

## Stray Feathers

**Second Recording of the Lyrebird's Song.**—Since the song of the Lyrebird was first recorded by Australian Sound Films in June, 1931, arrangements have been made for the production of a gramophone record for public distribution, especially as a souvenir for posting overseas. Delays occurred, and it was decided eventually to undertake a new recording in order that certain imperfections in the original one should be avoided. It was also determined that the subject should again be an absolutely wild bird singing under natural conditions in the forest. Several weeks were spent, therefore, in studying the characteristics of two males at Sherbrooke, the territories of which were suitably situated. One of these was the bird recorded last year, and investigation showed that the small patch of bracken where the previous recording was made was still his most popular singing place, although the positions of this year's mounds varied a little from those of last year's. One microphone was concealed in a stump centrally situated between three mounds in this area.

Another bird which, last year, occupied an area adjoining that of the bird recorded, was found to have forsaken his previous favourite singing position, and many hours were spent in determining the most suitable point in his territory to place the microphone. This bird has never been keen on singing from mounds, but usually gives his most sustained songs from logs or fallen branches. It became apparent, at length, that this bird had chosen as the new centre for his vocal efforts a small area near the edge of the forest, where two or three logs and an elevated branch or two formed ideal perches. The second microphone was concealed there.

Even before the installation of the apparatus was complete at this second point, the bird was there, and, had it not been that the necessity for preliminary testing caused his departure, it is probable that the recording would have been made in the first half-hour. In a couple of hours his desultory singing indicated that he was working back to the same area, and at about 1.30 p.m. he began to sing in earnest. This habit of giving desultory performances from various points in the territory and of reserving the full-throated sustained concerts for the favourite singing place appears to be general with each of the birds with which I have come in contact. There is little doubt that the recordings have been made possible largely as a result of that characteristic.

The first effort of a sustained nature was made by the bird in question from a log about forty feet from the microphone, and by judicious "scouting" he was induced to leave

that spot within a few minutes. In any other portion of his territory any attempt to drive the Lyrebird is likely to have an effect opposite to that which is desired but, once he has shown a determination to sing in his special singing area, he is unlikely to leave unless badly frightened. There was a period of silence followed by a renewed burst of song which provided the engineers with all the volume they required for recording. It is probable that the bird was within eight or ten feet of the microphone, and he remained in that position for about an hour. It is almost certain that the original bird could have been recorded also at the other microphone, so that the determination of the positions for the recordings was most fortunate.

Twelve minutes of the incomparable song were recorded, and, thanks to the perfection of the apparatus employed and the skill of the sound engineers, the recording, I honestly believe, is not noticeably inferior to the original. A gramophone record of the song has been a dream of mine for many years, and I shall be disappointed indeed if it does not assist materially in placing the Lyrebird in its correct place amongst the world's songsters and mimics.—R. T. LITTLEJOHNS, R.A.O.U., Melbourne.

**Remarkable "Strays."**—When wandering in a Sydney forest recently, Mr. J. S. P. Ramsay and I fell into a discussion on birds that strayed from their usual range, and he recalled that his late father, Dr. E. P. Ramsay, had once recorded the Shining Starling at Sydney. This seemed to me almost beyond belief, for it is one thing for a sub-tropical species (such, for example, as the Purple-crowned Pigeon) to wander down here, but quite another thing for an inter-tropical migrant to be found about 1,500 miles below its usual southerly limit. However, Mr. Ramsay has since given me the following extract from his father's note-book under date July 12, 1886:—

