

Description of the Eggs of the Northern Warbler (*Gerygone mouki*) Mathews

By FRANK E. HOWE, R.A.O.U., Melbourne, Victoria.

Clutch, two in number, oval in form; texture of shell very fine, and slightly glossy; colour, pinkish-white, finely marked with pink and reddish-brown, the markings being thicker and more prominent towards the apex, where they tend to form a zone.

Dimensions in mm., A, 17×13 ; B, 16×12 . Taken by W. Coleman at Chumberumba, near Cairns, North Queensland, on November 13, 1921. Incubation, fresh. A skin of the *Gerygone* accompanied the eggs, and was identified by the late Mr. A. J. Campbell.

Members desirous of having Vol. XXXII or other volumes bound, should send parts to the Hon. General Secretary to reach him not later than May 31. Estimated cost of case and binding is 5/-; cases only, 2/6.

Stray Feathers and Camera Craft

Vocal Mimicry of the Brown Thornbill.—The powers of mimicry possessed by some Australian birds have frequently been remarked upon. Especially is that so with the Lyrebirds, and, in scarcely less a degree, with the Bower-birds. Apart from those species, a number of our smaller birds are much given to mockery. I must here make reference to a paper by Mr. A. H. Chisholm, R.A.O.U. ("Vocal Mimicry Among Australian Birds"), appearing in *The Ibis* for October, 1932 (pp. 605-624). Prefacing his remarks with an informative discussion of various points concerning vocal mimicry, Mr. Chisholm lists eighteen indigenous and one introduced bird that have been noticed as more or less accomplished mimics in a natural state. Undoubtedly other species are given to mimicry; in fact, the purpose of this note is to add another bird to those already listed in *The Ibis*.

The Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*), a species moderately common in the neighbourhood of Sydney, is not generally suspected of mimicry. For many years now I have observed this bird, in a somewhat casual way, certainly, but, until the breeding season of 1932, I was not aware that it would imitate the call-notes of other birds. It was whilst kneeling at the nest of a pair of these birds, containing young, that I heard and, on looking up, saw one

of the adults imitate the calls of the Grey Thrush, the Grey Fantail, and also utter a series of soft, piping notes resembling one of the calls of the Yellow Robin. These were repeated every time the young birds were disturbed.

Mr. Chandler also gives, in *The Emu* (Vol IX, 1910, p. 249), a list of seven species of birds whose call-notes were uttered by a pair of Brown Thornbills.

When walking along a bush track in the Middle Harbour district, about six weeks later (October 30, 1932), my attention was drawn to the excited calls of some small birds in a sapling. From the nature of the alarm notes and the actions of the birds, a Blue Wren and two Brown Thornbills, it seemed possible that a snake or a lizard was the cause of their agitation. A search failed to reveal the presence of either reptile, but disclosed the nest of a Brown Thornbill, a few inches from the ground, in which were two nestlings not more than a week old. When touched the youngsters called loudly: immediately both adults came quite close to the nest, and in their fear, or alarm, commenced to imitate the call-notes of several birds inhabiting the neighbourhood. In quick succession one of the parents imitated the *accelerando* notes of the Spinebill Honeyeater, the harsh double note of the White-cheeked Honeyeater, the chatter of the Brown-headed Honeyeater, the piping of the Yellow Robin, the "peter-peter" of the Jacky Winter, and, finally, the "e-chong" call of the Rufous-breasted Whistler. Most of these calls were repeated by the adults during my stay at the nest. Passing the spot some four hours later, and being desirous of again hearing the vocal mimicry of the birds, I walked across to the nest, but was surprised to find it empty, except for an addled egg. The parent birds were not to be seen near by. The two nestlings could not possibly have left the nest on their own volition; apparently there must actually have been a snake or lizard which alarmed the parents in the first instance, thus attracting my notice to the nest, and it must have returned and extracted the young birds.

In searching for a previous record of the mimetic ability of the Brown Thornbill, I read some comments which recounted events so similar to those that I had experienced that I cannot refrain from quoting them:—

The Brown Tit-Warbler, when alarmed at its nest, will imitate the calls of a variety of birds. This happens when the nest contains young, and the birds are excited by a person imitating the squeaking of a nestling. The range and power of some of the louder calls is unexpected, and the experience is very pleasing to one who hears it for the first time.

These remarks appear in that delightful little volume of



Brown Thornbill at nest among dead bracken.

Photo. by K. A. Hindwood, R.A.O.U.

nature reminiscences, *Bush Charms*, by L. G. Chandler, R.A.O.U., a book one can read and re-read with pleasure.

In the instances detailed above, and from the observations of L. G. Chandler, it seems that, with the Brown Thornbill, the impulse to mimic the call-notes of other species is largely associated with the safety of the nestlings. Apparently, under the stress of some strong emotion, such as fear or excitement, and quite apart from sexual influence, birds may, and will, imitate the calls of other birds—perhaps consciously, perhaps sub-consciously.—K. A. HINDWOOD, R.A.O.U., Willoughby, N.S.W.

Random Bird Notes from Queensland.—Early in November, 1932, we sheltered during a week of heavy weather in the Boat Passage—a short channel leading from the Brisbane River into the southern end of Moreton Bay and about eight miles distant from Brisbane. Just before dusk each evening companies of Brolgas (*Megalornis rubicundus*) called loudly—they are noisy birds on the wing. They would fly across from the mangrove swamps below Lytton out to the sandbanks around Fisherman's Island. In the early mornings they returned to shelter and to feed amongst the mangroves. Flocks of Brolgas so close to Brisbane are an unusual sight. There were over a hundred birds all told.

On a sandbank close by a fair number of wading and shore birds gathered together—Caspian, Crested, Gull-billed and Little Terns, Silver Gulls, Cormorants and Pelicans. A Caspian Tern had a hard time trying to feed a vociferous young bird. Chased by the Silver Gulls, the parent bird, fish in bill, had to run the gauntlet of many birds eager to snatch the prize before the chick was finally reached. Even then when the parent had succeeded in poking a large fish half way down the chick's throat, a Pelican waddled up and grabbed the fish by the tail. The chick's outcry on losing the fish was very amusing.

Later in the month we were camped among many black wattle trees in a paddock on a friend's orchard at Tamborine Mountain. On a branch overhead swung an Oriole's nest. Early morning and again at evening the parent birds perched beside the nest and gave instruction in mimicking other birds' notes and songs to their three attentive nestlings. The male bird was a fine mimic. His mate kept the nest clean by swallowing all excreta. Good patches of jungle edged the orchard on two sides, and it was interesting to see Brush Turkeys—eight or nine of them—steal out towards dusk to feed on the new potatoes at the bottom of the orchard. The birds were led by a very wary old cock bird with huge wattles, and they all melted back into the shadow

of the scrub at the least movement in their direction. One morning a new mound was found. We all went to investigate. It was quite close to the high road and opposite a State school. The mound, about ten feet in diameter, was well heaped up to two or more feet high, and had a circular depression on top. The ground around the mound was cleanly swept as though with a broom. The mound was burrowed into near the outer edge in search of eggs, and two were soon brought out from the rich, warm, moist mould. In searching for the eggs a good number of a round white grub were thrown out—"blackfellows' lollies," Mr. Curtis called them; and he thought perhaps they had been purposely placed in the mound by the parent birds to feed the newly-hatched chicks.

Walking along the ocean beach on the north end of Bribie Island one day, I saw the body of a Petrel lying on the sand. During the following week (December 20) I found many more—a few of them skeletons, others fully feathered and fresh, as if only just come ashore. A day or two afterwards a live bird—from a distance it looked the same species—drifted past our anchorage in the inner channel. The bird was spreading its large wings in a vain effort to fly. We followed the bird in the dinghy, and my husband rowed me slowly round while I made certain of the bird's identity. The poor thing made frantic efforts to rise—walking on the surface of the water with wings lifted as we drew near. Without doubt it was the Great-winged Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera*). That the bodies found on the shore had also been referable to this species was plain. In W. B. Alexander's *Birds of the Ocean*, the range of the Great-winged Petrel is given as between latitudes 50° S. and 30° S., so the birds must have been well out of their latitude.

