

tree to extract the seeds. Presumably it was providing a further food supply. After a few minutes the bird was again disturbed, and it flew right away from the locality. After searching amid the big timber, tapping all suitable hollow spouts for some time, and as the male bird did not return, we decided that there was no nest there, so wended our way homeward.

The Catbird

By NORMAN CHAFFER, R.A.O.U., Roseville, N.S.W.

Along the eastern coast of Australia the rich soil and heavy rainfall supports a dense type of vegetation, usually referred to as jungle. A large number of trees such as *Eugenia* bear a profusion of berries which largely form the food supply of a number of birds. Quite a few of these birds are strictly limited to this jungle country. Particularly so in this respect is the Catbird (*Ailurædus crassirostris*).

The Catbird would not be so well known among casual observers were it not for its peculiar cat-like calls. These strange wailing notes, so unlike those of any of the surrounding birds, immediately arrest attention. During the brighter hours of the day the birds mostly move about quietly among the dense vegetation. At dusk they become considerably animated, and it is then their strange meowing cry is heard at its best. I have noticed that the birds of National Park are much quieter than those farther north. The bird is yellowish green on the breast spotted with white, and the wings and back are bright green spotted also with white. Owing to the general green colouration and quiet habits of the bird it is not readily seen. At a casual glance it may easily be mistaken for its relative, the green "Satin Bird," but the brighter green and larger size readily identify it. The "Satin Bird" too is much more alert than the Catbird, the movements of which are rather clumsy.

The nest, a substantial bowl-shaped structure, is composed of sticks and vine tendrils, among which are woven large numbers of flat leaves. Vine tendrils chiefly are used for lining the nest. Two cream-coloured eggs constitute the setting. The nest is frequently constructed in the middle of a thick creeper-covered tree but may also be placed among the fronds of a tree fern, the top of a bird's nest fern, or in a more or less open fork. I have seen nests at heights varying from 7 to 40 feet from the ground. The thickest part of the jungle is usually chosen for the nesting site.

Photographs of a nest and eggs were taken on October 20, 1930, at Lilydale, a little south of Sydney. The nest, located by Mr. Jack Marshall, was placed in a typical situa-



Catbird at nest.

Photo. by Norman Chaffer, R.A.O.U.

tion, the thick mass of a slender creeper-covered tree overhanging a creek. The nest, containing two eggs, was about 20 feet from the ground, and accessible only from a ladder or staging. With the aid of a couple of companions a heavy ladder was carried a mile down the steep hillside to the nest. As the tree was too unstable to support the ladder, we had to erect it on props. Fixing our cameras on top, we focussed on the nest and then retired beneath the bushes to await the parents' return. After waiting a couple of hours we decided that the bird had more patience than we had, and we were forced to content ourselves with photographs of the nest and eggs only. During the whole of the period the parent birds remained in the vicinity.

On January 3, 1931, I accompanied Mr. C. Rhodes to the Gosford district, where we located a nest with two large young. The adults were frequently noted feeding on peaches growing wild, and, following their usual direction of flight, Mr. Rhodes discovered the nest in a slender turpentine about 25 feet from the ground. The nesting tree was in forest country some little distance away from the brush, a situation very open and unusual. A few creepers twined about the tree but the nest was plainly visible. The young, about three-quarters grown, were already showing the bright green wing feathers of the adult. Quills still covered the back with a few green shafts showing. The head was covered with a brown hair-like down, very similar in appearance to the covering on the head of a young "Satin Bird."

The only means of securing a photograph was from a straight smooth-barked eucalypt, several feet away. This tree, entirely devoid of branches up to some distance above the nest, was climbed by Mr. Rhodes, who accomplished the difficult task of tying on a cross-piece while hanging on with his legs. For a leg, arm, and back aching job I can thoroughly recommend this. The turpentine tree was then drawn over somewhat with a rope and a cross-piece spanned between the two trees. The camera was then lashed on to the eucalypt. During these preparations, extending over an hour, the two adult Catbirds flew about in a great state of alarm, repeatedly uttering their weird meowing note. The birds' heads were thrust forward to the right and then swung to the left in a downward semi-circular sweep as the quaint call was uttered. Another single call, apparently an alarm note, was often used, resembling exactly in tone and volume one of the calls of the Rufous Fantail. It was an absurdly inadequate note for so large a bird. At first I repeatedly mistook it for a Rufous Fantail's note. I secreted myself in a hide, and after continually flying around for an hour one bird came to the nest, and a photograph was secured. Three others were obtained during the next two or three hours.