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[Part I.

Mallee Whipbird, *Psophodes nigrogularis* (*leucogaster* ?), and other Mallee Birds.

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Since the publication of the occurrence of "*Psophodes nigrogularis*" in the Victorian mallee by F. E. Howe and J. A. Ross, vide "Emu," Vol. 32, 133, 1933, we have been very anxious to become acquainted with the apparently rare bird.

During the month of September in the years 1933 to 1936, we have visited the locality in the Victorian mallee, where the bird and nests were found. Many square miles of suitable scrub were systematically searched, and we were ever alert to hear the strange call, but with the exception of the finding of several old nests, evidently referable to this bird, no trace of the Whipbird could be found during our visits for the first three years.

We made a fourth trip in quest of this bird—leaving Adelaide September 26th, 1936, and decided to restrict our search to the mallee north of Pinnaroo in South Australia. We were joined, as on previous years, by Mr. R. Ribbons, who is acquainted with the habits and call of this Whipbird. This time our quest was successful, for late in the afternoon of September 30th, Mr. Ribbons, who had wandered further afield, heard the bird calling. He made sure that he could find the location again, then hurried to join us to make for our camp. We were early astir next morning, and by 8 o'clock had reached the locality where the bird was heard calling the previous evening.

We had only to wait a few minutes to hear the bird commence calling about a quarter of a mile away, and it was a very great pleasure for us to hear for the first time the call of this Mallee Whipbird. The first few notes of the call appeared at this distance to resemble the warbling call of the Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*), then followed immediately a sequence of other notes not so quickly given. This completes

the song of the bird, but this song is repeated without pause between, for ten or twelve times. Other writers on this Mallee Bird and the Western Whipbird have stated that whilst the call is very distinctive, they are quite unable to describe it. This also is our experience. We would always be able to recognize this call, but beyond the meagre facts given above, we are not able to describe it.

When we first heard the call of the bird, we quickly made in the direction, and a little later we knew we were in the immediate vicinity. Then the bird called again quite close to us. We separated a few yards apart, then Mr. Ribbons saw the bird close to him, but he had no firearm. Mr. McGilp then made a squeaking noise through pursed lips, and immediately had several White-browed Babblers and Scrub-Robins hopping around him. Then he noticed a bird, running and dodging about the bottom of the broombushes, that raised its crest, and taking a snap shot, was successful in securing the bird, which on examination proved to be a female. This was in a measure disappointing, as the bird collected by the Victorians was a female, and we particularly wanted to secure the male, so as to complete the data required to determine the identity of the species.

We spent the next two days almost without a break in following up the male bird, which was continually calling, although moving about in a circle about a quarter of a mile in diameter. Many times we appeared to be within a few yards of the calling bird, but only on two occasions was a very fleeting glance obtained, as the bird darted from one bush to another; then it would move away some distance, and we would have to wait some time before it would call again. This species is undoubtedly the most difficult to secure of any we have had experience with. When sexing the bird we obtained, we formed the opinion that the birds had nested and probably had the young on the wing, although a thorough search failed to reveal any, but nests at least one season old. We have since heard from Mr. Ribbons, and he says that he had visited the locality again, and the bird was heard calling. Although we were successful in at last locating the Whipbird again, we are unfortunately unable to add much to the information already published, but our partial success has fanned our enthusiasm, and we hope next year to obtain a male, which will enable us to decide definitely if this Mallee form is distinct from the Western form. Certainly one expects to find a decided variation from the Western form, which may be termed a damp-country bird, as the dry mallee is such a contrast in habitat.

Description of Bird—following "Ridgway's Color Standards and Nomenclature":—Adult ♀; forehead, greyish olive, gradually reaching a deeper shade on the head and nape; upper surface, olive faintly tinted with yellowish green; wing, hair-brown, outer margin tinged with yellowish green; rump, citrine-drab; tail, deep olive; a very narrow ring of white feathers encircles the eye; throat, deep black, a few of the feathers being margined with white, the bordering white stripe being comparatively wide; breast, olive-grey; abdomen, pallid neutral grey, the sides of abdomen darker; the lateral tail-feathers have an obsolete brownish band, then a large band of black with large white tips; total length, 241 mm.; span of outstretched wings, 266.5; tail, 114; culmen, 18; tarsus, 25.

Other Species noted in Mallee Scrub Lands in Pinnaroo District, 1936.