Fregata minor (the Great Frigate Bird) is often seen above the ocean beach here, and comes down low enough for the red pouch and white lower breast to be plainly visible.

Motoring along the bumpy track through the swampy heath lands that lie between Caloundra and Lake Garra-manda we flushed a ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*). The car was stopped and I ran across to where the bird had gone down but could not find it. Then the bird rose again at a right angle to where it had taken cover. Twice again we flushed the bird, and I obtained a splendid look at it. The bird was in fine condition and plumage. In this State it has, I believe, only been recorded previously from Fraser Island.

The Fork-tailed Swifts (*Micropus pacificus*) were plentiful, and hawked low over the open heath lands.—L. M. MAYO, R.A.O.U., South Brisbane, Qld., 27/2/33.

Reference to Type Description of *Psophodes nigrogularis*.

—Towards the conclusion of their interesting paper on the new sub-species of Black-throated Whipbird (*The Emu*, Vol. XXXII, pt. 3, January, 1933, pp. 133-148) Messrs. Howe and Ross make the following statement, which is open to discussion:—

The reference given for this species in the *Official Checklist* (1926) of the R.A.O.U. is obviously wrong, as Gould's *Birds of Australia*, Vol. 3, referred to there as being published in 1844, is actually dated 1848.

The reference in the *Checklist*, i.e., "*P. nigrogularis* G., B. of A., 3, 16, 1844", is, while not actually wrong, somewhat misleading; yet this is scarcely an excuse for the perpetration of an error. The facts about Gould's publications are well known—at least they have been chronicled by several bibliographers. Details of the Australian birds described by Gould are available in Gregory M. Mathews's *Bibliography of the Birds of Australia* (1925), whilst in a recent number of *The Emu* (Vol. XXXI, 1931, pp. 108-9) there appears a short account of the manner of publication of Gould's folio volumes of the *Birds of Australia*.

In order that the discussion may be placed in its true light, I give hereunder a summary of the appurtenant facts. Gould, after successfully completing the *Birds of Europe* in 1837, turned his attention to the Australian avifauna, commenced his *Synopsis*, and soon afterwards the *Birds of Australia and the Adjacent Islands*. Finding the available material insufficient, and at the same time perceiving the possibilities of collecting on the spot, he discontinued both works and proceeded to Australia. Particulars of these incomplete publications are:—A *Synopsis of the Birds of Australia and the Adjacent Islands*, of which four parts were issued in small quarto in the years 1837-8, and giving for the most part the heads of birds in colour; and *Birds of Australia and the Adjacent Islands*, of which only two parts left the press, the first in August, 1837, the second in February, 1838; issued in folio, each part containing ten plates. Before leaving England, Gould cancelled these parts; in consequence they are now known as "Gould's suppressed plates". On his return from Australia he commenced the folio work again. Thus the first part of the real *Birds of Australia* was published on December 1, 1840; the next thirty-one parts at intervals of three months until September 1, 1848; while the last four parts are dated December 1, 1848. It will be observed, therefore, that the *Birds of Australia* was issued in thirty-six parts between 1840-8. Later it was bound in systematic order and not

according to chronological appearance. The title pages to each of the seven volumes are dated 1848.

When Gould was figuring a new bird he usually forwarded a description of it to a scientific periodical, but, because of the irregularity of issue of such journals as opposed to the regular appearance of the parts of the *Birds of Australia*, many names must be cited from the later publication, as in the case under discussion. It may be added that the technical description, although read before a meeting of the Zoological Society of London on January 23, 1844, was not published in the *Proceedings* of that Society until July. That was the month in which the part of the *Birds of Australia*, containing the figure of the Black-throated Whipbird, was issued. The plate, having priority of acceptance over the technical description, when there is equality in the date of publication, is thus quoted.

The reference to read correctly should be cited as:—*"Psophodes nigrogularis*, Gould, *Birds Austr.*, pt. xv (Vol. III, pl. 16), July 1, 1844," not merely "Vol. III, pl. 16, 1844" (*Checklist*), or "1848" (Howe and Ross).

The above remarks only emphasize, what has already been stressed by taxonomists, that for a reference to be of any use at all it must be accurate and sufficiently detailed to be read correctly. The endless trouble entailed in searching for obscure references or in elucidating mis-statements can best be appreciated by older workers in systematic zoology, or nomenclature. Nowadays, thanks to the labours of men like Sherborn, Richmond, Mathews, and Iredale, there should be little or no excuse for errors in the citation of the origin of a description, date of publication, etc.—
K. A. HINDWOOD, R.A.O.U., Willoughby, N.S.W.

Notes on the Mallee-fowl.—For years I have been anxious to secure photographs of the Mallee-fowl on its mound. The bird is rapidly being exterminated, and as the species had not been successfully photographed, I was particularly keen. Pressure of work, and the difficulty of locating the birds within a reasonable distance of my home, were the main factors in my being unable to visit the haunts of the Mallee-fowl until this season. On November 5 and 6 of last year (1932) I spent a most enjoyable, though strenuous, week-end in a section of the Mallee now being used for wheat-farming. A few pairs of Mallee-fowls still remain on an abandoned block, and a friend had located a mound in use. The week-end was very hot, and, as I had about ninety miles of car travel, and numerous miles to walk over sandhills, I returned home extremely weary. I was well contented, however, for I had eight exposed plates in my bag. My friend had misunderstood my instructions about making a "hide", and instead of a square enclosure, he had put



Mallee-fowl on mound.

Photo. by L. G. Chandler, R.A.O.U.

up a single bag like a shield in front of the mound. To make matters worse, it was on the north-west side of the mound.

I arrived at my destination about 5 p.m., and we went out to the mound soon afterwards. I shifted the bag to the north-east, and placing the camera in position, we covered it with branches and returned to camp. I was up at 4 a.m. next day, and after a hasty breakfast walked to the mound and entered the "hide" at 5.10 a.m. There was no sign of a bird in the vicinity, and I did not feel very confident of success. Having to move the "hide" was disappointing, but I determined to try my luck. It was a glorious morning: a clear blue sky and no wind, but very cold. Such mornings in the Mallee are often the forerunners of a hot day, and this one was no exception.

At a quarter to eight a bird suddenly appeared on my right side, and with stately walk she went around to the back of the mound. She was evidently suspicious, and walked up and down twice behind the mound, and then disappeared. In a few minutes she was back, however, and after some hesitation she came to the top of the mound and began to scratch slowly, using first one foot and then the other. I took a photograph, but she saw the movement when I changed the plate, and in a sedate manner walked away out of sight. She did not return for half an hour, and in the interval I suffered severely from cramp and the heat, and the attention of hundreds of ants. I obtained two more "snaps" before she again disappeared. She came back within twenty minutes, and, as on previous occasions, scratched in several places around the rim of the mound. I exposed three more plates, and then decided to test the focus of the camera, as I had bumped one of the tripod legs. The bird evidently saw me, for my "hide" was a poor one, and in genuine alarm she vanished in the scrub, but still in the same stately manner that was characteristic of all her movements. I say "she", but it may have been a male bird.

I waited another three-quarters of an hour, and was amazed suddenly to see the head of a Mallee-fowl above the mound; and then the sand flew up, and I realized that it was a young one, just hatched. It rested for about ten seconds on top of the mound, and I exposed a plate; then, like a flash, it was off. I ran and caught it, and after taking a "close-up", let it go. It went under some leaves near the mound and stayed there. The scratching of the old bird is undoubtedly done to assist the young one to liberty. At 11.30 a.m. I was back in camp after a morning of keen enjoyment.—L. G. CHANDLER, R.A.O.U., Red Cliffs, Vic., 1/2/33.

