

a shot is fired from the gun. Bang! In a moment there is a wild commotion and the air seems whistling with the sounds of hundreds of thousands of wings cleaving it, and then in one mighty cloud the whole assembly takes flight, making the sky look black and white, and as though it were filled with Harpies or the Sirens of Ulysses, the effect being heightened by the long bills, outstretched necks, and general peculiar appearance of the birds. Now they wheel and swing, and wheel again, gradually rising and soaring, filling the whole sky. Some continue flying and circling round high up, but by far the greater number are too anxious about household cares to keep away, and soon alight, and it is a mystery how they ever find their own again.

To see the birds settle is an interesting sight. With long bill and neck outstretched and lowered, legs drooping in a queer "touch-bottom" sort of way, and much wing-flapping and final balancing on the nest platforms, they settle; and then the squawking, pushing, pecking, and final taking up of positions begins again, and in a little while all is as before.

Standing waist deep in a reedy swamp, we find it no easy matter to secure a firm footing for the camera, but we manage somehow, and after having taken such views as we want we wade out.

Some Bird Observations.

BY (DR.) J. BURTON CLELAND, ADELAIDE.

WOOD-SWALLOWS (*Artami*) AND HAWK.—Some years ago, while approaching a thick belt of scrub near Adelaide, we were much struck by the alarm notes of a number of Wood-Swallows, and also by the fact that they were hawking at a higher elevation than usual. At last we discovered the cause of this excitement—a Hawk, perched in one of the trees; and then the object of the manœuvres of the Wood-Swallows became apparent, for as long as they kept in their flight well above the enemy he could not swoop on them and they were safe! The species of Wood-Swallow was, if I remember aright, *A. sordidus*.

SPARROWS AT SEA.—On 8th November, 1905, on board the s.s. *Salamis*, when 200 miles S.W. of C. Otway, from which direction a strong N.E. wind was blowing, several European Sparrows flew on board, apparently not much exhausted. The nearest land might, perhaps, have been a little less than that stated above, but the wind was not blowing directly from it. In Melbourne the day had been very hot. This incident shows how easily distant islands may be populated by means of strong winds of some duration, which do not even approach the force of a hurricane. Doubtless native birds of feebler flight had also been blown away from shore, but had at last succumbed. The course we were pursuing was not in the track of vessels leaving Melbourne

for the Cape, so they could not have reached the open sea by these means.

PTILOTIS PENICILLATA AND AN ENEMY.—The presence of a bird of prey in the neighbourhood of Honey-eaters of this species is at once notified, as in the case of the Miner (*Manorhina garrula*), by the loud alarm notes they utter. In September, 1895, I found them at fault through a mistake. A great chattering and screeching of "Greenies" was heard, and on going to ascertain the cause found some dozen of them, much excited, flying down on to a low overhanging branch and back again, screaming and fluttering. On the ground just below was the wing of a brown bird, lying flat, which somehow to our eyes suggested a coiled snake or lizard. We believe that the Honey-eaters also supposed it to be of this nature, and were making efforts in their own way to drive it off. Has anyone noticed their behaviour, or that of Miners, towards snakes? Is it possible that, in some of the supposed instances where snakes have "charmed" birds towards them, the real explanation is that the birds have been trying to drive the intruder off and at last have unintentionally approached too near the enemy and so perished?

THE LAUGHING JACKASS (*Dacelo gigas*).—A friend of mine has pointed out an interesting fact in connection with the "laughing" of a pair of Jackasses in his garden. The note, as anyone will remember, consists of two parts—a "chuckle" when the beak is closed and a "laugh" with it open. In watching his birds he has observed that whenever one is "chuckling," if the other joins in it will be with a "laugh;" if the first one changes to a "laugh," the second is straightway heard "chuckling," and so on; but never do both "laugh" at the same time or "chuckle" at the same time.

What is the explanation of the dark brown band that extends backwards behind the eye of the Laughing Jackass? It is of the same width and colour as the eye, and must be surely an attempt to hide the conspicuousness of that organ. The Laughing Jackass, perched on the dead limb of a tree, and fully on the alert for prey, did no such mask as this dark band exist, would show a brilliant and conspicuous eye, that must force itself on the attention of any small reptile or marsupial that might happen to peer forth before leaving its hiding-place. To prevent this and so secure more easily its prey, the eye is rendered much less conspicuous by being placed on a dark background, much in the same way as a man from underneath the shadow of large and over-arching bushy eyebrows can survey his neighbour calmly without unduly attracting his attention. Thus the small animal, the Laughing Jackass's predestined prey, peeping cautiously and curiously around, sees only the broken

base of a decayed limb where should be seen a deadly enemy with piercing eye fixed on him.