"On Saturday last, July 10th, while in the garden at 'Yasmar,' I heard the notes of some strange birds, and, on quietly walking close to the bush in which they were feeding, was surprised to find a small troop of Goldfinches in a hawthorn bush, and in the same bush, near the top branches, were two *Calornis metallica*. At first I thought I was mistaken and returned to the tree a second time, but found the birds to be both immature ♂s or ♀s of *Calornis*. The crimson iris was plainly to be seen. They seemed to enjoy the haws, the only fruit, save oranges, left for them to eat. These birds did not seem to have been caged birds, and how they got so far out of their usual range is unaccountable. The nearest known habitat of this species is, I believe, Port Mackay, Pioneer River, and I am not sure about this. I met

them first at Cardwell, and on the Herbert River, a little south of that township. Occasionally northern birds wander as far south as Sydney, to wit—*Graucalus swainsoni* (G. Masters), *Ptilopus superba* (Shot at North Shore), *Halcyon pyrrhopygia* (Ashfield, 1873-4); and from the south, *Glyciphila albifrons* (shot at Manly, and now in the Dob. Mus. Coll.). Many years ago, about 1865, I saw a *Ptilopus swainsoni* which had been shot at North Shore, from an *Acmena* tree then in fruit, and *Carpophaga magnifica* used at times to frequent the Loquat in the Dobroyde gardens, eating the fruit."

There can be no doubt as to the authenticity of the foregoing note, for Dr. Ramsay was perhaps the most competent and careful of Australian ornithologists of an earlier day. It is just possible that the Starlings were escapees from confinement, but Dr. Ramsay's evidence against this theory is supported by the fact that the species was not, and is not, customarily caged. Dr. Ramsay was at that time living at the Australian Museum in Sydney. "Yasmar" was his sister's residence on the old Dobroyde Estate at Ashfield. He was evidently on a visit there, which would account for his not collecting the *Calornis*.—A. H. CHISHOLM, C.F.A.O.U., Sydney.

**Are birds influenced by colour?**—For many years the Fairy Martins (*Hylochelidon ariel*) had built under the spout on the western side of our home, overlooking the grass tennis court. They built their nests despite the fact that House-Sparrows sat on the spout and harassed them considerably. I had the woodwork painted green. Previously it had been a cream colour. They came back, thoroughly investigated the old spot and after this examination departed, to my great sorrow. I intend to paint the wood cream again and hope that the original colour will please them and induce them to return.—H. D. LETHBRIDGE, R.A.O.U., Narandera, N.S.W.

**Emus in New Guinea.**—A correspondent of mine, Mr. F. F. Lamb, writes: "I was in one camp last year, a few miles out of Wau, near Edie Creek, elevation about 7,000 feet above sea-level. The 'Shoot boy' brought in three or four emu every week, weight I think would average 40 lbs., certainly a much smaller bird than I have seen in Western Australia. The jungle is very dense except for large patches of kunai or grass. There are cassowaries in the jungle."—A. G. CAMPBELL, R.A.O.U., Kilsyth, Vic.

**Friends of the Farmer.**—Whilst working in a cultivated field recently, I noted twenty-six widely different species of birds engaged in finding their food in the same field. The grain had not yet been sown, so all the birds were feeding either on weeds or on the insects which abounded in and on the ground and in the air. The first was the Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*), which were very plentiful in neighbouring paddocks, although only one pair was seen in this particular field. A single Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter cirrocephalus*) hovered for a while over the field, but departed without molesting any of the other birds. One or two Kestrels (*Falco cenchroides*) were always hovering in my vicinity, their food appearing to consist chiefly of mice and grasshoppers. Three or four Cockatiels or Quarriors (*Leptolophus hollandicus*) stayed for a while in search of food. Pale-headed Rosellas (*Platycercus adscitus*) were busy on any weeds that were seeding, and two Budgerygahs (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), which were quite tame, allowed me to approach within ten feet of them. A single Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) settled on the fence for a while, making short flights in the air after insects. It was finally driven away by the other birds. Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) and Tree Martins (*Hylocheidon nigricans*) were both plentiful, obtaining their food in the usual manner.