The Nest of the Osprey (*Pandion haliaëtus*) at Cape Mentelle, South-west Australia.—As far as I know, there is only one nesting site of this species on the coast between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin, and that is the well-known nest at Cape Mentelle, or, as it is known locally, Kilcarnup. A. J. Campbell saw this nest in 1889, when it contained young ones, and he published a photograph of the nest in his *Nests and Eggs*. Milligan visited the nest in October, 1901, and found it still in use, and took one of the two eggs it contained for the Perth Museum. He then, in conjunction with Mr. B. H. Woodward, succeeded in getting the small island on which the nest was situated gazetted as a reserve, and placed under the care of the Cave Warden resident at the Margaret River. Mr. T. Carter reported seeing the birds at the Margaret River in 1916; in April, 1919, he saw one bird near Augusta (*Emu*, XXIII, 140, 1923). The members of the R.A.O.U. on their official visit in 1920 visited the nest, and found that it had been occupied that season, there being empty egg shells in the nest. Two good photographs of the nest and islet, taken by Mr. H. E. Hurst, R.A.O.U., were published with the report (*Emu*, XX, 1921).

Mr. T. Carter reported that in February, 1922, he saw two pairs of Ospreys at different places between Augusta and Geographé Bay (*Emu*, XXIII, 1923). In the report of the State Secretary for Western Australia (Mr. D. L. Serventy) for the year ended June 30, 1931 (*Emu*, XXXI, 225), it was stated that during the year the curator of the Western Australian Museum had heard that the nest had been destroyed with explosives, but that the Chief Inspector of Fisheries and Game had reported, after investigations, that on June 10 one of the birds was on a nest which appeared to be in course of construction, and was about two feet in height.

I personally visited the islet on November 5, 1932, and found that little remains of the nest, and that it is not now used by the Ospreys. The birds have built another nest on the mainland, within a few hundred yards of the original nest, and on the day of my visit the new nest contained one egg. The egg was a poor specimen of an egg of a bird which usually lays beautifully-marked eggs. The egg in the nest had only a few markings. Whilst I was in the locality the two birds remained wheeling overhead; only once did either call, and that was just as the nest was being approached after a short, stiff climb, and then only one bird whistled once. I saw one of the birds adding a stick to the nest.

The protection hitherto received by the Ospreys has been due to the fact that the spot in the past had few visitors.

The country between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin is, however, being rapidly cleared by group settlement, and I much doubt that the birds will find their new home one of long duration. Ospreys breed at several points on the coast east of Cape Leeuwin, notably, near Point D'Entrecasteaux and at the outlet of Brooke's Inlet. The nests there should have longer lives than the one which has just been discussed. On visiting the nest at Brooke's Inlet on October 17, 1931, I found it to be about five feet in height and extremely neatly and firmly made. It contained three beautifully-marked eggs. The nest at Point D'Entrecasteaux is almost inaccessible, and should have a long life.—H. M. WHITTELL, R.A.O.U., Bridgetown, South-west Australia.

Occurrence of the Little Friar-bird near Sydney.—The unusual appearance of a bird in a certain locality, no matter how common it may be outside that area, is an event which provokes considerable interest. Two conditions are necessary for the proper appreciation of the circumstance: First, the bird must be seen by a competent observer and, secondly, the observer or someone cognizant with the facts must realize the significance of the record. It can scarcely be doubted that many species, that would prove rare additions to the list of a district, pass unnoticed because one, or both, of these two conditions are lacking.

Apposite to the above remarks a friend, Mr. Ralph Blackett, mentioned to me early in August, 1932, that several Little Friar-birds (*Philemon citreogularis*) were to be seen near his home at Harbord, which is some seven miles NNE of Sydney. Harbord is what may be termed a distant suburb of the city, being on the north side of the harbour, and now fairly well settled and considerably cleared of forest vegetation. The previous records of the Little Friar-bird from the County of Cumberland, which lies within a radius of some forty miles of Sydney, are two skins collected in 1902—one at Kurnell on May 31, the other at Pittwater during the same month.*

Following the information given me by Mr. Blackett, two friends and I went, on September 3, to see the birds. Almost before we had entered the grounds of his home we heard the varied and melodious calls of the birds we were seeking. Soon afterwards one bird was noticed actively chasing another; then, for an hour or so, we watched the actions and listened to the call-notes of at least half-a-dozen Little Friar-birds. All the birds observed appeared to have the yellow throat or the indistinct brownish band on the neck, or both those markings, that being the immature plumage. We were unable to ascertain whether any adults were pre-

*North, *Nests and Eggs*, Vol. II, 1907, p. 175.

sent. They were moving about some pine trees and Moreton Bay fig trees seeking insects among the foliage or in the crevices of the bark. Several of them were observed to fly off in the direction of a coral tree (*Erythrina* sp.), which was in full bloom; apparently they were seeking nectar.

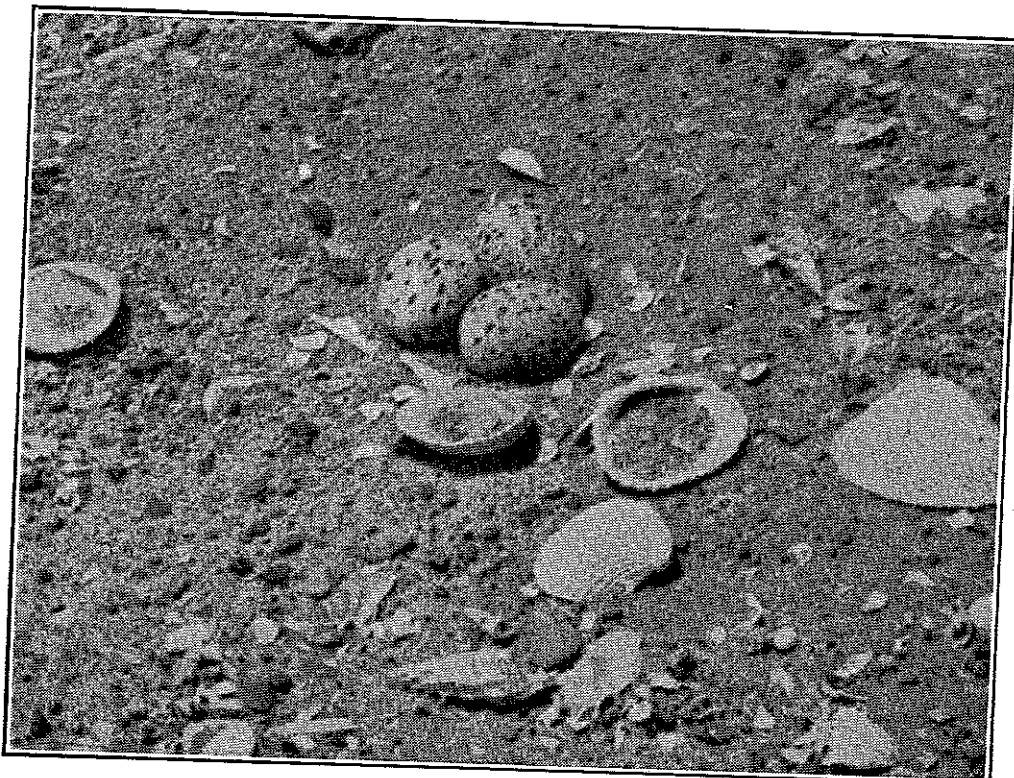
No record was kept by Mr. Blackett of the initial appearance of the Friar-birds, though it was some time in late autumn or early winter. Only one bird was noticed at first; their numbers then seemed to increase, until the maximum was reached about the time of our visit in September. It will be remembered by Sydney-siders that that month was one of the wettest experienced for many years. Rain fell on 23 days against an average of 12 days, the total number of points being 795, the third highest since 1840. This was too much for the Friar-birds; they gradually disappeared, and by the end of the month not a bird was to be seen.

North attributes the appearance of the birds in 1902 to a great inland drought. This factor could not have determined the presence of the later birds, for rain had fallen abundantly throughout the State during the greater part of the year. It may be mentioned in passing that the Noisy Friar-bird (*P. corniculatus*) is fairly well distributed in forest country throughout the County of Cumberland, where it breeds.—K. A. HINDWOOD, R.A.O.U., Willoughby, N.S.W.

