

photograph which is reproduced. It was a lucky chance that at the final "shot" for the day the bird's mate should have accompanied her to the nest and entered the area in camera range.

Black-throated Grebes are well distributed throughout New South Wales. These little water sprites nest on many inland ponds and lakes, and it is not unusual to find six or seven pairs breeding on ponds of only a few acres in extent. Some people believe that the eggs are partly incubated by the heat of decaying vegetation, because they are generally found covered with water-soaked vegetable matter and because the birds are rarely seen at the nests.

Stray Feathers

The Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*) in South Western Australia.—This Robin is, in Western Australia, an inhabitant of the drier inland portions of the State, nowhere approaching the coast except where inland climatic conditions occur right up to the coastline. An exception, however, is well known in the case of Rottnest Island, off Fremantle, where the species is resident, although it does not occur on the mainland opposite, its place being taken by the Scarlet Robin (*Petroica multicolor*) which is the prevalent species in the south-west area of heavy annual rainfall. The occurrence of the Red-capped Robin in this (Bridgetown) district, of average annual rainfall of 35 inches, is worth recording, although only a pair or two occur at one particular spot close to the bank of the Blackwood River. It would be interesting to know whether their presence is due to "isolation" or "invasion."—H. M. WHITTELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 12 '2 '36.

Photographing the Olive-backed Oriole.—Whilst on a short visit to the Marulan district on the southern highlands of New South Wales during November, 1935, I was shown a nest of a pair of what the residents called "Greenbacks" and which proved to be Olive-backed Orioles (*Oriolus sagittatus*). The nest—an untidy structure composed of light-brown bark and fibre—was situated about fifteen feet from the ground in a branch of a "forest oak." Naturally, I was keen to secure some photographs at the nest as the subject is rather an unusual one, so the following morning I returned laden with various apparatus, including a ladder. After meeting with some trouble in getting the branch, with the nest, tethered in order to reduce the movement caused by the prevailing strong wind and in setting the camera up in a precarious position, I prepared to await events. At that stage the nest held three straw-coloured eggs blotched with brown and grey, the latter appearing as if beneath the surface. Two of them were chipped and while I was in the



Olive-backed Oriole at nest.

Photo. by A. J. Elliott.

vicinity one young bird hatched. It was the right time to attempt photography and the birds were very anxious to return to the nest. They did not raise much objection to the camera being so close but were very timid while I was in view. Consequently I found it advisable to build a rough "hide" of branches, and, while I was concealed in it, the birds would readily return to the nest.

As I did not have high hopes of the exposures made during that forenoon turning out satisfactorily I returned the following morning, when, although I still had to contend with the high wind, four more exposures were made. On that occasion two young were in the nest and the third egg was chipped. The young bird hatched a little later and I made an effort to photograph an adult with half of the egg-shell in its bill, but she (?) was too quick for me.—A. J. ELLIOTT, Cambewarra, N.S.W., 15/2/36.

Jacana Notes.—On January 12, 1936, when overlooking a swamp on the Hawkesbury River, I noticed a Jacana executing the peculiar bobbing movement that usually betokens a nest, and waded quietly towards her. When about 20 feet away she slipped off through the weeds, disclosing a nest with three eggs. On approaching closer the nest was found to support also three young birds, apparently recently hatched. They were lying flat and plover-like with eyes closed, necks stretched out and bills just touching the water. Being evenly spaced, they looked like three spokes on the greenish-yellow wheel of the nest. I had just time to notice that they were of a delicate fawn colour with very dark brown stripes when one of the eggs rolled partly over, and the tip of a bill projected through the shell. As I was too late, and the light far too dull for hand photography, I backed quietly away and hurried for the tripod, anticipating a family group of exceptional interest.

Upon my return the mother slipped quietly away as before, and watched my slow approach, but when only a few yards separated me from her young she flew back directly over the nest with shrill cries, and when I reached it, the young were missing. No trace of them could be found, although the area for feet around was combed carefully with both hands. Before that was done the chipped egg split in two and the young bird, with eyes open, but with feathers still damp from the egg, kicked itself along on one side till it rolled into the water, where it sank to the chin before its feet found support on some weeds. Resting its chin on a reed stem, it closed its eyes and lay still. Upon placing it back in the nest, the same procedure resulted, so, as rain was now falling heavily, I returned to the edge of the water to watch the parent bird, which had fled to the end of the swamp. It was fully an hour before she worked her way, feeding, back to the nest, and again covered the remaining eggs, but the glasses disclosed no trace of the three young

ones, and on a last visit, the fourth bird was found just as it had been left an hour before. It was replaced in the nest, but immediately kicked out again, and so had to be left with the mother only a few yards away. At six-thirty the next morning only the nest and two cold eggs could be found in that part of the swamp.

