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Stray Feathers

West Maitland Notes.—Mr. D'Ombrian has probably underestimated the destruction of bird life described in the July issue of *The Emu*. I know of a **Little Grebe** being killed and that no more were destroyed was probably due to their activity in diving.

At Wattagan Creek, near Wollombi, N.S.W., I observed many of the little Musk Lorikeets. For years they have not been so numerous. This may not be an indication that the aggregate number in the State has increased but that the prolonged drought in this State drove them to the coast. Fourteen of them that were in and around **West Maitland** for the last three months have departed.

The water-fowl that were so thick on various sheets of water around here for months past have nearly all departed, the exceptions being those on the **Water Board's Reservoir**, the caretaker of which does his best to protect them.

Curlews (Stone-Plover) have been visiting the town lately. An acquaintance of mine had a pair running in his garden in town and they were visited by another pair. During August of this year I heard two, if not three, in my own garden, and they were also heard at night during the same month in the lucerne paddocks near my residence.

Recently I was given a case of mounted skins of birds set up by an English taxidermist about 70 years ago. I was informed that they were all taken in the Jingera Mountains, which lie between Bombala and Mt. Kosciusko. On examination I found amongst them a **Ground Parrot**. The information given me may have been incorrect, but if correct, it is the first occasion I have heard of the bird's being found away from the coast.—W. J. ENRIGHT, West Maitland, N.S.W., 5/9/38.

Camera Notes on the Chestnut-crowned Babbler.—In this north-west section of Victoria the Chestnut-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficeps*) is more rare than its relation, the White-browed Babbler. In their habits both birds are much alike, and even the call notes are similar. The distinctive chestnut cap and white feathers in the wing serve to distinguish the Chestnut-crowned species. It is rather shy, but it is not a difficult bird to photograph at the nest.

Generally speaking, I find the nest to be larger than that of the White-browed form. Foraging for food in small flocks, and each bird searching thoroughly and energetically, this species of Babbler must destroy an enormous amount of insect-life. Watching the birds feeding the young in a nest, one is surprised at the number of visits. Apparently more than one pair of birds feed the young. I have noted caterpillars, grasshoppers, moths, dragon-flies and spiders being fed to the young birds. Seen at close quarters from a camera-hide, the observer has the opportunity to note how attractive a bird the Chestnut-crowned Babbler is. A hide is the ideal method when taking photographs of birds, for they are more natural in their movements.

Like other Babblers, this species spends much time in what one may call play. At such times they appear to be very excited, and make a great noise as they chase each other in a kind of follow-my-leader game. This is not confined to the nesting season, although the building of nests seems to be a hobby. Possibly shelter nests are built, for I have seen several Babblers entering a nest at dusk. This season I was delighted to find a nest of the species in an orange tree in my citrus grove; but, unfortunately, the Sparrows destroyed the nest.—L. G. CHANDLER, Red Cliffs, Vic., 25/10/38.

Variation in the Plumage of the Pale-headed Rosella.—The variation in the plumage of the Pale-headed Rosella (*Platycercus adscitus*) has attracted my attention from the date of my arrival at Caldervale cattle station. Having been familiar with the varying lines displayed in the pleasing coloration of the Yellow Rosella (*P. flaveolus*), I was at once greatly impressed by the still greater diversity in the plumage of the former bird.

Almost every permanent watering place, such as creek water-holes and bores, has its assortment of these Parrots. The most outstanding examples are those which are of an almost pure yellow, with comparatively little of any other colouring whatsoever. Amongst the many different variations frequenting one of these bores in particular, are two very yellow birds. One is almost completely yellow with the exception of the extremity of the tail, which fades to a pale bluish-white, and of one partly dark-blue primary, which is only rendered visible when this conspicuous bird is in flight.



Chestnut-crowned Babbler at nest.

Photo. by L. G. Chandler.