Several Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) were busy in the vicinity of the working horses, and half-a-dozen Jacky Winters (*Microeca fascinans*) were noted perched on sods or chasing insects. Three Ground Cuckoo-Shrikes (*Pteropodocys maxima*) settled for a while to feed. I have seen as many as sixteen in one flock. Walking about on the ground after insects were two Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes (*Coracina novæ-hollandiæ*). Two male White-fronted Chats (*Epthianura albifrons*), both rather shy, were seen, whilst Yellow-tailed Thornbills (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) were very common, usually being seen in flocks of 20 or more, feeding together on the ground. Three males of the White-browed Wood-Swallow (*Artamus superciliosus*) were hawking overhead about 30 feet above the ground. The Black-faced Wood-Swallow (*A. melanops*) was very common. This species secures its food mainly by hovering and then swooping on it. It usually hovers about 10 feet from the ground. The Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*) was seen feeding on the ground, and several Black-backed Magpies (*Gymnorhina tibicen*), usually chasing the smaller birds, were noted. Odd Black-throated Butcher-birds (*Cracticus nigrogularis*) were included. These birds often hover when searching for grasshoppers, etc. One pair of Eastern Whitefaces (*Aphelocephala leu-*

*copsis*) was seen. This is the first record, and the birds were evidently strays. The commonest species present was the Ground-Lark (*Anthus australis*), whilst only an occasional Horsfield Bush-Lark (*Mirafra javanica*) was seen.

The list was completed by the Chestnut-eared Finch (*Tæniopygia castanotis*), a flock of about a dozen of which settled for a while, but soon departed, the Crow (*Corvus cecilæ*), one very wary bird settling for a few minutes, and the introduced Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), of which great numbers were present. They were very easily alarmed and were continually harassed by the Magpies and Plovers.—A. C. CAMERON, R.A.O.U., Biddeston, Queensland.

**Nesting Notes on the Tawny Frogmouth.**—Early in September last year (1931), I observed a nest of the Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) in course of construction. Three days later, one of the birds, the female presumably, was brooding. With photographic intent, I kept a watchful eye on the nest, but the period of incubation seemed to be unusually long. I soon reached the conclusion that the eggs were infertile. On November 28, I visited the nest again, to find one of the birds sitting as closely as ever. Thinking the nest might be empty, I threw a stick up past it to frighten the bird off. Away she went, kicking the eggs out as she started. They both broke on reaching the ground, and were found to contain nothing but a light yellow liquid. How long the birds would have continued to sit on the eggs it is, of course, impossible to say. I once read of an English Red Grouse which sat so long and closely on a clutch of addled eggs that she became almost too weak to fly. The eggs were finally removed by a marauder of some kind.—A. C. CAMERON, R.A.O.U., Biddeston, Queensland.

**A Wagtail's devotion to "duty."**—This incident appeared to me to be worthy of record. A Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) had her nest on a rail of the decoy pen overhanging the slide into the sheep dip, and on the first morning of dipping operations she fluttered about anxiously, going on to the nest every now and then when sheep were not actually passing through the dip. The second morning she was bolder, and finally remained on the nest all the time, with a man working a few feet away, and sheep dropping on to the slide every few seconds. Occasionally a sheep would make a rush across the slide, and crash into the rails where the nest was, but soon even that failed to disturb her. The final test was when a bucket of water was lifted

over her and the contents poured on the slide—and still she remained on the nest. About mid-day the eggs hatched, and on subsequent mornings she attended unconcernedly to the wants of the chicks, while dipping was still in full swing.—E. L. HYEM, R.A.O.U., Barrington, N.S.W.

**Index Animalium.**—For more than forty years, hidden away in the Library of the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, a scientist has been hard at work, looking up original references on *all* zoological subjects. To this man, Sherborn, future generations of workers in zoology will owe a great debt, more perhaps than they will ever realise. The present day scientists have not yet all grasped the importance of his gigantic undertaking. Those of us who have looked up a paltry 40,000 or 50,000 references consider that we have done some hard work. Sherborn has published over ten times that number. Some idea of the nature of so colossal a task undertaken single-handed may be obtained by the following statistics.

The entire work will consist of about 9,000 pages (8,466 are already published) and will contain over 500,000 entries after all duplicates have been eliminated. These entries have been collected from the literature between 1758 and 1850, including some 26,700 volumes, by page by page examination, and, with the exception of some 5,000 entries made by his friends abroad, have all been extracted by the author himself. This involved the use of a million and a half slips, as for safety's sake all entries were made in duplicate by carbon process. The use by authors of the same trivial name for various species of the same genus involved the comparison of the original diagnoses of some 5,000 species in volume one and nearly 80,000 in volume two so as to avoid duplicating whenever possible.