About a mile away, an adult was seen drawing water weeds from all sides on to the little nine-inch island upon which she stood. She was apparently building and took no notice of heavy rain, beyond an occasional fluffing and shaking of her feathers. After a while she sprang several times into the air to a height of two or three feet, flapping her wings the while but alighting each time on the foundation of weeds. Then her mate appeared, a more richly marked and apparently slightly-larger bird, and the two, facing each other, pirouetted about, sprang into the air flapping vigorously, and altogether gave a ludicrous imitation of two young game-cocks commencing a fight. Then the last arrival sprang to one side, bent slowly over till his head was well below his body, and with his ridiculous tail stuck up in the air, stretched out his neck and stared fixedly at the nest as if hypnotized. His mate turned her back and gazed down the swamp and they held these relative positions for over four minutes by the watch, which was not consulted until some time after they had taken up the peculiar attitudes. During the period mentioned it was most noticeable that the comb of the female (?) was a clear yellow, while that of the other was a bright crimson red. There was no question of sunlight, the rain pouring down the whole time, and while both were unquestionably excited at first, these colours remained till the end of their strange performance, when they flew off in opposite directions and commenced to feed. The site of the "dance" appeared identical with a typical nest, but at the next visit, a month later, no Jacanas were observed in the vicinity.—J. S. RAMSAY, Sydney, N.S.W., 10. 3. 36.

Gilbert Whistler.—When on a visit to St. Arnaud, Victoria, in November, 1935, I saw a pair of Gilbert Whistlers (*Pachycephala inornata*) at their nest in a low shrub of the gorse bitter-pea (*Daviesia ulicina*). When first seen the nest had three eggs in it, but two days later there were three young ones. While on the nest the female allowed me to approach until I stood quite close without her showing alarm. The male brought insects, but before going to the nest he alighted on a shrub nearby. He then called in a low tone which sounded like a person whistling softly for a dog. Mr. J. Sutton, of Adelaide, likens the call to "er whit, er whit, er whit, er whit." This is a good word description of the call as I heard it.

So far as I know this is the first record of the bird for the St. Arnaud district.—W. J. O'NEILL, Sandringham, Vic., 7/11/35.



Yellow-tufted Honeyeater approaching nest.

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.

Distribution of Victorian Species.—Mr. A. H. Chisholm's notes in the October, 1935, number of *The Emu* under the heading of "When Birds Wander," reminds me of a visit to Avoca, Victoria, on March 27, 1932, when I observed a pair of Blue-faced Honeyeaters (*Entomyzon cyanotis*) in the local park busy feeding young ones at a nest on the overhanging branch of a red gum about twenty feet above the ground. The nest was inaccessible. I paid several visits to the spot and watched with field glasses the parents carrying insects to the nest.

The presence of Chestnut-tailed Thornbills (*Acanthiza uropygialis*) noted by Mr. Chisholm at Maryborough, is not surprising as they are found at St. Arnaud, about 46 miles north-west of Maryborough in similar country. I saw them when on a visit to St. Arnaud in November, 1935.—W. J. O'NEILL, Sandringham, Vic., 7/12/35.

Ants Removing Nestlings.—In 1933 I was watching the nest of a pair of Brown Honeyeaters (*Gliciphila indistincta*). Knowing when to expect the young to hatch—they take fourteen days from the laying of the last egg—I was at the nest when the young were less than an hour old. Even when so young they would lift their heads and open their bills if the nest were touched. Soon after I saw several green tree ants (*Oecophylla virescens*) making towards the nest. One adult bird returned, plucked at an ant in the nest, and flew off, but the ant had so strong a hold of the young that the nestling was lifted and dropped over the side. Fortunately it caught in a spider web and I rescued it. The ant's head had to be squashed before it could be removed. The parent bird then returned and sat over the young. By night both young were on the ground beneath the nest—one was still alive but died later.—H. THOROGOOD, Proserpine, Qld., 8/2/36.

