

When pearl-shelling on the ocean beds to the north-west of Thursday Island I have seen large flocks of Spoonbills and Ibises making their flights to and from New Guinea. I did not notice them every year. As far as memory serves, these migrations were generally at the latter end of the year—during September, October, and November. The Channelbill (*Scythrops*) is rather a difficult bird to place; a few may be seen almost the whole year through. Some years they are plentiful during June, July, and August, but not regularly. In two different years I saw them in flocks of up to a dozen on Mulgrave Island; on both occasions this was in the latter end of April and early May. They were feeding on the wild figs when seen. The direction of their flight I could not ascertain, but they are not permanent on Mulgrave Island. We do not see many of these birds at or near Paira. If there are any about they are sure to be found in the vicinity of Somerset, three miles from here. Just why they favour that particular locality it is difficult to say; food is certainly not the factor, as the wild figs on which they chiefly feed are widely and plentifully distributed.

Birds which make an annual appearance at Cape York. They come and go with regularity as regards the time of the year, but, unlike the migratory birds, they are seen but once. Whence they come and where they go is a matter of conjecture:—The Australian Roller or Dollar-Bird (*Eurystomus pacificus*), the Chestnut-breasted Finch (*Munia castaneothorax*), a Swift, a Swiftlet, the Pied Grallina or Magpie-Lark (*Grallina picata*), Sea-Curlew (*Numenius cyanopus*), the Whimbrel (*N. phaeopus*), and two varieties of Quail.

Of these birds only the Finch and Quail are definitely known to breed during their sojourn in this locality. At different times I have seen *Munia castaneothorax* on Banks and Mulgrave Islands—the last islands of importance in the chain stretching from Queensland towards New Guinea on the western boundary of Torres Strait.

Notes on the Domestic Habits of the Spotted-sided Finch (*Stagonopleura guttata*).

BY (MRS.) S. T. W. NORTON, R.A.O.U., BOREE, WALCHA, N.S.W.

WHEN we first settled in the New England district, ten years ago (1910), I do not remember seeing any of these little birds about near the homestead; but so soon as our newly-planted trees and shrubs began to attain some growth and thickness of foliage the Finches (known locally as "Diamond-Sparrows" or "Red-tails") began to come into the garden through the summer months. The first pair I observed here arrived about March, 1916, and began at once building a nest in a rose arch near the house. They did not lay any eggs or rear any young ones that autumn, but used

their half-finished nest as a roosting and sleeping place till about midwinter, when the rigours of the winter in such an exposed place, or the shortage of food, sent them away. They reappeared in the spring, finished their old, half-built nest, and reared a family of four. I noticed that the four young ones went on using the old nest for a resting and sleeping place long after the parents had beaten them off, and had begun a fresh nest, which they built right against the old one, and raised a second brood of three. During the cold months (which are very cold here) they all retire, I think, to the more sheltered bush. At any rate, they all leave the garden, but I can always find isolated pairs out in the bush all through the winter.

In 1917-18 quite a flock of Finches took up their residence in the garden. We have a belt of cypress and *Pinus insignis* trees planted as a breakwind all along one side of the place, and I think there was a Finch's nest in every tree. At any rate, I knew of twelve nests, each in a separate tree, besides two or three odd ones in fruit trees and rose bushes. In the pines they always built right in so deep among the boughs that I could never observe the method of their building. They were very shy, too, and would never allow me to get within spying distance of their operations; but at last one day I was delighted, whilst sitting at an open window, sewing, to see a pair of "Diamondies" busily exploring the mixed wistaria and rose creepers just outside. One—which, I presumed, was the female—did all the investigating, rustling about among the branches, twisting leaves and stems here and there, and evidently seeking for a suitable site for her nest. The male bird hopped about after her, evidently admiring her efforts immensely, but doing nothing to assist; putting his little head on one side and watching her, and occasionally giving vent to the long-drawn, plaintive little note which seems common to both sexes. For a long time the little hen bustled about among the wistaria leaves, pulling them about and bouncing up and down among them, but at last she seemed to decide they were not an ideal place, for she left them and bustled off to the rose branches near, the little male obediently and admiringly following her as though she said, "Come on, my dear; let's try somewhere else. This place is no good." After some more twistings and turnings among the rose branches—all in full view of my delighted eyes—she came out and joined her mate on a wire just above. They had a consultation about things—sitting close side by side and saying things in small twitters. Evidently she conveyed to him that she had found the ideal spot at last. After a few moments he flew away with a definite purpose in his eye, whilst she returned to her chosen site and began busily twisting leaves and twigs and bouncing up and down in the same energetic way as before. Presently back came little master with a long trailing piece of seedy grass, and perched on a twig near her, holding it in his little bill till she was ready to take it. When she was ready she popped out of her arranged site, took the piece of grass with

scant ceremony, and pulled it backwards into her retreat and began to weave it into the branches with a great deal of energetic jumping up and down.