I might add that the mate of this bird is of the usual colouring. Another generally yellow bird has the usual green and blue tail and two of the primaries are blue. Amongst the other yellow examples are those sporting blue shoulders and the green and blue tail, whilst the head and breast have a few sparse fleckings of blue. I notice that in some of the parrots thus attired the scarlet-pink under base of the tail is present. Many of the younger birds have dull red forehead, lores, chin, and sometimes the throat as in the adult of *P. flaveolus*. Oft-times there are a few red feathers dispersed over the lower breast and upper abdomen, whilst the head almost invariably has a few feathers of the same dull colour, apart from the forehead, etc. I was surprised to see this red about the head of what was undoubtedly a mature male, and previous to that I imagined such to be only present in the duller juvenile birds.

As regards the distribution of the blue on the abdomen, there are no definite boundaries to the area of that colour. For instance the pale yellow of the head, is, in many cases, continued down as far as the lower breast, but usually only the head is thus coloured. The yellow of the hind neck and mantle is much more intense than that of the head, although in some of our ornithological works it is stated that the upper parts are edged with pale yellow, which may be the case in other localities, but not in this one.

Probably most of these variations, of which I have only mentioned a few, occur chiefly in the immature birds and disappear with age, although in certain cases of fully-matured birds it cannot be disputed.—N. H. E. McDONALD, Charleville, Qld., May 22, 1938.

Unusual Nesting of Finches.—A pair of Banded Finches were found building a nest in the hollow of a fence post on March 10, 1938. The nest when discovered was partly built and contained one egg. The entrance spout protruded through a six-inch by two-inch mortice. On March 15 the nest was completed and contained a set of five eggs. The Banded Finches brooded until March 22, when a pair of Zebra Finches took possession and drove the rightful owners away. The Zebra Finches brooded the eggs until March 27, when three of the eggs had hatched. The other two hatched during the night of that day or early morning of the next day. On March 31 the greater part of the nest had been removed by the Zebra Finches, which were in constant attendance and fed the young Banded Finches well. By April 2 the nest was rebuilt by the Zebra Finches and it was noticed that the young birds were showing pin feathers on the wings, tail, back and head. By April 10 the young birds were fairly well feathered and were nearing the time for leaving the nest. I visited the nest again on April 11,

but found it pulled from its position and scattered about the ground. There was no sign of the young Finches, but a Pied Butcher-bird was at the nest, so there is little doubt of the fate of the nestlings.—E. A. R. LORD, Murphy's Creek, Qld., 14/6/38.

Photographing the Oriole.—On October 15, 1938, R. S. Miller and I were at Mitcham, near Melbourne, and he found a nest of the Olive-backed Oriole, built about 20 feet high in a blackwood tree. The birds did not come into the tree when we sat down nearby and we assumed that either they were just completing nest-building or had fresh eggs. On October 23, I noted, by means of a mirror, that there were three eggs, and a week later, a wet day, we erected a staging of sorts to enable photographs to be taken. The nest then contained young birds, which had the appearance of having just been hatched, possibly on the preceding day. Their body colour was of a shade almost that of a carrot and they were beginning to grow a particularly-silky down, which appeared to be of the same hue, but which was actually much lighter, the colour of the skin affecting its appearance.

On November 1 the whole day was spent at the nest. Again the weather was wet and extremely dull and short exposures could not be given. Consequently, most pictures taken showed movement. On November 6 the young birds had grown considerably but their eyes were unopened. The parent birds, which had returned readily on the prior occasions, were now more reluctant to do so. The young were fed on large insects including cicadas. The male, which was more brightly marked than the hen, fed the young less frequently.

Apparently the nestlings grew very quickly during the next few days, for on November 12 they were large enough for one to leave the nest, although a little prematurely I think, when I climbed the staging to investigate. Stray wisps of down still clung to the birds. The adult birds were most determined and noisy in their "attacks" upon me, swooping continually about my head as I endeavoured to untie the lashings of the staging.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 19/12/38.

Institute of Ornithology at Oxford.—"The statute relating to the proposed Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology was brought before Congregation at Oxford this week," reports *Nature*, in its issue of November 5, 1938. "Accommodation and funds for the Institute will be provided by the University. There will be a salaried director. The committee of management, although mainly of University members, will have representatives of the British Ornithologists' Union, the Oxford Ornithological Society and the British Trust for Ornithology. The business of the Institute



Male Olive-backed Oriole at nest.