Dromaius novae-hollandiae, Emu.—Though there was ample evidence of its presence in the several localities visited no birds were observed.

Leipoa ocellata, Mallee Fowl.—As is usually the case, no birds were seen. Several nesting-mounds were inspected, and there were evidently a number of these mound-builders still existing in the scrub. The bird's peculiar call was heard one evening; it is a very mournful cry, something like a long drawn out "wow," "wow," "wow," "whoom," "whoom," "whoom"; it is quite unlike any call expected from a bird and sounds more like a call from an animal. Three mounds were examined, and it was noticed that in each of them one egg was placed on its side, whereas all the other eggs were placed upright in the sand and leaf mould. It was noticed that the eggs "on the flat" were more discoloured than the other eggs in the mound. One of the eggs was found to be incubated to within a few days of hatching, the embryo being almost fully feathered. We have always been under the impression that all eggs were placed in an upright position, so wish to call attention to our experience in the mallee this season, as it would appear that eggs due to hatch out within a short period are placed on the "flat," or on their side.

Coturnix pectoralis, Stubble-Quail.—No birds were noted, though the well-known call was heard over a grassy paddock one early morning. We were informed that Quail were very scarce this year.

Phaps chalcoptera, Common Bronzewing.—Not nearly as plentiful as in previous visits to the district. Mostly seen near the cleared lands or roadsides.

Ocyphaps lophotes, Crested Pigeon.—Though only arriving in the district a few years ago, it is now fairly numerous; breeding along roadside timber belts.

Zonifer tricolor, Banded Plover.—Not as numerous as usual; a pair was attending the wants of recently-hatched young, one of which was captured and examined—it was just a ball of mottled grey and white down. The parents kept coming close until the chick was released. It started off to join its parents, but a shrill call from them caused the chick to crouch flat on the ground in a position where it could scarcely be detected.

Peltohyas australis, Australian Dotterel.—Not observed, though it was reported as being on a fallow paddock, and its three eggs were described as being in a scratched out "squat" or depression and that the eggs were sometimes covered with earth and stubble butts, and at other times were quite bare. The latter is usually the case when the sitting bird is suddenly disturbed and has no time to cover the eggs.

Circus assimilis, Spotted Harrier.—Seen only once as the bird soared over taller mallee to the south of Pinnaroo. It was noticed that the points of the wing were carried higher than the rest of the wing, as is the case with Wedge-tailed Eagles.

Astur fasciatus, Australian Goshawk.—A pair only noted; one bird appeared to be in immature plumage, the feathers of the breast being longitudinally marked with black. The smaller male bird had the beautifully crossed breast-plumage.

Falco berigora, Brown Hawk.—Seen on several occasions and heard calling. Whilst listening to a call from this species a Starling was heard to imitate the long drawn out "chew" whistle of the Whistling Eagle so perfectly that one of us (McG.), who knew the call so well, called out, "There's a Whistling Eagle," and would have recorded the Eagle unless he had seen the Starling repeat the whistle.

Falco cenchroides, Nankeen Kestrel.—Fairly numerous along roadsides and near cleared land, but rarely seen in the scrub areas.

Kakatoe roseicapilla, Galah.—Several pairs noted. A nesting hollow contained young birds which made their presence known when the hollow limb was knocked. The type of mallee scrub visited is unsuitable for the nesting of birds requiring hollows, for the trees are much too small.

Barnardius barnardi, Ringneck (Mallee) Parrot.—Only a small party seen.

Psephotus varius, Mulga Parrot.—A fairly numerous bird, usually noted in the timber which lines many of the roads in the district. One pair noted cleaning out a nesting hollow.

Melopsittacus undulatus, Budgerygah.—Not seen until October 1st, when small flocks appeared to be coming from a northerly direction. These flocks continued to arrive until we left the district on October 4th, when the birds were quite numerous.

Podargus strigoides, Tawny Frogmouth.—Only one bird noted, and it was flushed from its nest in a fork of a mallee twelve feet up. One egg was dislodged from the nest and crashed to the ground as the bird clumsily left the nest, which was more substantial than is usual with the species, and a deal of green teatree twigs were used in its construction.

Eurostopodus guttatus, Spotted Nightjar.—Several birds noted; they were found in areas where there is little if any undergrowth under the mallee, and more often on soil with some lime patches showing. One egg was noted quite easily when a bird rose; it was on bare ground and a few feet away from a dead fallen limb of a mallee. There was no sign of any nesting preparation; the egg was a beautiful greenish colour with spots, dashes and small blotches of black evenly distributed over the surface of the shell. Only one egg is laid.

