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A. R. McGill

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An Ornithological Trip to North-western New South Wales

By A. R. MCGILL, Arncliffe, N.S.W.

Various articles and short notes have been written on the avifauna of the Moree district, the centre of an area usually referred to as 'North-western New South Wales' as distinct from that portion beyond the Barwon River, which is termed the 'Far North-west.' In later volumes of *The Emu* there are three papers which collectively give a comprehensive record of the bird-life of the area. They are 'Birds of the Moree District,' by F. C. Morse (vol. 22, p. 24), 'Notes from North-western New South Wales,' by Dr. C. Sullivan (vol. 31, p. 124), and 'The Camp-out at Moree, N.S.W., and the Birds Observed,' by C. E. Bryant (vol. 33, p. 159). The number of birds which have been recorded in these three articles is extensive; consequently further general bird-lists from that locality could hardly include many 'new' species. The late Aubrey Elliott dealt with the birds of the adjoining Moonie River district in vol. 38, p. 30.

At the invitation of Mr. Norman Chaffer, Messrs. J. S. P. Ramsay, Roy P. Cooper and the writer accompanied him on a tour to the Moree district, during the month of November, 1943. Photography in colour of the nesting birds usually associated in large rookeries at the Gwydir River Water-course was the primary objective, but the advent of floods during our stay somewhat restricted the opportunities and if any rookeries existed at the time suitable for the purpose, they could not be located, nor could we obtain definite information of any. The large Plumed Egret rookery at 'Boree,' which was such a feature of the 1933 camp-out of the R.A.O.U., had been abandoned for some years. The character of the swamp had altered entirely, all the nesting trees had died and were now mostly on dry ground. The large Egret rookery at 'Bullerana' in 1933 was now represented by possibly less than a dozen pairs of White Egrets, although many Little Pied Cormorants were again nesting. We were informed that a large nesting took place in the late summer of 1943, following extensive floodings. Possibly nesting will again take place following the floods experienced on this trip. Nevertheless, the non-fulfilment of our main objective did not in any way reduce the enthusiasm and enjoyment so much in evidence throughout the tour.

Our itinerary included, besides the days spent in travel, four days at 'Boree' station, 12 miles west of Moree; four days at 'Bullerana' station, 17 miles further west, which was the site of the 1933 camp-out; and six days at 'Koiwon' station, the property of a fellow-member, Mr. Ken Kirkby, 12 miles west of Bellata, a township 30 miles south of Moree.

The hospitality so readily extended to us by the owners or managers of these three properties was much appreciated. Their willingness to assist, if taken as a criterion, speaks well of the high regard held for most forms of bird-life by the average inland landholder. The locations of the two places first visited are detailed in a map included in the article by C. E. Bryant. Description of the contour and vegetation of those areas was also made. Typical level terrain of the inland areas, thickly timbered in parts, was met with at 'Koiwon.' Permanent water was non-existent, except in the form of bores and dams. Around the vicinity of our camp, three miles from the homestead, the belar (*Casuarina lepidophloia*) was predominant, although wilga (*Geijera parriflora*), cypress pine (*Callitris robusta*), myall (*Acacia pendula*) and eucalypts of several species were common.

One hundred and forty-six species of birds were identified during the sixteen days spent in the north-west; of these, forty-two were observed nesting. In the compilation of notes on some of the species that follow, reiteration of previously published data has been avoided whenever possible. However, in drawing some conclusions, brief mention relevant to the subject has been made. The notes compiled refer largely to items of special interest, breeding activities and the present-day status of certain species.

On several occasions the Emu (*Dromaius novæ-hollandiæ*) was observed. It surprised us by showing itself perfectly adapted to flooded country. An adult bird, accompanied by ten well-grown young, was seen a few times at 'Bullerana.' Closer settlement is probably lessening their numbers gradually.

The Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*), Brown Quail (*Synoicus australis*) and Little Quail (*Turnix velox*) were all met with, but only as individual birds. No flocking, previously mentioned as occurring in suitable seasons, was evident. I was fortunate in obtaining a clear view of the last-mentioned, enabling me to write a full plumage description for identification purposes later. Mr. Kirkby gave details of a red-coloured Quail, larger than *velox*, seen near his house on November 28. He was unaware of its identity, but the description fits closely with that of the Red-chested Quail (*T. pyrrhotorax*). Morse states this bird was "numerous in 1922 and breeding freely."

