

twenty years with Neville W. Cayley and his work, I venture to state that he will join the ranks of such men as Gould, Ramsay, Campbell, North, Mathews, and others whose names are landmarks in the progress of Australian ornithology. As a man he was sincere, kindly and friendly, without spite or rancour and he bore the vicissitudes and disappointments of life philosophically. His many friends will remember him as a good companion in whom the love of birds was unquenchable.

Neville William Cayley was born on January 7, 1887, at Yamba, Clarence River, N.S.W., and died at Avalon, near Sydney, on March 17, 1950. Sincere sympathy is extended to Mrs. Cayley, his two sons, Neville and Glen (by his first wife) and to his two step-daughters.

A portrait of the deceased appears in *The Emu*, vol. 37, pt. 3, Jan., 1938, plate 33.

Books by Neville W. Cayley are—

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| 1918. <i>Our Birds.</i> | 1932. <i>Australian Finches in Bush and Aviary.</i> |
| 1918. <i>Our Flowers.</i> | 1933. <i>Budgerigars in Bush and Aviary.</i> |
| 1926. <i>The Tale of Blucy Wren.</i> | 1938. <i>Australian Parrots.</i> |
| 1931. <i>What Bird is That?</i> | 1949. <i>The Fairy Wrens of Australia.</i> |

Scientific writings are—

1922. (With J. R. Kinghorn) 'On the Status of several species belonging to the two genera, *Fregetta* Bp. and *Fregettornis* Mathews,' *The Emu*, vol. 22, pt. 2, October, pp. 81-97, pls. 26 (col.)-29.
1925. (With Tom Iredale) 'Australian Crested Penguins,' *The Emu*, vol. 25, pt. 1, July, pp. 1-6, pls. 1 (col.)-3.
1926. 'A New Australian Finch,' *The Emu*, vol. 25, pt. 3, January, p. 133, pl. 26 (col.).
1926. 'A Bird Picnic at Wallarobba, N.S.W.,' *The Emu*, vol. 25, pt. 4, April, pp. 274-6, pl. 49.
1929. 'The Status of Certain Species of the Genus *Ninox*, and a Description of Two New Species of that Genus,' *The Emu*, vol. 28, pt. 3, January, pp. 161-4, pl. 34 (col.).
1929. (With A. H. Chisholm) 'The Birds of Port Stephens, N.S.W.,' *The Emu*, vol. 28, pt. 4, April, pp. 243-251, pls. 48-52.
1933. 'Australian Parrots,' *The Australian Zoologist*, vol. 7, pt. 5, August, pp. 359-370.
1938. 'Australian Parrots—A Review,' *The Emu*, vol. 38, pt. 1, July, pp. 49-53.
1938. 'John Gould as an Illustrator,' *The Emu*, vol. 38, pt. 2, October, pp. 167-172.

Stray Feathers

Observations on Swifts near Portland, Vic., during Summer, 1949-1950.—The summer in question has been the best one for visits from these birds for many years. It is often said that the appearance of swifts is a prelude to

rain but the period under review has been exceptionally dry in the Portland district. However, one thing will be noticed—in nearly every case the birds appeared when the barometer was falling. This has been my experience with these birds over a very long period and, of course, rain does in many cases follow this low pressure system. Portland is not noted for many flocks of swifts in any one season but the past one was an exception. The census now being taken on Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*), etc., at the request of the Union should, when extended to swifts, include the following points—date and time when seen, estimated number of birds, direction of flight, full weather conditions including barometer reading. We have no idea at present how many swifts or separate flocks of the birds roam say in Victoria in any one day. They move so fast that the same flock may be responsible for a dozen different reports from widely scattered areas in a few hours. By a thorough census, taken as above, from many observers, we would have some hope of arriving at a solution of this bird problem.

Here are my notes for the season just past. During the last week in December, 1949, what is described by some Portland fishermen when about five miles off Cape Bridgewater as "the largest flock of swifts [species not known] we have ever seen off the land flew for an hour around our boats."

January 28. Spine-tailed Swifts (*Hirundapus caudacutus*). A small flock, both morning and afternoon, hawking over Johnstone's Creek and Swan Lake respectively, 20 miles west of Portland. The morning lot were flying low in and out through forest trees. Light east wind, hot and overcast, glass falling. Only rain following appearance 5 points on 31st inst.

January 28. Fork-tailed Swifts (*Micropus pacificus*). A large flock flew over South Portland at 11 A.M. Came from S.W. and disappeared over the bay towards the north shore. Light N.E. wind, hot, glass falling. Five points two days later.

