
*McGILP—Some Birds of the Interior.***Some Birds of the Interior.**

By J. Neil McGilp.

During a visit to my home of childhood days, Carriererloo Station, 36 miles west of Port Augusta, I had an opportunity of meeting with several birds that are not commonly known. They were the Pied Honeyeater (*Certhionyx variegatus*), White-fronted Honeyeater (*Gliciphila albifrons*) and Black Honeyeater (*Myzomela nigra*). Other Honeyeaters noted were the Yellow-plumed (*Meliphaga ornata*), Singing (*M. virescens*), White-plumed (*M. penicillata*), and Spiny-cheeked (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*).

The White-fronted Honeyeaters were in large numbers and were nesting freely. In the space of about five hours I noted 22 nests with eggs and many with young just hatched. The sitting comprised two eggs, but four clutches of three were seen. The nests were constructed of small twigs, flower stems and grass, and were cup-shaped in form. The lining was of flower heads and flower down, so worked into the whole of the inside of the nest that it gave the inside a felt-like appearance. The nests were worked into small forks of bushes, portion of the topmost section of the nest being worked around the twigs of the fork. The birds showed no partiality as to nesting sites. Nests were found as high up as seven feet, and as low as a foot from the ground. A clump of mistletoe (*Loranthus*) was a favourite position, the nest being made on top of this parasitic growth. Nests were found in Mulga (*Acacia aneura*), Pinwood, Fuschia (*Eremophala maculata*), Bullock-Bush (*Heterodendron oleifolium*), Tar-Bush (*Eremophila glabra*), and Hop-Bush (*Dodonaea*), and once only in a Blue-Bush (*Kochia sedifolia*), by itself, though on several occasions this bush, when growing up among the limbs of other larger bushes, had been used. The birds are fairly close sitters, in many cases remaining on the nest for observation, especially when the eggs were of advanced incubation. On many occasions the bird attempted to lure me away from the nest by performing the usual wounded-bird tricks.

In the same locality I noted the Pied Honeyeater in fair numbers. These were just beginning work on their nests. The situation was a fairly well-wooded gully or watercourse with thick bushes. A day later on Yudnapinna Station, 30 miles north of Carriererloo, I found that these Honeyeaters had their

McGILP—Some Birds of the Interior.

work further advanced, and I noted five clutches of eggs (four of two, and one of three eggs), with several nests containing a single egg. In one instance the nest was built on top of a mistletoe in a dense Pinwood, but generally the nests were built into the new growth of young Mulgas, that had been lopped during the drought. The height of the nest was from four to six feet from the ground, and the tree was a dense foliaged one. The nest was cup-shaped in form, constructed of twigs, grass and flower stems, and lined at the bottom of the nest only with flower heads, in no instance resembling the felt-like character so noticeable with the White-fronted Honeyeaters' nests. On two occasions the male bird was flushed from the nests observed. They were fairly close sitters, but gave no sign of attempting the wounded-bird trick. They were greatly agitated, and the male bird undertook many acrobatic evolutions in the air with a swooping plane-like action with tail widely spread as its speciality. The mournful note was uttered continuously during this flight. The female did not attempt any unusual action, but flew to a nearby bush and joined in the mournful dirge of its mate. Once again I was struck by the frequency with which black and white male birds share in incubating the eggs. Within a hundred yards I saw two male White-winged Trillers (*Lalage tricolor*) sitting on their nests; while a pair of Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) were attending to young in a nest a few yards away.

Another little bird with a mournful note is the Black Honey-eater. It was fairly common in the more open country on each side of the wooded watercourse. They were busy with their nest-building, but I failed to locate a completed home. In all I found five nests in varied courses of construction, and once only was an upright fork chosen as the site for the nest. In four of the five sites a dry branch had been selected and the highest nest was three feet six inches from the ground. Usually a horizontal fork with a third twig or limb at the bottom was chosen to carry the nest. None of the nests was sufficiently advanced in construction to enable me to describe them, other than to state that very small twigs and much cob-web had been used so far as building had proceeded. The female only attended to building operations, the male bird coming close at hand, and then only forgot his mournful note and gave vent to a short, sweet, little song as his mate laboured at the nest. I watched a pair of these little Honeyeaters select their new home and the female was very fussy about it. The pair must have some time previously decided which tree should

McGILP—Some Birds of the Interior.

contain their home, much as we decide which suburb we desire to reside in. The female tried every avenue likely to be acceptable by settling in each of many apparently suitable forks and turning and twisting around much as our common friends the Willie Wagtails and the Jacky Winters (*Microeca fascinans*) do. After testing a fork for several seconds—to minutes in some cases—the female decided that something was not quite right, perhaps the gully wind gave too much motion, perchance the view was not attractive or the home would be too prominent, but for a reason I know not she rejected site after site, returning to one time after time, until at last she decided that the first fork I saw her inspect was suitable in every way. At once the work began and a small thread of cobweb was carried to the fork, but, oh, the care and work she went through with that one piece of web; during my watching she brought yet another cobweb and took so long fixing it that my patience gave out and I departed from my observation post not more than ten feet away from the proposed (?) nest. The male in the meantime had returned to the bush and remained on top of it while his mate was at work,

Whilst at Carriererloo, on the 27th August, 1932, I had the good fortune to see a fine male Scarlet-chested Parrot (*Neophema splendida*). I had an excellent view, as he sat on a dry branch of a small mallee with his brilliant breast of scarlet and the beautiful blue of his head and neck glistening in the bright sunlight. I admired him for about five minutes as he sat motionless. Thinking his mate was somewhere in the vicinity sitting on a nesting hollow I disturbed the male in the hope that he would lead me to the nesting tree, but he flew right away. Careful search in the locality did not reveal the presence of the female or other birds of this species. Later on in another mallee-gully I flushed a pair of birds, that from a rear view gave every indication of being these charming grass parrots.

I noticed a peculiar feature with reference to the movements of birds; thirty years ago the Redthroat (*Pyrholaemus brunneus*) was common close to Carriererloo, but I did not hear or see any sign of it on my recent trip. As a youth I often saw nests with the dark chocolate or stone-coloured eggs of the Redthroat within a mile of the homestead.

The Galahs (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*), once very rare (I can remember the first arrival of a party of six to Carriererloo Station Cultivation Paddock—cultivation, alas, in name only—)

are now in fair numbers as are also the Port-Lincoln Parrots (*Barnardius zonarius*), which 35 years ago were fairly rare.

A pair of Red-backed Kingfishers (*Halcyon pyrrhopygius*) arrived at Yudnapinna on 5th September, 1932. Mr. Paxton said on the 3rd instant that he could not understand what had become of them as they generally arrived on 1st or 2nd September every year. They nest in a creek-bank close to the homestead every season.
