

Of the paratypes, no. 405828, United States National Museum, adult male, collected at Ambukwamba, Groote Eylandt, on May 22, 1948, by H. G. Deignan (original number 201), most nearly resembles the type specimen.

Stray Feathers

A Query on Landrail Behaviour.—At the end of October, 1949, a nest of the Banded Landrail (*Hypotaenidia philippensis*) was discovered in a swamp at Bundoora, near Melbourne. It contained seven eggs. The accompanying illustration shows the situation, the herbage having been opened up in order to facilitate photography.

Being desirous of picturing the bird at the nest, if possible, I decided to construct a hide nearby and to watch to see whether the bird would return. The camera was not erected and the surrounding reeds and sedges were not greatly disturbed. It was not known how far incubation of the eggs had progressed, but proof of their freshness was soon forthcoming.

In about ten minutes' time the Landrail was heard giving its grunting call near the nest. This continued for a few minutes and then the bird crept quietly on to the nest and settled down. It looked towards the hide several times but did not appear to be unduly alarmed at its presence. We had, of course, broken down a 'sight line' through the reeds between the hide and the nest.

After sitting about five minutes the Landrail slipped silently off the eggs and immediately disappeared into the adjacent tangle of swamp growth. The question now was—should we place the camera in position, open up the nest surroundings and try our luck, or were the eggs fresh and their owner consequently unlikely to return to them readily? With birds that have precocial young the stage of incubation of the eggs is important to bird photographers. If they are well advanced there is always the chance that the eggs will hatch out overnight and the chicks be gone when the next visit is made. The best time for photography is a day or two before the young are due to appear.

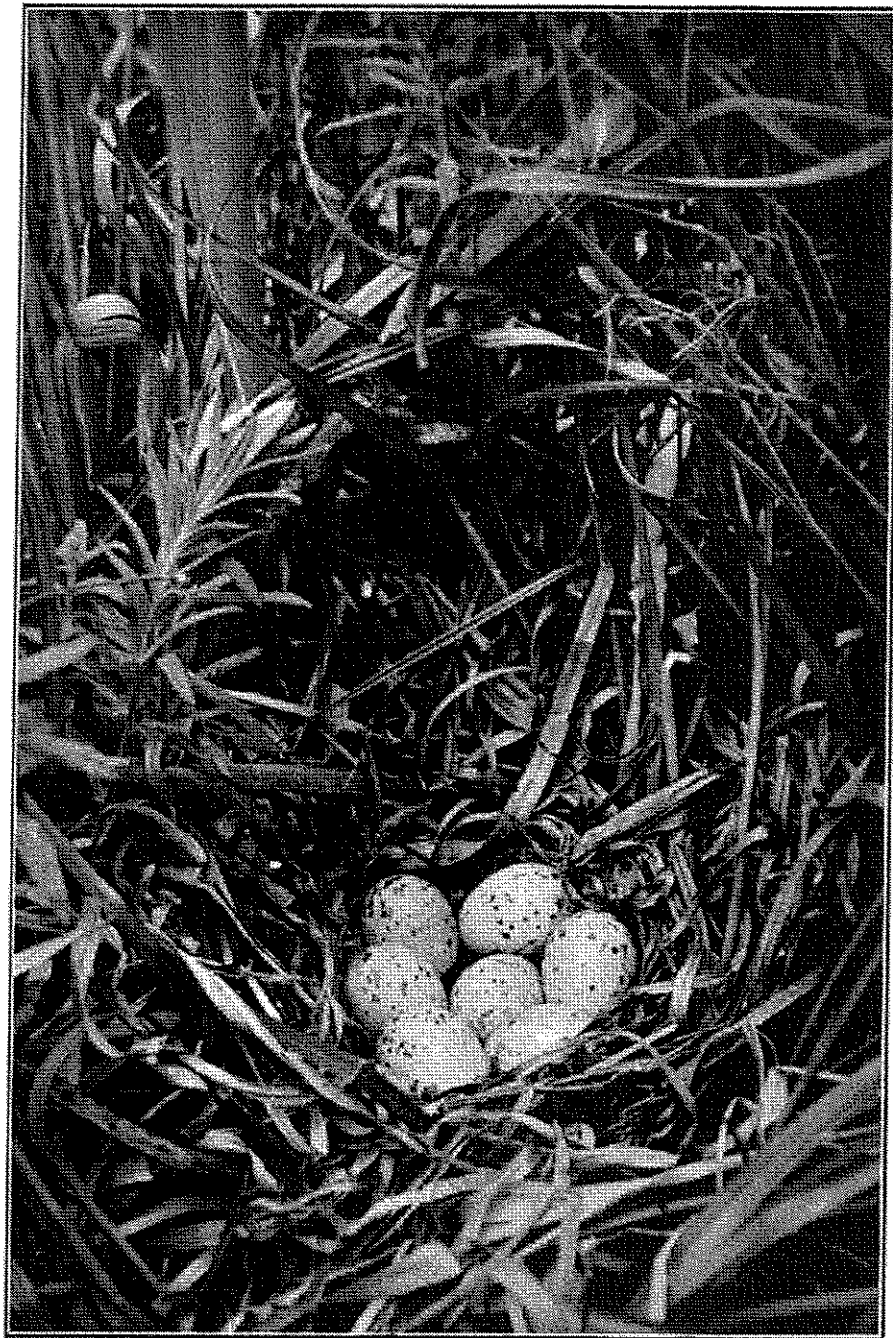
We waited a few minutes and then walked up to the nest. Immediately I noticed something that supplied the answer to our query. There were now eight eggs in the nest. The bird had returned and laid another while we watched. In the circumstances we decided to leave the hide in place and to postpone photography for a few weeks. On the following day and again a few days later (a holiday) the position was unchanged—eight eggs, and, though nothing was seen or heard of the bird, the eggs were warm and a cross made with two pieces of grass and placed across them was disturbed on each following inspection.