Sullivan regarded the Peaceful Dove (*Geopelia placida*) as a very common bird. It was a surprising omission from the 1933 camp-out list and was observed only in small numbers in a few scattered areas by us. The Diamond Dove (*G. cuneata*) was approximately equal to it in numbers, and both species were sometimes associated together. The Bar-shouldered Dove (*G. humeralis*) was seen more often

and appeared more widespread. Extended observations of this bird was one of the features of our stay at 'Koiwon.' Three nests were found, each containing two eggs. They were built in different kinds of trees, though all were at the same height from the ground. Each one appeared flimsy, even for a dove's nest, and the eggs were resting precariously on a few twigs. One nest, at which photography was undertaken, was built amongst a creeping vine that was entwined through the foliage of a stunted wilga—a frail nest on a scanty foundation. Another was placed on a piece of upturned bark that had been caught and held amidst the lower branches of a tall belar and could not be seen from the ground, eight feet beneath it. It was located by the bird's flying off while I was passing underneath, and then adopting a peculiar mouse-like attitude on the ground, characteristic of all the Bar-shouldered Doves found nesting, and probably intended as a ruse to lead away an intruder. Sullivan stated that the call "greatly resembled that of the introduced Indian Dove," but very clearly and for most of the day the oft-repeated call we heard was simply 'hot-woorrk.' This expression reflected perfectly our thoughts during the heat of the day.

Whilst the Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*) was seldom seen, the Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) was particularly common and widespread. The finding of its nest was a frequent occurrence in all localities visited, and in all fifteen occupied nests were found. Almost without exception, each nest contained eggs. One hears frequently inland that this bird is 'good eating,' but its recuperative powers must be great as it appears as common as ever, and probably in many areas it is increasing—a particularly difficult task for a 'good-eating' pigeon in closely-settled areas. Would that some of our other fast-vanishing pigeons might have the same recuperative powers!

Before the areas in close proximity to the Watercourse became flooded, a quarter-mile-long water channel at 'Boree' was an inviting spot. Small numbers of the Little Grebe (*Podiceps novæ-hollandiæ*—for this name see Mayr, *Emu*, vol. 43, p. 3), Black-tailed Native-hen (*Tribonyx ventralis*), Red-kneed Dotterel (*Erythrogonys cinctus*) and Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*) frequented its banks and water. Although the first-mentioned was seen also at 'Bullerana,' the other three species were not met with elsewhere. Though probably not as rare as our observations suggest, they are evidently confined to the quieter reaches and backwaters of the swamps.

In tall swamp-gums growing in the water near 'Bullerana' many nests of the Little Pied Cormorant (*Microcarbo melanoleucus*) were built. Large numbers of these birds were in the vicinity and many sitting on the nests, but heavy



Bar-shouldered Dove on nest.

Photo. by Norman Chaffer.

rain at the time prevented any opportunity for closer inspection.

It is probable that the Southern Stone-Curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*) and Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*) have both reached a point close to extermination in the district, due apparently to closer settlement and the ravages of the fox, which is common, judging by the numbers seen. The Stone-Curlew was not seen, but was heard calling once at night. The Bustard, however, was not recorded, although we searched carefully for it in likely areas. Sullivan's notes covering the 1930-1931 period sound very ominous, but to offset that slightly the observation of a few birds at Tycannah by a party travelling from the 1933 camp-out was temporarily encouraging.

The Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*) and White Ibis (*T. molucca*) were common and feasting industriously on the swarms of insects disturbed by the advancing flood waters. Numbers of Spoonbills were associated with them, the Yellow-billed (*Platalea flavipes*) outnumbering the Royal (*P. regia*) by a big margin. No signs of nesting plumes were noted on these birds. The Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) was not seen, but, of course, only a small portion of the Watercourse was actually searched.

As previously stated, the only evidence of Egret rookeries was a small one of the largest species (*Egretta alba*), and it was inaccessible for photographic purposes. The breeding plumes of these nesting birds, as well as many of those feeding by the flood-waters, were very showy. Large numbers of Egrets were observed, including each of the three species, though identification was not easy. The "two five- or six-inch plumes at the back of the head," as well as the black bill and legs, of the Little Egret (*E. garzetta*)—(cf. Jack Jones, *The Emu*, vol. 39, p. 300)—was helpful in originally identifying that species. Little has been written previously of this bird for the district. There is mention of a small breeding colony, in the paper by F. C. Morse. Other Egrets amongst those feeding were noticed to have black bills and were probably *garzetta* also, although the head plumes were not discernible. 'Spotless' instead of 'Little' (already suggested by Jones) is a suitable vernacular, as it is an immaculate bird and differs little in size from the Plumed Egret (*E. intermedia*). Distinction in the field between *intermedia* and *alba* is at times difficult unless an opportunity occurs to compare their respective sizes (cf. A. R. McGill, *The Emu*, vol. 42, p. 174). Those seen nesting were undoubtedly *alba* and the colour of their bills was dark orange-yellow, which contrasts to the 'dark-horn and black' colouring noted at the camp-out.