Cuculus pallidus, Pallid Cuckoo.—Not at all numerous, and no eggs were noted.

Chalcites basalis, Horsfield Bronze Cuckoo.—Not at all numerous, and no eggs were noted.

Hirundo neoxena, Welcome-Swallow.—Seen most frequently about homesteads and along roadsides. The White-backed Swallow, seen frequently on former visits, was not noted.

Rhipidura leucophrys, Willie Wagtail.—Common about roadways and buildings, where it was seen nesting, but not often noted in dense scrub.

Seisura inquieta, Restless Flycatcher.—A pair only noted and they were busy laying the foundations of a nest in the fork of a mallee.

Petroica goodenovii, Red-capped Robin.—Not often recorded.

Melanodryas cucullata, Hooded Robin.—Not often recorded.

Pachycephala pectoralis, Golden Whistler.—Only occasionally noted. A male bird was flushed from a nest, containing

two eggs, built in a broombush at about five feet up from the ground.

Pachycephala rufogularis, Red-lored Whistler.—Every suitable area contains its quota of one or two pairs of the species. The birds favour localities where there is a plentiful cover of broom bush and porcupine. The call can easily be distinguished from its near ally, the Gilbert Whistler. The birds were nesting, one nest containing three eggs being a compact, well-built cup constructed with bark and lined with green broombush tips and whitish rootlets. It was placed about three feet from the ground on some broken-down broombush which had lodged in the broombush which shaded the nest. Another nest of similar construction was built well down in the top of a porcupine tussock shaded by an overhanging mallee, so that the rim of the nest was practically level with the contour of the porcupine. The species sits rather closely to nest and the sitting bird was in each case easily determined through the red lores and throat being noted.

Pachycephala inornata, Gilbert Whistler.—Possibly not as numerous as preceding species. A nest, containing one egg, was built on some fallen broombush; it was not so compact or as well-built as the nest of the Red-lored Whistler, nor did it contain any green material. Two days later the nest contained two eggs which were smaller than any of the eggs seen in the nests of the Red-lored bird.

Colluricincla harmonica, Grey Shrike-Thrush.—A common scrub bird, its beautiful flute-like call greets one in almost any area in the scrub. A nest containing three young birds was of typical construction and was placed within a few inches of the ground in some sword-like grass growing up around the trunk of a mallee.

Grallina cyanoleuca, Magpie-Lark.—Two birds noted in the vicinity of a bore.

Oreocica gutturalis, Crested Bellbird.—A fairly common bird, but more frequently heard than seen. A sitting bird called from the nest. Each nest examined contained several more or less dormant caterpillars (not the processional variety). Two or three eggs formed the clutch. The nests were either in dense undergrowth or on a porcupine shaded by an overhanging bough of mallee.

Coracina novae-hollandiae, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike.—Only a few birds seen.

Lalage tricolor, White-winged Triller.—These noisy birds were apparently only just arriving in the district and were mostly noted in the timber fringing the roadways.

Cinlosoma castanotum, Chestnut Quail-Thrush.—A fairly numerous bird, found fairly evenly distributed through the dense scrub and the low cover growing upon areas which have been allowed to revert to scrub. A nest containing two eggs was discovered by the bird flushing; the nest was simply a bark-lined depression, with grass-lining for the egg cavity; the nest was only a few feet from a fallen log. The eggs are unusually greenish in colour with no warm shades.

Drymodes brunneopygia, Southern Scrub-Robin.—This species vies with the *Amytornis* and *Meliphaga leucotis* for the honour of being the most common bird in the mallee. It had been breeding freely, as numbers of chicks were being fed by parent birds. The peculiar nest built amidst a criss-cross structure of coarse sticks is placed on the ground and sometimes on fallen broombush to a height of at least two feet from the ground. The shape and colour of the egg varies considerably. The bird is able to give quite a penetrating call without opening its bill, and as it moves its head sideways when calling it has a ventriloquial effect.

Pomatostomus superciliosus, White-browed Babbler.—Noted almost everywhere; it was breeding, the nests being noted in many positions, but mostly in tall broombushes.

Epthianura albifrons, White-fronted Chat.—A common bird along roads and on cleared lands, rarely seen in scrub.