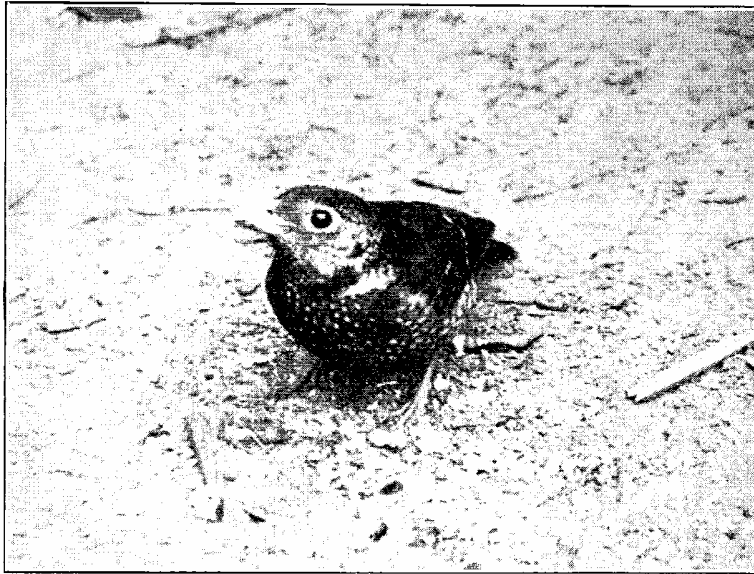
Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters.—Although found in small numbers on the creeks to the north-west, and although once more common in the Toolern-Melton district, Victoria, *Meliphaga melanops* has only in the last few years become established (or re-established) at the Toolern Vale sanctuary. In November, 1935, a nest, with eggs which hatched the day after discovery, was found, and at Christmas another containing two young birds. The young birds were grey-plumaged with a faint tinge of olive, but the feathers on top of the head were bright green. The gape was orange-yellow in colour. Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters will usually return to the nest readily despite the presence of a camera nearby.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 28.2.36.

Marsh Crake.—This species (*Porzana pusilla*) has a wide range and, according to Peters' *Checklist*, would appear to have five geographical races, ranging from Western

Europe through Asia and Africa to Australia and New Zealand. A specimen shot locally caused me to look up the description of the species in various ornithological works and I was struck by the fact that, whilst my specimen had legs and feet of a bright green colour, Gould gave the colour of those parts as "olive brown." North wrote: "Legs olive, feet olive, slightly tinged with brown." Mathews, in his *Birds of Australia*, merely quoted Gould. Oliver, in *New Zealand Birds*, gives the same colour as Gould. As regards the race occurring in Asia, A. O. Hume (*Cat. of Birds in Brit. Mus.*) gives the colour of the legs and feet as "green, with a yellowish tinge, claws pale brown." I have no literature at hand which gives the colour of the feet and legs in the European and African races. Lately I examined several skins, in the Perth Museum, collected in south-west Australia, and found the labels gave the colour of the feet and legs as "pea green." In the Adelaide Museum there are three skins with the colour of the "soft parts" given on the labels, all collected in South Australia. Two are marked "legs green." while the third is labelled "feet olive green."

At first sight one would possibly imagine that Gould had misled posterity in the colouration of the legs and feet of this Crake, but Mr. J. Sutton, of Adelaide, handled a live specimen in 1932 (cf. *South Australian Ornithologist*, xii, 68, 1933), in which the legs and feet were dull olive-brown, the soles of the feet being grey. Here, then, as with *Porphyrio*, we have variation in the colour of legs and feet. Mr. W. B. Alexander has drawn attention (*Emu*, xix, 59, 1919) to the fact that whereas the adult Dusky Moor-hen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*) has green legs with bright red colouration on the joints, immature birds collected by Mr. Tom Carter in south-west Australia had feet and legs described in the male as olive-green and in the female as grass-green. This variation or change in the colouration of the legs and feet of Rails, Crakes and Water-hens is interesting and a wide field of research is open in this direction.

