

On one occasion birds with this plumage comprised the greater portion of a flock. However, adults with yellow bills with blackish tips, white foreheads and black crowns are the ones generally noticed during their six-months' stay.

This species is the only tern yet recorded to nest in the Sydney district, their only known nesting place near Sydney being on a small shell-strewn patch of sand adjacent to Cook's River. It was formed some years ago during extensive river dredging in the vicinity, but unfortunately it is now becoming overgrown with various forms of vegetation, which will probably render it unsuitable for nesting purposes. During a visit there on November 29, 1941, six nests containing eggs or young, or both, were located. Some nests were rather attractively arranged in the midst of a heap of gathered shells, but others were merely depressions in the sand; it is strange that the individual 'aesthetic' tastes of birds in a small colony show such considerable variation.

The newly-hatched young, which usually remain motionless and crouched in the nest, but can run with surprising agility, are attractively marked. The light and dark plumage phases of nestlings, often seen in the same nest, are perplexing. For an earlier account of this nesting colony and remarks on nestling plumages, see 'Two Small Terns,' by M. S. R. Sharland (*Emu*, vol. 38, p. 2).

STRAY RECORDS

There are a few records of the Sooty Tern (*S. fuscata*), and accidental occurrences of the Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) and Grey Noddy (*Procelsterna albivitta*) for the Sydney district, but the six species mentioned herein are the only terns recorded from the environs of Botany Bay. Therefore it is somewhat interesting that all six have been observed within a comparatively short space of time, at a small restricted sand-strewn tidal area adjoining the mouth of Cook's River.

Stray Feathers

Rufous Fantail in South Australia.—I refer to Miss Ina Watson's account of this species in western Victoria near the South Australian border (*Emu*, vol. 44, p. 323). A search through the volumes of *The South Australian Ornithologist* disclosed that a specimen was taken by Mr. Walter J. Harvey at Coombe, 117 miles south-east of Adelaide, on December 10, 1933 (*Sth. Aust. Orn.*, vol. XII, p. 184).—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 12/6/45.

Albino Jacky Winter.—Whilst walking in Dobroyd Park, Sydney, N.S.W., during the afternoon of May 13, 1945, I was surprised to observe a whitish bird, the size of a Sparrow, flutter from a box-tree and alight on a garden seat. The bird twitched its tail on alighting and immediately rose in the air again in pursuit of an insect, then flew back to the box-tree where a Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascinans*) joined it.

The central tail feathers of this strange bird were black and the shoulders of a brownish hue; the remaining parts were white, except the lower underparts which merged into a creamy colour.

Everywhere this white flycatcher flew, it was closely followed by the Jacky Winter. I have no doubt that the white bird was an albino Jacky Winter, the first I have ever seen.—LAWRENCE C. HAINES, Sydney, N.S.W., 14/5/45.

The Striped Honeyeater in Coastal New South Wales.—In *The Emu*, vol. 44, pt. 1, July 1944, pp. 44-47, there appeared some interesting notes on the distribution of the Striped Honeyeater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*) in coastal New South Wales. Therein the late A. J. Elliott recorded the occurrence of the species in several localities from Sydney to as far north as Casino near the Queensland border, whilst A. R. McGill referred to numbers of birds in the Manning River district.

Recently I received, from Mervyn Goddard, some observations on the presence of the Striped Honeyeater at Macks-ville, Nambucca River, N.S.W., which locality is some 250 miles north of Sydney. He writes:

"The Striped Honeyeater is comparatively common in the lower Nambucca River district. It shows a preference for small clumps or thickets of she-oak (*Casuarina*) and paper-bark (*Melaleuca*) trees standing in open country, but may also be observed in the gardens of homes at Macks-ville. The birds make their presence known by calling pleasant whistling notes as one enters their haunts, after which they often remain silent until the intruder departs. Their food consists of insects and larvae procured among the leaves: they have also been observed at flowers and fruits in cultivated gardens.

"The nest is a deep cup-shaped structure neatly built of bark, dried grasses, rootlets and cow-hair bound together, and ornamented on the outside with whitish spiders' egg-bags or greenish silken material from cocoons. It is lined with fine dried grasses and is suspended at the extremity of a small branch. The birds show a preference for paper-bark trees in these parts in which to build their nests, which may be from six to thirty feet or more from the ground.

"The brooding bird will usually leave fresh or slightly incubated eggs when disturbed and will proceed to call nearby in typical fashion. Often, when the eggs are heavily incubated, the sitting bird has practically to be lifted off the nest. Three or four eggs form a clutch in this locality, though in two instances I have noted five eggs in a nest. The breeding season commences in September and continues until December. Of thirteen occupied nests found in 1944 the earliest was recorded on September 25, and the latest on December 7."