Smicromis brevirostris, Brown Weebill.—A common resident of the scrub. Several nests containing three eggs were noted; most of them were built in a bushy bough of a mallee. An unfinished nest was located on 26/9/36; it had all the appearance of a completed cup-nest, such as is constructed by the Silvereye or Honeyeaters. A week later the hood had been added and the completed nest had the usual purse-like shape. Collectors in the mallee claim that this species always constructs the nest by forming the cup first; this may be so, though in other localities this is not always the case.

Aphelocephala leucopsis, Eastern Whiteface.—As we were motoring along a pair of birds flew across the road. The species is rarely noticed in this mallee area.

Acanthiza nana, Little Thornbill.—A few birds seen in pine trees alongside of roadways. Not seen in dense scrub.

Acanthiza hamiltoni, Red-tailed Thornbill. — Plentiful and nesting in dense bushes, a deal of cobweb and cocoons used to decorate the nest. Three eggs form the average clutch. A bird of very many sweet notes.

Acanthiza uropygialis, Chestnut-tailed Thornbill. — Not as often seen as the preceding species and usually noted along timber-fringed roads where it uses any hollow posts to hold its very small domed nest. A set of three exceptionally heavily marked eggs was taken from a hollow fence-post.

Acanthiza chrysoorhoa, Yellow-tailed Thornbill. — Not as frequently noted as was expected. Seen feeding young in the usual double-chambered nest.

Hylacola cauta, Shy Ground-Wren. — This beautiful little songster is fairly common. It had evidently nested earlier, for many broods of young were noted with the parents. The nest is invariably placed in a slight depression in the ground; it is domed and the entrance is at the ground-level; it is usually built under some protecting rubbish.

Cinctorhamphus cruralis, Brown Songlark. — Frequently heard calling from the grassy paddocks, but not as plentiful as in previous years.

Amytornis striatus, Striated Grass-Wren. — Wherever porcupine grass is found in the mallee one can expect to find this bird. It builds its domed nest of grass and strips of bark and lines it with fur or flower-heads and down; it is placed almost invariably well down in a porcupine tussock, though occasionally an odd nest is easily seen, being placed right on top of the porcupine tussock. The eggs are two in number. The birds were nesting freely during our visit. They are very fleet runners, and, except when attending flying or running young, seldom leave the ground. When young birds are with them the parents will often show themselves well up in bushes or trees.

Stipiturus mallee, Mallee Emu-Wren. — This species is more numerous than is generally supposed. It is seldom seen and its weak note is not easily heard, and then is often mistaken for the call of *Amytornis* or *Malurus*, which frequent the same porcupine-clad flats. It is doubtful if the birds had started to breed, but they appeared to be paired off. It is well-nigh impossible to find a nest unless the bird is flushed or seen to carry material to a porcupine tussock. The tiny grass-nest is invariably placed in the centre of a porcupine tussock. Mathews makes this bird a subspecies of *S. malachurus*, vide

"A Supplement to the Birds of Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands, etc." We do not agree with this; the ear-coverts of the Mallee form are blue, whereas they are brown in *S. malachurus*, and this surely warrants specific rank if such status is allowed to *Acanthiza hamiltoni* and the many forms of *A. pusilla*.

Malurus melanotus, Black-backed Wren.—Not plentiful and mostly seen in low bushes along roadways. A pair had almost completed a nest; it was resting on the ground and protected by a small fallen dry bough and it was built entirely of dead grass and lined with fur. This species at first glance may be taken for *M. callainus*, but closer inspection will show that the Black-backed Wren has the same shade of blue on the crown and forehead as that of the blue on throat and foreneck, whereas *M. callainus* has the blue on the crown and forehead a much lighter shade than the blue of its throat and neck.

Malurus assimilis, Purple-backed Wren.—A fairly numerous resident of the scrub, especially where porcupine-grass and undergrowth prevail. It is frequently noticed in low scrub along roadways. The male bird appears to have a brighter red humeral patch than seen on birds in the interior. The tail-feathers of the female are distinctly greenish.

Artamus cyanopterus, Dusky Wood-Swallow.—Fairly numerous and resident in the district. It was breeding, its frail nest of grass and rootlets being placed in the top of small hollow stumps. Three eggs to the clutch. The beautifully sweet low song was frequently heard.

Artamus personatus, Masked Wood-Swallow.—Was just arriving in the district. Many were invisible to the naked eye as they soared high up in the heavens. Field-glasses failed to detect the presence of the White-browed Wood-Swallow in company with the Masked bird.