THE SOUTHERN STONE-PLOVER (*Burhinus grallarius*).—Some years ago four of these birds made our large garden and its surrounding fields their home. None of them were in any way confined, but wandered perfectly at large. Two were quite wild, attracted to the neighbourhood apparently by the tamer pair. Of the latter, one had apparently been brought up amongst children, for he would follow them about like a dog. Such was his tameness, in fact, that as soon as he saw me approach he would come up and feed out of my hand. Wherever we went, there he would follow us like a dog, even into and through the house as far as the drawingroom, where, if the piano were in use, he would stand beside it and whistle in an excited manner. While we were playing tennis he was always present, and most amusingly dodged the ball when it came in his direction—not infrequently striking his head against the ground in his endeavours to avoid it. We called him “Jip,” and from the way in which, when several of us formed into a line and marched, he would run and “plant” himself ahead of us, keeping about 2 feet in front and uttering a surprised, querying, piping sound, the sobriquet “Piper” was added. If in our march we suddenly wheeled round, he would dart in front and start piping again. Whenever “Jip” heard us whistling he would immediately start doing so too, either in rivalry or for instruction, as much as to say—“This is the proper way to whistle!” The other tame bird almost invariably whistled when “Jip” had done so, but rarely if ever could he be induced to do so by our whistling alone. Neither of these two tame birds ever exhibited in their note the beautiful, soft, sad cadence so characteristic of the wild bird’s whistle; their call ended short of this, and was quicker, merely rising to a height and falling. (I have reason to think that both the tame birds were hens. Is it possible that only the males have the characteristic whistle, and that the two wild birds, being such, had been attracted by the tame females?) All the birds, however, at times made use, especially when flying, of a wild, choppy screech, quite eerie in the dark. I have, at times, heard other wild birds using these unearthly notes, and one instance especially is fixed in my memory. Dog-tired and hungry, at the end of a long and heavy tramp, darkness had overtaken us on an unknown road, when suddenly, as we passed beneath some large, dark trees, wild, hysterical shrieks and yells, rapidly dying away in the distance, rose from the undergrowth beside us. At first, perhaps being overstrung by tiredness, we started, thinking of murder or of a human being in distress, but quickly recognized with relief an unmistakable Stone-Plover’s note throughout the other. One of the wild birds alluded to above

in time became comparatively tame, but still would not allow any close approach. As we came near first the head would be stretched straight out, so that a straight line was made from the tip of the beak to the end of the tail; then he would utter as it were surprised queries; and finally, after several short runs and halts, would fly away. At times these Plovers performed peculiar antics or dances. When in this humour one of the birds would run with outstretched wings about 20 or 30 yards, bending occasionally to this or that side, or even turning suddenly completely round. (Is there any connection between this and, on the one hand, the weird dances of the Native Companion—*Antigone australasiana*—on the other, the peculiar little duck of the head when walking practised by some of the Dottrels and their allies?)

We found, amongst other food, that the birds would eat mice and half-fledged Sparrows. On giving them one of these, the Stone-Plover would take it by the head and give it blows as if to break the bones and render the morsel less bulky, but these efforts seemed too feeble to accomplish much. After some minutes thus spent, the animal would be swallowed whole. We often noticed the tame bird, "Jip," with a clucking sound, picking up small sticks in her bill as if intending to make a nest. This was done at different times of the year, but no such structure was ever formed. One of the others, however, twice laid eggs, placing them, as usual, quite in the open and on the bare ground. Apparently they were not fertilized, as one in the first nest was found broken and rotten, and the two in the second one suddenly disappeared after being incubated for a very long time, the old bird still keeping about. These birds, contrary to the usual habit of wild ones, would not leave their nest until we were quite near it, and then, instead of flying off, would spread their wings and tail like turkey-cocks, utter a harsh note, and bravely attack us. Both sexes assisted in the incubation process.

The Coachwhip-Bird.

BY A. H. E. MATTINGLEY.

TRAVELLING along the mountains that traverse the whole of the eastern side of the continent, and are known as the Dividing Range, and its dependent system of hills, one's attention is arrested, as one makes one's way through the thick scrubs in the declivities of this mountain system by the "whip-crack" call of the Coachwhip-Bird (*Psophodes crepitans*). To the native-born Australian accustomed from his infancy to the call of the "Coachwhip," the note loses to some extent its interest, but to the "new chum" travelling through these forests the immediate



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