

Cracticus argenteus — Silver-backed Butcher-bird. Fountain Head, Adelaide River, Batchelor, Darwin.

Fountain Head appears to be about the southern limit of the range of this species in the area under review. At Batchelor this species is frequent in open forest. It is very similar in habits and economy to the Grey Butcher-bird. I saw a well-grown juvenile being fed on February 4, 1945.

Gymnorhina tibicen — Black-backed Magpie. Barrow Creek, Banka, Elliott, Larrimah, Elsey Station, Katherine.

Magpies are nowhere frequent: pairs and parties of three or four appear to be the rule. Generally noted in the open forest, they do not seem to be attracted by camps and permanent settlements, as I should have expected them to be.

Occurrence of the Black Honeyeater in North-west Victoria

By GORDON BINNS, Ouyen, Victoria.

The Black Honeyeater (*Myzomela nigra*) has been plentiful during the spring of 1946 in the north-western portion of the State. The writer has observed it over an area—narrow, it is true—stretching from Trinita to Bronzewing. The first birds noticed were quite close to the township of Ouyen, where the writer resides. Intrigued by the thin, plaintive piping call, eerie in the wind, a search was made of a grassy slope, studded with saltbush, and a pair located and identified at very close range. A second male joined the pair, which perched on a bush-top. Owing to the reluctance of the first pair to quit the spot, it was apparent that they had an interest there—particularly when the second male was chased off the spot by the swift-moving resident. This was on September 1.

On September 8 the writer visited the desert country just south-east of Bronzewing. The call of *M. nigra* was heard everywhere, and two nests were located, one in a gum sapling, about three feet from the ground, built in a tiny fork formed by a small branch leaving the trunk. The bird was so quiet that we were able to approach to within a couple of feet.

A few yards away, in a small tea-tree, a second nest was seen. This, also in a fork, barely two feet above the ground, was more in the open than the other, and the bird decamped early. Each nest contained two beautiful little eggs.

Armed with this experience, a search was made of the area mentioned at Ouyen. On September 11, a nest, also containing two eggs, was found in a saltbush, two feet

above the ground, in a strong fork. This nest was watched. The young hatched between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on September 21. They were very dark of skin, with long grey fluff on the crown and elsewhere. They grew steadily, but on October 3 had disappeared. The nest was intact and, considering the still-helpless condition of the nestlings, they must have been taken.

Several other pairs of *M. nigra* were located in this paddock, each pair in a definite locality. On September 22 Messrs. Norman Favaloro and F. E. Howe, with Mrs. Howe, visited me, and the area was gone over. Two nests, each containing two eggs, were found in the areas noted. Another, with two young, was found. Only one suspected nest was left unfound, but was located by the writer two days later. Like the first found in this area, these last four nests were all in saltbush, all from two to three feet above the ground. Two of them, however, were not in forks, but in smaller upright growth thrown up from horizontal limbs.

All the eggs seen were of a kind—yellowish buff (or smoked ivory) and similarly marked with a dark zone—with one exception, for one pair was so heavily marked that the larger end appeared to wear a dark cap, rather than a zone. These were in the first Ouyen nest, found on September 11.

Each nest found was of a type: there was no noticeable variation, either in size, form, or as to materials used in construction. This applies to the seven mentioned. There was a marked absence of much in the way of special lining materials. As has already been mentioned, the sitting hen bird is very easy to approach, if one goes quietly. She harmonizes perfectly with the nest and surroundings. When flushed, she flutters to a low twig, usually in the next shrub, before going farther away. The male birds do not frequent the immediate vicinity of the brooding hen. The thin, piping call would appear to be uttered as a warning, on the approach of an intruder. There is a curious double note, used by the male when flying—this is uttered during the performance of a peculiar movement. The bird appears to stiffen himself, with wings pointing downwards, as he rises during the utterance of this two-note call. He flies fairly high when at this.

The five nests at Ouyen were practically the same distance apart—about 200 yards from the next one in each case. The birds were very local in their habits, and could always be found where previously seen.

The beautiful pied males are aggressive, and were observed harrying male Crimson Chats (*Epthianura tricolor*) as well as intruders of their own kind. The speed of a pair of male *M. nigra* is wonderful to see—they move as one bird. I stood, unwittingly, close beside a nest which I sought, watching the male bird, hoping to be led to his

nest. He circled me, with an eye always on me, but improving the time by collecting insects, now on the ground, now on the wing. After darting into the air for an insect, he would return repeatedly to the same perch. When I had moved to another position, he quickly darted to a saltbush, where I found a pair of young in the nest—still unfeathered. It was observed that the bird did not visit the nest following the capture of each insect taken, but waited until several were 'in hand'.

During early morning observations, some very close and long views of the male birds were had, owing to the habit of perching on the tip of a bush or tree, usually on a dry twig. The plaintive note is sounded at regular and frequent intervals, and the whole of the bird is moved during the note, with a slight but obvious lifting motion—as though the bird raised himself on his toes to assist the effort.

I understand that the birds have been plentiful near Red Cliffs, too. They have been seen and heard in all types of country about Ouyen—in saltbush, open timber, porcupine grass, desert (mixed dwarf pine, tea-tree, eucalypts, and other native shrubs) and on gypsum flats. They have been observed working over flowering mistletoe, as well as taking insects on the wing. They are still about (October 29), but, I believe, in diminished numbers.

The Caspian Tern on Inland Waters

By NORMAN J. FAVALORO, Mildura, Vic.

On June 10, 1945, whilst driving a motor launch upstream on the Murray River near Bruce's Bend, a few miles from Mildura, I was surprised to see a Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) flying at an altitude of approximately one hundred feet directly overhead. It was the first of its kind I had seen in this district during the thirteen years I have been resident at Mildura. Later in the afternoon the bird flew low over the river and approached close enough for me to secure it for the National Museum reference collection.

The heavily-striated head indicated that the specimen was in mid-winter plumage. The eyes, feet, and tip of the bill were black, the remainder of the bill reddish-orange and the gape dark yellowish-orange. Unfortunately sexing was difficult and the skin was labelled '? male'.

The stomach contained a headless carp four inches long and the major portion of another almost as big. The most interesting feature of the bird itself was a very thick stump of a fish bone $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long deeply imbedded in the right side of the throat near the base of the upper mandible. The area surrounding the offending bone was inflamed and