February 18. Spine-tailed Swifts. About 20 birds flying low over my house, South Portland, 11 A.M. Disappeared to the west. Hot and calm with thundery conditions. Glass low, falling. Eight points of rain later in day.

February 23. Spine-tailed Swifts. A very large flock flying around Narrawong (10 miles east of Portland) for an hour, 10 A.M. Light N.W. wind, clear and hot. Glass falling. Cool change with 10 points of rain later in day.

February 25. Spine-tailed Swifts. A few birds (these small lots may be the outskirts of a large flock) over my house at noon. Calm and dull. Glass low and steady. No rain followed.

March 11. Fork-tailed Swifts. About 20 birds flying low through and over timber at Surrey River (8 miles N.E. Portland). Hot, light S.E. wind. Glass falling. No rain.

March 15. Spine-tailed Swifts. Two birds flew low across the road in front of my car at Tyrendarra at 5 P.M. Warm and calm. Glass falling. No rain.—NOEL F. LEARMONTH, Portland, Vic., 10/5/50.

Fantail nesting in a Dairy.—Recently I have observed what I believe to be a rather unusual nesting site of the Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*). After noticing a pair of the birds taking an interest in the interior of a small dairy, I investigated, and found a few pieces of dry grass hanging from a wire hook under the ridges of the roof. The grass was hanging in a vertical position and was held there by cobwebs binding them to the wire. During the next week the nest developed into the well-known wine-glass shaped structure, and was composed of rootlets with a few pieces of horse hair. The exterior was lined with a thick coating of cobwebs, but the interior had no definite lining. The tail of the nest was also rather ragged and unfinished. I have always taken this long tail to be a kind of drainage for the nest when exposed to the spring rains, so perhaps, if this is the case, the birds did not think it necessary to complete it, as they had 'a roof over their heads.' Almost a week after the first straw had been placed in position, the first egg was laid, two more being added during the next two days. The birds then commenced to incubate them.

The whole of this time the dairy was in constant use each morning and evening, but the birds paid no attention to anyone, and attended to the nest the whole time, although it was only about three feet from the head of the man operating the separator.

Several times while the birds were sitting one was observed to relieve the other of the task of incubation, apparently while the other fed or exercised. On its return the mate would move to the edge of the nest and the change-over would take place.

When the young were hatched the birds went on with the feeding in the same bold nature as though they owned the whole place. In a little over a week the young grew to full-sized birds, and early on a bright sunny morning deserted the nest and took up residence in a hawthorn tree about ten yards away. This tree was a favourite spot of a pair of Green Parrakeets (*Platycercus caledonicus*), but as soon as the young Fantails moved in the parent birds drove away the Parrakeets.

The nest is still in perfect order and in spite of being built on a smooth piece of wire it never moved a fraction

of an inch. I might mention that the dairy is only about eight feet square and the birds gained entrance through an open door. The nest was nine feet from the floor in a semi-dark position, and about six inches under the ridging.—R. H. GREEN, Antill Ponds, Tas., 23/1/48.

Nests in Every Month.—Although it is highly probable that in normal circumstances there are birds breeding in Australia—one part or another—in every month, it is surely unusual to find occupied nests in a single restricted area in each of twelve months in succession. This has been the case in the Sydney region during 1949-50.

The record began with **Lyrebirds** (regular winter breeders) in June of 1949. Smaller birds followed in July and then came the general nesting seasons of spring and early summer. With the advent of the new year we found *Cisticola exilis*, the charming little Fantail-Warbler, extending its breeding season through January into February; in March nests of the Tawny Grass-bird and the Red-browed Finch were found; in April the enterprising species included the Double-barred Finch and the White-eared and Yellow-winged Honeyeaters; and in May the circle was completed by the Magpie-Lark, the Little Wattle-bird, the White-cheeked Honeyeater, and the Yellow-tailed Thornbill.

Strongly favourable conditions, of course, have been at the basis of such an embarrassing development—embarrassing because with nests demanding attention all the year round bird-observers have little time available for meditation.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, N.S.W., 31/5/50.

The Royal Penguin in Australian Waters.—The Royal Penguin (*Eudyptes schlegeli*) breeds on Macquarie Island and ranges north to Campbell Island and New Zealand (both islands), and its occurrence in the Australian region has been reported recently (see *post*). Peters (*Birds of the World*, vol. I, p. 31) includes Tasmania in its range, this apparently being based on remarks by Mathews and Iredale (*Manual of the Birds of Australia*, p. 12, 1921).