Whilst discussing *Porzana pusilla* the vernacular name seems to call for comment. On the score of priority, if there is such a thing as regards vernacular names, the British Little Crake (*Porzana parva* of Scopoli of 1769) is entitled to retain its name. I think Gould named *P. palustris* [= *pusilla*] the Little Crake, and North called it the Little Water-Crake. Mathews called it Little Crake. For some reason the Committee of the R.A.O.U. *Checklist* adopted the name "Marsh-Crake," although they recognized it as identical with Baillon's Crake of Europe. The *Checklist* Committee probably had good reason for not also calling the Australian race "Baillon's Crake," but their selected name does not appear to be descriptive as all Crakes frequent marshes—only in Australia we call them swamps.—H. M. WHITTELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 27.2.1936.



Green Catbird.

Photo. by G. R. Gannon.



Buff-tailed Thornbill approaching nest in grass.

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.

Green Cat-bird.—The accompanying photograph of *Ailu-rædus crassirostris* was taken from the verandah of the National Park Trust's Zoologists' Cabin, situated at Water-fall, New South Wales. When I arrived there, on October 15, 1935, for a few days' stay, I was met by Mr. S. Everitt and Mr. W. Moore, who told me that they had heard several times a strange bird note, but that they were unable to get a glimpse of the bird. We awoke the next morning to hear the usual bird chorus at dawn, and amongst them was the strange call. We got up at once, and, after some stalking, traced the call to a Cat-bird.

A pair of these birds are regular visitors to the Cabin, and will pick up any crumbs that are placed out for them. The call notes, which we discovered were due to them, are not uttered frequently, perhaps once or twice during the day, and, to me, they were quite different from what I would have expected from one of these birds. As near as I can describe them they sound as if a strong spring were being unwound, and in the unwinding two checks are made as if the speed slackened slightly, and then there is a sudden end, as if the spring had broken, thus: "Churr-churr-ch—" The illusion of a spring being unwound is heightened by a slight click which is given immediately before the note referred to and which, one might imagine, is made by a catch being released off the spring. When I had food placed outside for the birds, I knew when one or both had arrived, by this somewhat faint click, but which on these occasions was the only note given.

I have heard the Cat-bird call in southern Queensland, and it is there a distinct "meow," uttered not infrequently, and is very penetrating. Although I am not very well acquainted with the birds in our own National Park, I have seen them often enough, but have never heard them give the call that is common to the Queensland birds.—G. R. GANNON, Artarmon, N.S.W., 21/11/35.

Buff-tailed Thornbills.—At the Toolern Vale (Vic.) sanctuary the nesting season of 1935-36 was marked by the very large number of these birds that were in evidence. At Christmas, 1935, especially, they were particularly numerous, nests being found in many diversified positions—hollows in trees, clefts in creek-sides, crotches of trees and on the ground in long grass. The nest of the bird pictured resembled, in every respect, except that it lacked moss on the "roof," a nest of the Speckled Warbler (*Chthonicola sagittata*), even having the runway characteristic of the Warblers. A large percentage of the nests contained young Cuckoos.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 4/3/36.

Mistletoe-bird.—Local knowledge of the habits of the Mistletoe-bird points to the fact that it is nomadic in its movements, its presence, or absence, being largely governed

by the fruiting of mistletoe plants. Records of the occurrence of the Mistletoe-bird in the Sydney district indicate that it is present throughout the year in forest country generally—rare during the winter months but comparatively common in summer. A plentiful supply of mistletoe berries is always available in the summer; thus it is evident that the bird is closely associated with the plant it helps to distribute by voiding the seeds which then adhere to the branches of trees. Insects are also eaten.—K. A. HINDWOOD, Willoughby, N.S.W.

Library Notes

The following are additions to the library:—

Remarks on the Origins of the Ratites and Penguins, by Wm. K. Gregory, with discussion by R. C. Murphy. Reprinted from the *Proceedings of the Linnaean Society of New York*, Nos. 45 and 46, 1933-34.

The Wilson Bulletin, Vol. xlvii, No. 4.

Australian Science Abstracts, Vol. xiv, No. 4.

The Condor, Vol. xxxvii, No. 6.

Research and Progress, Vol. i, No. 4. Contains "The Rossiter Ornithological Observatory on the Bird Migration Bridge," by Dr. Ernest Schuz, and "Parrot Disease," by Prof. Joseph Fortner.

