

Field Notes on *Acanthornis Magnus* (Gld.) Scrub
Tit or Great Tit.

By Edwin Ashby, M.B.O.U., etc.

On the occasion of my recent trip to Tasmania I paid a visit to a selected treefern gully, I think it is called Hors-nail's Creek, at the back of Mt. Wellington, where in January, 1913, I found two nests of the year of *Acanthornis magnus*, these nests are now in the Adelaide Museum. At that date breeding was apparently over.

This year on September 29th I hoped to find the birds nesting, but was evidently too early.

I found one nest of the previous season in the same situation as those found in 1913, viz. in the hanging down dead fronds of a tree fern. The nests are in structure typical seri-

cornis nests, except that they are chiefly composed of portions of dead tree fern fronds and roughly, but cleverly, so built in between the hanging fronds of the tree fern that the weight of the fronds keeps the nest in position. Unless the greatest care is taken the nest drops to the ground as soon as the fronds are parted, showing that no attempt is made to attach the nest to the fronds, but trust is put in the weight of the fronds to keep the nest in position.

The gully visited is a typical "fern gully," the tree ferns hugging the rivulet, which is almost a cascade, the sides of the gully clothed with dense bushes and larger timber.

I saw no sign of the *Acanthornis*, although I waited quietly in the locality for several hours, incidentally; wet to the skin, as there had been a heavy shower, and the ferns and bushes were dripping. My idea is that the birds only visit these tree fern gullies in the upper range during the breeding season, and that during the rest of the year they must be searched for in the dense bushes that clothe the gullies lower down. The old locality near Newtown in Kangaroo Valley was essentially a bush gully, unfortunately from the ornithologist's point of view, now mostly occupied with gardens, and the *Acanthornis* naturally has disappeared from that habitat.

On the 9th October we unexpectedly met with this bird at an altitude of about 1,500 ft. in a gully known as "The Sidling" near Scottsdale, in North-Eastern Tasmania. The sides of the gully were very precipitous, but covered with dense scrub, below the road a number of bushes had been cut down by some men who were erecting a telegraph line, and it was amongst these fallen bushes that the *Acanthornis* was first noted, its movements and general appearance were very similar to *Sericornis (frontalis) longirostris* (Q and G), afterwards several were seen in the bushes on the other side of the road. They were searching for insects as much in the bushes as the ground. Not once did we detect a call note, but I was fortunate to hear one trilling out a very sweet little song, reminding one of the song of a *Sericornis*, but yet dissimilar.

Later, on 13/10/16, I again met with this bird in "Wenney's Gully" on the River "Don", near the Latrobe, in North West Tasmania.

This gully cannot in any sense be described as a Tree Fern gully, but was clothed with bushes, myrtle, and big timber. The gorge was very precipitous. *Acanthornis* were work-

ing for insects both amongst the fallen debris, and amongst the branches of the bushes, also up the trunks of the trees, with a very similar action to a tree creeper's, but not once did I hear them make any call note or song.

I think probably it is a new locality for this bird, but Mr. Butler records it from considerably further to the West. Mr. F. M. Littler in his birds of Tasmania, calls it the "White Breasted Scrub Tit," certainly a very descriptive name.

Locally it was known to my friends at Latrobe, when as boys they had been egg collecting, as the "little scrub bird" in distinction to the "*Sericornis humilis*", which they knew as the "Greater scrub bird." Its habits, movements, and general appearance lead me to conclude that it is more closely related to the genus *Sericornis* than to that of *Acanthiza*, where Gould originally placed it.

The rarity of this bird is probably due to its retiring habits, and general lack of call notes. It is evidently widely distributed though very local in its haunts.

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