

Nesting of Black-shouldered Kite, *Elanus axillaris*, and Description of Young.

By H. T. Condon.

A visit was paid to the site of a nest of this species at the Sewage Farm, Islington, on 3rd May, 1936, by C. A. Smith, R. F. Brown, and the writer.

The nest was twenty-five feet up in a tall gumtree about 200 yards from the road and quite close to a barn which was in constant use. The nest was near the end of a horizontal limb and surrounded by leaves, so as to be almost invisible. It was twelve to fifteen inches across, about four inches deep, built of green sticks and lined with pieces of green grass and gum-leaves. There were at the foot of the tree about two dozen furry pellets (? mice), the largest being about two inches long. Four young were in the nest.

When the nest was approached one bird, the female as we concluded later, was on the nest, but flushed when we were some twenty yards away. The male was sitting on a telegraph-post about eighty yards away. Both birds uttered mournful notes when perched or flying. One note was like the cry of a Silver Gull, another a mournful whistle. Cf. White-winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*), but not so loud.

The female made many stoops, often coming within ten feet of our heads. The birds are graceful and expert fliers, and hover something like a Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*). The tail is wide-spread and fan-shaped while hovering and the legs outstretched towards the ground.

The female Kite attacked a White-backed Magpie which was sitting in the tree which contained the nest, but she was attacked by the following:—One Silver Gull, two Willie Wagtails, one Welcome Swallow, a Magpie-Lark, White-backed Magpies, Noisy Miners, and White-plumed Honeyeaters. The female Kite for a time perched in a nearby gumtree, on a branch about fifty feet up. One of the Willie Wagtails flew up and sat on the branch close beside it, wagged its tail and chattered excitedly, but the Kite remained indifferent to this piece of effrontery and gazed intently at R. F. Brown, who was at the nest.

The largest of the four nestlings was selected for the following description:—Bill, black; iris, dark brown; cere, yellowish green; skin in front of the eye, bluish yellow; inside mouth, pink; tongue, deep pink; skin at gape, yellow; legs and feet, pale yellow; claws, black. The body was covered in down of smoky-grey colour; wing-feathers, black with white markings; feathers on scapular region, dark reddish-brown, white tipped (the dark blue patch of skin on the shoulder referred to by R. F. Brown (see page 27) was not noticeable, as feathers were beginning to appear); a few reddish-brown feathers on top of head; black hair-like feathers in front of eye. The bird was perhaps half a pound in weight, about eight inches long, and was very quiet to handle.
