

however, they have become plentiful again, and the "bushman's clock" chimes regularly every morning. Magpies became so weak that they could not fly, and no doubt many died. Also many of the smaller birds died.

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## Observations from the Fern-tree Gully District (Vic.)

BY R. T. LITTLEJOHNS, R.A.O.U., AND S. A. LAWRENCE, R.A.O.U.

FOR the last two or three seasons we have carried out our modest observations with the comfort of a house at Upper Ferntree Gully as headquarters. Here we have used our limited opportunities in an endeavour to secure photographs and reliable information of the local birds in their natural surroundings. We always make it our aim to refrain from injuring our subjects in any way, and, probably for that reason, know very little of sub-species. We are more bent on obtaining photographs such as that of the Yellow Robin here reproduced than on seeking new forms. It appears to us that the bird in question would far rather be recorded by photography than have the honour of position as a type specimen.

Our experience has satisfied us that results can be obtained even with an inexpensive outfit. Some of our first photographs were obtained with an ordinary box camera of the cheapest variety. Much time and energy, however, we have always found it necessary to spend. During the season 1915-16 practically every week-end from June to January was spent at Ferntree Gully. For the early part of this time our attention was confined almost entirely to the Lyre-Bird (*Menura victoriæ*), with which we were, and are, anxious to try conclusions. Several week-ends of strenuous hunting through damp gullies failed to disclose a nest. The time was not wasted, however, as on two or three occasions we were able to observe from very close quarters. The first occasion was at Belgrave, when we located a pair feeding a few yards from a tourist track. By carefully stepping from log to log we approached close enough to obtain a glimpse of the male as he paraded to and fro on a fallen tree-fern. For some time he treated us to imitations of various bird-calls, including those of the Laughing Jackass, Coachwhip-Bird, and many others. Eventually our presence became known, and the pair began to work slowly down the gully. A silent chase on hands and knees brought us more than once to within a few feet of them when they paused to feed.

A few weeks later we spent the whole of one damp, foggy morning watching a male bird we had often heard in the Ferntree Gully Reserve. We had located a fresh dancing-mound the week before, and made our way carefully to this spot. Unfortunately for our proposed attempt at photography, the bird was already on the mound when we arrived. We were fully compensated, however, by a fine performance lasting about half an hour, and



at a distance of about six feet. We approached by crawling slowly forward while the bird was occupied with his performance, and lying motionless immediately he paused to listen for signs of possible danger. This he did frequently, and our progress became slow and tedious. Eventually we reached a position separated from the mound only by a thin screen of bracken. Then, although uncomfortably wet and cramped, we spent one of the most interesting half-hours of observation in our experience. Almost perfect imitations of many bird-calls followed each other in quick succession, that of the Jackass being most oft repeated and perhaps least perfect—slightly faulty always towards the finish. After this lengthy performance the bird walked slowly into the dense bracken at the far side of the mound, and to our delight turned again in our direction, passing unconcernedly within four feet of where we lay, unconcealed and almost afraid to breathe. He then disappeared again into the bracken. The movement of the fern marked his course until he presently reappeared on a fallen tree about 30 feet distant. Here he proceeded to preen himself and dry his plumage in the morning sunshine, now struggling through the thick fog. His toilet performed, he glided silently down the hill and out of sight. We had now little hope of his returning in a reasonable time, but remained on the off chance for an hour or two with the camera carefully concealed and focussed on the mound. At the end of that time we gave it up, but are still confident that a picture could, with patience, be obtained in this way.

In a gully at Ferny Creek, a little further afield, we located a pair of Pink-breasted Robins (*Erythrodryas rhodinogaster*), but, owing to being occupied at the nest of a Pilot-Bird (*Pycnoptilus floccosus*), we were unable to spend sufficient time to discover the nest, which was undoubtedly somewhere in the vicinity. In the same gully, on another occasion, we were photographing under difficulties at the nest of a Rufous Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*), when the appearance of a male Leaden Flycatcher (*Myiagra plumbea*), a bird new to us, drove all thought of the Fantail out of our minds. A long search, however, failed to disclose any nest.

In the more open country towards Lower Fern-tree Gully we have given considerable attention to the Rufous and Yellow Whistlers, and have succeeded in securing photographs of both species. We have also, on one occasion, come across the rarer Olivaceous Whistler, but were not fortunate enough to find a nest.

However, we are often quite content to spend considerable time with some of the birds which are more common, and therefore give more opportunities for choosing suitable circumstances for photography. Probably the most frequent victim of our enthusiasm is the Yellow-breasted Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*), and our negatives of this bird number thirty or more. One of our chief aims, when time and circumstances allow, is to demonstrate the remarkable trustfulness exhibited by many of the subjects.



The picture reproduced was obtained without trouble. The nest contained newly-hatched young, and the parent bird took little notice when disturbed, as shown, or even placed by hand in a suitable position. Several other species, including the Jackass, Pilot-Bird, Flame-breasted Robin, Mistletoe-Bird, Rufous and Yellow Whistlers, Buff-rumped and Striated Tits, Blue Wren, White-shafted and Rufous Fantails, and Pardalotes, we have found quite as trustful after a little coaxing. Unfortunately, we have not been able to make a record of every case.

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### Description of Nest and Eggs of *Melithreptus atricapillus mallee*, Mathews.

(*Austral Avian Record*, vol. i., p. 192, 1913.)

By F. E. HOWE, C.M.Z.S., R.A.O.U.

NEST made of grasses and lined with horsehair and fine grass, and decorated externally with a few spider cocoons. Dimensions in inches,  $2\frac{3}{4}$  across by  $1\frac{3}{4}$  depth, egg cavity  $1\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$  in depth, and placed in the topmost branch of a mallee tree.

*Eggs*.—Two eggs taken from the above nest by Master Roy Ribbons at Carina, north-west Victoria, on 13th October, 1916, are now in my collection. In shape they are nearly oval, and the texture is fine and with a slight gloss. Colour beautiful salmon-pink, but deeper at the larger end, where they are boldly blotched and spotted with rich red-brown. In both specimens purplish-brown markings appear as if beneath the surface. Dimensions in inches :—(a) .75 x .56, (b) .74 x .56.

A set of three fresh eggs taken at Kiata, Victoria, by Mr. William Blutcher on 16th October, 1916, are much smaller than the type set. The colour, too, is much paler, and they are more like the eggs taken in southern Victoria. Dimensions in inches :—(a) .66 x .55, (b) .65 x .53, (c) .68 x .55. This clutch is now in the collection of Mr. Erasmus F. Wilson, R.A.O.U.

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### Camera Craft Notes.

**A Wood-Swallow Colony.**—Of many pleasant rambles in quest of photographs in the Greensborough district, none has been more enjoyable than those spent at a little spot on the Plenty River known to us as the "Wood-Swallow Paddock." Intersected by dry watercourses, and in parts thickly grown with native and introduced shrubs, the paddock apparently possesses a great attraction for a colony of twenty or more pairs of White-browed Wood-Swallows (*Artamus superciliosus*), which nest there annually. The Sordid (*A. sordidus*) and the Masked (*A. personatus*) are also present, but not in any great numbers. Small prickly acacias appear to be most favoured as nesting sites, but the



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