A week later a hurried visit to the nest disclosed it to be empty. This was inexplicable. We knew to the minute the age of at least the eighth egg, and that the young could not possibly have hatched after not more than twelve days' incubation. There was little likelihood of the eggs having been picked up by an egg collector, and there were no signs of struggle or disturbance and not the slightest trace of broken eggshells. We assumed that some mishap, some 'cause unknown,' had occurred, and on several occasions later in the season we searched diligently in the neighbourhood for a second nest and eggs of our Landrail, but without success. At the time I remembered that there was an account in the late Miss Ethel Turner's *Broadland Birds*, 1924, of a Water-Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) that removed its newly-hatched young and finally an addled egg, but I did not give much thought to the matter.

Some months later we were again in the swamp. We had stopped in a somewhat open area near where the Landrail nest had been. The vegetation was now more open and beaten down than previously. As we stood there for a minute or two, my companion—both of this and the other occasions—pointed down at my feet, and there was the remains of a nest about the size of that of a Landrail. It was flattened a little and weather-worn, but contained numbers of fragments of eggshells, unmistakably those of *Hypotaenidia*. Measured, the position was exactly ten feet from where our previous nest had been built.

In *Bird Life*, 1949, Edward A. Armstrong refers to birds carrying off their eggs. "Only a few birds are known to do this," he writes (p. 127), continuing that "some kinds of nightjar will pick up their eggs in their huge mouths and place them somewhere else." He refers to a pheasant-tailed jacana in Cashmere that became worried by a photographer's hiding tent close to her nest and trundled all her eggs away over the water-lily leaves and through the water to another safer position, and to a Texas night-hawk that moved its eggs out of the sun into the shade. Included in his remarks is one to the effect that "Water rails have several times been seen and photographed moving their eggs or young."

Could it be that our particular Landrail had moved its eggs after building a new nest nearby in which to place them? The comparatively slight distance of ten feet would not be too great to make the transposition unlikely, and, on the other hand, if disaster befell the first clutch, it is probable that the bird would have moved away a greater distance than ten feet to build a new nest with no ties to the earlier one. I cannot assert, of course, that the Landrail moved her eggs, but I think that it is quite likely in the circumstances. The fact that it was about twelve days after the occasion when we first saw the eggs before the empty



Nest and Eggs of Banded Landrail,

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.

nest was noted, does not militate against the possibility. The bird may well have accepted the inspection of its treasures on the first few occasions, but have become concerned at a later stage, and may have moved them as soon after our third visit as the necessity first to build a new nest to receive them permitted.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 12/6/50.