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.

will be to carry out research on problems of ornithology, especially on the numbers, distribution, movements, habits and economic status of British birds and to publish the results obtained. It is evident that activity will be concentrated on field work and will begin by extending that done by the Oxford Ornithological Society. The Society has recently made a count of all species over small areas like Bagley Wood and of the waterfowl on the lake at Blenheim. It has also made surveys of a single species over a wider area as, for example, the count of all the rookeries in an area of more than nine hundred square miles around Oxford."

The Bustard.—Australia is such a vast continent that statements regarding the extinction, or near extinction, of any species should be made with due caution. Changes in climatic conditions, seasonal variations in food supply, and settlement influence the distribution of birds and often cause them to leave their known haunts. Only too often it is then assumed that they are on the verge of extinction. Twenty years ago this was said of some of the *Neophema* Parrots, and more recently of the Flock Pigeon (*Histrionaphys histrionica*), but those species have been recorded in considerable numbers during the past few years. The absence of records signifies, more often than not, the absence of observers. Immense areas in the interior of Australia have never been thoroughly explored for birds, and certainly no continuous observations have been made in those parts. The status of a species should never be assumed on negative evidence, i.e., on what is not known about a particular species. The following letter, appearing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of August 6, 1938, and which refers to the Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*), well illustrates this point, for there have been many statements of late which indicated, superficially it now seems, that the Bustard was decreasing greatly in numbers.

Sir,—Some twelve months ago the president of the Re-acclimatisation Society of Australia, Mr. A. Jewell, was reported as having stated that the Bustard (Plain Turkey) was now practically extinct. You subsequently published a letter from me in which I furnished some evidence that such a statement was not in accordance with facts, and that these fine birds of the plains were still plentiful in parts of this State. [New South Wales] and Queensland. However, a month or two later Mr. Neville Cayley, the well-known bird painter, deplored the fact that "it will not be long before the beautiful Bustard, or Plain Turkey, is extinct." I feel that it will be a matter of great interest to the two gentlemen mentioned, and to bird-lovers concerned about the preservation of our native fauna, to learn that their fears in regard to the Bustard are groundless.

I am now on a visit to Rockwood Station, situated 560 miles north-west of Rockhampton, and have come across large numbers of these beautiful birds—as many as a dozen at one time. Having been protected for some years past, they have become very quiet, and

will allow a car or a horseman to approach within a few yards. It is safe to say that there are many thousands of them in Central Queensland districts, and, so far as I have been able to judge, they are just as numerous to-day as they were when I was resident here nearly forty years ago.—I am, etc.,

Rockwood, Q., July 30.

F. N. ROBINSON,

—K. A. HINDWOOD,

Willoughby, N.S.W., 5/8/38.

A Note on the Goshawk.—The Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*), in common with most species of the Hawks, is a rare bird in this district. Some years ago (October 19, 1930) I was fortunate in finding a nest less than thirty feet from the ground, and in a position where I could fix my camera in a neighbouring tree. I waited until the young were hatched and then placed a dummy camera in position and made a hide on the ground from which to release the camera shutter. Next day I put my camera up, and retired to the hide. It was an hour or more before the Hawk arrived with some species of bird for the young—which I could not distinguish. She looked a savage, wild thing as she tore the bird to pieces with beak and claws and fed the young Hawks. As is frequently the case, the young were of various sizes, and one lusty fellow grabbed most of the food. The day was not ideal for photography, and I only obtained one fair photograph out of two that I took.

The second visit of the bird was made nearly three hours later. Once, in between the two visits to the nest, the Goshawk perched on a limb about thirty yards away and I was much amused by a Black-and-white Fantail that had a nest nearby. Perched squarely on the Hawk's back, it scolded and pecked for several minutes, and occasionally fluttered above, but, with a look of lordly indifference, the larger bird stared straight ahead and took not the slightest notice. It was an excellent illustration of dignity and impudence. I once witnessed a similar scene in which a Black-backed Magpie and a Fantail were the actors.