The Nankeen Night-Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) was seen in large numbers. Hundreds of them rested during

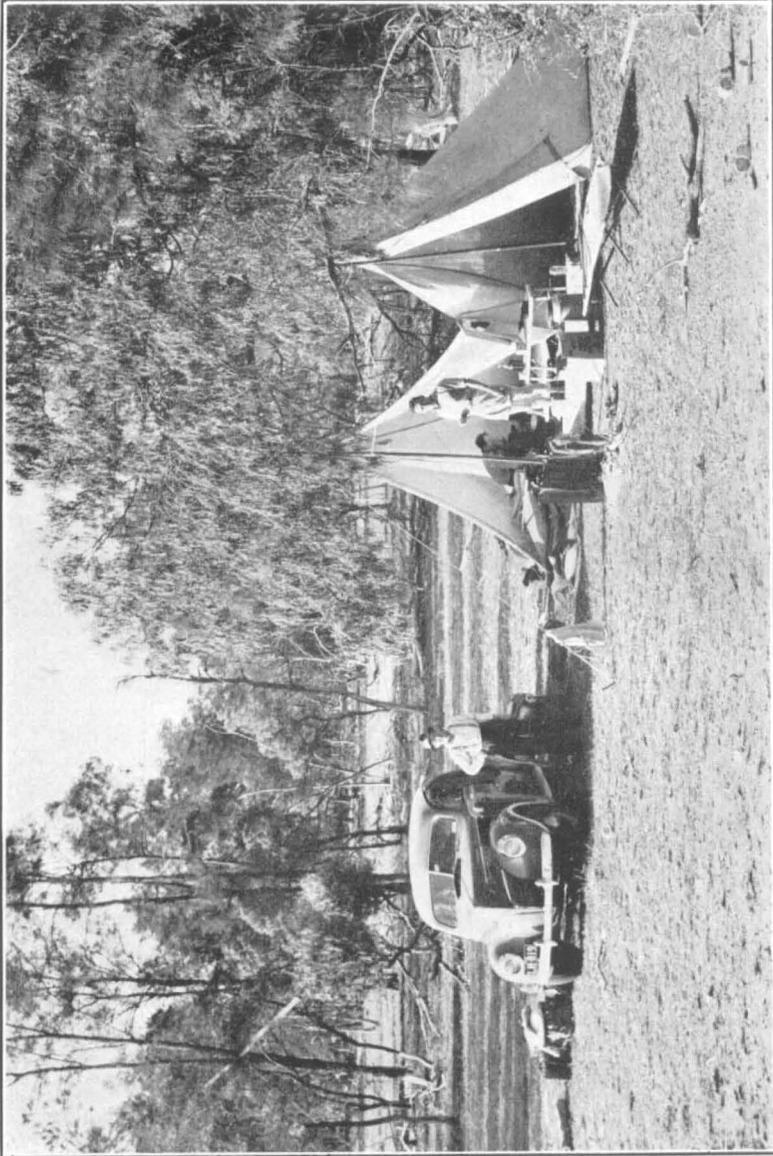
the day in a clump of trees beside our camp at 'Boree.' The absence of any dark-plumaged immature birds was strange. All observed were in full adult plumage with the conspicuous head-plumes. They were common in all swamp areas, as were the White-faced Herons (*Notophoja novæ-hollandiæ*) and White-necked Herons (*N. pacifica*). The former, which was nesting in a large eucalypt at 'Bullerana,' occurred generally as individual birds, but *pacifica* was seen in flocks associated with egrets, ibises and spoonbills.

The water was spread over too much country to favour the observation of ducks. Only the commoner forms were seen and then only in small scattered flocks. Unfortunately the Pied Goose (*Anseranas semipalmata*) was missed. This locality is possibly its only favoured haunt, at present, in New South Wales, where it is stated to be stationary in small numbers.

