

beautiful fan-shaped tail. Then away he flies like a flash in pursuit of an insect, twisting and turning in the air in every conceivable attitude. He is seized with a sudden impulse, swoops down to the streamside and after a hurried bath is off again. Momentarily he pauses to pour forth his song of joy. His whole being seems to vibrate with the joy of living. Then he remembers his mate brooding on the dainty cradle overhanging the stream and hurries back to relieve her. At his approach she slips off. He whisks around the nest with expanded tail for a few moments and then quietly and contentedly settles on the eggs and is at peace.

Another pair nested over the stream a few hundred yards away from the cabin. These birds were as usual very trustful, and we began taking liberties with them. I secured a photograph of the female as she fed the young bird between the fingers of my companion's hand held over the nest. I tried to induce her to hop on to my hand to feed the young bird held therein, but she cleverly evaded doing so. She would hop around my hand and then feed the young bird whilst hovering in the air.

Tragedy overtakes a large percentage of the nests of the Fantails and other birds, particularly the Black-faced Flycatcher (*Monarcha melanopsis*) in the National Park. Both eggs and young frequently disappear. The Pied Currawong (*Strepera graculina*) is suspected of being the chief offender. However, in spite of the many setbacks, the number of these beautiful creatures appears to be maintained to delight the eyes and ears of all lovers of nature.

The Starling

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My experience of the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was chiefly in the fruit-growing districts of South Australia. The Starling's most bitter enemy is the orchardist, and there is, in my opinion, just cause for complaint against the bird. With the farmer the balance is more equal, and, although armies of Starlings may be seen moving over newly sown wheat-fields, much of the food they are consuming consists of caterpillars and other forms of insect life. In the case of the grazier the tables are completely turned, and most valuable service is done for him by this species of bird.

Owing to this inconsistency in the birds' habits, it is difficult to pass a verdict, although I think we could well dispense with their services. In fruit-growing districts incalculable harm is done by these robbers to practically all classes of fruit excepting the citrus varieties, and so much per dozen is given for the destruction of both birds and eggs by some district councils. Grapes are particularly favoured, while such trees as figs and mulberries, of which usually only a limited quantity is grown, are often stripped of their entire crop.

Many fruit-growers have to employ a man each season to shoot and scare birds from their crops. As Mr. Piggot says, "They cannot be left from sunrise to sunset," as bird scarers are of little use. Many devices are employed to frighten the Starlings, but few could be called successful. In some places I have seen a drum used, with paper canons set spirally around it, and set off at intervals by a fuse, but the birds soon seemed to discover that the report was harmless. Other enterprising growers purchase scare-crows whose hollow, metal arms are set in ball-bearings, and are filled with shot. These, if moved periodically, are useful. The whole body turns on a pivot so that the arms are presented to the wind, when they revolve like flails, and the shot consequently rattles loudly in them.

When it is seen to what trouble and expense the orchardist is put, it is not to be wondered at that he feels bitter against the Starling.

Against this tale of destruction can, to a certain extent, be balanced the good done by the consumption of insect pests. If one watches the food brought by a parent bird to its young it will be seen to consist entirely of insects; at least, such is my experience in the matter.

To just what extent Starlings will move or migrate I am not sure, but they certainly do not confine their attention to certain small areas, as many birds have been shown to do. I noticed upon the ground beneath a boxthorn hedge, which was a favourite roosting place for Starlings, a large quantity of seeds belonging to a small bush locally known as a "grape bush." The fruit of this bush the Starlings relish very much, and the nearest locality in which it grows, to my knowledge, is about twelve miles from the hedge in question, on the swampy land lining the shores of St. Vincent's Gulf, and the Port Adelaide River. The hedge had been planted as a break-wind to an orchard, while the land for many miles along the coast is used entirely for grazing purposes, so it is evident that the same birds which are at one time robbing the orchardist, are at others assisting the grazier some miles distant.

However useful as an insect-destroyer the Starling may be, it must also be remembered that were the Starlings not so numerous we would have more native insect-eaters, which would not take such a heavy toll of the fruit crops as the Starling takes.

In Western Australia where, as yet, the Starling is unknown, the insect pests are, I think, no more pronounced than in other States, as the Plovers, Wood-Swallows, Magpie-Larks, Magpies and in places the Herons patrol the fields quite as effectively as the Starling does, and there is no reason why they and others of our native birds should not cope with the pests as well in other States as here if given a chance.

The Starling's five pale blue eggs are laid usually in a rough nest in a hollow tree or under the guttering of houses. Owing to the vast numbers of Starlings, it is difficult for many of our birds such as Kingfishers, Pardalotes, Tree-Martins, Tree-creepers, Kestrels, Owls and others to find nesting places where they can remain unmolested; for, besides occupying most of the available nesting sites, the Starling is always ready to bully, and it is a common sight to see a flock pursuing a Hawk until pursuer and pursued disappear into the distance. The objectionable habit of nesting under house roofs need not be expounded upon.

The Starling is very fond of the red berries of the box-thorn, which is such a pest in some parts. The small seeds contained in the fruits are not digested by the bird, and consequently the Starling is an active agent in the dispersal of this plant. The vast hordes of Starlings which gather at evening to roost can scarcely be credited unless actually seen. I have almost been deceived several times by what appeared to be a misty cloud stretching along the western horizon, just as the sun was setting; but, on closer inspection, it would be seen to be moving up and down, and the real nature of the cloud be perceived. It would be a mob of Starlings wheeling and circling before settling to roost for the night in the mangroves lining the Port Adelaide River and Torrens Island.

It can readily be understood that could such vast hordes of insect-destroyers be suddenly eradicated, serious consequences would result, until our native birds could increase sufficiently to carry on the good work. However, as their destruction must necessarily be gradual, we need have no fear, that is, provided we are fortunate enough to find a method, however gradual in its effect, of coping with the ever increasing Starling menace.