Notes on the Little Tern.—Many interesting forms of wading birds and sea birds frequent the tidal reaches of the Hunter River, which joins the sea at Newcastle, New South Wales. One of the most interesting, and certainly the most graceful forms that visit the area is the Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*). Numbers of that species nest on suitable sand spits and reclaimed areas along the foreshores, a small colony being established on Walsh Island. The greater part of the island has been built up by dredging sand from the river channels; the sand banks thus formed have provided ideal nesting grounds for the Terns. It was during 1931 that I first noticed the Terns breeding on the island, although I had located odd pairs breeding in other parts of the district prior to that time. Last year the birds were first noticed by me early in October, when a flock (of about one hundred) was seen feeding, in company with a few pairs of Crested Terns (*Sterna bergii*), on small fish which were in shoals all along the river. These fish are known locally as "anchovies": they reach a length of about two inches and are almost transparent. On October 22, at Walsh Island, the first Tern's nest found contained three eggs. I searched the sands thoroughly and also watched many birds,



Little Tern sitting on young.



Nest and eggs of the Little Tern.

spending a few hours in their company, but could not locate any other nests. Many holes had been scooped out in the sand, as many as three holes having been dug out in a space of a few square yards, evidently by a pair of birds that was undecided as to the most suitable site.

My next visit to the island was on November 19. On that occasion my search and watching resulted in the discovery of seven nests. The nests were simply a shallow hole scooped in the sand, and in most cases the holes were lined with a few small, flat shells. The nests located consisted of four with three eggs each and three with clutches of two. The eggs vary considerably in shape and colouration, the usual type having a stone-grey ground colour with spots and blotches of brownish-black, dark-stone and lavender; the last-named appear as if beneath the surface. As soon as a landing was made on the island, the nesting Terns flew high into the air and began uttering their loud and harsh calls. Occasionally a bird would leave the flock and swoop down to within a few feet of our heads, and then gracefully rejoin the party. When the sandy portion of the island was reached we sat down to watch, and in five minutes the Terns with nests had settled down to the task of incubating, and all the birds were quiet again. While we were sitting and watching the brooding birds a Tern would often come in from the river carrying a small fish in its bill. It would alight within a few feet of its nest and waddle clumsily to its mate, which eagerly accepted the food. Both birds share in the task of incubating, and also sit on the newly-hatched young.

Little Terns do not always breed in colonies, for on November 12, 1930, at Smedmore, a suburb of Newcastle, I found a pair, one of which was sitting on three eggs. Again, on November 19, I found a single pair in possession of a large area of sand at Moscheto Island, also on the Hunter River: these birds had two young in down.

A description of a pair of young in down and apparently only a few days out of the shell is as follows:—Upper colouration yellow, under surface pure white, bill yellow, the tip being almost black, crown of head has a few dots and lines of black, no markings on the wings, feet webbed and yellow, iris black. The young at this early stage can run a few yards.

The birds are not easy to photograph—the first bird I attempted to photograph spent twenty minutes swooping at the camera and tripod from high in the air, after which it tired of flying at the camera and alighted a few yards from the eggs. It remained in that position for a few minutes, and then, for some reason unknown to me, flew away. However, it returned in about five minutes with its

mate, and alighted a few yards away from the nest. After being in that position for a few more minutes, it waddled to the eggs and sat on them. Since my first experience I have secured photographs of another bird sitting on young, and a photograph accompanies this article. On both occasions a hide was made, as there is little cover on the island.

My last visit to Newcastle was on January 22 of this year (1933). The birds were not seen at Walsh Island. Only one pair was noted in the district, and both birds were seen flying along Throsby Creek, a branch of the Hunter. Apparently these Terns move north after the young are reared, for during July of last year (1932) I noted several near Grafton, on the Clarence River. On that trip I did not hear one of the birds give its familiar call, which appears to be given mostly during the breeding season.—A. J. GWYNNE, R.A.O.U., Carrington, N.S.W., 24/1/33.

A Plea for the Adoption of Popular Bird Names.—A correspondent in the January number referred to the claim of *The Emu* to be a "magazine to popularize the study . . . of native birds," a policy which is endorsed, I am sure, by every reader. It must be a great pleasure to all lovers of our birds to note the increasing interest among the public of recent years. However, there is one considerable factor which is hindering this popularization. I refer to the difference between the popular names of some of our common birds and the names used in the books of reference.

A case which particularly comes to mind is that of the "Mopoke," so well known to every country dweller by its nocturnal call. The name is very apt, and there seems to be no reason why it should not be adopted as the official vernacular name of *Ninox boobook*. Or, as a compromise with the bird-student, it could be called the Mopoke Owl. In Tasmania the "Mopoke" is *Ninox novæ-seelandiæ*, which could appropriately become the Little Mopoke Owl. Then there is the bird which figures in the books as the White-faced Heron. This name conveys nothing to the ordinary man. But mention the "Blue Crane," and he knows what you mean at once. I would not suggest calling a Heron a Crane, but why not compromise with "Blue Heron"? Two other birds, the popular names of which might well be recognized, are the "Crow" and the common "Grass-Parrot" of the inland districts. What gain is there in designating as a Raven a bird which is known, with sufficient justification, to a very large majority of the populace as a Crow? In northern Victoria everybody knows what a Grass-Parrot is, but few have heard of a Red-backed Parrot.

My contention is that for the purposes of ornithology proper the scientific names are sufficient, and that in the

choice of the vernaculars the layman should receive first consideration.* If a bird is widely known by a certain name which is not distinctly inappropriate, then that name should be accepted as the official vernacular. It may not be the most suitable name conceivable, but it has the authority of usage and will remain, whatever the bird-books say. These are not new principles. That they have been recognized and acted upon by those responsible is evident by a comparison of *The Checklist* 1926 and recent editions of bird-books, with bird-books of a few decades ago, with their "Superb Warblers," "Piping Crow-Shrikes," etc. All that is asked for is an extension of the good work. The increased frequency with which new popular works on birds are making their appearance makes it imperative that the matter should not be too long delayed.

Besides adopting straight out some common names, as suggested, *The Checklist* practice of giving an alternative name in parentheses might profitably be extended. Also, in some cases the two names already given might be reversed, to give emphasis to the popular name and commend its use in bird-books. The table below gives some suggested alterations.

<i>The Checklist 1926 Names</i>	<i>Suggested Names</i>
White-faced Heron	Blue Heron
Boobook Owl	Mopoke Owl
Spotted Owl	Little Mopoke Owl
Red-backed Parrot	Common Grass Parrot
Australian Raven	Southern Crow
Australian Crow	Northern Crow
Noisy Friar-Bird	Leatherhead (Noisy Friar-Bird)
Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike	Summer-Bird (Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike)
Fairy Martin	Fairy Martin (Bottle-Swallow)
Brolga (Native Companion)	Native Companion (Australian Crane)
Maned Goose (Wood Duck).	Wood-Duck (Maned Goose)
Grey (Black) Duck	Black Duck
Pink Cockatoo (Major Mitchell)	Major Mitchell (Pink Cockatoo)
Eastern Rosella	Common (Eastern) Rosella
Restless Flycatcher (Grinder)	Scissors-Grinder (Restless Flycatcher)
White-fronted Chat (Tang)	Tang (White-fronted Chat)
Australian Pipit (Ground-lark)	Groundlark (Australian Pipit)

*The proposal contained in this contribution is one already determined for consideration by the now-forming *Checklist* Committee.—Ed.

Revision is particularly desirable in the first five names of the list. The sixth name (Australian Crow) will only require alteration if the fifth is changed.—HENRY B. BOSS-WALKER, Tyers, Victoria, 17/2/33.

The Brown Bittern.—Little seems to have been written about the Brown Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*), as it is a bird seldom seen by the every-day naturalist, and one which has received little or no mention in most of the Australian bird books; so perhaps these few notes may be of interest following the excellent photograph of the subject by Mr. J. Bright in *The Emu*, Vol. XXXII, part 1.

The Bittern is found inhabiting reedy creeks and swamps throughout Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand and New Caledonia. Its yellow-irised eyes are the most suitable for its nocturnal habits. The legs are of a medium length with long toes, so that the bird will not sink into the soft mud when searching for food. The female is slightly smaller than the male, and has similar plumage.