—K. A. HINDWOOD, Sydney, N.S.W., 9/3/45.

The Wandering Albatross as an Ocean Derelict.—Results of beach surveys, giving the mortality of sea-birds, have been published in a number of issues of *The Emu*. Mr. F. Lawson Whitlock has been a frequent contributor with details of his observations, generally along the beach at Bunbury, south-western Australia. In a summary of birds of that locality (*Emu*, vol. 39, pp. 47-56), he has mentioned (p. 50) that the finding of the Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) on the beach is a rarity, only two specimens having come under his notice. The only other published record of a beach derelict of this species of which I have knowledge, is that given by R. W. Legge (*Emu*, vol. 29, p. 74) of a bird washed up at Falmouth, eastern Tasmania, after a particularly violent storm.

Because of the apparent rarity of examples of this nature, it may be of interest to record that I found two specimens on the beach at Bate Bay, Cronulla, New South Wales, on September 30, 1944. The first was in an advanced state of decomposition and the only clue to its identity was one wing, which, being uppermost, was still in good condition. Notes on the extent of black and white in the wing plumage were made, and the measurement taken, which was 690 mm. from carpal joint to the tip of the longest primary. A short distance along the beach another example was observed, being perhaps more decomposed than the former. However, in this case the legs and feet remained and one was brought home for identification purposes. In neither instance could the head be found. After comparing the foot with museum specimens and checking the wing measurements, it appeared relatively certain that both birds were *exulans*.

It is difficult to envisage this splendid, powerful-flying bird becoming an ocean derelict. Extensive storms of a particularly severe nature might be responsible for such a happening, but no unusual weather conditions occurred to my knowledge prior to my observation.—A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W., 22/2/45.

Thornbills Hovering.—I was interested to observe recently, a small flock of Yellow-tailed Thornbills (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) hovering above a patch of long grass. The little birds were undoubtedly catching insects on the wing. They made a pretty picture as they fluttered here and there over the lank green grass, appearing not unlike yellow butterflies sipping the early morning dew that glistened in the sun from every grass-stem.

The Striated Thornbill (*A. lineata*) also hovers, and appears to be suspended by its bill, as it collects the small insects to be found on the underside of gum-leaves, some twenty to thirty feet above the ground.—LAWRENCE C. HAINES, Sydney, N.S.W., 14/5/45.

Multiple Nest-building.—At Beecroft some Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) seem to be 'railway conscious.' In 1943 a pair built a nest on the top wire of the overhead electric rail system and when this was destroyed by a railway employee they built another, which suffered the same fate. In September, 1944, a pair selected as a nesting site two insulators on a wire stretching from an iron post on the platform to the overhead wires and built a nest on each. Observations on several days revealed that the birds deposited nest material on the insulator nearest the line of approach, but this action was not absolutely invariable. Each bird assisted in building the two nests and the direction of approach during the operations was such that the nests were practically identical in size at all stages and completed at the same time. It was amusing to see the birds moulding the cup of the nests and almost touching tails as they turned, the two insulators being close together.

In previous records of multiple nest-building, in which several nests were started, I cited the commonly-accepted explanation that the birds become confused by the number of similar sites and learn only gradually to distinguish one nest and concentrate on it—a theory that fitted the particular instances well. But how can one account for the behaviour of these Wagtails seeing that at all times both insulators and any deposits of nesting material were clearly in view? When only one nest is required and is the normal expression of the breeding instinct, the mentality which compels birds to complete two nests simply because some material was deposited initially on two adjoining insulators must be very different from the human kind. Our own concepts of 'intelligence' do not apply. We think of 'purpose' in relationship to the nest and regard duplication as a waste of time and effort. But perhaps the 'purpose' of nest-building, so far as the birds are concerned, is expressed primarily in terms of emotional satisfactions which serve essential, though unpremeditated, ends. It is sad to relate there was no final chapter to this interesting story for some scrupulous and 'unornithological' railway servant again frustrated the Wagtails' plans.—N. L. ROBERTS, Beecroft, 15/3/45.

Sparrow Feeds Cuckoo.—Pallid Cuckoos were rather more abundant than usual about Melbourne in the spring-summer of 1944 and several were observed from time to time at Wattle Park (at the eastern extremity of the city), where they appeared to be troubling the White-plumed Honeyeaters. On December 8 a pair of these Honeyeaters was seen feeding a young Cuckoo which could fly, and which snapped at them every time they approached. Three weeks later (December 30) a peevish cry in the same reservation revealed another young Pallid Cuckoo, perhaps a week

emerged from a nest, squatted lengthwise on the thick branch of a gum about 30 feet aloft. Presently a small bird flew up and surprised me by adopting a novel technique: instead of popping food into the gaping mouth of the Cuckoo and retreating quickly it stood up close to the young bird and fed it with a 'pumping' action. The explanation came when the fosterer was seen to be a female of the House Sparrow.