Discussion on the increase or decline of birds of prey is difficult, as seasonal conditions govern their numbers greatly. However, the absence of the Swamp-Harrier (*Circus approximans*) was not anticipated as it is usually referred to as a resident species. I was pleased to obtain close views and observe the hunting methods of the Spotted Harrier (*C. assimilis*). It is a beautifully-marked bird in flight and the pair seen were little concerned with my presence whilst they hunted in a small stubble paddock close to the roadside. When a small bird, believed to be a lark, rose out of the crop, the slow easy flight of the harriers quickly changed, but too late to catch the lark before it again sought cover. The male harrier then perched conveniently on a post, whilst the female moved slowly through the short stubble on her long legs, heavily beating her wings. Although I watched their efforts with interest for a time, they were not successful in again flushing their quarry. Soon afterwards I saw them both in the air again with their typical easy flight. The Brown Hawk (*Falco berigora*) was seen nesting twice, two well-grown young, on the first occasion, being perched quietly beside the nest, whilst the parent bird remained in a nearby tree. Much variation in plumage was evident with this bird, some being very dark. Mr. Kirkby pointed out a nest close to his house, where a pair of Black-shouldered Kites (*Elanus axillaris*) reared young earlier in the season. The species was observed on a few occasions only.

No species of owl was seen or heard on the tour. Previous lists give the impression that members of this group occur but sparingly in the district.

Those species of cockatoos and parrots which are so much a feature of the bird-life of inland New South Wales, such as the White Cockatoo (*Kakatoë galerita*), Galah (*K. roseicapilla*), Cockatiel (*Leptolophus hollandicus*), Blue-bonnet



Type of country around camp at 'Koiwon.'

Photo. by Norman Chaffer.

(*Psephotus hæmatogaster*) and Red-backed Parrot (*P. hæmatonotus*) were all seen in large numbers. Some are probably increasing despite their depredations (especially by the two first-mentioned) amongst the grain-fields. The familiar 'Red-back' was the only species of parrot found nesting and that in only one isolated instance. The beautiful Buln-buln or Ringneck Parrot (*Barnardius barnardi*) was frequently seen in small flocks and may be on the increase also. The absence of the Budgerygah (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) was unexpected, as it occurs in countless numbers in some seasons. Both the Pale-headed and Eastern Rosellas (*Platycercus adscitus* and *P. eximius*), as well as the glorious Red-winged Parrot (*Aprosmictus erythropterus*), were found in small numbers, but appeared restricted in range compared with others of the group. The last-named was only seen at 'Bullerana,' where a few flocks of approximately a dozen birds sometimes flew into the trees around the homestead.

Near our camp at 'Koiwon' five Tawny Frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*) were perched together on the one limb and appeared to be two adults with almost full-grown young. A nest, evidently the one used earlier in the season, was built at the extremity of the same limb. They flew after we stood watching them for a while; one of the adults, however, with sustained flight, so unusual with the species. It was still flying strongly when it disappeared from view over a patch of surrounding scrub. The Owlet-Nightjar (*Ægotheles cristata*) was probably common, but was only seen when some were disturbed from tree-hollows during the daytime.

The Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sanctus*) was nesting in low trees in the swamp at 'Boree.' Well-grown young occupied the only nest examined. In the dry scrubs some of the smaller birds showed more blue than usual and each was observed carefully when possible. One pair, busily feeding young in the nest on what appeared to be grasshoppers, were closely watched by Ramsay and myself. Whilst not certain of their identification, our belief is they were definitely not *sanctus*, but possibly the Forest Kingfisher (*H. macleayi*)—(cf. C. E. Bryant, *Emu*, vol. 33, p. 169). The Red-backed Kingfisher (*H. pyrrhopygius*) was noted on the north-west slopes, but not in the plain country. The Rainbow-bird (*Merops ornatus*) was restricted to settled areas about homesteads. At 'Bullerana' some were occupying nesting-burrows tunnelled into the flat surface of a sandy ridge. These peculiar formations often occur and are commonly termed 'ridges,' though only slightly elevated above the surrounding black soil.

The Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) was often heard and many frequented the dry scrub-land. The only instance

of its breeding that came to our notice was an egg in the nest of a Yellow-throated Miner. The Black-eared Cuckoo (*Owenavis osculans*) was restricted to the dry scrubs and was often seen. No evidence as to its foster-parents was obtained. The habitat appeared suitable for the Speckled Warbler (*Chthonicola sagittata*), which is its usual host, but the only record of this species was one reported by Cooper in a patch of low scrub bordering the flood-waters. The Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*) was frequently heard and seen in the lightly timbered areas. A young bird, most probably referable to this species, occupied the nest of a White-winged Wren at 'Boree.' An adult was seen fluttering in the grass at 'Bullerana' and on examination was found to be covered with much viscous substance making the bird practically helpless. With difficulty most of it was removed and the bird given a reasonable chance of survival.