More About Vocal Mimicry.—Mrs. Bernard O'Reilly, of the McPherson Range National Park, Queensland, has written me to the effect that a male Regent Bower-bird (*Sericulus chrysocephalus*), sitting only six feet or so from her on a day in mid-summer, was seen to sway his body in rhythmic fashion and was heard to imitate the voice of the Grey Thrush, the bell-like feeding-notes of the Crimson Parrot, and the 'coowee' and grinding calls of the Satin Bower-bird. All imitations were rendered in a whisper-song, and probably would not have been heard from twenty feet away. Vocal mimicry by the Regent-bird has been recorded previously only from a specimen in an aviary. It now becomes clear that the species practises the art, if only in whisper-songs, in a state of nature, and so is something more than 'possible' among vocal mimics.

When writing in *The Emu* of 1950 (vol. 49, p. 232) on additions to the list of vocal mimics among Australian birds, I quoted Messrs. P. A. Bourke and A. F. Austin as having stated that *Orthonyx spaldingi*, the Northern Logrunner or Chowchilla, possessed considerable ability as a mocker. What I did not know then was that the late Dr. E. P. Ramsay had recorded the same fact more than 70 years previously. His note on the species, given in *Proc. Zool. Soc., London*, 1875 (p. 599), reads—"Its powers of mimicry are very great; like the lyrebirds, it seems capable of imitating almost any sound." Curiously, a Queenslanders of old who wrote a good deal on birds of the north, Kendal Broadbent, makes no reference to mimicry on the part of *Orthonyx*, though he refers to both the Golden and Tooth-billed Bower-birds as 'grand mockers.' Another odd point is that mimicry has never been reported for the southern species of the *Orthonyx* group.

An additional note on the subject overlooked earlier occurs in *The Emu* of 1921 (vol. 21, p. 46). In this, H. V. Edwards writes of *Seisura inquieta*, the Restless Flycatcher, as follows—"One of these birds reproduced very accurately, I thought, a peculiar whistle habitually given by a farmer to his wife to intimate that he had finished milking and was ready for breakfast." The fact that the first comma in the above sentence occurs after 'accurately,' rather than after 'reproduced,' seems to suggest that Mr. Edwards was not convinced that the whistle was imitative.

In any event, I personally do not regard the Restless Flycatcher as a mimic in any degree, although its well-known piping call does (fortuitously) suggest a human whistle.

The list of Australian birds that have been known to practise vocal mimicry, with varying consistency and ability, remains at 53 species.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, N.S.W., 7/2/51.

The Mewstone Rookery of the White-capped Albatross.—Amongst those birds which spend most of their days traversing the oceans of the world in their endless search for food is *Diomedea cauta*, more commonly known as the White-capped or Shy Albatross. This species, known to fishermen and seamen as the Mollyhawk, and credited by some as being the reincarnated souls of departed sailors, is the most common of the albatrosses seen off the Tasmanian and southern Australian coasts.

It is well known that Albatross Island, in western Bass Strait, is used by this Albatross as a nesting place in the months of September and October, although one or two other places have been suspected. John Gould, while sheltering in Recherche Bay in southern Tasmania, observed and took specimens of this bird in 1840, and later described it, in 1841. At the time he noted that the Mewstone and other isolated rocks off the coast in the neighbourhood might be used by these birds for breeding, as the plumage of some of his specimens indicated that they had lately been engaged in the task of incubation, but apparently he did not investigate further.

The Mewstone is a craggy islet 440 feet high and about half a mile in circumference, rising steeply out of the sea five miles south-east of Maatsuyker Island, or, to give it its exact position, lat. 43°44'S and long. 146°23'E. There is very little soil and only scanty vegetation on the rounded summit, where patches of green appear between the rocky outcrops, and the nature of its base is such as to make a landing hazardous in anything but the calmest weather.

Last winter the Mewstone was visited by the Fisheries Research Vessel *Liawenee*, to which the writer was attached, and some observations made at the time are interesting in the light of Gould's supposition.

An extract from the log for Sunday, July 9, 1950 reads—
“ . . . and on account of a heavy south-westerly swell running we hove to under the lee of the Mewstone whilst waiting to haul the long-line. This rock was covered with white dots which at first glance were thought to be Pacific Gulls (*Gabianus pacificus*); however as we drew closer it was apparent that the sitting birds were identical with the numerous albatrosses which soared around it and after a careful search only the one type of bird could be seen. It was

difficult to ascertain whether the birds settling on the ledges were on nests or not, but the quantity of their refuse indicated that the rock was a well-used resting place, and the guttural throatings of the many birds made a long continuous cry audible even above the competing roar of the surf on the ledges below. The problem of obtaining a specimen was solved by the finding of a dead bird, which I think is *Diomedea cauta*, floating on the surface of the sea."