The sorting of the collected material into alphabetical order alone occupied three years and the whole work will have taken forty-three years to compile, edit and produce. The production is a monument to the care of the Cambridge University Press printers. The first volume (1758-1800) was published by the Cambridge Press itself, the last nine volumes (1801-1850) have been issued by the Trustees of the British Museum. One more is yet to come.

Sherborn has been the recipient of innumerable letters from all parts of the world, thanking him for his labours, and these testimonies from foreign correspondents are most highly prized. As one of them has been printed we may venture to quote it. The American Museum of Natural History, presided over by Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn, at a special meeting held on December 16, 1930, passed the following resolution: "Whereas the various zoological workers in the American Museum of Natural History have

found the Index to be a most valuable source of reference and are agreed that its great utility, trustworthiness, and lasting value are due primarily to the high scholastic attainment, the infinite patience and the persevering application of the author, now therefore be it resolved that the scientific staff of the American Museum of Natural History hereby expresses its great appreciation of the Index as a work which will endure for all time, and acknowledges its indebtedness to Mr. Sherborn for his many years of labour on behalf of all zoologists."

On March 10, 1931, Mr. Sherborn received the high distinction of a Doctorate of Science (*Honoris causa*) from Oxford University, and the Public Orator made the following pleasing reference about him, "I know not whether to compare him to Atlas, seeing that for well nigh fifty years he has borne on his shoulders so great a burden alone; or to Argus, since even the most minute traces of evidence seem not to have escaped his eye; or to Ariadne, inasmuch as for all zoologists, and for those who derive their materials for their several studies from the vast store-house of zoology, he has provided most certain clues amid the many labyrinths of scientific writings."

The writer of this encomium has been working at the Natural History Museum for over a quarter of a century, and early made a friend of Sherborn, who generously allowed all those who cared to avail themselves of it, the use of the thousands of slips which had been placed in drawers, properly arranged for the convenience of workers. This was a great boon, and saved many mistakes. The Library has been enriched by many hundreds of volumes of rare and almost unknown publications by the energy of Sherborn, who not only brought these books to light, but was able to say where they could be obtained.

We now have, in a set of nine or ten volumes, every known zoological reference, from the year 1758, when binomial nomenclature was first used, to 1850. During these years many references in books were overlooked by workers, but now we have them all collected, forming a very solid basis for future work.

From 1851 to 1864 there is no publication giving a list of new names, but the latter year saw the beginning of the "Zoological Record," so that, in the future, mistakes should be few. It is sincerely to be hoped that the work begun by Sherborn will be continued. The records for the years 1851 to 1900 will be colossal and certainly more than one man can do.

Now that Mr. Sherborn has reached the zenith of his career, with congratulations pouring in upon him from all sides, the members of the R.A.O.U. would like to add their meed of praise, coupled with the wish that he may see the completion of the last volume and enjoy for many years a



position such as I verily believe will never be equalled in our world of zoology.—GREGORY M. MATHEWS, R.A.O.U., Meadway, Winchester.

**Nightjar Problems.**—Is there any information available as to the manner in which Nightjars remove their eggs or young from one position to another? This question is suggested by a remark in the January *Emu*, that a spotted Nightjar, found breeding near the R.A.O.U. camp, "transported the chick about two yards" from the discarded shell. What does "transported" imply? Did the parent carry the babe in the beak, in the claws, or beneath the wings, or did she merely push or pull the nestling across the two yards of earth? I have collected and published from time to time a good many notes relating to this matter of "carrying the baby in birdland," but I know nothing definite regarding Nightjars' methods, although the practice itself appears to be more or less general in the group. Thus, A. H. Paget-Wilkes, writing in *The Ibis* for 1928 (p. 745) says of the Pennant-winged Nightjar (*Cosmetornis vexillarius*) of Africa: "If disturbed the birds will remove the eggs (in some cases a few yards and in others considerable distances) in the manner of Nightjars." But he gives no indication as to what precisely is "the manner of Nightjars."

