flight they have almost the appearance of a Rainbow-Bird.

* *Irediparra gallinacea*.

Nests which I have seen, and others which have been described to me, consisted of bits of grass, rushes, water-weeds, etc. They were flat and open, and contained either three or four eggs.

Early one October I watched a pair of adult Lotus-Birds with three young ones, which were unable to fly, taking long strides across the weeds and lily-leaves in a narrow lagoon where they are always to be found. The little ones seemed awkward, and frequently bogged knee deep, and had continuously to balance themselves with their wings in an effort to keep from sinking into the water, as they followed closely on the trail of the larger birds. They made one think of children paddling and trying to keep their clothes dry.

Mr. R. Barling, Junr., who, living on the edge of the big swamp, Casino, was very familiar with the Lotus-Bird, and took particular interest in it, told me that some years ago (presumably before the greater part of the swamp was drained), Lotus-Birds were to be seen there in hundreds. He had invariably found the eggs (usually four) placed on a large leaf, with no attempt at nest-making. A peculiarity of the eggs is that they will float; if accidentally rolled from the breeding-site they do not sink, and the bird will usually gather them back again.

Although not often seen swimming, the Lotus-Bird will occasionally do so. Occasionally a bird may be met with on a small island of lily-leaves, with no other vegetation near. Then, if shot at or wounded, it will sometimes glide quietly from the leaves into the water, diving out of sight for possibly a minute. Mr. Barling has also seen Lotus-Birds glide from their eggs when a Hawk was hovering above them, and sliding off the lily-leaves, dive from sight. Presumably the habit of diving is never used as a means of gathering food, but merely as protection in time of danger.*—FLORENCE M. IRBY, Casino, N.S.W. (August 20, 1927).

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Distribution of Magpies.—If we assume that the White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*) belongs to the older forested hills of eastern Australia and the Black-backed Magpie (*G. tibicen*) to the younger tertiary plain country inland, there must theoretically be localities where the two species overlap.

In a recent trip by train to Nhill (Victoria) I took note of the birds that could be readily identified near the railway line. The White-backed species only was seen until beyond Glenorchy, 162 miles out, where the gold-bearing ridges of

* What is to be said of a remarkable note on the diving of the Lotus-Bird given by Carl Lumholtz in his book *Among Cannibals* (London, 1889)? He remarks (p. 23) that when at Gracemere, Central Queensland, he was puzzled at sudden disappearances of young Lotus-Birds, until one day he saw two young ones dive under the water and hold themselves fast to the bottom. "I watched them," he adds, "for a quarter of an hour before taking them up."—EDITOR.