Details of the specimen taken:

Total Length	= 880 mm.
Wing	= 430 mm.
Tarsus	= 90 mm.
Length of Bill	= 130 mm.

The bird, a female, was quite cold and the stomach was empty. No cause of death was apparent. The skull was preserved for the National Museum of Victoria.

Subsequently Mr. W. B. Hitchcock of the above-mentioned museum confirmed the identification, from the skull, as *Diomedea cauta*, and this removed any doubt as to the species inhabiting the rock.

The use of 'White-capped' as a common name for *D. cauta* seems more descriptive than 'Shy,' for this species is by no means shy, showing much more audacity than its relative the Wandering Albatross (*D. exulans*). Whilst the former usually keeps a respectful distance between itself and the ship, the latter will come to within a few yards to take scraps thrown overboard, especially fish livers which it greatly prizes and which cause serious arguments if there are not enough to go around.—DUDLEY E. KURTH, C.S.I.R.O. Division of Fisheries, Hobart, Tas., 10/12/50.

What are 'Natural Conditions' for Gouldian Finches?—Mr. Ray Murray, an aviculturist of 12 High Road, Camberwell, Vic., has been carrying out research investigations on this species, *Poëphila gouldiæ*, but work has been somewhat handicapped by mortality in the young birds. From time to time, water supply, diet, general conditions under which birds are kept, and cold, have been instanced as the chief factor causing death, but bird-fanciers apparently do not know the real answer.

Mr. Murray inclines to the opinion that natural diet is not sufficient if birds are kept under otherwise adverse conditions. He instances Sydney aviculturists who have sown their Gouldian aviaries with buffalo grass to the seeding heads of which the birds take readily, but recent wet, cold conditions in Sydney have upset calculations and results cannot be measured. A South African cage-bird man suggests that change of water may be of account and writes of the effect on his birds when the authorities installed filter beds in order to eliminate a brownish colour from the water.

In order to establish in his aviaries as many features as possible agreeing with those under which Gouldian Finches exist in the wild, Mr. Murray asks the following questions in the hope that members familiar with the habitat of the species may be able to assist. "What is the diet of the Gouldians in the wild state? Give names of grass seeds if possible. Do they eat live food of any sort? Are they fond of the young shoots of grasses? If so, what grasses? Do they consume much grit, and, if so, of what type? Are there any other general items of interest concerning diet that have been noted? Is the species found mostly in limestone or ironstone country?"

Will any member who can help write direct to Mr. Murray.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, Vic., 25/4/51.

Gouldian Tragedies.—Stephen Coxen has a place in Australian ornithological history because he was instrumental in causing his brother-in-law, John Gould, to visit Australia in 1838, and because his property, 'Yarrundi,' in the Hunter River country of New South Wales, was a central point for much important work by Gould and Mrs. Gould. Reaching New South Wales in 1827, Stephen Coxen went on the land immediately, and some five years later was joined by his brother Charles, who became both a pastoralist and ornithologist. When Gould first called upon Stephen (March, 1839) the country was in the grip of a severe drought, and a year later much damage was caused by floods. Those trials, together with eye-trouble and a financial depression, were too much for Stephen Coxen, and, instead of visiting England (as he had intended in the good times), he committed suicide.

When writing of Coxen history (*The Story of Elizabeth Gould*, 1944), I stated, on the authority of a modern member of the family, that Stephen died, "probably about 1845, through falling overboard from a vessel between Newcastle and Sydney." Actually, he died from the effects of poison, self-administered, in a hotel at the corner of King and Sussex Streets, Sydney, on September 5, 1844. A report on the subject in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of the day (to which my attention was directed recently by Major H. M. Whittell), reveals that when Coxen learned from his landlord, P. J. Cohen, that he had been given a maintenance grant of £2/2/- a week, he exclaimed—"Had it come five minutes earlier I might have been saved. I have taken poison." He also said that Cohen should have allowed him to go by steamer to Newcastle on the previous night, and he would have jumped overboard and saved anybody any trouble. He left a note stating—"All the means I have in the world is on the table, 23/6d., and this I have borrowed"—a remarkable decline on the part of a man who in Sep-

tember of 1839 was in such comfortable circumstances that he insisted on buying many gifts for his sister, Mrs. Gould.

