

Stray Feathers

Photographing the Friar-bird.—Although the Noisy Friar-bird (*Philemon corniculatus*) is found over most of eastern Australia, I had only seen one bird in the field before going to north Queensland. There, in the poor, sandy country west of the Atherton Tableland, they are very numerous all the year round, frequenting the trees along rivers and water-courses.

Most of their nests are placed well out near the end of thin branches, making them a difficult subject for the photographer, but I was fortunate in finding one pair nesting in a bloodwood sapling, 8 feet from the ground. On the arrival of the young birds, the parents condescended to 'sit' for their portraits. Like most of the honeyeaters, Friar-birds are always looking for trouble.—A. D. SELBY, Kallista, Vic., 13/9/45.

Distribution of Honeyeaters in the Tasmanian Region.—Of Australia's large group of honeyeaters only twelve, roughly 17%, are represented in the Tasmanian region (Tasmania and the islands of Bass Straits). Of these twelve, the Brown-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*) is found on King Island, the White-naped Honeyeater (*M. lunatus*) in the Kent Group, both occurring also on the mainland of Australia but not in Tasmania itself. Ten species occur on the mainland of Tasmania. These are: Yellow-throated Honeyeater (*Meliphaga flavicollis*), Black-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus affinis*), Strong-billed Honeyeater (*M. validirostris*), Yellow Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera paradoxa*), Little Wattle-bird (*A. chrysoptera*), Yellow-winged Honeyeater (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*), Crescent Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*), Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*), Tawny-crowned Honeyeater (*Gliciphila melanops*), and the Noisy Miner (*Myzantha melanocephala*). The first four of the ten listed above are confined to the Tasmanian region.

Three species from this list show a markedly uneven distribution in Tasmania. These are the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, the Noisy Miner, and the Yellow Wattle-bird. In five years' observing I have met with only one specimen of the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater in the Devonport district. This was on October 14, 1944, near Port Sorell, some twelve miles east of Devonport. Littler, in his *Hand-book of the Birds of Tasmania* (Launceston, 1910), p. 57, stated that this honeyeater was "not at all plentiful." He had records of it from six localities in Tasmania, four of them being in the north-eastern part of the State. His list of six localities was not meant, of course, to be exhaustive, and the fact that four of them are in the north-eastern portion of the State may be no more than an indication



Noisy Friar-bird at Nest.

Photo. by A. D. Selby.

that Littler did a good deal of his observing in that area. My own observations, so far as they go, lead me to think that the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater is very unevenly distributed throughout the State, and almost certainly the rarest of the honeyeaters found in Tasmania.

A parallel case of uneven distribution is that of the Noisy Miner. Until early in 1945 I had not seen it west of Longford, which is some fifty miles south-east of the Devonport district. In late February, 1945, I saw a party of four near Hawley Beach not far from Port Sorell. More recently, in May, 1945, I saw Miners on several occasions near the spot where the party was seen in February. An observer might, perhaps, overlook the occurrence of the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater in a district where it was rare, but he could hardly fail to notice the presence of such a noisy, conspicuous bird as the Miner. I conclude that the species has only recently arrived in the Devonport district. Littler (p. 62) drew attention to the uneven distribution of this species in Tasmania, and what he wrote thirty-five years ago is apparently still true of this bird.

The Yellow Wattle-bird occurs chiefly in mountain country, from which it descends to warmer foothills in winter time. I have seen the species in mountain country about forty miles south of Devonport, but I cannot claim extensive acquaintance with it. However, there seems no doubt, judging by literature on the subject, that it is irregular in its occurrence.

The remaining seven species occur fairly generally throughout Tasmania, some of them being familiar birds in the open spaces and gardens in the towns, especially in the autumn and winter months. The Black-headed Honeyeater and the Strong-billed Honeyeater appear to be essentially birds of the gum forests.—C. C. LAWRENCE, Devonport, Tas., 21/5/45.

Cuckoo Depositing Egg by the Bill.—The following incident was related to me by Mr. Abe C. Allen of 'Allenvale,' Lorne, Victoria, and seems worthy of placing on record. One day in November 1944 he heard a commotion among several birds of different species, and, thinking that the presence of a snake was the cause, he approached quietly and saw a Bronze-Cuckoo which was on the ground and had its bill wide open so that one end of an egg could be seen in the bird's mouth. A swelling of the throat indicated where the other part of the egg was located. Two Blue Wrens (*Malurus cyaneus*) were the most excited by the presence of the Cuckoo, which soon flew to a small scrub and perched on the side of a nest. It stayed there for about a minute making convulsive movements with its body and flapping its wings. It then flew to an adjacent sapling, but

the egg had disappeared and the bill was closed. Mr. Allen then examined the nest and it contained two eggs of a Wren and a white egg liberally speckled with small red spots showing that the intruder was a Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*).—J. A. Ross, Malvern, Vic., 11/11/45.

The Banded Stilt.—The memoir on this species by Mr. Jack Jones in the July issue will remain for a long period the reference for the species, so it is as well that any additions necessary, and they are few, should be published.

