

Lesser Noddy Tern (*Micranous tenuirostris*).—Only one colony was noted, that being on Wooded Island. Here, again, hundreds of thousands of birds were breeding in a mangrove thicket. Each nest contained a single egg or a small young one. Most of the eggs were heavily incubated, laying evidently having commenced a couple of weeks previously (to 12th November). The “Ternery” reported by A. J. Campbell in “Nests and Eggs,” p. 856, and visited by him, on Pelsart Island, has been abandoned for several years past, the birds having all left for Wooded Island.

Panayan Tern (*Sterna anæsthetæ*).—A few of these Terns were noted on Pelsart Island, breeding in the open, in company with the “Sooties.”

Green-backed Silver-eye (*Zosterops gouldi*).—Common on all the larger islands; had apparently finished breeding.

Spotted Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis maculata*).—Very common on East Wallabi (the largest island of the group); possibly also on West Wallabi. Not noted elsewhere. Had apparently finished breeding.

Brush Bronze-wing (*Phaps elegans*).—Noted only on East Wallabi; possibly also on West Wallabi. Very plentiful. Breeding apparently over.

Spotless Crake (*Porzana tabuensis*).—Only one pair of these birds was noted, these being seen on a rocky islet forming part of Rat Island. This record for these birds is, I think, somewhat unique.

Painted Quail (*Turnix varia*).—These birds were noted in large numbers on the Wallabis only. They had apparently finished breeding, as numerous young birds were noted, but no nests or eggs.

Oyster-catchers (*Hæmatopus longirostris* and *H. unicolor*).—Both these birds were observed along the beaches on most of the islands, usually in companies of three to seven. Both species were seen together. They did not appear to have commenced breeding.

Reef-Heron (*Demigretta sacra*).—Odd birds of this species were noted, chiefly on the Wallabi Group. They did not appear to be breeding.

The list does not profess to be a complete one of all the birds breeding on these islands, especially with regard to the Petrels. Waders of different kinds were common on all the beaches, but it was regretted that no special attention could be paid to them.

## Birds at Essendon.

BY H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., MOONEE PONDS, VICT.

THIS district, with its hills and dales, its river frontage and pond life, its belts of evergreen trees and numerous shrubberies, is the home of, or is visited by, many interesting birds, although so near the heart of the great city. Some, such as the Heron and Dottrel, may be seen once or twice, then depart to other feeding-grounds; others, like the Reed-Warbler, come down from the





Lesser Noddies Nesting in Mangroves, Wooded Island, Abrolhos.

FROM A PHOTO. BY C. P. CONIGRAVE.





north in springtime, stay with us during the warm months, then go north again to more genial winter climes; still others, such as the "Greenie" Honey-eater and the Blue Wren, we have, like the poor, always with us.

The Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*, Gould), which makes its home in the thick vegetation surrounding the ponds, is a very plain brown and grey individual, but its sweet notes more than atone for any lack of gay colours in its plumage; in fact, we may well call it the Nightingale of the South. Besides chanting at frequent intervals during the day, it may be heard also on warm evenings long after dark. The nest, like a deep cup in shape, is usually bound to the stems of three or four tall reeds at the height of a foot or two above the water-line, and the brown-blotched and spotted eggs repose on a soft lining at the bottom of this cup in perfect safety, whatever gale may blow across the water. Such a situation among the reeds is chosen in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, but the exception came to light when I was searching some shrubs by the water-side, and found a Reed-Warbler's home perched up in a fork 8 feet from the ground in the imported bush *Sparmannia africana*; the nest contained three fresh eggs. Never before or since have I seen the Warbler's home in such an elevated position, all others in the locality being placed only a foot or two above the water among the reed-stems.

Our handsome and useful ally, the Magpie-Lark (*Grallina picata*, Lath.), is very much on the increase in this district. During the summer of 1906 I found the queer mud nests, two in number, shaped like saucepans without handles, placed on horizontal branches of the weeping-willow within a few yards of each other. During the present autumn between twenty and thirty individuals could be seen each evening winging their way to roost in the same locality where the nests had been, after spending the day feeding in moist places.

The White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina leuconota*, Gould), may be seen in small companies in the fields hereabouts, engaged in its useful task of assisting the farmer to keep in check his insect foes. The tameness of this handsome forager, and his delightful flute-like notes, make him a general favourite. No Hawk, and very few other birds, are allowed about the domain which a pair of Magpies has chosen for a home, and it is most amusing to watch the pertinacity with which this self-constituted constable will chase away intruders, endeavouring always to rise above the foe and strike downwards at his back. He is always successful in intimidating these trespassers upon his domain, even when they are Hawks twice his size, and by his pluck and pertinacity soon puts them at a safe distance from his home.