I was able to watch the whole building of that nest. At first I had to observe them only through the closed glass window. If I appeared at the open window they would at once fly away and perhaps not come back for hours; but after a while they seemed to get used to my presence, and would go on happily with their building whilst I sat in full view in the open window. One little bird—I presume the female—did all the building, whilst the other—presumably the male—did all the carrying of materials. He was most energetic and indefatigable. He would arrive with a long trailing piece of stuff and perch on the same twig every time, where he would patiently sit holding it dangling from his bill till the little lady deigned to come and take it. Sometimes he got very tired of waiting, and would open his little bill to give voice to a long protesting quaver. Of course, the piece of grass would at once fall to the ground, but I never once saw him pick it up again. He would put his little head on one side and observe the fallen piece with a contemplative air as though wondering if it were worth while bothering any more about it, and would then fly away and bring a fresh piece. After a while there was quite a pile of dropped and despised pieces littering the verandah beneath the nest. The little hen did all her building from the *inside*. To begin with, she outlined the whole nest, spout and all, with roughly-woven grass and weed stems. She left a round space at one side just opposite where the little male perched with his building materials, through which she drew in the trails of material, always holding them by the extreme end and going in backwards, and hauling the material after her. Once inside she seemed to go round and round and jump up and down and bounce about with much energy. As the whole nest grew and became more and more solid and opaque I could not see her at all excepting when she emerged for more material, but her busy jumpings and bouncings inside the growing structure jerked the whole rose-branch and kept it in agitation. I observed that the male bird brought nothing but *green*, growing material. He would fly out into the orchard, where grass and weeds grew tall, and would select a suitable piece, nipping it off near to the ground with his sharp little bill and tugging at it till he got it free; then, holding it by the extreme end (the bitten-off end), would fly off with it, the long piece of material streaming out behind him as he flew. He was particularly fond of a tall, soft weed with a yellow, dandelion-like flower, which is very plentiful here—in fact, the nest was built almost entirely of it, yellow flowers and all. He also brought long stems of seedy grass (never just grass-blades). I have also observed them using long trails of a little creeping weed with small red berries that trails about over the ploughed ground in the orchard. The small bird nips and tugs at the stem till he gets it cut through, and then often has much

difficulty in getting such a long, unwieldy piece home. If there is any breeze it is very difficult, and I have seen him having a fearful struggle to reach the nesting-site with it. One pair built their nest entirely of asparagus sprays. They built their nest in a fruit tree just beside the asparagus bed, and the lazy little male simply descended into it for all his material.

My especial pair of Finches were very amusing to watch. The male bird would bring a piece of material and would often have to wait a long time before the busy little lady weaving inside the nest was ready to take it from him. He seemed to get very tired of this waiting game. Sometimes, as mentioned above, he would give voice to a protesting note and drop the piece; sometimes he seemed to think he would take a hand—or, rather, “bill”—in building himself, and would attempt to weave his piece into the nest, but he always did his bit of weaving on the *outside*, and the little lady, if she emerged in time to catch him at it, never failed promptly and scornfully to drag it out again and haul it *inside* the nest, bundling him most unceremoniously out of the way, and even trampling over him without the least compunction if he did not move aside quickly enough. I could plainly see by her impatient and scornful attitude that she was saying, “My dear, I wish you would attend to your own department and leave the home-making to me; what do you know about it, anyhow?” and the small male bird would hastily—and, I am sure, apologetically—fly away and bring another piece with obedient despatch. At last a very brilliant idea seemed to occur to him, and if she was not ready for his material when he arrived he took to placing it very carefully in a fork of the rose-branch, just outside the nest, and flying off for another, and so soon had quite a little collection of pieces ready for her ladyship’s selection. She seemed to approve of this arrangement, too, and would emerge and seize a piece from the pile and drag it backwards into the nest whenever she needed it. She seemed consumed with a veritable fever of house-building. Sometimes little master, arriving with a specially fine piece of flowering weed and finding the lady of the house safely occupied within, could not resist the temptation of weaving it on to the outside, and if he accomplished this feat without her coming out and demolishing his work, he seemed to consider it with the most comical air of pride and delight, and would sit on a twig and admire it, head on one side, till, her little ladyship coming bustling out, he would fly off hastily to attend to his providing duties again. We used to stand and watch him—my maid and I—with the greatest amusement, and hoped he would get time to finish his bit of house decoration before she came out and caught him.

The main part of the nest grew in bulk and thickness, but the “spout” was left quite sketchy till the very last. Unfortunately, I had to leave home for a few days just before it was finished, and when I returned there was a most complete and compact “spout” to it, through which they were carrying large feathers.

