

Notes on Tasmanian Bird Life.

By Edwin Ashby, M.B.O.U., C.F.A.O.U.

Mount Wellington in the immediate neighbourhood of Fern Tree, at an altitude of about 2,000 feet, was the first centre of observation. The writer, in company with two others, walked up from the Cascades, Hobart, on 17th October last. In the bush adjoining the creek the Brown Scrub-Wrens (*Sericornis humilis*) were continually seen, either creeping like mice on the ground under the thick bushes, or peeping out for a brief moment from amongst the leaves a few feet above the ground-level.

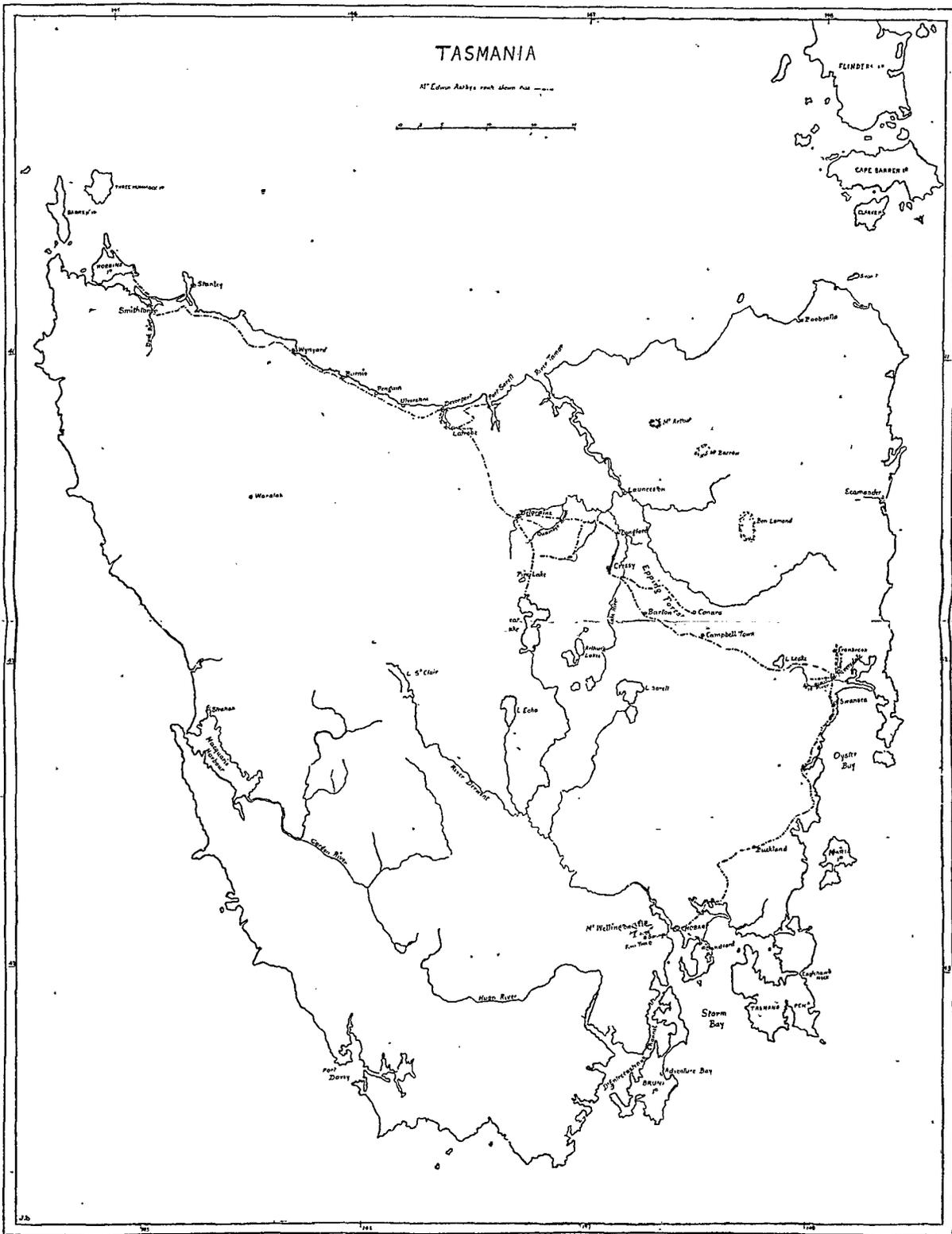
Their dark plumage assimilates perfectly with the colour of the dead leaves when in shadow. Several Dusky Robins (*Amaurodryas vittata*) were noticed where the "bush" was fairly open owing to the larger timber having been felled; logs were being dragged down the track as we were ascending. Olive Whistlers (*Pachycephala olivacea*) and the Golden Whistler (*P. pectoralis*) were both noticed here, moving about very quietly in the larger bushes, but owing to the lateness of the afternoon these and most other birds were silent. At sunrise the following morning three of us were out in the scrub near Fern Tree, where a Brush Bronzewing (*Phaps elegans*) was calling from a bough of a lofty Gumtree, but although several attempts were made to get a good view of the bird, the density of the undergrowth prevented it, the position of the bird only being located when it took to flight. The call note of these birds when heard from some distance is very similar to the distant bellowing of a bull. On the last morning of our stay, the writer secured a male Bronzewing, whose plumage much surpasses in richness of colouring that of any skins obtained in drier districts on the mainland. One cannot but think that the race whose habitat is the wet, dense forest of Mount Wellington and other Tasmanian mountains, must be very distinct from that which inhabits the dry mallee around Karoonda in South Australia, from which locality I have unfortunately only a single skin for comparison.

