

although few in number. This was the first occasion, as far as we can remember, on which we have ever seen this Swift in numbers; usually it occurs in twos and threes. But at West Devonport, also on the shores of Bass Strait, we were favoured this autumn with a wonderful sight. At the autumn equinox, the 22nd day of March, the weather was cold and squally, wind veering west to south-west, with occasional showers. On returning to our cottage from the sea beach at about 4 of the afternoon a wonderful concourse of Swifts was seen, apparently mustering for departure. Many hundreds, probably thousands, were passing backwards and forwards at all heights from 30 feet to 300 or more. The whole atmosphere seemed thick with birds, from the near foreground right away to the wooded hills beyond the fields, vastly more Swifts than we had seen in all previous experience. The main body probably migrated at this time, but many remained, for on the 3rd day of April numbers of Swifts flew about the garden and all around, chasing winged ants, which were swarming in the air; these ants were of a blackish-brown colour, nearly half an inch long. There had been much rain from the eastward during the morning and the preceding night, and the ants usually swarm in the air on these damp autumn days. While coursing their prey the birds flew as low as 16 feet from the ground, and went up to about 70 or 80 feet.

On Good Friday, the 5th day of April, another storm took place, and in the evening Swifts again made their appearance. After this we expected to see them no more, when, behold! on the 24th day of April, while exploring the tea-tree flats near the sea, we were much surprised to observe several of these birds flying leisurely about at a fairly low elevation. An extremely late stay for our aerial visitants, and indeed these were the last seen of any of the Swallow clan, although two other migrants were heard even later in the season—the Summer-Bird (*Graucalus*) at the month's end, and the Fan-tailed Cuckoo two days after.

Notes on Some Familiar Birds.

BY J. R. M'CLYMONT, M.A., BROWN'S RIVER ROAD, NEAR
HOBART.

ONE day in September last I noticed a small bird—I was too far off to recognize the species—fluttering about in front of a Pallid Cuckoo (*C. pallidus*) perched on a fence. Its movements resembled those of a bird struggling to free itself from a noose in which its feet were entangled. The fluttering continued for several minutes until the Cuckoo flew away. On another day

(20th October) a Yellow-throated Honey-eater (*Ptilotis flavigularis*) was observed flitting hurriedly from perch to perch before a Pallid Cuckoo near the same spot. In one of its hurried flights it grazed the Cuckoo's head, causing the latter to flinch slightly, and this was the only movement on the part of the Cuckoo on either occasion. This went on for four or five minutes until the Honey-eater flew away. What meant the strange agitation of the two non-parasitical birds, the almost absolute passivity of the other? The true solution would be interesting. Mere playfulness on the part of the smaller birds, and a love of teasing the intruder, may be the explanation.

Much forethought and ingenuity are involved in the selection of a suitable nest and of the right foster-parent for its young; and these qualities, I think, save the Cuckoos from any charge of stupidity or maternal incapacity. There are several points of interest in connection with these birds which are worthy of close observation. I venture to mention a few of them—1. Migratory range of the various species. 2. Complete lists of nests appropriated by each species.* 3. Whether other birds, either singly or collectively, drive the Cuckoo from their nests. 4. Whether the young birds consort with and accompany their parents or otherwise. 5. Whether the Cuckoo's egg is laid in the nest of the foster-parent or otherwise.

The following are some of the dates of the appearance of the Welcome Swallow. It appeared last year at Kingston, about 10 miles from Hobart, on 15th September. In 1891 I noted its appearance at Koonya, Tasman Peninsula, on 23rd September. I believe that it appears in the Huon district very late in September. The disproportional lateness of its appearance in the two last-named districts may be due in a measure to their greater humidity, later springs, and less abundant supply of insects for food. It may be worth noting that the advent of Swallows at Kingston (sea level) on 15th September was followed by their appearance on 20th September on a neighbouring hill, at an altitude of about 600 feet—an extension of migration into the third dimension of space. From 20 to 30 Swallows were seen, singly and in pairs, over this locality on 1st April. They were heading in a northerly direction, flying high and rapidly, with the exception of one bird, which kept near the ground, hawking for insects now and then. Probably the straggling band was being augmented as it sped along. The day was fine and calm, the following one being chilly and showery.

The Wood-Swallow (*Artamus sordidus*) sometimes evinces a

* Lists up to date of foster-parents of the better known Cuckoos are furnished in "Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds" (Campbell). On page 565, 35 foster-parents are recorded for the Pallid Cuckoo.—EDS.

liking for bees. I have watched them in the garden of a bush homestead picking off bee after bee with great dexterity and pertinacity, both bird and insect being on the wing. After each successful catch the Wood-Swallow returned to a neighbouring blue gum, and when clinging to the strips of bark which were becoming detached from the trunk it was extremely difficult to detect it, so nearly did the colour of the bird resemble that of the fresh bark of the eucalypt.

The weak flight of the Fantail (*Rhipidura diemenensis*) is in marked contrast to the exquisite curves oftentimes described by the Wood-Swallow. The perpetual jerky movements of this Flycatcher, both when on the perch and when on the wing, suggest a limited range of vision and the need of extending it. The young birds of the first year have a white line across the throat above the black throat-mark, and white spots on the head above the eyes and behind the ears. The remainder of their plumage is grey, except the breast, which is pale buff. Could a prize be offered for the handsomest nest, it would probably be awarded to the Humming-Birds, whose nests are marvels both of structural beauty and of ornamentation. The nest of *Rhipidura diemenensis* somewhat resembles the Humming-Bird's model, but is, of course, larger, and has a short stem added to the cup or bowl.

Late in January last a nest of the White-bearded Honey-eater (*Meliornis novæ-hollandiæ*) was taken in a briar bush close to a public road, a few miles from Hobart. The nest is constructed externally of shreds of bark, chiefly that of *Eucalyptus obliqua*, and is lined with downy seed-stems of a clematis and a few horsehairs. It is $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches across and 2 inches deep. The egg cavity measures $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in depth. Of the three eggs in the clutch the ground colour of one was decidedly paler than that of the others.

The Native Hen (*Tribonyx mortieri*) has a place amongst Rails which swim occasionally. In crossing a running stream it loses but little owing to the current.

I do not know if Cormorants are generally accounted swimmers under water. On one occasion I remember seeing one swim a little below the surface for a distance of 40 or 50 yards. Its wings were partly opened, as those of a bird preparing for flight.* This was in a sheltered bay and near the shore. I think the species was *P. gouldi* (*leucogaster*).

* Although the wings are semi-expanded locomotion is effected by the feet — Eds.



McClymont, James R. 1902. "Note on Some Familiar Birds." *The Emu : official organ of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union* 2(1), 22-24.

<https://doi.org/10.1071/mu902022>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/36302>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1071/mu902022>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/378894>

Holding Institution

American Museum of Natural History Library

Sponsored by

Sloan Foundation

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: NOT_IN_COPYRIGHT

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.