The Bittern is one of the most useful of birds, for its diet includes much that is harmful to the man on the land and his stock. Bitterns use their long-pointed bills to good avail on the denizens of the creek-side—"yabbies," water snails, frogs, and unsuspecting small fish. They vary their diet with insects, many of which hatch on the surface of the water.

A tale is told by a Queenslander, for which, however, I cannot vouch, of the intelligence of a Bittern he once watched. A large log lay parallel with the stream, the side jutting out over the water. The Bittern would take a small piece of dry reed, drop it into the water near the log, and follow it as it drifted slowly down-stream. When a small fish rose to the "bait" the bird would catch it, then carry the "bait" back near the bank and drop it in again. If the "bait" drifted out of its reach the Bittern would run ashore for another piece. This went on until the bird had satisfied its hunger, and several people actually witnessed the bird in its remarkable and intelligent "fishing."

On clear, still nights the booming call of the Bittern can be heard for a great distance, and in the early days the aborigines wove tales about it, and the "medicine-men" would frighten the blacks so much that they would not go near swamps at night.

Because of its call, the Bittern is commonly called the "Boomer," and is named by the aborigines "Bar-mah." One associates the "boom" call with the summer months, and as the nesting season of the Bitterns is from November to January, the cry may be a mating call. The call is a sound like the echo from an anvil being struck, and the bird will

utter its "booms" seemingly without pause for a great length of time. On quiet, warm nights the Bittern seems most happy, and it booms away to its heart's content. I have often heard it booming at midnight from the reed beds of the Kananook Creek at Frankston, Victoria, and have counted as many as thirty-five "booms" uttered without pause. Some say that the Bittern only "booms" in groups of four, the groups being repeated, but I have not noticed any pause between groups of "booms." The Bittern can also be heard during the daytime, and on many occasions I have heard it up to midday. The last time I heard it "boom" during the daytime was from the little creek at Mount Eliza on a misty January morning—its loud, dismal call coming in monotonous regularity.

When the nesting season arrives (November) the birds choose a secluded spot and build a nest of dead reeds, which they pull together into a flat platform-like nest. This is about a foot in diameter and several inches above high water level. Four eggs are the usual clutch. They are of a pale olive green colour, about two inches long by one-and-a-half inches broad.

Bitterns are stationary in their movements and are generally recognized as being rare. They are not sociable birds, being usually found only in pairs. Each pair of birds will have its own section of the swamp or reed-bed to themselves, other pairs rarely encroaching on their area.

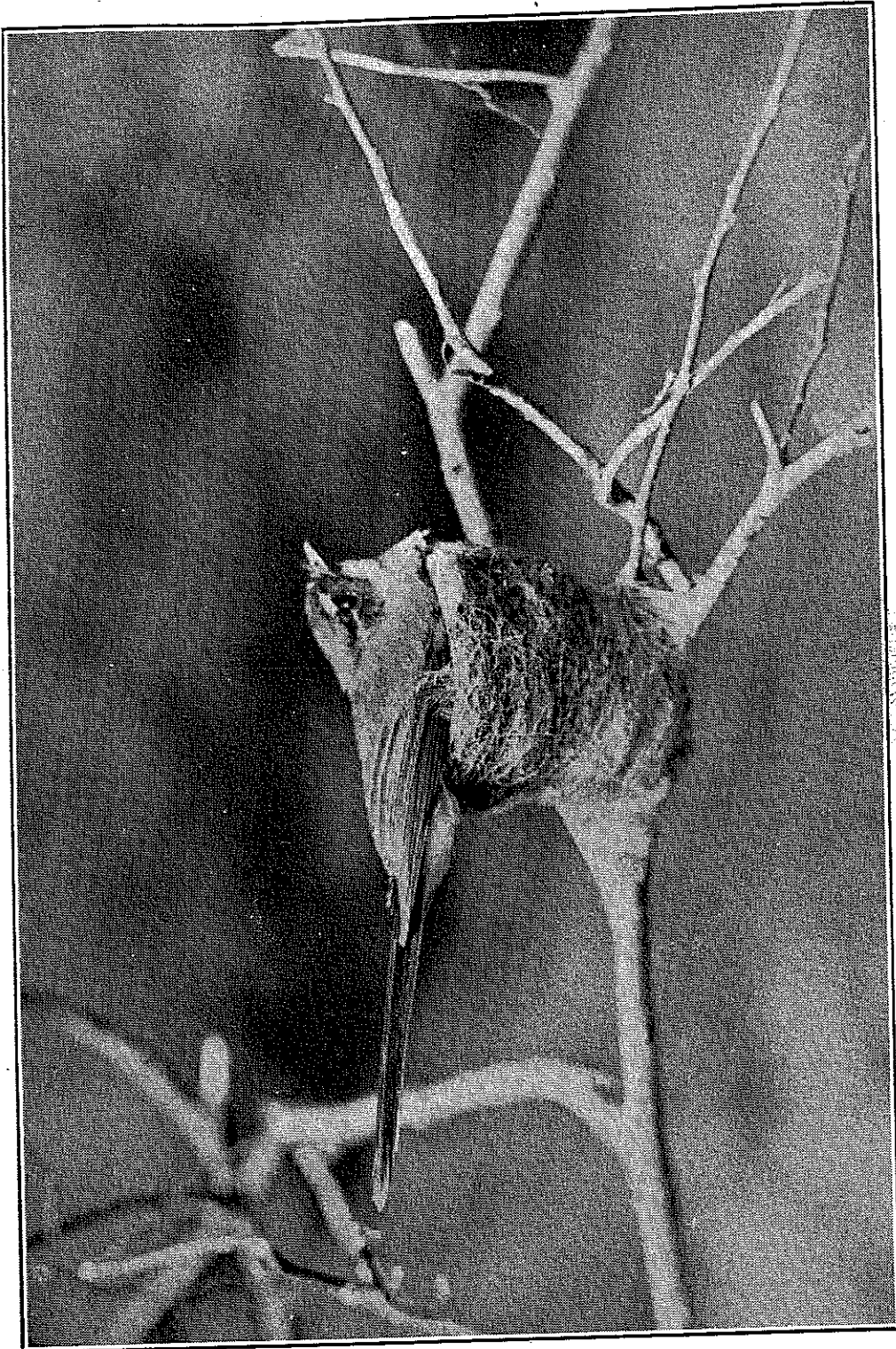
Dredges have recently been at work on the Kananook Creek at Frankston, and many of the reed-beds have been razed to the water level, so it will be interesting to note the effect on the creek-side birds, the Bittern in particular.—(MISS) G. ONIANS, R.A.O.U., Armadale, Vic., 14/2/33.

Unusual Conduct of a Willie-Wagtail.—While quietly eating my lunch in the shade of a clump of turpentine trees on November 22, 1932, I became interested in the movements of a Willie-Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*), which was acting very peculiarly near a nest which contained eggs of a pair of Grey Fantails (*R. flabellifera*). The Fantails' nest was one of those unusual ones which lack a "tail" or "stem," and it was placed about ten feet from the ground, on a dry and exposed turpentine branch. While I was watching, the sitting bird left the nest, the mate immediately taking over the duty of keeping the eggs warm. A few minutes later a Willie-Wagtail flew into the branches near the nest and gradually made its way closer. When about one foot from the nest it began to call "Sweet pretty creature," and it kept that up for some considerable time. Then it approached very close to the nest, still calling continually. The Grey Fantail appeared to take no notice whatever

although it once uttered a couple of notes which were sufficient to bring its mate to the scene. Failing to dislodge its smaller "cousin" with its calling, the Wagtail grasped the Fantail's tail with its bill. This action had a magical effect. The sitting bird, assisted by its mate, attacked its tormentor with surprising suddenness, the three birds descending in a tangled heap towards the ground. The Wagtail, for the first time, then made use of its well-known scolding notes, and, righting itself, it again flew close to the nest, but was again driven off by the plucky Grey Fantails. One of the Fantails then returned to the nest. The Wagtail stayed about for some time before moving off, but seemed to abandon the idea of interfering with the nest. Some hours later the Fantails were still masters in their own home, but when I returned the following morning the nest was empty, and I could find no trace of broken eggs on the ground below. Whether or not the Wagtail was responsible for the deed I cannot say. I strongly suspect that such was the case.