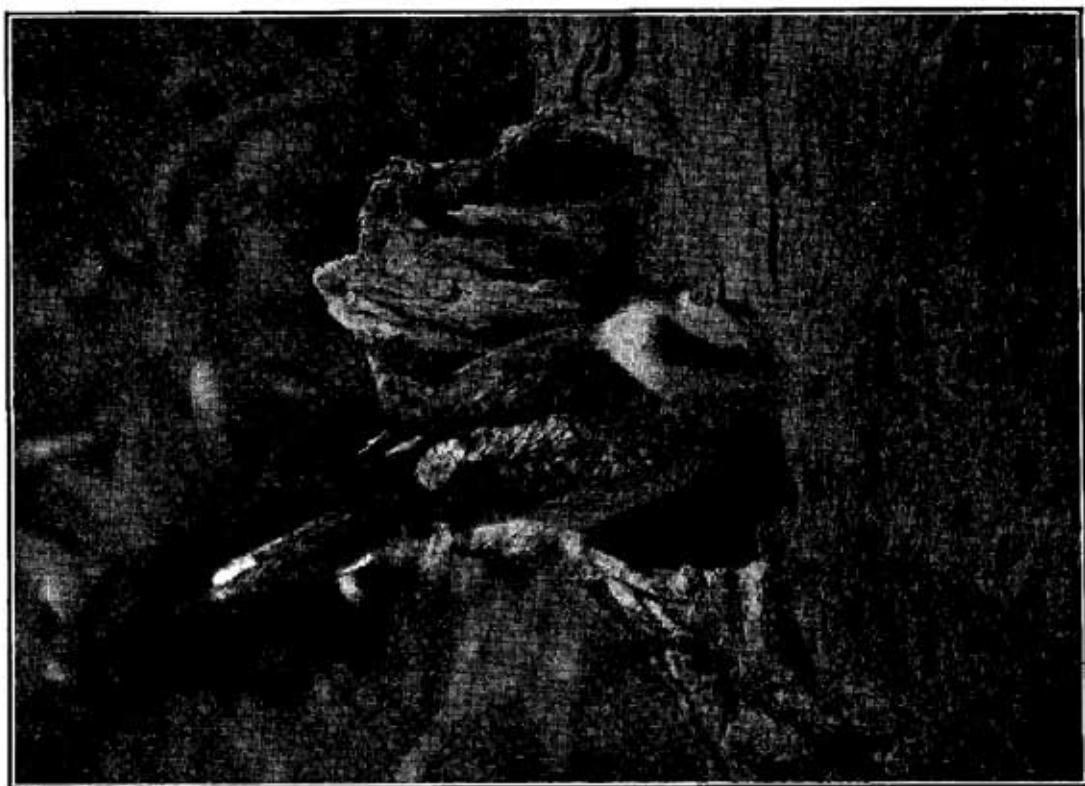
central Victoria are left behind. Here three Black-backed Magpies were seen, in company with a party of Red-backed Parrots (*Psephotus hæmatonotus*). Further on, in a fallow paddock, where cultivation was in progress, four Black-backs and one White-back were together in one party, but in the same field was a pair of Black-backs and also a pair of White-backs.

Just outside Horsham, 203 miles, were three White-backs together and one solitary Black-back, also eight White-backs in three parties, and three Black-backs singly. During the next ten miles two couples were noted, in each of which one specimen was pure white on the back and the other distinctly black. Finally, the Black-backed species was the sole representative. In the strip of country from Glenorchy to Dimboola, a distance of sixty-three miles, the actual count was twenty-eight White-backed Magpies and twenty-nine Black-backed Magpies.—A. G. CAMPBELL, Kilsyth, Victoria (September 10, 1927).

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Spring Migrants.—On August 22 the Fan-tailed Cuckoo began his trilling notes in a tree just across the road, and on the 23rd the migrant Pipits appeared in a paddock near the beach. The first Welcome Swallows were seen near the Mersey River on August 29, but were not plentiful until September 3. On the same date in August (29th) the Tree-Diamond (*Pardalotus affinis*) was calling "Pick-it-up" from the gum just at the back of my cottage, whence he announces his arrival each spring. Neither Pallid nor Bronze Cuckoos have been heard so far (September 13). Yesterday I went to Bell's Parade, about six miles up the river, to see the magnificent trees of silver wattle in full bloom, and noticed that the nest of the Satin Flycatcher (*Myiagra nitida*), built last year on a slender fork of tea-tree overhanging the creek, was still *in situ*. Once I fancied that the call of this beautiful species was heard, but the day was gloomy and somewhat cold, and the call was not repeated. That interesting resident species, the Olive Whistler (*Pachycephala olivacea*) was uttering constantly his strange "I'll whit you" from a thick patch of scrub.—H. STUART DOVE, West Devonport, Tasmania (September 13, 1927).

Correction.—On Plate 5 of the last (July) issue of *The Emu* the titles of The Mewstone and Central Maetsuicker Islands became transposed.



KOOKABURRA AT NESTING HOLLOW. (See page 119.)
Photo. by D. Dickison.



LOTUS-BIRD TENDING EGGS. (See page 122.)
Photo. by W. G. and R. C. Harvey.