Another point upon which it would be well to have Australian observations is the question of the seasonal movements of Nightjars. Various students of African birds have declared that the Pennant-winged species migrates backwards and forwards across the forest belt of Equatoria, breeding to the south as far as Natal in the months September to November, and in February migrating northwards. It does not necessarily follow, of course, that Australian Nightjars are in any sense migratory, but there is at least reason to doubt that they stay about the one area throughout the year. I imagine, however, that the Nightjars of Fraser Island, Queensland (the only island upon which I have heard or seen these birds) are more or less stationary, as, for example, is the remarkable little *Microsiphonorchis* of the island of La Gonave, West Indies. (For information on this species see *The Auk*, 1928, p. 471).

Returning to the Pennant-winged Nightjar I suggest to readers of *The Emu* who have copies of Newton's *Dictionary of Birds* that they turn to the illustration of that species on page 641, and make a marginal note to the effect that the position of the curious "pennants" is erroneous. For Paget-Wilkes and other writers on African birds have pointed out that these remarkable wing-feathers (which are found only on the male bird, and that only in the breeding season) are carried horizontally, whether the bird be sitting or flying. Indeed, they emphasise that it is physically impos-



sible for a Nightjar to carry the "pennants" erect, as depicted in the Newton illustration. — A. H. CHISHOLM, C.F.A.O.U., Sydney.

**White-browed Babbler.**—The White-browed Babbler (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*) is a common bird in the Ararat district and is known by several local names, such as Cat-bird, Cackler, Twelve Apostles and Jumper. They are handsome birds and never fail to attract and interest one. They never seem to be at rest, always on the hunt for food, sociable and energetic, jumping over the ground, up a tree, then down again, chattering all the time. They are gregarious in their habits and exceedingly noisy and garrulous. I have located numbers of their nests, mostly in the hedge acacia (*Acacia armata*) and several in eucalypts, but very few were used for breeding. The birds appear to build several nests but only use one. I have seen a pair of birds build a beautiful nest and then for some unknown reason commence to build another close by. Why do they do this? Is it to deceive their enemies?

The birds the nest of which is illustrated, built the nest in an isolated, dead acacia in a very open position, about four feet from the ground. The nest was a large domed structure built of dried sticks, having a rounded roof, projecting so as to form an entrance to the nest at the side. The interior was lined with dry grass, wool and feathers. The nest was located on November 8, 1931, and contained three light brown eggs, streaked with fine hair-like lines running around the eggs, which gave them a marbled effect. On November 15, three young ones were in the nest and the parents were busy feeding them, returning to the nest about every ten minutes with food. The birds were very chary of the camera which was placed about two feet from the nest, but after the first half hour took no notice of it, becoming very trustful. When feeding, and gathering food for their young, the parent birds would join a flock of ten birds which were feeding in a plot of furze about one hundred yards away. Suddenly, one of the birds would leave the group, and in short flights from tree to tree, approach the nest giving a call like the soft mewing of a cat. It would then enter the nest, feed the young, remain for a few minutes, and then off again to join its friends.

The nesting season for this district extends from August to December, and I have found nests containing eggs or young during this period. The White-browed Babbler is occasionally the foster-parent of the Pallid Cuckoo. While on a visit to the Carwarp District in October, 1926, I found a nest, the sole occupant of which was a young Pallid Cuckoo, with the Babblers bestowing as much care on it as if it were young of their own.—C. L. LANG, R.A.O.U., Ararat, Vic.



White-browed Babbler at nest.

Photo. by C. L. Lang, R.A.O.U.