Several times during the summer of 1906-7 did I see the



Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sanctus*, Vig. and Hors.) about Essendon, and heard its clear, penetrating call. In all probability it reared its young not far away, for there are still, I am glad to say, many of the original gum-trees remaining, in the hollows of which it could lay its round, pearly eggs.

The Pipit (*Anthus australis*, Vig. and Hors.), more commonly known as Ground-Lark, is very plentiful on the grassy hills about the Maribyrnong River; in fact, they may be seen in almost any grass-paddock, and even about the roadsides of the district. Although it is known that the bulk of these birds make a long autumn flight to the north-west of Australia and regions beyond,\* yet plenty of them stay with us all the winter, and pick up a good living from the ground, judging by their plump condition. They will make little, short runs in front of you, and do not like to take the trouble of flying unless you press them, when they will make a short flight and again alight.

We have three Robins here—the Scarlet-breasted, the Flame-breasted, and the Red-capped. Of the latter (*Petræca goodenovii*, Vig. and Hors.), which is in some respects the most beautiful of the three, I have so far only come across a single pair, and that was quite recently, at the edge of a grove of pines near the Maribyrnong River. The male bird was in fine plumage, and exhibited great confidence in my intentions, allowing a close inspection without betraying any fear; needless to say, this confidence was not abused. The breast, also the front and crown of the head, were bright red, remainder of head black, as was the throat; the back and wings were also black, with a broad white stripe upon the latter. This pleasing contrast of colours, with the clean build and general air of alertness, make this species very engaging to look upon, and I am hoping to renew the acquaintance as spring progresses, if the pair stays here to build. The female is quite plain, with none of the brilliant tints of her mate, nor does she exhibit the same confidence in the human being; in the case above cited, she immediately withdrew on my approach, nor did she again make her appearance.

The Scarlet-breasted (*Petræca leggii*, Sharpe) is very similar to the Red-capped, but the black head has a large white spot upon the front; there is no red except upon the breast; the throat and wings are similar to the last, but the female, when mature, has a dash of red upon the breast, much fainter in tone and less in quantity than that of the male. I have noticed that this species keeps in pairs all through the winter months, while the next, the Flame-breasted (*Petræca phænicea*, Gould), flocks after the nesting season is over, and remains thus in companies

\* Apart from a reference in "Nature Studies in Australia" (Gillies and Hall), p. 12, this assertion has not been supported.—EDS.



until housekeeping begins again. It is a beautiful sight to see a dozen or twenty of these feathered gems congregated in a small paddock during autumn or winter, their breasts glowing like so many live coals. The red is of a different quality from that of the Scarlet-breasted, and seems to glow with life, like that wonderful tint one gets in a fine opal. The hen, strange to say, has no red at all upon the breast, like that of the preceding species, but is a plain little grey bird, and the young males resemble her, for they do not enter into the delights of full plumage until their second spring season. Thus, when one comes upon a party of Flame-breasts feeding in autumn or winter, the brilliantly-coloured individuals are quite in a minority, by far the larger number being in plain grey; yet so glowing is the tint upon the mature males that these attract one's notice instantly, while their sober-looking relatives are comparatively unheeded.

The Yellow-breasted Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*, Lath.), which is so plentiful in the tea-tree scrub about the shores of Hobson's Bay, I have not so far come across in this district. In Tasmania there is another Robin, called the Dusky (*Petræca vittata*, Q. and G.), about the same size and build as the Yellow-breast, but without its colour. A friend and myself, when on a bush trip in the island across the Strait, had a most interesting experience with this bird. We had, during our tramp, emerged in a clearing, on one side of which stood a tall charred stump, once a gum-tree. As we approached we were amazed to see a Dusky Robin come fluttering down the side of the stump, and then lie twisting about at the foot thereof, apparently in all the agonies of dissolution. We had heard no shot from the mischievous pea-rifle, nor seen any Hawk or Butcher-Bird near, so could not account for the poor bird's dying condition. As we walked up to investigate she fluttered very feebly for a short distance, then lay still; we advanced a step or two, still she fluttered just out of reach. A few repetitions of this performance, then the truth flashed upon us. Her nest was in a niche in the side of the old stump, her disablement just a clever bit of acting, which would have done credit to the heroine of a tragic drama, but was to our feathered actress really a matter of life or death, for she was luring us away from what was to her the most precious thing on earth. Many crafty birds practice similar delusive tactics upon the simple human being, but this trait in the Dusky Robin was new to us, and was exhibited in such perfection that we could but marvel at such a large amount of guile in so small a body.