Annals of the Transvaal Museum, Vol. xvii, Part 2.

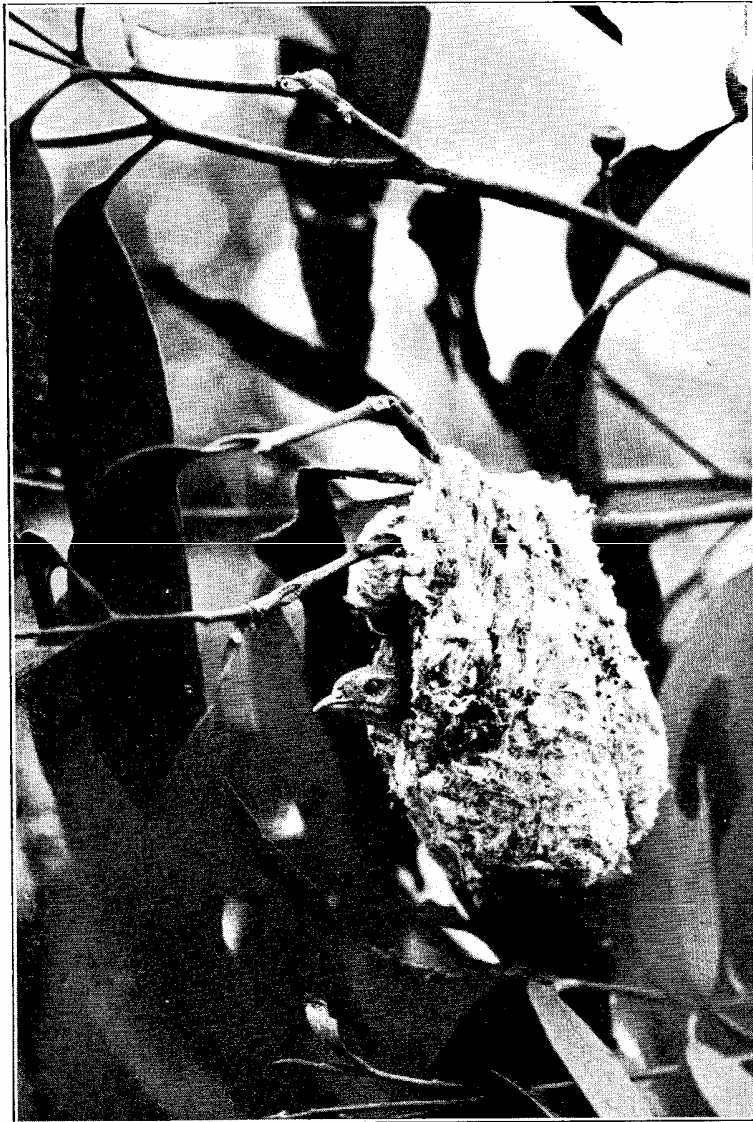
The Ibis, Vol. v, No. 4, and Vol. vi, No. 1. The latter contains "Birds of the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago," by Sir Charles Belcher and G. D. Smooker; "The Food and Breeding Habits of the Coot," by Walter E. Collinge.

The Avicultural Magazine, 4th Ser., Vol. xiii, Nos. 11 and 12; 5th Ser., Vol. i, No. 2. No. 12 contains "A Collector on Melville Island," by Walter Goodfellow. [Whilst the account is a spirited and interesting one of the author's visit it is deplorable to see a writer reverting to the old barbaric attitude adopted towards the Australian natives—"for my part (and many others agree with me) I should rejoice to hear that the last black had died out in Australia."]

The Victorian Naturalist, Vol. lii, No. 9. Contains "Glossy Ibis Nesting in Victoria," by Charles Barrett.

American Museum Novitates, No. 814 and 820. No. 814 is "Results of the Archbold Expeditions No. 6." [Deals with 24 apparently undescribed birds from New Guinea and the D'Entrecasteaux Archipelago.] No. 820 is "Birds Collected During the Whitney South Sea Expedition, xxx." [Includes descriptions of 25 new species and sub-species, many allied to Australian forms.]

The Lowan, Vol. i, No. 2. Contains "Notes on the Relative Scarcity of Some Victorian Birds," by R. S. Miller.



Female Mistletoe-bird brooding.

Photo. by K. A. Hindwood.