For some forty minutes I watched the scene, and no other bird but the Sparrow approached the Cuckoo. Once or twice the fledgeling was fed quickly (in the normal fashion of regular fosterers), but usually the Sparrow stood up close and fed her charge repeatedly, disregarding the snapping of the arrogant youngster. The feeding visits were not made as frequently as is usual, a fact which suggests that each meal was fairly heavy, and this supposition is supported by the fact that the Cuckoo did not 'cheep' nearly as freely as is customary.

Eventually the young bird flew, quite strongly, to another tree, and there it was followed and fed by the Sparrow. Again the feeding method used was to stand up close to the Cuckoo and supply food—possibly broken-up seeds—by repeated 'pumping.' That Sparrow, it is clear, was not accustomed to Cuckoo arrogance, and was therefore much less sophisticated than a regular fosterer. Its devotion, however, seemed to indicate that it was in complete charge of the parasitic bird—that the young Cuckoo had in fact been hatched in the Sparrow's nest. If so, is not this the first instance of the kind to be recorded? Indeed, I know of no other report of an introduced bird being seen in the act of feeding a young Cuckoo. It is true that Cuckoos' eggs have sometimes been found in the nests of introduced birds (notably Goldfinches), but I do not recall any record of a young Cuckoo in Australia being reared to maturity by a non-native bird.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Melbourne, 8/3/45.

Honeyeater Caught by Spider.—In February this year, 1945, Mr. F. W. Harper, of Vacluse, Sydney, noticed a strange object in a large web spun between two trees in his garden. He thought it was a bat, but an investigation revealed a Spinebill Honeyeater (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) hanging head downwards in the lower part of the web with wings fully extended. The unfortunate bird was hopelessly enmeshed in the glutinous silk and quite unable to move. Mr. Harper took it from the web, removed the silk from its feathers and feet and, after a rest and drink, the exhausted creature was able to fly to a bush. There was no visual evidence that the spider had attacked the bird but Mr. Harper did not make a close inspection for any mark of injury. From the description of the spider,

which was in the centre of the web, I have no doubt it was a species of *Nephila*. The yellowish silk of this spider is so tough that the aborigines use it to make fishing lines, and some western stockmen have made whip-crackers with it in place of the usual crochet cotton. There is a record in the *Sydney Mail* of a hawk darting through a *Nephila*'s large web and becoming so entangled in the sticky strands that it struggled on the ground for half a minute before flying away.—N. L. ROBERTS, Beecroft, N.S.W., 15/3/45.

Birds and Bushfires.—While investigating a serious bush-fire in the heathlands to the west of Cordeaux on January 1, 1945, I took the opportunity of noting the behaviour of the common swamp birds at the approach of the fires. In the swamps, about 300 yards from the fires, Emu-Wrens (*Stipiturus malachurus*) were present in almost incredible numbers. Wherever one walked they could be flushed, but we noticed as we walked towards the fires, that they resolutely refused to travel ahead of us towards the fire, but flew around us or over our heads when flushed.

Closer to the flames, up to about a hundred yards away, large numbers of Yellow-winged Honeyeaters (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*) and a few Eastern Spinebills (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) were feeding among the tea-trees. Then, closer to the flames, in some cases only a few yards away, numerous Spinebills flitted about the bushes apparently unconcerned. Numbers of this species were noted flying about the charred remains of bushes in a recently-burned swamp. Striated Thornbills (*Acanthiza lineata*), Grey Fantails (*Rhipidura flabellifera*) and a Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*) were noted in timber only a few minutes after the fire had passed through.—ELLIS MCNAMARA, Cordeaux River, 10/1/45.

Black-winged Rosellas.—The Eastern Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*) is undoubtedly the commonest parrot occurring in the Wallangarra District, Qld. It was with interest that I observed striking variations in the colours and markings of the species. In some birds, the black feathers that help to make up the wing pattern so predominate that, with the exception of a few orange and green feathers, the wings appear to be almost black. The underparts of these birds are a deep orange colour rather than yellow, and the reddish breast extends much more down the abdomen than is usual. These dark-winged birds are noticeably larger than the ordinary Rosellas.—LAWRENCE C. HAINES, Sydney, N.S.W., 8/3/45.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Gould named the Rosella from the nearby Darling Downs as *P. splendidus* (now *P. e. ceciliæ*), but the characteristics of this subspecies do not accord with the foregoing account.