

Another Decade in Australian Oology.

BY A. J. CAMPBELL.

(Read before the Aust. O.U., Hobart Congress, 28th November, 1903.)

THE study of oology (which, of course, includes caliology or nidiology) is one of the most fascinating of nature studies, especially for the young.

I think it can be proved that all the successful ornithologists of the world were in their early days "bird-nesters," therefore it is the young we most desire to see take up the study of ornithology—the old help themselves.

During the previous decade (1884–1893), as was pointed out by me in a paper, "A Decade in Australian Oology," read before the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, 10th July, 1893, about 130 species of Australian eggs were described as new to oological science.

By a strange coincidence about the same number of species was discovered or described during the last decade (1894–1903), bringing the total to about 690 known kinds of Australian eggs, leaving a balance of some 70 or 80 species (*i.e.*, taking the total of known Australian birds at about 765 species) to be discovered or otherwise accounted for.

At this rate of progress the balance of unknown eggs should be wiped off during the next decade; but, of course, the last miles of a journey are always the hardest and appear the longest. I shall endeavour to mention some of the most important *desiderata* in Australian eggs. Those are the large Chestnut-faced Owl (*Strix castanops*) of Tasmania, coupled with the little Lurid Owl (*Ninox lurida*) of Queensland; the Bower Shrike-Thrush (*Collyriocincla boweri*) of the Northern palm scrubs, and the White-eared Flycatcher (*Piezorhynchus (Monarcha) leucotis*) of the same region; the Purple-crowned Wren (*Malurus coronatus*), Rufous-crowned Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus ruficeps*), and the Carter Desert-Bird (*Eremiornis carteri*) of the North-West; then, coming back again to the rich North-East, we have such interesting forms as the Broadbent Ground-Thrush (*Geocichla cuneata*), Tooth-billed Bower-Bird (*Scenopæus dentirostris*), the glorious Golden Bower-Bird (*Prionodura newtoniana*), and the Collared Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis gutturalis*); two Tree-runners—the Pied (*Sittella a'bata*) and the White-winged (*S. leucoptera*)—are both required from the North, although they will doubtless be found characteristic of their genus; among the charming Honey-eaters there are the Broadbent (*Glycyphila albiauricularis*), Varied (*Ptilotis versicolor*), Streak-naped (*P. filigera*), Fasciated (*P. fasciogularis*), and the Cockerell (*P. cockerelli*), all of the North Queensland scrubs; the Yellow-rumped Finch (*Munia flaviprymna*), of which a few pairs of birds have recently reached the Southern markets; of the white eggs, those of the Little Kingfisher (*Alcyone pusilla*), the rare Red-faced Lorilet (*Cyclopsittacus coxeni*), the remarkable Night-Parrakeet (*Geopsittacus occident-*

alis), and the Rock-Pigeon (*Petrophassa albipennis*) are very desirable.

The foregoing are more particularly "home" or purely Australian birds, but it is to the ends of the earth we are to look for the most difficult to obtain—to the tundras of the high north for the migratory waders, and the islands of the far south for Petrels. There are about half a score of our migrants, chiefly Limicoline birds (a tribe especially dear to our retiring president, Col. Legge), whose breeding haunts—many about the Arctic Circle in Siberia, have yet to be invaded. Let me specify them:—Oriental Dottrel (*Ochthodromus veredus*), Mongolian Sand-Dottrel (*O. mongolus*), Curlew (*Numenius cyanopus*), Whimbrel (*N. variegatus*), Little Whimbrel (*Mesoscopolax minutus*), Grey-rumped Sandpiper (*Heteractitis brevipes*), Little Stint (*Limonites ruficollis*), Sharp-tailed Stint (*Heteropygia acuminata*), Curlew-Stint (*Ancylochilus subarquatus*), and the Great Sandpiper (*Tringa crassirostris*). [It is just possible that our energetic member, Mr. Robt. Hall, who, with commendable enterprise, has visited Eastern Siberia, is returning with information of some of these interesting wanderers.]

To the south we shall have to look for the island homes of the Black-bellied (*Cymodroma melanogaster*) and the White-bellied (*C. grallaria*) Storm-Petrels, likewise for the Silver-grey Petrel (*Priocella glacialisoides*), while to more temperate seas for the Brown-headed Petrel (*Æstrelata solandri*) and the White-winged Petrel (*Æ. leucoptera*).

Probably some of the Antarctic expeditions now out will fall in with the eggs of the first-mentioned sea-birds.

Before I proceed to the next part of my paper perhaps I should have mentioned the Spine-tailed Swift (*Chætura caudacuta*). These familiar Australian birds are known to breed in Japan, and I believe eggs have been offered for sale in England, but I can find no description of authenticated specimens. As I have stated in my work ("Nests and Eggs," p. 532) I am credibly informed that these Swifts breed under the Kegon Waterfall, near Nikko, Japan. The rock under the fall consists of alternate hard and soft layers, making a series of shelves. The Swifts nest in the recesses between the shelves, the outer edges of which are so friable that they will not bear the weight of a man, therefore the situation has been deemed practically inaccessible. Nevertheless some of our Australian visitors to Japan might easily interest the inhabitants there to procure examples of eggs.

If oology is of any scientific importance surely it is an aid to the proper classification of birds. "By their fruits ye shall know them" is an ancient truism.