Several Pink Robins (*Petroica rodinogaster*) were seen. Their favourite feeding-ground seems to be along open tracks in the thickest forest; usually they are found close to running water. The only nest of this Robin I have found was a deep cup-shaped one composed of moss and placed in a fork over running water. They are very numerous around Fern Tree and very tame, perching fearlessly within a few feet of the observer. The striking magenta breast, set off by a black plumage of the head and upper side of the male, is always a charming and conspicuous object when facing one, but when the Robin settles on some fallen half-burnt log and turns its back to the intruder, it does a sort of disappearing trick, becoming quite invisible, its tone of black harmonizing perfectly with the charcoal of the burnt log.

Many pairs of the Spotted Pardalote (*Pardalotus punctatus*) were working in the leaves of the Gumtrees alongside the track; their whistle, consisting of two high-tone notes, could be heard continuously in every direction. It is rather interesting to note that specimens collected by the writer on Mount Wellington and at Brown's River are smaller birds; the spots on the mantle are smaller and paler and the marginal black fringe of each feather broader than is the case with specimens taken in the drier district

of Sandford on Frederick Henry Bay. In face of this divergence, unless we are able to recognize two distinct races in Tasmania (which is improbable), they cannot be separated from the form common in Victoria. Several pairs of the Golden Whistler were whistling and working for insects in the Gum saplings. It is difficult to determine any difference in its song from that of the mainland birds, but the complete absence of black in the tail is a marked characteristic. The brilliant yellow plumage of the underside equals that of skins from Victoria and South Australia, but the upper plumage is darker than that of specimens from South and Western Australia; also the throat of the Tasmanian female bird is so pale that in some lights it is almost white. The Olive Whistler could be heard in the dense bushes of the gully-side, the commonest call notes being the combination known throughout Tasmania as "I'll wet you," repeated time and time again with a wonderfully soft intonation. All the members of this genus whose notes I have heard conclude their varied songs with a swish-like sound. Of the two male skins collected on Mount Wellington, one on this occasion and the other in October, 1920, neither shows yellow under tail coverts, whereas a specimen collected by the writer at Adventure Bay, Southern Tasmania, has bright yellow under tail coverts. The Strong-billed Honey-eater (*Melithreptus validirostris*) was common, more often than not seen climbing the tree-trunks like a Tree-creeper, searching for insects in the crannies of the bark, in this respect and also in its call notes differing widely from its near relative (*M. gularis*), a very common bird in the Blackwood district, South Australia.

One fine male was attacked most fiercely by another male bird of the same species while he was searching for insects in the bark of a lofty Gumtree. The attack was a very savage one, and continued quite a while with beak and claw, the birds somehow managing to cling to the bark of the upright trunk. Both birds paid the penalty with their lives, for my companion, not knowing to what species they belonged, shot them, and they proved to be fine males. Tits were numerous, mostly in the clumps of low bushes scattered about partially cleared ground. As far as one could judge they were all the Brown Tit (*Acanthiza pusilla*); though in 1920, in a gully near by, I shot a Tit that was making a loud and unfamiliar call, and which we believe to have been *A. Ewingi*. The nest of these two species is very distinct, but it is not at all easy to separate the skins. Both the Crescent Honey-eater (*Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*), and the Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) were in considerable numbers, the notes of the former being heard in every direction. The rich chestnut colouration of the latter was most



marked; it is most certainly a distinct race from the paler mainland forms.

Along the margin of the tiny rivulet which wound its way down the centre of the well-grassed clearing before mentioned was the haunt of the beautiful Firetail (*Zonaeginthus bellus*); the glorious crimson of their rumps and the delicate barring of the rest of their plumage is an added charm to these open glades, bordered by dense forests. I have noticed in many parts of Tasmania that this Finch is mostly found in such localities. The only Parrot met with during this brief visit near Fern Tree was the Green Rosella (*Platycercus caledonicus*). Small families of this pleasing Parrot were often heard and sometimes seen flying through the forest. In the dense scrub alongside the track which led down the partially cleared gully an Australian Ground-Thrush (*Oreocincla lunulata*) was obtained. This specimen is of interest in that its bill is not longer than that of adult birds in South Australia and Victoria; its breast is strikingly buff, but the plumage of the upper side shows greater divergence still. Each feather is of a rich brownish-buff colour with buff centres beautifully set off by an intense black border. The specimen is a male, and is probably a bird of the previous season, which may account for its strikingly rich colouration and smaller bill. Up to the present I have seen no skin from the mainland to correspond with it.