Large numbers of Fairy Martins (*Hylochelidon ariel*) were noted during our travels; they were commonly seen darting from under culverts and bridges. While passing through Narrabri, following a heavy shower, large flocks were industriously building and colonies of nests were attached to some prominent buildings. Many nests were built under a shed attached to the shearers' quarters at 'Bullerana,' where we were camped, and the birds active at them all day. Chaffer stated they were nesting there in 1933.

The Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*) was decidedly rare. It is partly migratory in the inland, and, like the Scarlet Robin (*Petroica multicolor*), it evidently comes down from higher altitudes during the colder months. The occurrence of the Rufous Fantail (*R. rufifrons*) in the dry inland scrubs was a pleasant surprise, considering its partiality for the moist rain-forests in the coastal areas. When Cooper first located it, it was thought probable to be a new record for the district, but both Morse and Sullivan had previously recorded it. Dr. Sullivan's remarks of surprise agree perfectly with our own experiences. Both the Willie Wagtail (*R. leucophrys*) and Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascians*) were common and nesting freely. The Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*) and Hooded Robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*), however, were only in small numbers, although each was seen feeding well-grown young. That gem of the inland scrubs, the fearless Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*), was common. Three nests, each containing two eggs, were located, each a splendid example of avian ability in construction and choice of position. The only Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria*) seen was the Northern form (*chrysorrhoea*). A few birds occupied

a small patch of creek-side scrub at 'Koiwon.' One was seen feeding an immature bird out of the nest.

Amongst the commoner forms observed in timbered areas were the Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*), Grey Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) and Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*). Each was found breeding, the nest containing eggs in all cases. A fine nest of the Thrush, containing three eggs, was picturesquely situated amidst the dense slender shoots growing from the sawn-off trunk of a wilga tree.

The Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (*Pteropodocys maxima*) was rare, but one pair occupied a nest containing three eggs, in the topmost branches of a tall tree by the roadside near Moree. Two nests of the widely-distributed Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina novæ-hollandiæ*) were found, each containing well-grown young. The White-winged Triller (*Lalage tricolor*) was common and nesting freely in both very high and low situations.

The memorable call-notes of the Crested Bellbird (*Oreoica gutturalis*) were heard often and the birds frequently seen at 'Koiwon.' No sign of nesting, however, was apparent. The ventriloquial tone of this bird's call has been written about frequently, and often during the six days spent in their midst we experienced their unusual powers. The Grey-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus temporalis*) was common, but was the only representative of the genus observed. Some occupied nests were noted, but the only one examined contained well-grown young.

The Western Warbler (*Gerygone fusca*) was often heard, and the birds seen closely on different occasions. One was busy building its nest at 'Boree,' but the flood-waters probably destroyed its efforts after we left the locality. Morse expresses doubt as to the exact identity of this bird and Sullivan stated that he "spent hours of difficulty before he settled its identity." S. W. Jackson, in 1911, collected a specimen of *Gerygone* at Mogil, a little north-west of the Moree district (*Emu*, vol. XI, p. 247), which was named a new species, but it has since been placed in the synonymy of *fusca*. Concerning the call of this species in the locality, Chaffer reports: "Although the call of this bird bore considerable resemblance to that of the White-throated Warbler (*G. olivacea*), I had no difficulty in distinguishing it. In fact, the different call-notes of the birds nesting at 'Boree' led up to my identification of it as *fusca*." The birds observed appeared to me as typical of the Western Warbler, but I found the call difficult to distinguish from that of the White-throated species, a fact commented on likewise by both Sullivan and Bryant in their respective articles. I thought the call of *fusca* sounded quite distinct from that

of *olivacea* in the southern Riverina district of New South Wales, whilst there in 1941.

The Chestnut-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza uropygialis*) and Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*A. chrysorrhoa*) were the common representatives of the genus in the district, although their choice of habitat differs somewhat. Whilst no nesting observations of *uropygialis* were made, a few nests of *chrysorrhoa* were located. In one instance two almost identical nests were placed one above the other in the same small tree. Both structures appeared alike in age, but only the lower one, which contained young, was occupied. The open cup-shaped nest attached to the top was evident in both. I was pleased to meet with the inland representative (*albiventris*) of the Brown Thornbill (*A. pusilla*). Its taxonomy has been fully dealt with by George Mack (*Memoirs of the National Museum, Melbourne*, no. 10, p. 86) and by E. Mayr and D. L. Serventy (*Emu*, vol. 38, p. 256). However, its bright red upper tail-coverts are very conspicuous when it flies and would immediately distinguish it in any locality from *pusilla* in the coastal districts.