I think both of them took part in this business, though I could not be sure, as the small bird that arrived with a feather at once entered the nest and disappeared from view. They seemed to have a penchant for *white* feathers—though they used black ones too—and it was most amusing to watch a small bird struggling to reach the nest with a big white fluffy feather (bigger than itself), catching the wind and almost turning it head over heels in the air. Frequently they were blown entirely out of their course, and, after taking a “breather” on an adjacent fence, would try again and again till the feat was accomplished and the goal attained. They did not build straight ahead every day till the nest was finished; on the contrary, the female seemed to have fits of energy—orgies of building. Whilst the fit was on things were kept going at top pressure for an hour or two at any time of day, but mostly in the early morning. Then they would seem to desert the nest altogether for a day or two, and once left it so long that I began to fear that perhaps my spying upon them had disgusted them, and that they had abandoned it; but after nearly a week’s neglect, one morning they were back at work, busier than ever. Once, in the midst of a very furious bout of building fever, the boy came round to cut the grass just below them, and frightened them away. Soon after he was gone, one—I am sure it was the female—came back, popped into the nest, and did some energetic jumping about in it; came out and called several times; sat and listened; popped back into the nest and did some more bouncing round; came out again and called several times, but her mate did not respond. She waited a bit; then, evidently saying “Drat that man! Whatever is he about? I must go and find him!” she flew off, and very soon came back accompanied by her mate bearing a long trail of grass, which she took from him and dragged into the nest, whilst he was despatched for more.

They finally finished the nursery, and she laid four eggs in it, and whilst she was sitting he used to come and feed her early in the morning—perhaps oftener—and she would make a noise something like the “buzz” of a big fly caught in a spider’s web. When the young were hatched both parents fed them with equal devotion, and long after the little ones could fly they still pursued their unfortunate little parents for food with a fretful, crying noise. The four young used to sit in a row on the fence, and when an old bird flew up they all would rush at it and scramble all over the poor little thing in their greedy desire for the food it had brought, so that the little parent, in its bright dress of black and grey, white and crimson, would almost disappear beneath a fluttering wave of brownish-grey, noisy youngsters, each intent on trying to secure the whole titbit for itself. To one who did not understand what was going on, it would seem that a battle-royal was in progress and the bright little bird was fighting for its life against overwhelming odds.

Their greedy, unruly behaviour was a great contrast to that

of four young Swallows sitting very close together near by. They placidly awaited the visits of their busy parents, and each took its just turn of a meal, without protest or fuss from the others. They never tried to rob their little brothers.

Notes on Birds of Prey from Casterton, Victoria.

By C. E. SIMSON, R.A.O.U., CASTERTON, VICTORIA.

ALLIED Swamp-Hawk (*Circus gouldi*).—Swamp-Hawks are fairly plentiful all over the district, preferring the growing crops along the river and the rushes of swamps in the scrub. They do a good deal of hunting for small birds, but do not seem to have enough courage to attack the larger ones; they also feed on young rabbits. They are very harmless, and, apart from killing a few small birds, do no harm. We generally find their nests at harvest time when cutting the crop.

Grey Goshawk (*Astur cinereus*).—I have seen odd birds about which, I feel sure, belong to this species. Their habits seem to be the same as the Australian Goshawk.

White Goshawk (*Astur novæ-hollandiæ*).—I have seen only one specimen of this beautiful Hawk in these parts, but it is said to be more plentiful in the forest country towards the mouth of the Glenelg River.

Australian Goshawk (*Astur approximans*).—This Hawk is very plentiful all over the district, but seems to prefer the more lightly timbered country to the stringybark scrub. They are very fearless about a homestead, and take an odd chicken or two, but do more good than harm by keeping Sparrows and Parrots away. One used to perch on the roof of our hay-shed, and any Sparrows or Parrots that happened to be under the roof when he arrived had to run the gauntlet to some pine-trees a hundred yards away, when the odds were on the Hawk. I was not at all pleased when somebody shot the unfortunate Hawk and incidentally put a charge of shot through the iron roof. These birds will often return to their old nests. One that was used in 1914 was again used last year. I have no record of it during the years 1915 to 1918.

Collared Sparrow-Hawk (*Accipiter torquatus*).—This is a rare bird here, and is only occasionally seen. I knew of two eggs that were taken from a nest last year, and a fortnight later a full set of four eggs was taken from the same nest.

Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaëtus audax*).—These magnificent birds are always to be found about the district, and they nest in the big red gums along the river and the steep gullies leading into it. Most of the nests are in commanding positions on the side of a steep hill or gorge, and, although the nest may be not more than 60 or 80 feet from the butt of the tree, you appear to look straight down from the nest to the bottom of the gully—perhaps



Norton, S. T. W. 1921. "Notes on the Domestic Habits of the Spotted-sided Finch (*Stagonopleura guttata*).*" The Emu : official organ of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union* 20(4), 228–233. <https://doi.org/10.1071/mu920228>.

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