**Bird and Lizard Myth.**—The Maoris had a remarkable belief about the Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*), which visits both the North and South Islands of New Zealand in the summer months. They thought that as autumn came on the bird's body contracted, its feathers became transformed into scales, the two legs disappeared and were replaced by four, and that the bill became a pair of jaws armed with teeth. The Cuckoo, thus transformed into a large lizard, lived in crevices of rocks right through the winter, and as spring advanced, a re-transformation to the bird-form took place. The lizard of this interesting myth was probably the Rock-Lizard (*Lygasoma grande*), the body and head of which are covered with light markings very like those on the Long-tailed Cuckoo. In view of the evolutionary development of birds from a reptilian ancestry, this belief of an intelligent race seems the more remarkable.—H. STUART DOVE, R.A.O.U., West Devonport, Tas.

**Tawny Frogmouth's Calls to Young.**—Whilst walking beneath a group of gnarled white gums I found a young Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) crouched up against the butt of one of the trees. The beautiful young creature had apparently but recently taken its first flight, and was not quite strong enough to regain the branches. Upon being handled, it commenced to cry in a querulous tone. One of the parent birds that was perched lengthwise on one of the lower limbs of the tree at once commenced to call "oom-oom-oom," long repeated, but very softly. Gradually, however, the "ooms" merged into queer gurgles, and upon the young one commencing to cry again, the old bird uttered a series of soft notes which very closely resembled those of *Ninox boobook*, then swooping down and flapping about my head a couple of times, flew into an adjacent tall tree and was not seen again. The young bird was later put well up the tree, where it seemed quite at home.—A. E. BRIDGEWATER, R.A.O.U., Mansfield, Victoria.

**Wild and semi-tame Goshawks mate.**—The half tame Grey Goshawk, which was the subject of an article in *The Emu* some time ago, mated last season with a wild female. They built a nest in a tall stringy-bark tree, about 300 yards from the house, though out of sight behind a spur of a steep hill. Unfortunately, during my absence in October, the male Goshawk took to killing fowls owing to its not being fed regularly, and was shot. The female did not at any time come near the house, and successfully reared her brood of two.—E. LINDSAY HYEM, R.A.O.U., Barrington, N.S.W.

**"Protective" Action.**—I was much interested some time ago in a Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*), which, on our near approach in a boat to its nest, assumed an attitude with uplifted head, and remained motionless whilst I focused my graflex upon it, and took its photograph from a few feet away. The nest was on a dead gum "sucker." I have no doubt that the attitude assumed was protective and that the bird tries, and succeeds, to look like a twig.—H. D. LETHBRIDGE, R.A.O.U., Narandera, N.S.W.

## Correspondence

To the Editor.

Sir,—Possibly through a mistake on my part, on page 312 of Vol. XXXI of *The Emu*, you quote me as writing, "In September and October, 1930, fair numbers [of Flock Pigeons], in small flocks were observed on Moolawatana, South Australia." This is not correct, as the date should be September and October, 1931. I will be pleased if you will make this correction.

Yours, Etc.,

J. NEIL McGILP.

C/o Lands Department,  
Adelaide, S.A.

A letter has been received from G. M. Mathews concerning the review of the genus *Gerygone* Gould in the *Novitates Zoologicae*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, pp. 317 to 379, September 3, 1931, by Dr. Wilhelm Meise.

Dr. Meise uses "groups," or, as Mr. Mathews calls them, "super-species," and relegates some forms at present carrying specific rank to sub-species. He appears to admit the following species and sub-species:—

*G. olivacea*, with *flavigasta* and *rogersi* as sub-species.

*G. magnirostris* with *G. m. tenebrosa* as sub-species.

*G. chloronota* with no sub-species in Australia.

*G. fusca*: includes the *laevigaster* group with *G. f. laevigaster*, *G. f. broomei* and *G. f. mastersi* as sub-species; the *fusca* group with *G. f. fusca*, *G. f. mungi* and *G. f. exsul*; and *G. f. cantatrix*.

*G. igata*: includes *G. i. igata*, *G. i. insularis*, *G. i. modesta*; and the *richmondi* group with *G. i. richmondi*, *G. i. mouki*, and a new form from Bowen, *G. i. amalia*.

*G. palpebrosa* with *personata*, *johnstoni* and *flavida*.

Mr. Mathews adds that perhaps some field naturalist will confirm the above from observation and cabinet skins.