Circumstances prevented me from visiting the nest again.
—L. G. CHANDLER, Red Cliffs, Vic., 25/10/38.

More Notes on Mimicry.—I have discovered that the Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*) has earned a place amongst the growing list of bird mimics. On July 26 of this year, a bleak cloudy day with a strong west wind blowing, I came upon a group of small birds sheltering in dense red tea-tree in a creek bed. My attention was first drawn to a pair of Brown Honeyeaters which were apparently nesting as both birds were excited at my presence and tumbled about from branch to ground as though injured. While searching, unsuccessfully, for the nest, I noticed that a party of Blue Wrens—an adult male in fine feather and a young male, the sex of which could only be distinguished by his blue tail,



Goshawk feeding young at nest.

Photo. by L. G. Chandler.

and several females—had been attracted by the excited Honeyeaters. Then a Grey Fantail came and joined in the commotion. I departed for a little distance and all the birds ceased their noise and resumed their feeding. It was then that I heard the call of a Speckled Warbler.

Working my way quietly through the bushes, I saw the Fantail perched on a twig, giving forth a splendid display of mimicry. The Blue Wren's and Speckled Warbler's calls were the only calls given apart from his own chatter and pretty little song, but the imitations were so perfectly rendered that it would be very difficult to distinguish them from the original.

I have recorded twenty separate bird calls for the Brown Flycatcher, the last noted being that of the White-throated Warbler. The Flycatcher appears to be practising this particular call each morning and is giving the Warbler's run of notes very nicely.—E. A. R. LORD, Murphy's Creek, Qld., 1 9/38.

John Gilbert in Western Australia.—By the issue of the Gould commemorative number of *The Emu*, our knowledge of the movements of John Gilbert was much improved, the letters published by Mr. A. H. Chisholm being particularly valuable in that connection. On page 189 was printed a copy of a letter written by Gould from Perth on April 11, 1839, in which he wrote: "The *Helen* arrived from Launceston last week." With the above as a clue, I took the opportunity, when in Perth recently, of referring to the file of the newspaper *Perth Gazette* in the Public Library, and found, in the issue of April 6, 1839, the following "arrival" under "Shipping News": "April 2, 1839, The *Ellen*, from Launceston. Passenger and supercargo Mr. Gilbert." The date of Gilbert's arrival in Western Australia is thus now satisfactorily determined.—H. M. WHITTELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 10/12/38.

The Night Parrot.—In my notes on Gould and his collectors in Western Australia in the Gould commemorative issue of *The Emu*, I assumed that the specimen of *Geopsittacus occidentalis* which was sold at the dispersal of G. D. Rowley's collections in 1934 was the one originally sent to the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park, in 1867, by Dr. Ferdinand von Muller, and which came from Mr. Ryan's sheep-station in the Gawler Ranges. In that assumption I was, apparently, wrong, as, on referring again to Mr. H. M. Wilson's "Notes on the Night Parrot, with References to Recent Occurrences," in *The Emu* of October, 1937, I find there a list by the late Mr. J. Sutton of all the specimens (14) that he had been able to trace. In that list Mr. Sutton included those recorded in the British Museum Catalogue, vol. 20, of 1891, amongst which was a skin of an adult Night Parrot, received from the Zoological Society's collec-

tion, presented by Dr. Muller, and received from the Gawler Ranges. Rowley's bird is an addition to Mr. Sutton's list, so the existence of 15 skins is now known, but the provenance of Rowley's specimen is yet to be determined. Possibly von Muller sent more than one living bird to Regent's Park.

Loré Rothschild's collection of bird-skins was purchased in 1932 by the American Museum of Natural History, New York, but on Lord Rothschild's death, in August, 1937, it became known that he had bequeathed the Tring Museum and all its contents, and a library of some 30,000 volumes, to the British Museum. The bequest included 2,400 mounted birds and Rowley's specimen is apparently included.

According to Mr. Sutton's list, there was a specimen—whether a skin or a mounted bird is not stated—in Gregory M. Mathews' collection. That specimen passed into the Tring Museum and Mr. Sutton notes "doubtless now in the American Museum of Natural History, New York." If it were a mounted specimen it is more likely to have passed to the British Museum.

