

## Bird Notes from Sydney

By NORMAN FEARNLEY, West Pennant Hills, N.S.W.

### LITTLE WATTLE-BIRD NESTING IN HOLLOW

On October 2, 1955, at Kenthurst, near Sydney, I was examining the hollows of several trees in open forest country bordered by heathlands. On tapping a scribbly-gum I saw the small downy head of a bird lift above the edge of what proved to be a shallow burnt-out hollow. Examination showed that two young birds, sparsely clothed in tawny down, were in the nest which was made of fine grass and lined with frayed reddish bark. The hollow was no larger than that made by two cupped hands. I was puzzled as to the identity of the nest, thinking of Dusky Wood-Swallows and other birds that nest in such situations. I went away for an hour and on returning noticed a long tail blowing about over the edge of the nest. The brooding bird was a Little Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*), a species common enough in suitable areas near Sydney, but nearly always nesting in thickly-foliaged shrubs, especially the heath-leaved banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*).

### TURQUOISE PARROT NESTING

I had been watching a pair of Turquoise Parrots (*Neophema pulchella*) at Kenthurst for some months and had a likely nesting hollow under observation. On October 2, 1955, I noticed one of the birds fly towards and then past the hollow. Watching from a distance I saw the male return and settle near the entrance and call. The female came out and was fed by the male; both birds then flew away together. I came back later and tapped the hollow without any response so I then poked a fine switch down the nesting hole to a depth of about two feet six inches. No bird came out so I cut into the side of the hollow just above the nest. Hearing a 'growling' noise I thought there were young birds present. Feeling into the nest I caught the female which was sitting on five eggs which seemed to be in various stages of incubation as is the manner with parrots. The female made no attempt to bite and she was released after examination and the 'window' I had cut into the hollow was put back and sealed with clay.

### STARLINGS 'ANTING'

Several Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) were seen on a road near my home. They were running about picking up what later proved to be ants and then tucking their heads under their wings. I walked to the spot and found four or five sugar ants (*Camponotus*) lying on the ground. The ants were still alive but were badly wounded, apparently having been squeezed in the thorax by the Starlings. The abdomens of

the ants were undamaged. It seems fairly obvious that the ants, of a large-headed variety, were being used by the birds for 'anting'. The date was December 30, 1955.

#### CRESTED HAWK NEAR SYDNEY

During a bird-watching expedition with H. A. Salmon to the Royal National Park, a fairly large bird was seen to perch on a tall blackbutt tree bordering the Hacking River, near the Upper Causeway at the southern end of the Park. The bird appeared to have a barred front and I had an idea that it might be a Channel-billed Cuckoo. However, a view through binoculars showed that it was a Crested Hawk (*Baza subcristata*). The barring on the under surface and the crest could be seen distinctly. We watched the bird for several minutes as it dived amongst the outer foliage of nearby trees, presumably for insects. Such a feeding habit is well known. The above sight record extends the known range of the Crested Hawk about 150 miles south of Taree in which locality A. R. McGill recently saw the species. It also adds a 'new' bird to the list for the Sydney district. Our observation was made on December 29, 1955.

#### NESTING BROWN WARBLERS OUSTED BY TENT-CATERPILLARS

On October 23, 1955, I found a new looking nest of the Brown Warbler (*Gerygone richmondi*) in a small turpentine tree at West Pennant Hills. The nest was about eight feet up and attached to the outer part of the tree which was in a sheltered gully. A colony of tent-caterpillars had taken possession and caused the birds to abandon their home. All one side of the nest was covered with webbing sheltering the caterpillars which were also in the nesting chamber. On taking the nest down and dislodging the grubs, I found such an accumulation of excreta from them that it covered the two perfectly fresh eggs of Warbler lying in the nesting chamber. The caterpillars were about an inch in length.

#### BROWN WARBLERS AND CUCKOOS

In the same locality as the foregoing I found another Brown Warblers' nest containing two eggs on November 30, 1955. When examined again five days later, it contained an egg of the Golden Bronze-Cuckoo (*Lamprocoptes plagosus*) and a Warbler's egg. A third nest, examined on December 7, 1955, held three eggs, and buried in the lining was an egg of the Golden Bronze-Cuckoo, showing that the Cuckoo had laid before the Warblers had completed their nest. The nest was commenced early in November and I know from observations that the birds ceased active nest-building for about two weeks, a delay that apparently upset the Cuckoo causing it to lay in the unfinished nest.

## NESTING OF BROWN SONG-LARK

Two nests of the Brown Song-Lark (*Cinclorhamphus cruralis*) were found in a grassy paddock at Pitt Town on January 10, 1955. One contained two eggs, the other three eggs, and both were well hidden in matted couch grass and were only found by seeing the birds flush from their nests. I have an idea that the males are polygamous as quite a few females were seen in the area but only two males. One in particular flew from one spot to another uttering its peculiar creaking and cackling notes, gliding to a post and elevating its tail, occasionally giving a few notes when perched. The other male had very little to say and glided without calling.

## The Song Thrush: Additional Notes

By ALLAN McEVEY, Curator of Birds,  
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The following observations are presented as supplementary notes to an earlier paper (*Emu*, 55, p. 135) on the Song Thrush in Melbourne.

*Song*

The *Handbook of British Birds*, vol. 2, 1948, provides a chart (here reconstructed in part) of the yearly song periods for this species in the south of England. Observations by the writer on the species in Melbourne during the years 1950-55 suggest that a general picture of the Melbourne song periods can be represented as in B. The song data

Song Periods

A. England                      B. Melbourne

-inter Spring Summer Autumn W-  
Jan Feb Mar Apr May June July Aug. Sep. Oct. Nov. Dec.

A.							---				---		
	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	
B.			---	---	---	---					---	---	

kept during this period have been averaged out to produce this chart. The data are not comprehensive enough to make it more than tentative. It is to be noted also that the months are here arranged to correspond with the English seasons. Whilst this is an over-simplification, since the climatic conditions for each season are not the same in the two countries, it does permit the seasonal changes and seasonal song development to be presented in the same sequence.