

SOME NESTING NOTES

By G. B. RAGLESS

The nesting season in 1956 was an outstanding one in many ways. The long wet winter followed by a cool prolonged spring and mild summer seem to have produced conditions which were favourable for the nesting activities of birds. Among the most interesting recordings are the following:—

Meliornis novae-hollandiae (Yellow-winged Honeyeater).—In the Happy Valley district during the autumn of 1956 this species nested as freely as during any spring, but during the latter period the numbers nesting appeared to be less than usual. On 11th October at Clarendon Ridge I found a nest containing 4 eggs, and on 20th December at Cut Hill, Victor Harbour, a nest containing 4 young birds. These young were hardly able to move around in the nest, as they were almost ready to fly. A check of the birds indicated that they were all undoubtedly honeyeaters. These birds usually lay two eggs and occasionally three, but to the best of my knowledge there has never been a record of four before. It seems remarkable that I should find two instances of this during the one season.

Aquila audax (Wedge-tailed Eagle).—On 14th July an occupied nest of this species was found in the south-eastern hills within

eight miles of Adelaide, and I know of two other nests a mile or so further distant. Speaking with residents in the Fleurieu Peninsula area, it would appear that the birds are fairly common there, and I have seen them frequently myself. Possibly extensive clearing and pasture development with a consequent increase in the sheep population has made conditions favourable to them.

Malurus cyaneus (Blue Wren).—On December 5th at Clarendon Ridge I found a nest of this species containing 4 eggs, being one more than the number usually laid by birds in South Australia. A striking example of the fecundity of the Blue Wren was provided on December 24th in the same locality. In the one prickly acacia bush were two nests of identical construction, one containing 2 young estimated to be a week old and 1 addled egg, the other 3 fresh eggs. The addled egg and full clutch were of a like type, being undoubtedly laid by the same bird. Only one pair of birds were in the vicinity and they must have worked very hard to have established two homes at the same time.

Phaps elegans (Brush Bronzewing).—Near the River Onkaparinga at Mount Bold a nest of the above species was found on February

9th containing one egg, but between 7.30 a.m. and 1.30 p.m. the following day a second egg was laid.

Malurus cyaneus (Blue Wren) and *Lamprococcyx plagosus* (Golden Bronze Cuckoo).—At Cut Hill near Victor Harbour on 15th December I found a deserted nest of the Blue Wren containing one damaged and one partly set wren's egg with an addled egg of the above Cuckoo. The nest was placed in a favoured site for this wren, being 4 feet up in a prickly acacia growing under Stringybark. This Cuckoo often uses a wren's nest in which to deposit its eggs in eastern Australia; this is the first record for South Australia, where it has only previously used the nest of the Yellow-tailed Thornbill. It was unfortunate that the eggs in the above combination were in too poor a condition to make specimens. [For some details of Cuckoos and their foster parents see articles by J. N. McGilp in Vol. 15, p. 18, and Vol. 22, p. 9, of this Journal.]

Calyptorhynchus funereus (Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo).—On 24th November two eggs of the above were secured for the S.A. Museum, being the first eggs from South Australia in this collection. The eggs were taken at a depth of 3 ft. 6 in. in a large hollow of a dead and partly burnt Stringybark 50 ft. from the ground. The tree was close to a track in cleared and freshly-

ploughed land. When blowing the eggs it was found that one was almost fresh, while the other was well incubated. This suggests that one young would have emerged much sooner than the other and maybe only one bird would have survived. Local residents have mentioned to me that seldom do more than one bird reach maturity. It will be remembered that a long period elapses prior to the young of this species being able to fend for itself; this could be Nature's way of easing the strain upon the parents, because usually two eggs are laid.

Porphyrio melanotus (Eastern Swamphen).—At West Beach on 4th November I found a nest of this species containing 19 eggs placed in two layers in the nest. The eggs appeared as if laid by the same bird.

Stipiturus malachurus (Southern Emu-Wren).—At the Nangkita Swamp on 6th December, when in company with a Sydney visitor, we found a nest of the above species placed in long grass at the base of small Teatree bushes growing in a damp situation. A later visit showed that the nest was deserted, possibly because cattle had been put to graze in the area. On two previous visits a party consisting of 3 female and 1 male wren had been observed in the vicinity. The birds were not as shy as expected and exposed themselves at a distance of 20 ft., the male being a very attractive specimen.