I shall endeavour to obtain further information regarding both specimens.—H. M. WHITEELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 2/12/38.

Cuckoos and "Summer-birds."—Although the winter at Devonport was sharp and frosty, with much keen south-east wind, quite a number of Fantailed Cuckoos (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) stayed about the town and its outskirts, and appeared well-nourished and alert. A pair of "Summer-birds" (*Coracina novæ-hollandiæ*) was noticed, on more than one occasion, in the middle of winter. On the other hand, all the Pallid and Bronze-Cuckoos cleared out at the usual time, towards the end of the summer.—H. STUART DOVE, Devonport, Tas., 13/8/38.

A Welcome Swallow "Picnic."—On Monday, July 25, 1938, which in Brisbane was a mixture of clear bright sunshine and strong, cold, westerly wind, conditions on Gregory Terrace, which runs along the ridge between Victoria Park and the City proper, were particularly boisterous. At the Girls' Grammar School, which is well surrounded by ornamental trees that were on this particular day wildly waving in the wind, a large company of Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) had discovered a colony of insects on the wing. The birds were hawking in a packed flock, just on the leeward side of the trees and right on the roadside, and at a spot where smoke from a rubbish fire in the school yard was streaming across the Terrace the birds were busiest. I first noticed these Swallows when motoring

past at about 8 a.m., and when again along the route at 11 a.m. there were still plenty of birds about, although they were strung out now along the trees and rockeries for some hundreds of yards. Unfortunately, I had no opportunity of stopping to try and find what insect was attracting them so can give no information on that point.

It was most interesting to notice how the cold and bleak conditions seemed to make no difference to the activity of the Swallows and it rather points to the fact that the records of the blighting effect of cold on the Swallow family is only of secondary effect. The real cause of their distress in some climes, e.g., in Europe, is possibly the absence of food supplies—rather than cold conditions—and, whilst they are able to keep nourished, cold has little effect on them. Perhaps other readers have even more definite information on this question; if so, I would be interested to learn their conclusions on the question.—GEO. H. BARKER, Brisbane, Qld., 19/9/38.

Notes from Eaglehawk Neck.—Three years ago I noted the presence of *Hypotaenidia philippensis* in the heathy tract of the scenic reservation across the road from Lyeltya. The birds have remained, and each year have reared their young. Last December I watched one adult bird hunting in a garden bed, 8 feet away from the window through which I was watching it. Presently I saw a small blackish, downy bird sitting in the grass on the edge of the path, and also saw the parent bird give it something to eat. After a time the little one ran across the path, holding its body stretched out just like the adult bird does. Later on I saw a partly-grown Rail in an open garden bed near the back door.

The birds cross the road and wander through a star-fern tract on my place, and frequent the vegetable garden. Sometimes, when a person calls out suddenly, the Landrail instantly gives its loud "tick tick" cry.

Throughout the winter there were two companies of Swamp Quail (*Synoicus ypsilophorus*) about Lyeltya—one of nine, and one of three—but they have all scattered to various breeding quarters except one pair, which birds have become quite tame. Now, instead of rising with swift wings and uttering a "shriek" when disturbed, the two birds run steadily ahead of a person. They have also learnt the meaning attached to the call of "chuck, chuck." When fowl-feeding time comes the Quail are there also, and run in and out amongst the hens, getting a share of the grain. Sometimes, when I see the Quail eating grass-seed by the path, I call "chuck, chuck." At once the birds look up, and watch to see if I throw them some wheat. I think that the hen has a nest on the scrubby hillside outside the garden

boundary. I often hear a Quail calling from that direction about eleven in the morning. Then the other replies from somewhere in the garden, "bā-bee bā-bee." The two calls draw nearer and nearer to each other, and then cease. The bird on the hillside appears to come down. She is not sitting yet as the two are together at present a good deal.