Pardalotus xanthopygus, Yellow-tailed Pardalote.—A very common bird. Was nesting freely, clutch three to four eggs. Nesting burrows are frequently used for a second brood, as many were being relined for this purpose. The scales from the pin-feathers of the young birds were seen in nests being relined. Young birds have practically the adult plumage when they leave the nest. What a tremendous quantity of very fine strips of bark is used in constructing the nest! The entrance to the nesting tunnel or burrow is often protected and almost hidden by fallen sticks.

Pardalotus ornatus, Red-tipped Pardalote.— Only noted in the larger timbered areas. A nest in a hollow limb contained two eggs.

Melithreptus brevirostris, Brown-headed Honeyeater.— Fairly common; it is rather a noisy bird. It was nesting; a nest was built of very fine strips of bark and lined with a little fur and wool; it was suspended from three twigs about eight feet up in a mallee; the bird sat very closely to the nest. The eggs are two to three to a sitting and are a beautifully warm salmon-pink dotted with darker colour, more particularly at the larger end, thus forming a dark zone. The male fed the sitting bird on the nest.

Plectorhyncha lanceolata, Striped Honeyeater.— Was not seen, but calls resembling those given by the birds were heard once or twice. There is a great similarity between the call and that of some of the calls of the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, so we can place doubtful against this record of the Striped bird being in the district at the time. We have identified it on previous visits in other years.

Gliciphila melanops, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater.— Only seen in semi-cleared and heathy areas. Its plaintive call was often heard.

Gliciphila albifrons, White-fronted Honeyeater.— Not often noted, but its sharp metallic note was more often heard. A pair was feeding young birds. These birds prefer the areas with short broombushes and teatree.

Meliphaga leucotis, White-eared Honeyeater.— Very common and always resident. It was breeding freely. The nests were made of strips of bark and sheaths of porcupine-grass and lined with flower-heads, fur, etc. The nests were placed a few feet up from the ground in teatree and broombushes, and placed low down on porcupine tussocks. The birds sit fairly close to eggs or young. Two eggs form the clutch. One set of three eggs was observed. The bird has a great variety of notes, one of which resembles the croak of a frog.

Meliphaga cratitia, Purple-gaped Honeyeater.— Not numerous. A pair was watched carrying food to young in a nest in a mallee shoot; it was suspended in the fine twigs at a height of about three feet from the ground. While the nest was being searched for a bird came and sat on the nest and was loath to leave it. The purple-coloured gape was easily visible as the bird sat on the nest.

Meliphaga ornata, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater. — Fairly plentiful; had evidently not commenced nesting operations. It is called the Graceful Honeyeater in the district. Its calls are very varied.

Myzantha obscura, Dusky Miner. — Fairly common along roadways where timber has been left. It is an early nester and was seen feeding young on the wing.

Anthus australis, Pipit. — Always present on cleared land; never recorded by us in the virgin scrub.

Anthochaera carunculata, Red Wattle-Bird. — Plentiful, but mostly seen in small patches of scrub near cleared land.

Acanthagenys rufogularis, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater. — Fairly common; it was nesting; a nest, made of green tendrils and lined with wool and fur, was suspended in a low teatree at a height of five feet. There were three eggs in the nest. This is unusual, as two eggs form a usual clutch. A very noisy bird with a great many notes.

Corvus bennetti, Little Crow. — Not at all numerous, and appears to prefer the scrub.

Corvus coronoides, Raven. — More numerous about cleared land and residences.

Corcorax melanorhamphus, White-winged Chough. — Not at all common; seen in small flocks of eight or ten birds. No occupied nests noted, though many old nests were about.

Strepera melanoptera, Black-winged Currawong. — Fairly often seen, usually single birds or in pairs, breeding freely, three eggs being the usual clutch. The nest is usually placed high up in a fork near the top of a mallee. The nests invariably have a quantity of dodder or snotty-gobble vine hanging down below the nest. The birds use green material to line the nest, and they do not go far from nests containing young or eggs.

Cracticus torquatus, Grey Butcher-Bird. — Numerous and breeding, mostly having young in nest or on the wing with them.

Gymnorhina tibicen, Black-backed Magpie. — A common bird near cleared lands, but rarely seen in scrub; breeding.

Gymnorhina hypoleuca, White-backed Magpie. — Two or three seen, all near homesteads, and they may have been the progeny of escaped tame birds.