I am at a loss to explain this action on the part of the Wagtail. All its actions had been slow and deliberate, and it certainly meant to interfere in some way with the nest. I am confident that it did not want nesting material, as no nest of a Wagtail was within reasonable distance of the spot, and, besides the nest was not damaged, although the eggs had disappeared. The most feasible explanation I can advance is that it did the act out of a spirit of mischief, or for some other reason difficult for us to understand. It seems probable to me that even the most inoffensive of birds, on occasions, will not hesitate deliberately to damage the contents of nests other than their own which they may find unguarded, or even those of weaker species, the owners of which can be driven from their nests. The conduct of this Wagtail just described seems to support that contention, as do some other observations.—A. J. ELLIOTT, R.A.O.U., Cambewarra, N.S.W., 4/2/33.

Kookaburra and Snake.—One day recently, as I was watching two young Kookaburras on the ground, one of the parent birds flew up with a live snake in its beak, gripped close to the snake's head. The bird made no attempt to beat the snake on the bough or to kill it otherwise than by continuing to squeeze its neck. In about ten minutes the snake's wriggling ceased, and the bird then passed it slowly between its mandibles, squeezing it in the process to break the bone, until the snake hung head downwards. The Kookaburra then reversed the process till it again had the snake by the back of the head. Then the bird dropped the snake to the ground and crammed it head first into the eager mouth of one of the young ones. This



Grey Fantail on nest without a "stem".
Photo. by A. J. Elliott, R.A.O.U., and A. O. Elliott, R.A.O.U.

youngster gulped about half of the snake down, but could then swallow no more, so we caught it, and drawing the snake out examined and measured it. It was a copperhead, 2 feet 3 inches long. We cut it in half and gave each young Kookaburra $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches of snake, which they swallowed without much difficulty. Since then the old bird has been seen to bring two more snakes, which we judged to be each 18 inches to 24 inches long, and which the young ones swallowed whole. The killing process was always the same, the old bird holding tightly on to the snake's throat until it was choked.—F. G. MANN, R.A.O.U., Frankston, 21/1/33.

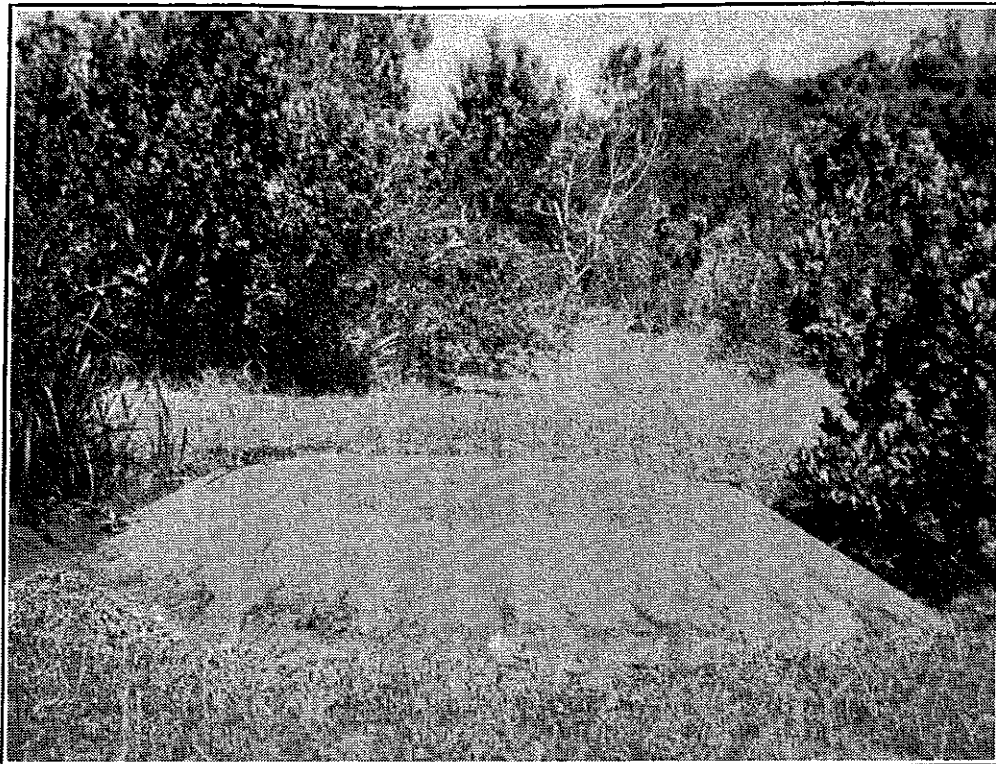
The Red-kneed Dotterel.—Rarely is the Red-kneed Dotterel (*Erythrogonyx cinctus*), principally a bird of the interior, observed in southern Victoria. Although there have been several records (mentioned below) from farther south and, in addition, others doubtless come down that are not recorded, nevertheless the birds nesting at Bendigo and photographed there by R. T. Littlejohns, R.A.O.U. (*The Emu*, Vol. XXXI, p. 15) were probably at about the limit of their ordinary range in this State. N. J. Favaloro, R.A.O.U., told me that they were to be found in numbers on swamps at Tandarra, a few miles north of Bendigo. C. F. (now Sir Charles) Belcher, R.A.O.U. (*Birds of the District of Geelong*) records that there are three examples in the Geelong Museum which were shot at Point Henry, and states that others have been obtained at Avalon. To a meeting of the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, on June 14, 1897, the late G. E. Shepherd, of Somerville, on the Mornington Peninsula, forwarded a note recording "the recent occurrence of the Porphyry-crowned Lorikeet, the Red-kneed Dotterel, and the White-faced Storm Petrel in his district," together with a specimen of each. (*Victorian Naturalist*, Vol. XIV, p. 42).

In September, 1932, my brother and I were walking slowly across a drying portion of a swamp between Altona and Point Cook, and about ten miles south-west of Melbourne, towards several White-headed Stilts (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) that were feeding on the far edge of the lagoon, when about ten feet ahead of us a small bird drew our attention to it by dipping its head several times, and it was at once seen that it was a Red-kneed Dotterel. The slow bowing motion seems to be a characteristic of the species, although not usually referred to. In this it is similar to some other waders that also bow, but opposed to several others and also many of the *Ralliformes* that flick the other end. The bird was quite tame, and resumed its feeding after a minute or two. Each time that it left off to watch us it again indulged in the bowing movement. When dis-

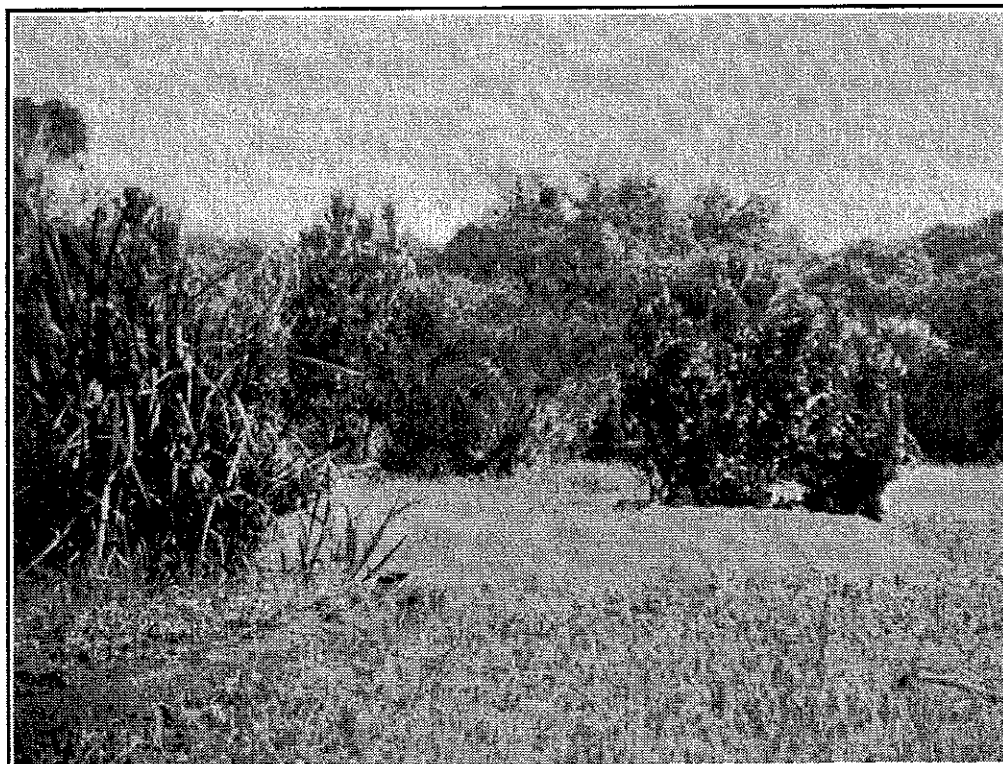
turbed it flew off with a double note approximating to "chip-churr," the first part sharp, the second drawn out. All the Dotterels run quickly, and the Red-kneed Dotterel is possibly the fastest of them all. It certainly moved much more speedily over the sticky mud than we could. There was no sign of it when we again visited the locality on October 2, about a fortnight later.—C. E. BRYANT, R.A.O.U., Melbourne, Vic., 3/3/33.