While engaged on the preparation of a distributional list of South Australian birds, which involved critical examination of all Museum material, I discovered that there was a skin of this species in the South Australian Museum which had been taken in South Australia in 1933. Details of the specimen are—registered no. B16739; locality, near the mouth of the Inman River, Encounter Bay; date, February 22, 1933; sex, male (imm.); collector, Master Harry Ewens. The bird was received alive at the Museum in poor condition and moulting, and the following colours of the soft parts were taken: iris, light brown, a narrow

- (i) culminicorn when viewed from above has parallel edges
sclateri (Big-crested) (casual visitor).
- (ii) culminicorn when viewed from above converges behind nostrils.
 - (a) line over each eye does not reach bill; crest large and drooping
crestatus (Rockhopper or Crested)
 (many Australian records).
 - (b) line over each eye reaches bill; crest smaller.
pachyrhynchus (Thick-billed or Victoria)
 (many records).

Note: There does not seem to be any means of separating the immature birds of *crestatus* and *pachyrhynchus*.

In conclusion I should like to suggest that the reference to *E. schlegeli* under *Eudytes sclateri* in the *Official Checklist*, 1926, be deleted as it is indefinite and misleading. —H. T. CONDON, South Australian Museum, Adelaide, S.A., 18/10/49.

Egg Tasting.—While I was at Skokholm Island bird observatory in May of this year (1949), Dr. Hugh Cott, of Cambridge, was a fellow visitor to do some collecting for the subject on which he is carrying out special research—the edibility of birds' eggs.

He asked his fellow visitors to form a panel to do some egg tasting for him. We gathered in the wheelhouse (the kitchen) one morning. Before each place was set a teaspoon and a paper prepared for noting our opinions. A fresh egg of a Greater Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)—Gulls' eggs are collected and used instead of fowls' eggs on the Island—was used as a control. The egg we were to taste was that of a Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*). Both eggs were prepared in the same way. Broken into a glass jar, they were lightly beaten, and then the jars put into hot water until the eggs were 'scrambled,' but without any fat or condiments.

We were given a list of flavours we were to try and detect, such as nutty, mealy or uncooked, fishy, acrid, sour, sweet, bitter, aromatic, etc., and next a scale to decide palatability—10% to 8% good, 8 to 4 palatable, 4 to 0 distasteful. We knew a fowl's egg rated at 8.6%. We also had to describe the texture—slimy, granular, etc.

The control egg was passed around; each took a small portion with the teaspoon, and did his or her best to remember the flavour. Then it was suggested that each should take a sip of water to 'clear the palate,' after which came the Shearwater's egg. Gingerly tasted at first, it was found

to be quite good, and after savouring and gently ruminating, everyone concentrated on trying to assess and describe their sensations.

When Dr. Cott had gone through the papers, we heard the conclusions were surprisingly similar. Its rating averaged 7.0%, that is 'edible'; its texture was described as 'slightly rubbery,' and there was a very slight fishy flavour discernible. On another occasion eggs of the Razorbill (*Alca torda*) and Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) were tasted. These were quite good, and were rated 7.9% and 7.4% respectively.

Dr. Cott has now tested some 400 species from all over the world. Australians will be interested to know that the egg of the Emu rates next to the fowl, with 8.4%. That of the European Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) is the worst and is rated at 2.7%. It is exceedingly bitter.

His team of experts are official egg-tasters, whose daily job it is to taste eggs for the Government to check on keeping qualities, etc., for storage. He also has an 'animal panel,' consisting of a hedgehog and some rats. He says their reactions are very uniform. Care is taken to re-check each finding by putting the egg specimens in different orders and positions for the animals.

An interesting finding is that there is a direct correlation between the colour of the soft parts of the bird and the egg yolk. For instance, the colour of the yolk of the Oystercatcher's egg (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*) is that of its bill and legs—bright red.

With air transport it is possible to get fresh eggs from most countries. Dr. Cott would like to try more of the Australian species.—INA WATSON, England, 21/10/49.

Diurnal Birds Singing at Night.—About sixty years ago A. J. North (*Descriptive Catalogue of Nests and Eggs of Birds found breeding in Australia and Tasmania*, 159, 1889) was able to record only one species of bird singing at night, namely the Horsfield Bush-Lark (*Mirafrja javanica*). In the intervening years our knowledge of diurnal birds which sing at night, particularly in the breeding season, has grown steadily.