Under the heading 'Nesting of the Banded Stilt,' Mr. Jones refers to "... the description in October, 1930, of authentic eggs ..." but he does not give the reference to the literature. This description of authentic eggs is to be found in a Western Australian trade journal, *The Westralian Farmers' Gazette*, issued fortnightly by a co-operative company, The Westralian Farmers' Ltd. At the time a series of natural history articles by Mr. Lawson Whitlock and by Mr. L. Glauert was appearing in the *Gazette*. In the issue of September 25, 1930 (vol. 6, no. 258), Mr. Glauert gave a picture and a description of the Banded Stilt, mentioned that he had already received eggs at the Western Australian Museum, Perth, and, for the purpose of scientific description, asked for further information on the nesting of the bird from residents of the nesting locality. Information being duly received, Mr. Glauert and Mr. C. F. H. Jenkins, then assistant at the Museum, described the eggs before the Royal Society of Western Australia on October 14. Unfortunately the *Journal* of the Society was not published until January 15, 1931, and meanwhile Mr. Glauert wrote another article 'More about the Rottneest Snipe' in the *Westralian Farmers' Gazette* of October 30, 1930, in which he described the eggs, gave a photograph of two specimens, and published the information sent him by correspondents in compliance with his request of September 25.

But actually the first description of the eggs of the Banded Stilt appeared in a short note written by Mr. Glauert in the *West Australian* newspaper of September 27, 1930. This was followed by a further note by the same authority in the issue of the newspaper of October 8, 1930, this time accompanied by a photograph of the eggs, together with a photograph of a mounted specimen of the bird.

Mr. Jones states that Gould described the Stilt as *Himantopus palmatus* in 1837 "apparently from specimens collected by Leadbeater." But Leadbeater was merely a London natural history agent and was certainly not the actual collector of the specimens.—H. M. WHITTELL, Bridgetown, W.A., 4/10/45.

Bottle-feeding Brown Honeyeaters.—The Brown Honeyeaters (*Gliciphila indistincta*) in the garden were noted varying their feeding methods to suit the flower types. At heads of small flowers they hovered and dipped the curved bill successively into each; for large single blooms they perched on the stem and searched around and between the petal bases for nectar without entering the face of the flower. It was conjectured what they would do when confronted with a novel situation.

An artificial flower was constructed of bright red cloth sewn on to a wire frame secured around a small glass bottle two inches high and with a half-inch neck opening. The red cloth was seamed to simulate petals and a yellow cloth frill added around the mouth of the bottle to indicate the centre of interest. The 'flower' was about six inches across, flattish, and somewhat resembled a large red hibiscus. The mouth of the bottle was flush with the central surface and only accessible from the front. This shape prevented the usual 'backdoor' entry. After filling the bottle with a thin mixture of honey and water the exotic beauty was hung in an *Abutilon* bush near the bird bath in our suburban garden.

All birds shunned the bath at first but soon accepted the addition as harmless. The honeyeaters appeared curious and hovered about it; they also inspected it from nearby leaves and twigs. The next day one was observed inserting its beak into the bottle whilst hovering. In a few days the Brown Honeyeaters accepted the strange flower so readily that a bottle of honey-water was made up with dual pipes through the cork to permit easy refilling of the flower bottle. The birds simply perched on the red cloth and clutched it with their feet. At this period they visited the artificial flower just as though it were one of the garden flowers.

Shortly a dry spell, accompanied by hosing prohibition, reduced the garden flowers to a minimum. Increasing numbers of birds then visited the bottle-flower, at very frequent intervals. When the syrup sunk below their reach the birds would play about, apparently waiting for a refill. As soon as this was supplied they would alight and sip it up. Sometimes two would try and enter their beaks at the same time. Sugar and water seemed equally as acceptable as honey and water.

No birds other than Brown Honeyeaters were seen to visit the flower jar. There are always numbers of Silver-eyes about but only occasionally do we have honeyeaters other than the Brown. These fortunately are numerous. At one stage small brown ants, in numbers, were drowned in the fluid. This did not seem seriously to upset the honeyeaters. Altered suspension stopped the ants. The impres-



Little Grebe fanning her (covered) eggs.

Photo. by C. E. Bryant.

sion was formed that birds could be held about the area by providing syrup in this way despite the shortage in normal flower food.—J. S. ROBERTSON, East Brisbane, Qld., 18/6/45.

Grebe Fanning Her Eggs.—In his random notes on incubation in the previous part (page 99) Mr. R. T. Littlejohns referred to a Little Grebe's vibrating the wings rapidly over the eggs to ensure keeping them cool. I was fortunate enough to be able to photograph such an action, during a hot day in January 1945, at Heidelberg, Victoria. I am certain from my close observation of the performance, that although some moisture might well be shaken on to the eggs, the object is not to damp the eggs but to fan them.

How far the actions are carried out, after a time, in a more or less involuntary manner, I cannot say, but on more than one occasion the bird rapidly vibrated the wings although the eggs were covered, and when, as a result, no benefit whatever could apply. She had in fact covered the eggs prior to leaving the nest, when she would stop and go through the wing motions as if in the nature of an extra precaution before slipping off into the water.—C. E. BRYANT, Melbourne, 26/11/45.

Display of the Lyrebird.—It is unusual to find birds displaying except when in full adult plumage. On October 19, 1945, however, a pair of Lyrebirds was observed running along a log, from which they then descended. Shortly afterwards my friends and I were regaled with excellently-rendered mimicry of the calls of several birds.

A close approach to the birds disclosed the male dancing on a mound and quivering its tail feathers as it threw them forward towards its head in display. The male had recently recovered from the moulting of its tail feathers and was performing with a newly developing tail which was approximately six inches long and which just reached its nape. The tail was about a quarter of the adult size. The display seemed to be of no import to the hen, which was unconcernedly searching and scratching for food three yards away and which took no notice of the performances of the male.

When the male ceased its performance it moved away to another dancing mound only twelve yards distant and repeated its performance. Apparently its complete performances were stimulated by a feeling of ecstasy and for its own pleasure entirely.

I have not seen any previous record of Lyrebirds with an abbreviated tail displaying, and wonder whether other species display before their feathers are fully developed.—ARTHUR H. E. MATTINGLEY, Camberwell, Vic., 13/11/45.