

Some Tasmanian Bird Notes.

Contributed by EDWIN ASHBY, F.L.S., M.B.O.U.

—*Rhipidura motacilloides* V & H Third Record for Tasmania.—

Mr. W. H. Vaughan of Lunawanna, South Bruny Islands, Southern Tasmania, informed me that at the end of January or beginning of February, 1919, a Black-and-white Fantail (*Rhipidura motacilloides*) was flitting about his pigsty all one day, catching flies. Sad to relate, their cat brought it into the house the next day. Not only is this the third record of the occurrence of this bird in Tasmania, but it is the most southerly one by a good deal, and it is to be greatly regretted that the bird should have met with so untimely an end.

—Strange Nesting Place of *Petroica phoenicca*, Gould.—

In 1917 a pair of Swallows built a nest under the front verandah of the house of Mrs. Drake, of Lunawanna, South Bruny Island, Tasmania. The next year, 1918, by the time the Swallows had returned to resume nesting operations a pair of Flame-breasted Robins (*Petroica phoenicca*, Gould) had taken possession and refused to give way to the original owners.

The nest was just outside the dining room window, thus Mrs. Drake was able to watch them closely during the whole process of incubation and raising of the young. Two chicks were successfully brought up. The nest had not been occupied since, either by the original owners or by the intruders. Mrs. Drake stated that the Robins had a good deal of trouble at first in keeping the Swallows out. There seems no doubt as to the identity of the Robin, for the pair were continually round the house during my visit, and my informant pointed them out as being the same species that had occupied the nest. I brought the nest away with me; it is lined with fine grasses, some frayed soft string, pieces of darning cotton, and a small piece of silk.

—Reasoning powers of the Blue Wren and its value to the Horticulturist.—

Mr. W. H. Vaughan, of Lunawanna, South Bruny Island, Tasmania, who is a bird lover, gave me a rather interesting instance of the value of the Long-tailed Blue Wren (*Malurus longicaudus*, Gould) to the farmer and its power of deduction and learning by experience. He was digging in his garden with a companion and turning up with the soil numbers of short white grubs, probably beetle larvae, as it was a piece of new ground. A cock Blue Wren flew down, picked up three grubs and flew off to his nest only a few yards away and returned once or twice picking up a similar number.

It then tried four grubs at a time, but while it could pick up the four, it could not carry the extra one off, it fell out of its beak directly it attempted to fly. The bird was most persevering, picking it up again and again each time only to be met with failure as soon as flight was attempted, finally it accepted the lesson and carried away the three grubs to its hungry offspring. Throughout the long morning of fully four hours this diligent little bird went back and forth between the digger and the nest, but never once did it attempt again to carry four grubs at a time, but was content with the three it could successfully handle. It was so tame that it often perched on the moving fork as he dug and sometimes on his boots. Mr. Vaughan thought that it could not have taken much more than two minutes to take up each triplet of grubs and unload same to its young, but if we double his estimate, which will be a liberal allowance, we find that the single bird had destroyed during the morning fully 150 of these injurious larvae.

—Rapid Flight of the Falcon in Pursuit of a Homing Pigeon.—

Mr. Vaughan, who now lives at Lunawanna, some years ago lived at Newtown, one of the suburbs of Hobart, Tasmania. While in his garden he saw a Falcon, probably the Little Falcon (*Falco lunulatus Latham*) in pursuit of a Homing Pigeon. The falcon caught up with the pigeon almost above his head, struck and missed, the pigeon turned back on its course and flew straight for the distant church spire. The falcon hovered for some time ever rising upwards, by the time it had reached the desired altitude the pigeon appeared to be fully half way to the distant church, the falcon set after it and caught it up close to the church. It failed again, and the pigeon turned back again on its recent course; the falcon repeated its previous methods, striking at the pigeon a third time exactly above Mr. Vaughan's head and the pigeon then fell at his feet.

He could see no wound when he picked up the bird but noticed a small metal ring round its leg. It was alive though much distressed. He took it to a bird fancier friend of his who, by means of the ring, was able to find the owner.

I regret to say that I omitted to ascertain the distance away the church was, but I was given to understand that it was a long way, though not so far that he could not keep the birds in sight all the time. The pace of the falcon's swoop must have been nearly twice that of the pigeon in full flight. It is also remarkable that the falcon should have three failures chalked up to him; possibly the last was only a partial failure, but owing to the good offices of my friend the pigeon's life was saved.