Two pairs of *Petroica multicolor* range the garden—one pair in the front, and one pair at the back. The latter built their nest on a fork of a South African shrub which overhangs a path in constant use, and within six feet of a window. Sometimes, when the blind was up, and a light flashed suddenly out of the window, one would hear a surprised chirp from the nesting bird. All winter the Robins slept in the same tree, but did not use it for nesting later.

Three pairs of Dusky Robins (*Amaurodryas vittata*) were so tame that they were almost a nuisance in the winter to anyone gardening. In their eagerness to get the worms exposed by the digging or hoeing, the Robins often narrowly missed being struck by the tools. It was pretty to see one perch on the hoe handle when a person was using it, or even on the stick which I have to use to aid me in walking. They come to the kitchen window for tit-bits and are fond of morsels of suet. One morning lately the breakfast dishes were gathered up for washing, when a Dusky Robin flew in the window, perched on the edge of a glass butter dish, and pecked at the tiny fragments of butter adhering to it.

Blue Wrens come for food, and hop about the floor. They prefer tiny crumbs of biscuit, cake and brown bread. The males were very late last winter—which was very cold—in changing their plumage and did not assume the blue and black until August instead of July.—J. A. FLETCHER, Eaglehawk Neck, Tas., 21/11/38.

Black-faced Flycatcher near Melbourne.—Several instances have been given of birds generally more northern and eastern in their range extending to the neighbourhood of Melbourne. Another example is the Black-faced Flycatcher, which I observed at Fern Tree Gully on January 3, 1939. Although odd birds have been reported fairly regularly from the area, usually the species is a visitor to the most easterly portion of Victoria only. There are a few records of more westerly occurrences even west of Melbourne. These latter are, however, not recent. Rufous Fantails were most abundant, as were also Pilot-birds. A Powerful Owl was also observed.—W. BURGESS, Melbourne, Vic., 4/1/39.

Greenfinches.—The introduced Greenfinch appears to be increasing around Melbourne during recent years, and this season (1938-39), it is particularly abundant, especially in

the north-eastern outer suburban and nearer country areas. Around Bulleen, Doncaster and Heidelberg, many birds have been noted often in flocks of from a dozen to twenty. At the last-named place I found them to be common in pine trees and feeding on water-weeds in drying lagoons. They have a song similar to that of the alien Goldfinch. A number of Greenfinches have always been about the environs of Geelong—around Bream Creek, Torquay, Barwon Heads and Anglesea, for example—and I noted them apparently increasing at Anglesea at least, a few days ago.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 5/1/39.

Reviews

["Territory, Annual Cycle, and Numbers in a Population of Wren-Tits (*Chamaea fasciata*)."] By Mary M. Erikson, Univ. of Calif. Publ. in Zool., vol. 42, 1938, pp. 247-334; illus. Price \$1.25.]

This is another worthy addition to the excellent recent American literature on studies in territorialism in bird life, and has a special interest for Australian readers because it concerns not migratory birds, which have been most studied from this point of view, but a strictly sedentary, non-flocking species. And as most of our own familiar birds are regarded as non-migratory, anything written elsewhere of those with similar habits should be scanned with particular interest.

Like Mrs. Nice's investigations on the Song-Sparrow, the work provides a most convincing example of the success of the marking method in conjunction with systematic trapping, in tracing in detail the haps and mishaps of individual birds during their daily lives. Both ordinary numbered aluminium rings and combinations of coloured celluloid ones were used. The species must be ranked as amongst the most extremely territorial of all birds so far studied. The territory, once selected, is defended at all seasons, and not only during the breeding season, as is the case with many birds. So it comes about that the song of the male is to be heard throughout the year, affording additional evidence for the modern view that true song is to be interpreted as a means of announcing occupancy of territory and a warning to actual or potential invaders to "keep off."

One nesting is the rule, but if a brood is not successfully reared, further attempts will be made. The resulting family group will at first keep together, but gradually the bond of attachment will loosen and the young will disperse and forage in the neighbourhood, their presence at such period being tolerated by the adult territory holders. By the end of winter, however, sexual urgings become manifest in the maturing yearlings. The young male responds by attempting to select a plot of ground as his own and the