Previous writers regard the Little Grassbird (*Megalurus gramineus*) as common, but during our stay its call was only heard once, and then quite hesitant with some difference in tone. There is a possibility of the Tawny Grassbird (*M. galactotes*) frequenting the locality, although not previously recorded, but the author of the call* we heard, which came from a grassy area near water, proved too elusive. The omission of the Golden-headed Fantail-warbler (*Cisticola exilis*) from each of the previous lists was surprising. It was only seen in one restricted area by us, but several birds were observed at close quarters and seen giving their characteristic flight above the thick reed-grass of the swamp.

The Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) was often seen, but undoubtedly the prominent *Malurus* of the Moree district is the White-winged Wren (*M. leuco-notus* = *cyanotus*). It frequents almost exclusively the open areas overgrown with roly-poly (*Bassia quinquecuspis*). It probably does not extend far south or east of Moree, as Kirkby has not found it in his locality, although some roly-poly patches exist there. Large tracts also occur near Narrabri, but the species was not located there either. Quite a few nests, all neatly fashioned and well hidden in clumps of *Bassia*, and containing eggs or young, were found. The floods would probably cause abandonment of some at 'Boree' after our

*Is there any evidence that the call of *M. galactotes* resembles that of *M. gramineus*? McLennan refers to the "delightful song, with its rich and varied notes," of the former (MacGillivray, in *Emu*, vol. 13, p. 171). Gilbert said the only note he heard was "a harsh and rapidly repeated *chutch*," and Hill (Mathews, *Bds. of Aust.*, vol. IX, p. 387) refers to "two sharp notes" and to "pleasing notes."—Ed.

departure. My first glimpse of the species was a splendid introduction—three resplendent males at play in the one small acacia. Kirkby has seen the Black-backed Wren (*M. melanotus*) in swampy areas near the Gwydir River, but we did not record it. He also reported the interesting observation of a pair of Red-backed Wrens (*M. melanocephalus*) on his property recently. They flew out of a patch of heaped-up roly-poly after he had set fire to it, but the birds were badly burned and did not survive.

The Purple-backed Wren (*M. assimilis*) was only seen on one occasion. About a dozen brown birds and two or three fully coloured males were watched for some time in a very restricted patch of tall grass and tangled fallen scrub on the edge of a cultivated paddock. Mr. Kirkby had not met with them previously, but was pleased to hear the report and went out the following day and located the full party. This bird is probably a subspecies of the Variegated Wren (*M. lamberti*): it is thus treated by Mack (*Memoirs of the National Museum, Melbourne*, no. 8, p. 100). There appears to be a slight difference in the back coloration of the males from that of *lamberti*, but otherwise it resembles that form a good deal, except in the habitat it occupies, which contrasts vividly with the flower-bedecked heathy areas so favoured by the Variegated Wren around Sydney.

Previous reports give only a few notes on the Wood-Swallows. Morse mentioned them very briefly and did not record the Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*). Sullivan lists all six, but gives only brief notes. Four of the five different forms observed at the 1933 camp-out were apparently rare. Representatives of the family were much in evidence during our stay. Unfortunately the Little Wood-Swallow (*A. minor*) was missed notwithstanding the fact that we spent much time in belar scrub, mentioned as its favoured haunt and nesting habitat. The Dusky species was common along the roadside but was not seen farther north than the vicinity of Narrabri. The White-breasted Wood-Swallow (*A. leucorhynchus*) was the typical bird of the watered areas, but was also seen over a dam in the dry scrubland, about a dry creek on the bare plains at Tycannah and on a railway water-tank at Bellata. Large flocks of White-browed and Masked Wood-Swallows (*A. superciliosus* and *A. personatus*) had probably only recently arrived and some were still migrating. The former was commencing to nest freely on 'Koiwon.' I watched one pair near the camp, and the first egg was laid only three days after selecting the nest site. One bird seen near the camp was possibly a hybrid of *superciliosus* and *personatus*. Chaffer saw it previous to my observation and his notes read—"My glimpse of this bird was rather unsatisfactory. It appeared strange to me, but after noting the white eyebrow, I concluded it was