During the first week of July, while standing in the vicinity of the lily pond in Queen's Park, which Mr. Oliver's fostering care has rendered so attractive, I was much interested in hearing a familiar note proceeding from a reedy island in the pond; it was a note which I had not heard since leaving the banks of the



Tamar about eight months ago, and I knew it to be that of the Grass-Bird (*Megalurus gramineus*, Gould), usually frequenting clumps of reeds and rushes by a riverside or in wet pastures and swamps, but very unusual in a park close to the main road and frequented daily by numbers of people. This just bears out good old White of Selborne's dictum of over a century ago, that that district always turns out to be the richest in natural productions which is the most searched, and we have only to keep eyes and ears open to come upon interesting things in most unlikely places. So it was in this case. By concealing myself as much as possible and continually imitating the weird, penetrating call which arose from the thicket of reeds, I was presently able to draw the shy little fellow up fairly close to me and obtain a good view of him. Not very striking in appearance: the back marked much like that of a sparrow, under side grey with dark streaks upon the breast, tail rather long and somewhat elevated; no brilliant hues to attract the eye, but still most interesting to the naturalist from its shy nature and recluse mode of life. Scores of folk dwelling near rivers and swamps must be familiar with the weird call of the Grass-Bird and yet have never seen the little recluse, so closely does he conceal himself amid the dense vegetation in which he makes a home.

Of the Honey-eater family, the familiar White-plumed (*Ptilotis penicillata*, Gould), or "Greenie," is, of course, the most numerous, its lively notes and rapid motions making it very conspicuous. Numbers are always to be seen and heard amid the group of graceful gums on the eastern side of the Park, a portion which has been very wisely left as far as possible in its natural state, and forming one of the most delightful spots in this reserve.

Another Honey-eater, the Spiny-cheeked (*Acanthogenys ruficularis*, Gould), is far less generally known than the "Greenie," but is quite numerous just now in the Park and in many of the gardens of the district. It derives its name from a whitish bristly patch just behind the eyes. But to my mind the notes uttered by this species form its most remarkable feature. The tone reminds one of a gate creaking on its hinges, and the bird while calling elevates its head and beak almost perpendicularly, reminding one of the attitude adopted by the familiar Shrike-Thrush (*Collyriocincla harmonica*, Lath.) when challenging a rival.

This native Thrush is also to be seen the Park, although its numbers are exceedingly small when compared with those of the imported Song-Thrush, which, with the Blackbird, may be seen on every lawn and in almost every bush; still, the fine, bold, cheerful notes of the Australian bird make it a welcome resident. On awaking early in the bush on a fine spring morning it is most inspiring to hear a number of these bold warriors whistling against each other, and making the forest resound with their melodious challenges.



Casual visitors to the lake in Queen's Park are Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*, Gm.), White-fronted Herons (*Notophoyx novæ-hollandiæ*, Lath.), and Australian Dottrel (*Peltodyas australis*, Gould).\* A pair of the latter appeared for a few hours at the margin of the lake during the first week of May, and then, as with the Grass-Bird, disappeared, to be seen no more for a season. During part of last summer a friend and myself were staying at the country town of Avoca, and were much interested in watching the Dottrels, which are very numerous about the waterholes in that locality. This species is marked about the head and breast with black and white in strong contrast; yet, in spite of this apparently conspicuous colouration, when an individual alights at the edge of a pool after one of its short flights, it becomes practically invisible, and requires close attention to discover its whereabouts until it makes one of the quick little runs characteristic of its class. As an acute observer remarks:—"How they do the thing is a mystery; there is not a moment's hesitation, or searching for a spot—the bird appears simply to sink into the surroundings, and to become at will, for the time, part and parcel of them."

A few months ago a fine White-fronted Heron (*Notophoyx novæ-hollandiæ*, Lath.) alighted at the edge of the lake, and would doubtless have stayed some time had it not been assailed by a pair of "Willie Wagtails" (*Rhipidura tricolor*, Vieill.), who have for some time been housekeeping in the Park, and consider themselves guardians of that domain. So fierce were their assaults upon the long-legged intruder that, after shifting his position several times to various parts of the lake shore, he was at length compelled ignominiously to take flight and seek more hospitable regions.

## The Black Cormorant in New Zealand.

BY EDGAR F. STEAD, CHRISTCHURCH (N.Z.)

I WISH to make a plea to your clemency on behalf of the Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), a bird whose character is, in my opinion, nothing like as black as his plumage. And while I would be the last person to deny that the Shag does take trout, I am thoroughly convinced that he deserves much more consideration from anglers than he usually receives.

The chief point to which I would call attention is the indiscriminate slaughter of the Shags caused by the price that is put on their heads. On this account birds are killed which have been bred on the sea-coast, have lived in salt waters or estuaries, and have probably never even seen a small trout in all their lives. In many waters where there are both eels and trout the Shags

\* ? Black-fronted Dottrel (*Ægialitis melanops*).—EDS.





Dove, H. Stuart. 1908. "Birds at Essendon." *The Emu : official organ of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union* 8(2), 66–71.

<https://doi.org/10.1071/mu908066>.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/88007>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1071/mu908066>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/379522>

**Holding Institution**

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

**Sponsored by**

Smithsonian

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

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>.