The following list of species known to sing late at night, say within three hours of mid-night either way, is almost certainly incomplete: Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*), Little Quail (*Turnix velox*), Australian Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*), Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sanctus*), Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*), Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*), White-browed Babbler (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*), Rufous Song-Lark (*Cinclothrhamphus mathewsi*), Brown Song-Lark (*C. cruralis*), Australian Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*), Australian Pipit (*Anthus australis*), Horsfield Bush-Lark, (*Mirafrja javanica*), Black-

backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) and White-backed Magpie (*G. hypoleuca*).—E. F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 31/1/50.

McPherson Range.—When writing in *The Emu* of 1920 (vol. 19, p. 259) on birds of the McPherson Range, the late S. W. Jackson stated that he had been told in 1919 by Alderman John McMaster, the venerable Mayor of Brisbane, that the range was named after an early bushranger. That man, McMaster said, had arrived in Brisbane from Britain at the same time as himself, in 1855, and had 'gone bush' soon afterwards. By way of extenuation, the Mayor added that his acquaintance had not committed any murders.

As the area in question is of considerable ornithological interest, it should perhaps be pointed out that Jackson's informant was distinctly in error, for the range was in fact named by Allan Cunningham, explorer and botanist, in compliment to Major Donald McPherson, of His Majesty's 39th Regiment, in the year 1828. Incidentally, there has long been difference of opinion whether the name should be spelt 'Macpherson' or 'McPherson,' but that point seems to have been resolved by Mr. B. T. Dowd, who, writing in the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* in 1944 (vol. xxx, p. 343), produces evidence to indicate that the correct spelling is 'McPherson.'—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, 15/12/49.

Double Nest-building of Willie Wagtail.—On September 24, 1949, a pair of Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) were singing in a mixed gum and wattle plantation at Larpent, Vic. One bird flew to a nest and began working material into the rim. While it was at work the other bird flew to another unfinished nest, four inches away, and worked at that. The nests were 25 feet from the ground in an *Acacia melanoxylon*, and were roughly half-built. Watching proved that each bird would help building at both nests. There was only one pair of Willie Wagtails present.

On October 4, the slightly lower of the two nests had been completed and contained four eggs on which the bird was sitting. The other nest, though more advanced than when last seen, was not completely built, nor was it lined. Several days later this latter nest blew down. The young were successfully reared from the completed nest.

The nests were built on similar curves of two branches of roughly similar shape and running parallel to each other some six inches apart. I think it is probable that the birds became confused by the similarity of the branches, causing two nests to be started. It is surprising that construction

continued so far with both nests. Instances of multiple nest-building are not infrequent (see *British Birds*, vol. 41, p. 348, and vol. 42, p. 183, where further references are given) but they usually refer to artificial situations such as the rungs of a ladder, the girders of a bridge or stacked crates and so on. Furthermore they refer to birds the nest position of which is normally distinctive, and it would be interesting to know if such mistakes occurred among ground-building birds, such as Pipits.

In the same tree in which were the two Willie Wagtails' nests was the nest of a Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*). The two species were continually fighting and chasing each other, and it was possible that an increased emotional tension caused by the nearness of the Restless Flycatcher caused the error in nest-building to continue to such an advanced state.

Also in the same tree, at a higher level, was the nest of a Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*). The nesting association between this bird and the Willie Wagtail is well known, but the presence also of the Restless Flycatcher may indicate that there is another, not so well known, nesting association with the Magpie-Lark.—A. GRAHAM BROWN, Colac, Vic., 1/1/50.

Owlet-Nightjar. On October 2, 1949, I had what must be the unusual experience of finding an Owlet-Nightjar (*Aegotheles cristata*) abroad during daylight hours, apparently of its own choosing. At the time of discovery it was on the ground, perhaps feeding, but I could not be sure. When it was disturbed, the bird flew to a low branch of a sapling and remained perched there for some minutes. Its position provided an excellent opportunity to note its general characteristics, the rufous ear patches, barring on the tail, yellowish legs and feet. Later, it flew strongly and confidently through the trees to another perch about a hundred yards away. After it was disturbed a second time it took a longer flight and I lost sight of it. The time was 10.30 a.m. It was a dull morning, with the clouds down to a few hundred feet, sultry, and raining lightly at the time of the observation.—C. C. LAWRENCE, Lindisfarne, Tas., 22/2/50.

Correspondence

FOREIGN BIRDS IN AUSTRALIA

To the Editor,
Sir,

I have been much interested to read the article by H. E. Tarr on the 'Distribution of Foreign Birds in Australia' (*Emu*, vol. 49, pp. 189-198). This is a subject on which I