superciliosus and did not attempt any further investigation." Unaware of his observation at the time, I watched one, which was probably the same bird, for some time the following day and found that the head, including the prominent white eyebrow, was typical of *superciliosus*, but the black facial-mask and colour of breast was identical with that of *personatus*. I know no previous mention of a hybrid of these two species, but the possibility is likely as they habitually flock together. The Black-faced Wood-Swallow (*A. melanops*) was common, but frequented almost exclusively those open areas which were thickly clothed with the prickly wattle (*Acacia farnesiana*). As this bird is generally regarded as stationary, it was strange that during the camp-out it was "only reported from one source, after the main party left the camp." Five nests (one just finished, three with eggs, and one with young) were found. One, built into a six-foot acacia on 'Bullerana' plain, contained the interesting clutch of four eggs, two of which were heavily spotted at the pointed end, whilst the other two were marked exclusively at the rounded end.

A few occupied spouts in tall eucalypts probably contained nests of the Red-tipped Pardalote (*Pardalotus ornatus*), the call of which was often heard. The Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*) is evidently rare, the only ones seen being a few birds in ornamental trees in the streets of Moree.

The absence of some species of honeyeaters, previously recorded from the district, was not surprising and was probably due to the non-flowering of favoured trees and shrubs. The White-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*), a familiar bird in inland New South Wales, was common. Occupied nests, one containing eggs, were found on a few occasions. The Singing Honeyeater (*M. virescens*), which does not occur in the eastern parts of this State, is sparsely distributed over the inland scrub-lands. In that particular habitat it was frequently seen, though no nests could be located. One bird that mingled with them a few times, though often disagreeably, was puzzling. It was about the same size and build, very dull coloured, and may have been an immature; it had no striations on the breast, however, and a heavy black mark from the eye down the neck was very prominent. The Striped Honeyeater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*) was only seen in the belar scrubs, where it was fairly common. A nest containing young was found near the camp.

The distribution of the Noisy and Yellow-throated Miners (*Myzantha melanocephala* and *M. flavigula*) was interesting. South of Narrabri only *melanocephala* was seen but *flavigula* soon became the dominant species as we travelled northwards. The Noisy, however, frequented patches of restricted territory throughout the Yellow-



Black-faced Wood-Swallow at nest.

Photo. by Roy P. Cooper.

throated species' range. The latter bird was more widespread in the district and was the only representative in the dry timber at 'Koiwon.' *Melanocephala* was nesting only at 'Bullerana,' but *flavigula* was found breeding in different areas. One nest examined near the camp contained three eggs of the Miner and one of the Pallid Cuckoo. Some Cuckoos select a foster-parent whose eggs closely resemble their own, but in this instance the contrast between the ovate, white,* sparsely-spotted egg of the Cuckoo and the salmon-coloured, pointed, heavily-marked eggs of the Miner was rather striking. An occupied nest of the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*) was the only one found, although the species was common in the timbered areas. I am not aware that this species has previously been recorded as a mimic, but on a few occasions I heard it give a fine repertoire of notes in which the call of the Grey Thrush and Oriole could be clearly distinguished from those of many others. The Blue-faced Honeyeater (*Entomyzon cyanotis*) was dispersed sparingly over the district and was found nesting twice, both nests being in the old nests of Babblers, though in positions too difficult for examination.

Four species of native finches were observed, but the Zebra Finch (*Tæniopygia castanotis*) was the dominant member of the family. Many were nesting in the prickly acacias. At one nest, which contained one egg, both birds were working assiduously, lining it thickly with wool taken from a dead sheep close by. A substantial nest of the Olive-backed Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*), containing three eggs and composed almost entirely of wool, was built into the outer branches of a tall belar near our 'Koiwon' camp. They were fairly common in that area, but not observed elsewhere. The Apostle-bird (*Struthidea cinerea*) was plentiful and nests were often found, but mostly in difficult positions. One examined contained four eggs.

Extended field-study was made in connection with the Spotted Bower-bird (*Chlamydera maculata*), but we were rewarded for the time taken by the belief that, both observationally and photographically, it was the best accomplishment of the tour. A bower at 'Bullerana,' at which interest was first centred, became almost submerged by flood-waters, but three widely-separated bowers were located at 'Koiwon.' At one of these, closest to the camp, the main observations occurred. The birds soon became trustful and frequently visited our camp for scraps of food.