The Mallee-fowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) in South-west Australia.—The late Mr. Thomas Carter, writing in *The Emu*, in his "Birds of the Broome Hill District" (Vol. XXIII, 1923), said: "In November, 1902, I examined a nest near Cape Mentelle, which was being prepared for the eggs, and a fortnight later I knew of several eggs having been taken from a nest farther north on that coast. At that time Mallee-fowl were not uncommon in the coastal scrubs between Cape Naturaliste and the mouth of the Warren River (about 100 miles apart), and a few still occur there, the diminished numbers being caused mostly by burning off the scrub to improve the grazing for cattle. In March, 1916, a fine male bird was shot on the Lower Blackwood River, and its body served as the *pièce de résistance* for dinner at the local hotel, and it was excellent eating." Mr. Edwin Ashby, writing after the official visit of the R.A.O.U. to Western Australia in 1920, "Notes on the Supposed 'Extinct' Birds of the South-west Corner of Western Australia" (*The Emu*, Vol. XX, 1921), said: "Another interesting fact is that *Leipoa ocellata* (the Mallee-fowl) is to be found at Cape Naturaliste. My informant had seen the birds and found the nests quite recently. This bird needs investigating in this locality. It seems almost certain that the *Leipoa* living in this apparently isolated and certainly wet locality will show some specialized differences; one would expect that, at least, it will prove to be a new subspecies."

Mr. A. J. Campbell appears to have been the first ornithologist to record the breeding of this bird in the south-west corner of Western Australia. This he did in his *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds* (1900), wherein he describes a nest seen by him near Geographé Bay. This nest, however, remained unfinished, as one of the birds was accidentally killed. Campbell published a photo. in his work of "Egg Mound of the Mallee Hen", but does not say in what portion of Western Australia he took the photograph, except that it was situated in some "stink"-wood scrub in Western Australia. In "Field Observations on Western Australian Birds" (*The Emu*, Vol. II, 1902), A. W. Milligan wrote a description of a mound he saw near the mouth of



Nest of Mallee-fowl near Cape Naturaliste, S.W. Aust.



Another view of the same mound. The track by which the leaves had been swept into the cavity is shown in the lower left foreground.

Photos. by H. M. Whittell, R.A.O.U.

the Margaret River in 1901; he was fortunate to observe one of the birds working, and was able to publish a photograph of the mound, taken by C. P. Conigrave.

I am in a position to endorse, nine years later, Carter's statement that a few Mallee-fowl still occur between Cape Naturaliste and the mouth of the Warren River. I have not actually seen a mound at the latter place, but I have been told by several people that the birds still nest about there. It is, however, with great pleasure that I publish a couple of photographs, taken by myself on November 6, 1932, of an occupied nest situated within a couple of miles of the ocean near Cape Naturaliste. Two nests are in this district, within a mile and a half of each other. One, an old nest, was cleaned out by birds this year, although a wire fence line ran through the middle of the nest. I do not know whether the birds carried on with their task, but a friend is ascertaining this for me. At any rate, a new nest was made within a mile and a half of the old one, and on November 6, when photographed by me, contained certainly eight eggs. I uncovered the top row of four eggs, and saw the tops of four more below. I was informed by a resident that the birds had excavated the cavity to the depth of about three feet, and I computed that when seen by me the nest may have contained four tiers of eggs.

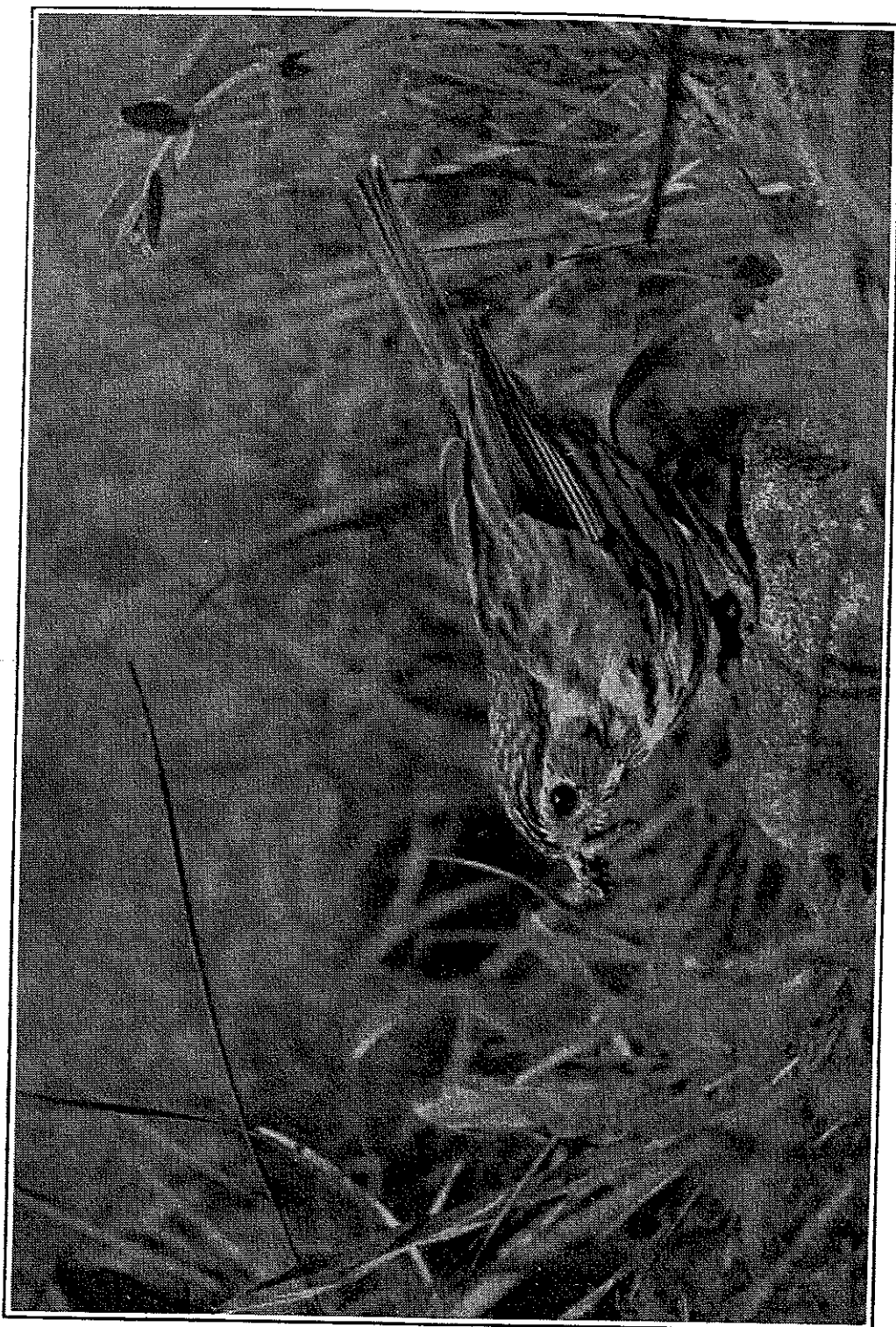
The nest was visited by me at about 10 a.m., and, after examination, I walked farther on. On my return, about an hour later, it was apparent that the bird had visited the mound in my absence, and had proceeded with the work of filling in the central depression.