Coxen was reported to have been aged "about 54 years" at the time of his death. In reality, he was scarcely 46, having been born on November 18, 1798.

That tragedy was one of four shocks suffered by John Gould in the 1840's. First, Mrs. Gould died at 37 years (August, 1841); then his young sister Sarah Wilson, was buried in the same grave (December, 1841); then came Stephen Coxen's suicide (September, 1844), and soon afterwards the chief Gouldian field-worker, John Gilbert, was killed by aborigines in northern Australia (April, 1845).

Add to that record the fact that both Henry and Franklin Gould, the Birdman's sons, died young (at 25 and 33 respectively), and it will be realized that John Gould endured much sorrow while carrying out the ornithological enterprises that followed his return to England from Australia in 1840.—A. H. CHISHOLM, Sydney, N.S.W., 16/9/50.

Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*).—In September, 1937, three Banded Plover settled down in a small paddock near my home, presumably because of a great plague of grasshoppers which had infested the Darling Downs, the normal habitat of this species of plover.

One bird was driven away at the end of September and on October 6 a nest was found with four eggs.

The nest was composed of a few pieces of broken weed and some pieces of dry cow manure placed in a slight hollow in the ground.

One bird, apparently the female, did all the brooding, while its mate kept guard on a termites' mound. When any large bird came into the nesting area it was attacked by both Plovers and quickly driven away.

The male bird was timid and kept at a distance when I approached the nest, but the sitting bird would allow me to get quite close before she would leave her eggs.

Once off the nest she would endeavour to draw one away from the nest by using the 'broken-wing stunt' and by lying flat on the ground with wings outspread. She would take short flights and come back to within a few feet from where I stood, uttering a peculiar chattering call.

Three eggs hatched on September 2 and the shells were presumably eaten by the parents as no shell could be seen in or near the nest. The fourth egg was addled and remained in the nest after the young birds had left.

The parent birds remained in their territory but the young ones were only occasionally seen owing to their protective colouring and their ability to conceal themselves.

The chicks were mottled brown and black with a white collar and a black band over the nape. The under parts were white.

Both parents became very aggressive when one ventured near their brood and would attack in the same manner as the Spur-winged Plover.

On November 16, I came on the birds drinking at a water-hole in the nearby gully. Two of the young birds crouched at the water's edge and the third took to the water and swam strongly to cover on the far side.

The birds were then fourteen days old and were covered with grey down except the nape which was still black.

From then on the young birds were frequently seen and by December 23 were fairly well feathered and could fly a little.

The family remained about until the end of January, 1938, when they became very restless and left us and flew towards the west and the Darling Downs.—E. A. R. LORD, Murphy's Creek, Qld., 11/7/50.

A Tame Scrub-Turkey.—A Scrub-Turkey around our home has become quite tame. It comes up to be fed on wheat and walks around with the fowls. They appear unconcerned. It is not afraid of the dog, which does not molest it. It has been coming regularly now for some weeks.—EDWARD WARE, Jnr., Pinnacle, via Mackay, Qld., 22/10/50.

Courtship Feeding of Dusky Wood-Swallows.—On September 3, 1950, near Dookie, Victoria, I noticed the following courtship behaviour of a pair of Dusky Wood-Swallows (*Artamus cyanopterus*). Perched on a low branch of river red gum (*Eucalyptus rostrata*) about eight feet above the ground, the female faced her mate, which was six inches away and bearing a large melalonthoid grub. She adopted the begging attitude of a fledgeling with the body depressed and extended wings quivering. The head was thrust forward with open bill, and she uttered a low call continuously, as did the male. After about a minute, during which both birds evidenced great emotional excitement, the female ate the grub and flew off. The male remained for a few minutes as though entranced, before flying to a new position. Both birds then remained perched for at least ten minutes some eight yards apart.—IAN ROWLEY, Melbourne, Vic., 11/4/51.

Frigate-birds near Sydney.—On March 13, 1951, at 3 p.m., while driving along Palm Beach road near Bilgola, I noticed a large bird in the air about fifty feet above the headland. Stopping the car I got out and obtained a very good view of the bird 'floating' almost directly overhead. It was some three times the size of a Silver Gull, and had long, black, crank-shaped wings; the underparts of the body varied from white to greyish. The tail was long and forked.

