

From Magazines

Birds and Bush Fires.—The following interesting article, indicating how several Sydney members of the R.A.O.U. fought a bush fire to save birds' nests, is reprinted from the "Sunday Telegraph Pictorial" (Sydney) of 4th November, 1928:—

"Imagine a young man perched in a tree with a camera strapped to branches, while a bush fire, in places leaping thirty feet up the vegetation, races towards him. Picture the same young man clambering hurriedly down the tree, and, with three others, fighting the flames in order to save several homes—not the residences of people, but the homes of distracted wild birds.

"As related to a gathering of Sunday bird-students yesterday, the unusual fire-fighting episode here indicated makes a thoroughly moving little story. It occurred last Sunday at Doonside, a few miles from Parramatta. Messrs. N. Chaffer, K. Hindwood, H. Innes, and S. Erickson (all of North Sydney) went by car to Doonside, chiefly with the object of photographing the charming Red-capped Robins (*Petroica goodenovii*) that occur there.

"The bird-seekers were unusually fortunate to begin with. They found no fewer than thirty nests, representing nineteen species of wild birds, among the tea-trees, eucalypts and undergrowth in one large paddock. This was almost too good to believe, and cameras were soon busy. About noon, one of the lads was aloft in a tea-tree, with his camera trained on the nest of a Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*), while the others were busy fraternising with robins. Suddenly commotion developed among the birds. In a few minutes, then, a wall of fire came sweeping down the paddock, licking up the dry vegetation like so much paper. The flames were nearing the photographers almost before they realised what was happening. There was no time to unstrap the camera in the tree; it had to be cut loose. But one of the youths paused sufficiently long to snatch the eggs from the flycatcher's nest and carry them to a place of safety. A pretty rescue, this, for had the eggs remained in the nest (even if the cradle had not been burned), they would inevitably have been ruined by the heat; whereas they were replaced in the scorched nest after the fire passed, and the mother returned and brooded them contentedly.

"Meanwhile, what of the other bird-homes? Four young men, standing in a safe spot, watched sorrowfully as flames swept over the spots where they knew cosy little nests to be hidden. Then they rallied to the rescue. Armed with

green bushes, they made a massed attack on the fire as it approached particular nests. It was a heavy job, but the perspiration was shed in a good cause, and when the flames passed at least six bird-homes had been saved. Only in one case was the labour in vain. The fighters had repelled flames from three pretty eggs of the rufous song-lark, tucked away in a grass-tuft, and then turned to save other nests. But later, alas! they found that the fire had doubled back, completely destroying the song-lark's home.

"Surely this is one of the most novel and stimulating fire-fighting episodes yet recorded!—several young men working for hours to save the eggs and young of helpless wild birds. The sorrowful thing is that the defenders, too, were helpless in many cases. Against this, there is the bright reflection that when several robins and other small mothers returned after the fire they found their homes intact, oases in a blackened waste. Is it too much to suppose that those birds sang a song of thankfulness to the strange giants who came to the rescue?"

Correspondence

Seabrook, via Northam,
Western Australia.

31st October, 1928.

The Editor, *The Emu*.

Dear Sir,—Re the Diamond Firetails (*Zonæginthus guttatus*) which Mr. T. G. Bryant, Mr. C. S. Sullivan's informant, describes as being "Java Sparrows," "the same bird that he knew on the Murchison River, W.A.," I would suggest that the bird probably referred to is the Chestnut-eared Finch (*Taniopygia castanotis*).

On reference to the R.A.O.U. check-list it will be seen that the Diamond Firetail is not found in Western Australia. The White-fronted Chat (*Epthianura albifrons*) and the Chestnut-eared Finch I have both heard referred to as "Java Sparrows" in this State, but one most likely to be seen on the Murchison and confused with the Diamond Firetail is, I think, the Chestnut-eared Finch.—Yours, etc.,

C. T. H. JENKINS.

News and Notes

Dr. B. Anderson, R.A.O.U., has, for health reasons, given up his practice at Westbury, Tasmania, after a residence there of 32 years, and was accorded a public farewell by his numerous friends and well-wishers in the district. Dr. Anderson has a very keen ear for the notes of wild birds, and his large grounds at "The Willows" were a sanctuary during his long residence there for quite a number of species, several of which nested in the vicinity of the house.—H. S. DOVE, Devonport, Tasmania.