The nest was approximately fourteen feet in diameter and two feet in height. Leaves had been swept up from under the surrounding bushes for a considerable distance away from the mound, but appeared to have been swept into the cavity by only one route—from the north-east. This route was about a foot broad, and is clearly shown in the lower left-hand corner of one of the photographs. The soil around the nest had been scraped up to the depth of about four inches, leaving a sort of moat twelve inches broad and four inches deep around the nest.

The local resident who showed me the nest also informed me that the birds had been absent from this particular district for some years, but that heavy bush fires had apparently driven them farther north again. He had put up a bird not long previously when out shooting. I am glad to be able to record that the necessity for endeavouring to preserve the few remaining Mallee-fowl in this locality is fully appreciated by the gentleman, to whom my thanks are due for showing me the mound.—H. M. WHITTELL, R.A.O.U., Bridgetown, W.A.

Cormorant versus Falcon.—On the evening of January 19, 1933, a Little Pied Cormorant (*Microcarbo melanoleucus*) was flushed from the river. Rising heavily, though quickly, it circled around overhead a few times, as is usual, and then made downstream. A few seconds later, however, it returned, hotly pursued by a Falcon, I think *Falco peregrinus*, which was a few feet above the Cormorant. Just as the birds were over the deep waterhole at a height of perhaps sixty feet, the Falcon "stooped," but the Cormorant, swooping down on to the water at a terrific pace and going straight under, just escaped the cruel talons of the pursuer, which "braked" with wonderful skill just above the surface of the water. The Falcon then made off. As the Cormorant came to the surface, looking scared, I flushed it again, but no sooner was it well into the air than it was sighted again by the Falcon, and again following a terrific swoop, the Cormorant went under, and the Falcon circled overhead. As the Cormorant broke the surface, I again made it rise, but it made no attempt to rise high, but flew close to the water about a couple of hundred yards up river, the Falcon following closely. By the time I again put up the Cormorant, the Falcon was out of sight, so circling around until a much greater height than usual was attained, the Cormorant flew safely away.—A. E. BRIDGEWATER, R.A.O.U., Mansfield, Vic., 20/2/33.

Notes on the Speckled Warbler.—The Speckled Warbler (*Chthonicola sagittata*) is distributed over the eastern and southern portion of the continent from south-eastern Queensland and eastern New South Wales to Victoria and South Australia. It is usually to be found in open forest country and grass areas bordered by scrub or bushland. A stationary species—it moves about its home area in small companies or family parties and often in the company of Buff-tailed and Yellow-tailed Thornbills—it spends most of its time on the ground, hopping about in search of food, which consists of insects and their larvæ, varied at times with seeds. The male and female have the same plumage, though one is a shade darker than the other. The legs are short and progress over the ground is by slow and deliberate hops, reminding one very much of a frog. The flight is short and low. Even when flushed suddenly from the ground the bird seldom flies higher than ten to twelve feet or farther than twenty to thirty yards, and readily perches on bush or branch. It has a pleasing little song, no stronger than that of the Scarlet Robin. The high-pitched and cheerful notes can easily be recognized at some little distance.



Speckled Warbler near nest.
Photo. by Doris H. Nicholas, R.A.O.U., and Eileen Campbell, R.A.O.U.

The breeding season in Victoria commences in July, when the small companies break up in pairs, each pair taking up its own separate territory. Two broods are raised during the season. The nest is situated on the ground among dry grass and herbage, while a bush, sapling or overhanging branch is always found within a few yards of the nest. This provides cover, into which the birds fly on leaving or returning to the nest. A slight rounded hollow is scraped in the ground, so that the nest is flush with the surface; over this is woven a domed structure composed of dried grasses and moss. This is warmly lined and filled out with feathers, hair and sometimes rabbit's fur. This domed structure has a lid with side entrance, the lid forming a short tunnel of between three and four inches to the nest hollow. A most interesting nest, one might almost call it a combination of the Ground Lark's and Striated Thornbill's nests.

The Speckled Warblers give a good example of married life and mutual society help and comfort, as they do all the work together, carrying the material for the nest, always going out and returning together. They are never, during the breeding season, more than a few yards apart.

The eggs—three, sometimes four, in number—are very distinctive. A round oval in shape, the colour is a deep cochineal red, uniform throughout, of fine texture and glossy surface.

When disturbed at the nest, the parents are thrown into a frenzy of agitation, uttering harsh and angry scoldings. Anxious to examine the eggs of one particular nest, I stooped down to do so, and as I did a bird flew directly at me, uttering urgent protest. Then seeing this did not frighten nor distract my attention, it suddenly, in desperation, changed its tactics. Flying quickly to its branch, it began to sing, and it sang and sang and kept on singing. Only a few days previously I had been reading a book by E. M. Nicholson, *How Birds Live*, and of his theory and definition of song. He writes: "Singers are birds in possession, uttering the signal or warning of possession which is song." Surely this was the song of possession. How amazing! It seemed incredible that I should hear and see this little bird proving Nicholson's theory in such an unmistakable manner. But something still more wonderful was to follow. I again turned to the nest, and, kneeling down, prepared very carefully, to insert my finger into the tunnel. Before it reached the entrance, however, such a loud and vicious hiss issued from it that I threw myself back on to my heels with fright—I confess to real fright, for through my mind flashed thoughts of tiger snakes and blue-tongued lizards. Vanquished, I climbed to my feet and walked away, but return-

ing again with interest aroused, I resolved to investigate further. Approaching the nest a second time, I repeated my former actions. Again that vicious hiss. Then slowly dawned the realization that young birds, and not eggs or reptiles, occupied the nest, and that Nature had given these babies their own defence.

The photograph was taken by Miss Campbell, R.A.O.U., and me on September 22, 1931. Both parents were feeding the young while we waited for over an hour to obtain the picture. The entrance to the nest can be seen behind the bird's head.—DORIS H. NICHOLAS, R.A.O.U., Ouse, Tas.

Crested Hawks.—An unknown bird call that sent me searching caused a most delightful surprise, for, instead of the small creature that the soft note led me to expect, I discovered a pair of young but fully-fledged Crested Hawks (*Baza subcristata*). Perched on a sapling, they kept up a constant calling of "wee chu, wee chu," absurdly soft and low for such large birds. A mature bird was feeding them, after hawking over the ground and most probably gathering grasshoppers, which were there in great numbers. As the parent flew further and further in its search for food, the young followed, flying slowly from tree to tree.

About a week later we saw a Crested Hawk on the ground, silently stalking a clutch of chickens; the mate, equally silent, circled overhead. Suddenly seizing a chicken, the first bird flew with it into the shade of some bamboos. Placing its prey on the ground, it stood looking at it, absolutely unafraid, although I stood within a few feet of the Hawk. These were the first specimens of the species that I have noted in this district.—F. M. IRBY, R.A.O.U., "Nar-rango," Casino, N.S.W., 24/1/33.

White Rock, Tasmania.—I have visited the White Rock, referred to in *The Emu*, Vol. XXXII, p. 165, on several occasions. It was named Ile de Phoque by Baudin in 1802 and was reported to be covered by seals, which, however, according to local reports, were largely slaughtered last century by people from the mainland and consequently kept to the caves near the water line. When I last visited the island some years ago a herd of seals, not very large, plunged into the water, and though quietly followed by our steamer kept just out of gunshot range, a circumstance which somewhat confirmed local information. White Rock can only be approached comfortably in fine weather.—(SIR) JAMES W. BARRETT, R.A.O.U., Melbourne, 12/1/33.