The problem of Crow-Raven identification presented the usual difficulties. Birds, believed to be Ravens (*Corvus coronoides*), were numerous in all areas. Kirkby says both species occur in his locality and he could distinguish between them. No mention of the Crow (*C. cecillae*) is contained in any of the previous lists, although the Little Crow

* A white Pallid Cuckoo egg is certainly unusual, the ground colour generally being pinkish.—Ed.

(*C. bennetti*) is included and regarded as rare. The White-winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) was found nesting on a few occasions, and was common in timbered areas.

The Pied and the Grey Butcher-birds (*Cracticus nigrogularis* and *C. torquatus*) were approximately equal in numbers, both being fairly common. The first-named was sometimes seen feeding and tending well-grown young. Its glorious carolling notes are delightful and are often uttered in an undertone. One nest of *torquatus*, containing young, was located at approximately 35 feet up in the fork of a peculiar straight slender tree, devoid of any branches lower than the nesting-site. The Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) was plentiful, but no nesting activities, apart from feeding well-grown young, were observed.

Concerning introduced species—the Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) only frequented those areas close to the railway and main highways, but the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was widespread and nesting. The 'Indian' Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) was recorded by a single bird seen in the grounds of the Moree Public School.

The remaining species, recorded by us from the district, not included in the narrative and which were not observed nesting are those set out below. Their numerical status agreed, in most instances, with that published in earlier reports, with the exception of those associated with the Watercourse, which species, on the whole, were far less in numbers than what was apparent in previous accounts. The list is—Eastern Swamphen (*Porphyrio melanotus*), Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Little Black Cormorant (*P. sulcirostris*), Darter (*Anhinga novæ-hollandiæ*), Pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*), Marsh Tern (*Chlidonias leucopareia*), Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ*), Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*), White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*), Australian Snipe (*Gallinago hardwicki*), Brown Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*), Maned Goose (*Chenonetta jubata*), Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*), Grey Teal (*Querquedula gibberifrons*), White-eyed Duck (*Nyroca australis*), Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*), Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaëtus audax*), Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*), Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*), Nankeen Kestrel (*F. cenchroides*), Dollar Bird (*Eurystomus orientalis*), Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*), Spine-tailed Swift (*Hirundapus caudacutus*), Fork-tailed Swift (*Micropus pacificus*), Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*), Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*), Tree Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*), Little Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina robusta*), White-fronted Chat (*Epthianura albifrons*), Brown Weebill (*Smicromnis brevirostris*), Eastern White-face (*Aphelocephala leucopsis*), Little Thornbill (*Acanthiza*

nana), Buff-tailed Thornbill (*A. reguloides*), Brown Songlark (*Cinclorhamphus cruralis*), Rufous Songlark (*C. mathewsi*), Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*), Orange-winged Sittella (*Neositta chrysoptera*), Brown Tree-creeper (*Climacteris picumnus*), Mistletoe-bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*), Brown-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*), Noisy Friar-bird (*Philemon corniculatus*), Little Friar-bird (*P. citreogularis*), Pipit (*Anthus australis*), Horsfield Bushlark (*Mirafra javanica*), Diamond-Sparrow (*Zonæginthus guttatus*), Banded Finch (*Steganopleura bichenovii*) and Plum-headed Finch (*Aidemosyne modesta*).

An interesting observation was the association of various nesting species. This association of birds, whether for nesting, feeding or social reasons, is an interesting study. In three instances during the tour the gathering together into one small area of many varied forms for breeding purposes was very apparent. One example is typical of the three mentioned. Close to our camp at 'Koiwon,' and within a radius of a hundred yards, the following were all occupying nests—Yellow-throated Miner, White-browed Wood-Swallow, Red-capped Robin, Magpie-Lark, Rufous Whistler, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Striped Honeyeater, Olive-backed Oriole, Willie Wagtail, Apostle-bird and Crested Pigeon.

In the intervening ten years since a general survey of the birds of this interesting district was published, little change is apparent in the status of most species. Ground-nesting birds are probably on the decrease, especially the Stone-Curlew and Bustard. Assessment of the increase or decline of the Watercourse birds was impossible due to considerable flooding.

The possibility of meeting with 'new' species for the district would be unlikely, considering the shortness of our stay and the nature of composition of the previously-published lists. The Golden-headed Fantail-Warbler and the introduced 'Indian' Dove were the only additions to the district's recorded avifauna. However, included amongst a few further species believed to have been seen, are two previously unrecorded, but observation was difficult and limited, and identification in each case was indefinite: consequently, they have been omitted.

It is proposed to publish a List of Members. Will members please notify the Hon. General Secretary of any change of address, immediately.