The bird was definitely a frigate-bird. W. B. Alexander (*Birds of the Ocean*, 1928, p. 260) says that "Frigate-birds are perhaps the most easily recognized of all sea-birds."

Some six years ago, when moving about in small ships, I saw numbers of frigate-birds in the New Guinea area; such birds were always at a considerable height and appeared to have entirely black under-parts.

The weather on the day the bird was seen at Bilgola was unsettled, with heavy intermittent showers and an easterly wind, apparently following a severe cyclonic disturbance extending southwards from central coastal Queensland to north-eastern New South Wales.

Bilgola is about 18 miles north of Sydney and almost the same distance south of Terrigal where A. J. Macarthur-Onslow observed a Greater Frigate-bird (*Fregata minor*) on April 8, 1930 (*The Emu*, vol. 30, 1930, p. 143). A frigate-bird (? species) was seen in Sydney Harbour towards the end of December, 1932 (*Proc. R.Z.S., N.S.W.*, 1939-40, 1940, p. 22). Both Greater and Lesser Frigate-birds have been recorded from Port Phillip Bay, Victoria (*The Emu*, vol. 29, 1929, p. 112), likewise from New Zealand, where there are several records for both species (W. R. B. Oliver, *New Zealand Birds*, 1930, pp. 171-2).—GEORGE MARSHALL, Cammeray, Sydney, 4/4/51.

Notes on 'Anting'.—On the afternoon of March 20, 1950, on the corner of Tennyson and Campbell Streets, Sandringham, Victoria, I noticed a Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) 'anting' itself. Having only seen this performance once before I settled down for some steady observing, but a passer-by disturbed the bird soon after, and although I waited some time the bird did not return. The bird acted in a most deliberate fashion. An ant was picked up in the beak and rubbed inside the wing from the shoulder to the end of the primaries, then the other wing was treated with the same sweeping movement. The ant was then discarded and another picked up and the action repeated. I examined the ant nest and found that the bird was using a small red sugar ant. A few damaged and very inactive ants were noted about the nest, most of which were being removed to the ant burrow by other ants.

The next afternoon I was most fortunate for on the opposite corner I watched a party of five Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*), two Starlings and a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), all anting themselves amongst a swarming mass of sugar ants. The Starlings were going through the same process as I noted on the previous day—the deliberate unhurried pressure of the ant down the full length of the wing, effected with a sweeping motion along first one

wing and then the other, the ant dropped and another taken up and the performance repeated at least a dozen times.

The Mynas had a slightly different action. With them the ant was picked up and, seemingly, pressed under each wing, one after the other, then discarded and the action again repeated. The Mynas were continually on the move, jumping about amongst the ants while continuing the anting. The House Sparrow had a different action again, but whether this was the usual practice I do not know, as the Sparrow only performed on one occasion. The Sparrow picked up an ant and rubbed it down one wing in similar fashion to the Starling but with a very hurried movement. The ant was discarded and another picked up to do the other wing. I had the birds under observation for about fifteen minutes on this occasion and the Starlings and Mynas were anting continually during that time. On my examining the ant mounds, of which there were several, I noted many damaged and many apparently dead ants scattered around. Some of the apparently dead ones immediately 'came to life' on being touched. The ants were not removing the bruised ones as at the nest on the opposite corner on the previous afternoon. I collected some specimens and the ants were identified at the National Museum, Melbourne, as belonging to one of a large group of sugar ants and known as *Camponotus innexus* Forel. The weather on both the afternoons mentioned was warm and sultry.

Mr. Jack Tester, who lives at Box Hill, near Melbourne, has watched Starlings and Mynas anting in similar fashion, at an ant nest near his front gate on evenings about the same time as my observations. I asked him to collect some specimens which he did and they proved to be another species of sugar ant—*Camponotus consobrinus*.—ROY WHEELER, Windsor, Vic., 14/8/50.

News and Notes

ANNUAL CONGRESS AND CAMP-OUT

The Camp-out in connection with the Annual Congress in October, 1951, will be held, according to present intentions, at the Hattah Lakes, Red Cliffs district, Victoria. Details will be supplied to all members, later.

In the meantime a circular with some details has been prepared and copies are available on application to the Hon. General Secretary.

Circulars in connection with the photographic exhibition to be held in Melbourne during the Congress are available, on request, from State Secretaries.