

in March. There are a few of the former here still, though the latter have all gone. The Robins (Flame-breasted) were a month later in coming; it was the second week in April before I saw one, and I saw the first Thrush the same day. There was a speckled Ground-Thrush in the garden this winter, the only one I ever remember to have seen here. One day in the middle of March a great number of Spine-tailed Swifts (*Chaetura caudacuta*) passed, flying very low and in a southerly direction. Since the heavy rains in June I have noticed more Black Swans than I have seen for years, but they are moving about a great deal. In captivity we have several pairs of Cape Barren Geese, which bred on the place. They usually begin to lay about the end of May or early in June, though one began as early as 27th April one year. If they lay early in the season they will sometimes lay a second time, but not as a rule.—G. L. DENNIS. Eeyeuk, 4/7/03.

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THE NORTH AMERICAN CHECK-LIST.—On the 20th anniversary of the appointment of "the Committee on the Classification and Nomenclature of North American Birds," it was shown in a paper by Dr. J. A. Allen that the additions made since its appointment embraced 3 sub-families, 7 genera, 3 sub-genera, 54 species, and 181 sub-species, representing an increase as regards the constituents of North American avifauna of 24.7 per cent. The changes in nomenclature were 169. The list published in July, 1902, contained 1,186 forms, representing 822 species and 364 sub-species, and the opinion is expressed that "probably very few, if any, *bonâ fide* species remain to be discovered within our Check-List limits." It is urged, however, that research should not be confined within these bounds. Dr. Allen concludes his paper with a passage which may be worth the consideration of the framers of an Australian Check-List, whenever that work is undertaken:—"Plainly, not every degree of differentiation that can be recognized by the trained expert needs recognition by name, and not every slightly differentiated form that can be distinguished readily on comparison of large series of specimens should be considered as entitled to a place in a list of North American birds. The trinomial system, unfortunately, lends itself readily to abuse, and can easily be made to bring the whole system of naming sub-species into disrepute. Whether or not the differentiation is so readily distinguishable as to warrant its recognition in nomenclature is a question that may very fittingly be left to a committee of experts, whose combined opinion is more likely to be right than that of a single authority, however cautious and experienced."

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LAUNCESTON NOTES.—The winter we have just turned our back on has been on the whole fairly mild, notwithstanding that it has been the wettest experienced for some ten years. About the 20th July, while on an excursion some 12 miles down the Tamar,

I observed some male Blue Wrens (*Malurus gouldi*) in full summer plumage. On the 1st August I noticed that others of the same species about Launceston gardens were attaining full plumage. Round about St. Leonards, some five miles south of the city, this species never moulted at all, so far as could be observed. The vanguard of the Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) put in an appearance on the 26th of last month. As I mentioned in a previous note, a pair has been with us all the winter. After an absence of many months a flock of White-fronted Chats (*Ephthianura albifrons*) suddenly appeared on the outskirts of the city on 30th August. In all probability they came from the midland districts.

Of late years the Goldfinches (*Carduelis elegans*) have developed the mischievous trait of destroying the buds of peach trees as soon as they open. At first I was under the impression they were merely hunting for aphids among the blossoms, but after long and continued observation came to the conclusion the buds were wilfully destroyed, for some reason or reasons unknown. In every instance the petals of the expanding blossom would be pulled off and the tip of the tiny embryo fruit nipped through. The thought has occurred to me that perhaps the birds have cultivated a taste for prussic acid, a minute portion of which poison is contained in each fruit.—FRANK M. LITTLER. 4/9/03.

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EARLY SPRING NOTES.—I should like to place on record the fact that the Swallow (*H. neoxena*) arrives *in pairs* to take up its summer abode here. This morning, while walking on the Don Beach, I saw the first pair of the season, evidently just arrived, and winging their way up the coast. They were flying about 18 feet above the margin of the water. Later on in the morning I came across a second pair sitting on a spar which projected over a small creek running down the beach. This pair seemed somewhat exhausted, and their plumage was ruffled, the wind having been adverse as they crossed the Straits. To-day I heard also the first Cuckoo of the season, the Fan-tailed (*C. flabelliformis*), trilling among the scrub near the Don River, and yesterday noted the sweet, protracted call of the Grey-tailed Thickhead, sounding like "Weet-weet-weet-tuee!" in the heads of some tall stringybarks which border a bush road. Some time ago Mr. Hall, when writing me, expressed his opinion that the females of the two Robins, the Scarlet and Flame-breasted, *both* had coloured breasts. This was contrary to my own field observations, and yesterday I had an opportunity of confirming these. On the banks of the Mersey River I saw a male Flame-breasted (*Petroica phænicea*) in fine plumage, consorting with a hen whose breast was just light grey, as was the abdomen, without a trace of bright colour. The two were evidently mated. The female of the Scarlet-breasted (*P. leggitii*) has a patch of colour on the breast, and is, to my mind, of a more robust figure than the hen of *P. phænicea*. These observations seem to point to a difference,



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