

The Nesting of the Banded Stilt

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Through the kindness of Mr. J. Neil McGilp I have been able to examine critically a typical clutch of the remarkable eggs of the Banded Stilt (*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*), and was immediately impressed with their unusual character. They are anything but what I expected—taking a line through eggs of other species of Stilts and Avocets with which I am acquainted. Accompanying the eggs Mr. McGilp sent me a graphic account, with plates, of the large colony of these birds found breeding on an island in Lake Calabonna (*South Australian Ornithologist*, Vol. XI, part 2). I had previously received from Mr. L. Glauert, of the Perth Museum, a reprint of an article from the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Western Australia*, with an account of a colony at Lake Grace, further eggs being photographed and reproduced in plates. In *The Emu*, Vol. XXXI, part 1, are other plates of eggs, accompanying the article on the Banded Stilt, by Messrs. F. E. Howe and J. A. Ross. With the eggs and these plates I have been able to form an opinion as to their chief characteristics. One cannot fail to be struck with the fact of their departure from the true type of eggs peculiar to Plovers, Sandpipers, and wading birds in general. In the first place, few of them seem to be truly pyriform; then again, their white or very pale creamy ground-colour is also aberrant; and lastly the fine sinuous or thicker and shorter linear markings are not characteristic of the family. Had the eggs been shown to me without their history, I should certainly have been inclined to attribute them to some unknown species of Oyster-catcher. I note that Mr. McGilp also recognises that resemblance. The size of the eggs, too, is larger than what one would have expected the Banded Stilt to produce.

In this State (W.A.) the Banded Stilt is a saltwater species. In the interior are many large areas marked on the map as lakes, and there are many more smaller areas not marked at all. Just north of the Stirling Ranges, one can count over fifty lakelets and pools, from the summit of Mt. Donnelly; possibly all that is left of a one-time single big lake. These lakelets are at times much frequented by large flocks of Banded Stilts, even during the breeding season of other aquatic birds. Lake Balicup, which has an area of about 800 acres, is a favourite haunt. The water is very salt, but teems with immense numbers of a slender spiral mollusc; indeed, the whole eastern shore of the lake is a detritus of myriads of these small shells. They form part of the food of the Banded Stilt. One would have expected that in the presence of such an abundant food supply Lake

Balicup would have been a regular breeding place. But no one I questioned about this matter had heard of their breeding on the lake. Probably the Banded Stilt was always a bird of the interior at the breeding season, and loves solitude at that period of its life, awaiting favourable opportunities of exceptional rains before attempting to rear its young.

In the year 1904 I was in the Norseman district. The winter was exceptionally wet, and Lakes Dundas and Cowan presented vast areas of water. I saw Banded Stilts on Lake Dundas, and both Hooded and Red-capped Dotterels were nesting there. Later in the year I met a young fellow who had been prospecting farther north on Lake Cowan. He told me he had come across a large colony of long-legged, long-beaked, black and white birds, nesting on a sandy beach. He described the eggs as white with black markings. I was greatly puzzled, and as I held the view that the Banded Stilt probably migrated to a distant country to breed, I dismissed the probability of the birds being of that species. In the light of recent discoveries I now think that this was a colony of these remarkable birds.

The Grey Fantail.—This charming little bird frequents our home grounds here almost all the year round, nesting here and there amidst the shelter afforded by the many ornamental trees and shrubs which abound. Usually they choose the common laurel for their nesting sites, but will occasionally select a spot on a bough of a horizontal cypress, and again they will make their tiny and beautiful nests amidst one of the ivy bushes close to the house. To-day, however, February 1, I was shown a nest containing three half-fledged young, in a most unusual site. The birds had chosen to build what is most likely a second nest low down in the branches of a hawthorn hedge which skirts the road leading to the rear of the homestead, and along which motors and horse-drawn vehicles, as well as saddle-horses, are frequently passing every day. The nest is only 3 feet from the ground, and the distance from it to the wheel tracks is just 6 feet. This means that the body of the motors passes within 4 feet or thereabouts of the nest, level with the axles.

This brood will be lucky if it escapes the eyes of a brood of Grey Butcher-birds (*Cracticus torquatus*) which frequent the locality. I have not previously known the Fantails breeding so late, and it is all the more remarkable on account of the drought which we are experiencing, though swallows are not out of nests here yet either.—R. W. LEGGE, R.A.O.U., Cullenswood, Tas.