Glancing over a collection of Australian eggs, it is wonderful to note how correct has been the classification of the birds by systematists. Nevertheless there appear a few exceptions or anomalies which I may be permitted to point out, and which might be taken into consideration when any future systematic

scheme is on the *tapis*, or, indeed, during the consideration of the proposed "Check-List" of the Aust. O.U.

Piezorhynchus nitidus lays a very different egg to that of *P. gouldi*, including its allies. The former is greenish-white spotted with sepia, while the latter is pinkish-white marked with red, and the nests of both are totally different. Would it not be better to retain *P. gouldi* and its allies in the genus *Monarcha*, where Gould originally placed them?

For years the familiar Yellow-tailed Tit was designated *Geobasileus*, until it was transferred to the genus *Acanthiza*. The Tit seldom or never lays spotted eggs as the true *Acanthizæ* do. Moreover, its double-chambered nest distinguishes the structure from those of all its congeners.

On strong oological grounds the Redthroat should be kept in its original genus, *Pyrrholæmus*, because it is not a true *Sericornis*, judging by the character of the eggs of all the known *Sericornes*. The same applies to the Scrub-Tit of Tasmania. It is not a *Sericornis*, but an *Acanthiza*, or, better still, *Acanthornis*, as Colonel Legge has called it.

With regard to the White-breasted Shrike-Robin of Western Australia, it has obviously been misclassified. It is not an *Eopsaltria* (which lays greenish eggs mottled with red), but lays a uniformly olive-coloured egg resembling that of the Dusky Robin (*Amaurodryas*—I prefer that name to *Petræca*) of Tasmania.

The eggs of *Climacteris leucophæa* (White-throated Tree-creeper), being almost white, differ from those of true Climacterine birds, which are richly spotted with red.

In the large and varied family *Meliphagidæ* (Honey-eaters) some anomalies are apparent in the classification. The *Zosterops*, which lay uniformly bluish-green eggs (not the usual pinkish-mottled eggs of Honey-eaters), will have to be kept in a separate sub-family. It is possible that the genus *Myzomela* may be divided. The light buff-coloured eggs of *M. nigra* and *M. pectoralis* are distinct from the red-speckled eggs of the rest of the genus.

I think it would be proper to keep the Tasmanian or Crescent Honey-eater in its old genus (*Lichmera*). By habit and feathering it is not a true *Meliornis*. The sexes are almost alike in plumage in *Meliornis*, but in the Crescent Honey-eater they differ.

The *Myzanthæ* have all been bunched under the name *Manorhina*, which in Gouldian days only referred to the Bell-Bird. The nidification of the Australian Miner differs materially from that of the Bell-Miner. It is also questionable whether or not, on oological grounds, the common Miner of Tasmania and South-Eastern Australia should not be separated from its other cousins.

The beautiful Spiny-cheeked Honey-eater is certainly not a Wattle-Bird—*Acanthochæra*—but should remain as formerly *Acanthogenys*. Its eggs are olive-coloured. Wattle-Birds lay reddish eggs. Again, the boldly marked eggs of *Philemon*

bucerooides (Helmeted Friar-Bird) are characteristically different from those of the rest of the genus.

Possibly all the Wood-Swallows have been termed *Artami* without sufficient oological evidence. There appear to be three types—(1), *sordidus* stands alone, (2) *superciliosus* and *personatus* are closely allied, (3) the remaining species are characteristically alike.

Cuckoos are always puzzling creatures. Amongst the beautiful Bronze-Cuckoos, should not those that deposit pinkish-speckled eggs be generically distinct from those which deposit uniform brownish or olive-coloured eggs? At present both kinds are placed in the same genus—*Chalcococcyx*.

Of course, it is exceedingly difficult to treat Parrots and Pigeons oologically, because they all lay white, or nearly so, eggs, but microscopic examination of the shell and the different number of eggs to a normal clutch will greatly assist classification. Then, if nestlings be considered, the large and splendid genus *Platycercus* would probably be divided—those that wear the parents' plumage from the nest, as in the common Rosella, against those that take three or four seasons to don full plumage, as in the handsome Crimson (Pennant) Parrakeet.

In the family *Rallidæ*, the eggs of the Crakes differ considerably. Those of the Spotted Crake (*Porzana fluminea*), being more Rail-like, differ from those of the Little Crake (*P. palustris*) and Spotless Crake (*P. tabuensis*).

To conclude for the present these somewhat crude suggestions, I may say with regard to the graceful sub-family *Sterninæ* (Terns), that if a systematic study be carefully made of the genus *Sterna* there may be reasons found for separating *S. fuliginosa* and *S. anæsthesia*, which lay reddish-mottled eggs, with glossy-surfaced shell, from the other members of the genus laying olive-marked eggs with surfaces more or less matt or dull.

Birds Occurring in the Region of the North-West Cape.

BY THOMAS CARTER.

PART III.

(90.) CACATUA GYMNOPIA (Bare-eyed Cockatoo, Kogga-je).—This noisy and conspicuous bird occurs in great flocks along the beds of the larger watercourses and rivers, which are fringed with white gums. About the end of October, when most of the young birds are fledged, immense flocks may be seen, and their clamour is occasionally deafening and annoying. As almost all the natives in the district are now regularly employed and fed on the stations, they do not trouble much to secure the young birds, which were formerly much sought after by them and considered a great dainty. Flocks occasionally visited the coast south of Point Cloates, at a point about 25 miles from the nearest inland creek. Such casual visits were usually made in the winter months, May or June. At the Yardie Creek considerable numbers were resident, breeding in holes and crevices



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