On the 19th October while following down the track from The Springs (3,000 odd feet) to Fern Tree, I caught sight of a Yellow-throated Honey-eater (*Meliphaga flavicollis*) with a piece of string in its beak, so asked those with me to stand still. The bird fussed about for a minute or so while another bird of the same species flew at it in a vexed sort of manner. Presently the first bird commenced flitting from branch to branch of a tall bush, at last reaching the nest a bare 4 feet from where I stood in the pathway. We watched the bird place the piece of string in position in the inside of the cup-shaped nest. This took some time, and when completed to its satisfaction the bird flew away, allowing us to examine the nest more closely. The nest was a rather deep cup-shaped one, the outside being built of strips of bark and the inside of string and grass. It was situated 2 feet 9 inches above the ground in the fork of a rather dense bush, and measured $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches across over all, the inside cup being barely 3 inches in diameter.

On 20th October we left Fern Tree for Mr. W. L. May's property at Frederick Henry Bay. There in all the flats and swampy ground, the Striated Field-Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*) was numerous, individuals continually being seen for

a brief moment peeping out of the thick clumps of "sapphire," especially at the "causeway." The only time one can get a really good view of the birds with the aid of a fieldglass is when the male bird is absorbed in giving forth its sweet trill of song from the top of some stunted bush. At such moments the black striated marks which decorate its neat olivaceous plumage are easily discerned. We noted this bird in similar situations from Sandford in the south to the far north-west at Smithton. In all the skins I have made from these widely separated localities the females have the ground colour of the throat and neck brownish-buff; and one male collected by Mr. Keith Ashby is similar, probably immature. But a male which I collected at Sandford on 22nd October has the ground colour of the throat and centre of the neck almost white; later on at Smithton, in the far north-west, a male was secured in which the throat and neck are pure white (except, of course, the black streaking); also, while the other specimens have the underside and flanks brownish-buff, the Smithton specimen is lemon-buff. It would be very interesting to learn whether this distinct variety has become the normal one in that locality, and also whether the inducing cause is an ecological one or a result of inbreeding or of mutation.

While the Eastern Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*) was entirely absent from the western side of the River Derwent, around Sandford they were extremely numerous, the brilliancy of their plumage—reds, blues, and greens, set off by black and pure white—forming a glorious adjunct to the landscape. The insular form is distinctly a giant race. Apart from the Parrots, the most conspicuous birds around the homestead were the Noisy Miner (*Myzantha garrula*), again a distinct insular race in their larger size. The third species that made itself most noticeable was the Grey Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*), the flute-like notes of these splendid musicians being heard in every direction. The toll taken by these birds in fledglings in this immediate district must be very great, but Nature's "factor of safety" of overproduction seems amply to compensate, for there is no lack of bird life.

Early on the morning of 23rd October our party, consisting of Messrs. W. L. May and F. W. Coleman, Miss Ashby, and the writer, started on a fortnight's motor trip, making Swansea and Riversdale on the east coast on the first day, thence over the ranges, reaching an altitude of 2,000 or more feet, via Lake Leake, to Campbelltown; and from there keeping in the back country in a narrow but good road, via Barton and Cressy to Longford, then along main roads to Deloraine and Latrobe, and next along the northern coast westward as far as Smithton, and

by motor-boat to Robbins Island, one of the Hunter Group, almost the extreme north-western corner of the State.

I had been informed that the Forty-spotted Pardalote, (*Pardalotus quadragintus*) had been recorded as nesting near Buckland. We therefore stopped for lunch just outside that place, alongside a creek which wound through a wide flat valley sprinkled with large gumtrees in full flower. Swift Parrots (*Lathamus discolor*) were in great numbers, feeding on the honey. I shot one specimen, a male, and again the next day met with the same species at a sheeprun north of Riversdale and Swansea. We had been informed that the Musk Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta concinna*) had recently appeared in the district of Swansea, and the owners of sheepruns were quite certain that the birds noted were of that species. It was only by actually shooting a specimen that I could convince them that they were mistaken, and that the birds were really the Swift Parrot, and not *Glossopsitta concinna*. It seems fairly certain that *discolor* is a rare visitor to that district, and the flock I saw was outside their usual range of habitat: The specimen shot at Riversdale was also a male, and in comparing it and the Buckland bird with a female that was picked up dead in Hobart, on 15th October I find that the female has a good deal more yellow in the green, especially on the underside, and in this respect is seemingly a brighter-coloured bird. The two male skins show a deeper red on the shoulder and on the underside of the wings, but otherwise the female is as brightly coloured as the males.

Our search for *P. quadragintus* was abortive. Numbers of the Striated Pardalote (*P. striatus*) were calling in the leafy tops of the big Gums, but at that height it was most difficult to locate them, and they only became visible when they flew. We were on the look out for a strange Pardalote note, one informant having told me that its note is a single one much like the first, of the double whistle, of the Spotted Pardalote. We certainly heard no such note at Buckland; neither did we distinguish any new note of that character throughout the trip. Throughout the whole fortnight's trip we pulled up at every locality that seemed likely, listening for a new note. I made skins of both *P. striatus* and *P. punctatus*, but failed entirely to obtain the bird of our search or to locate its note. I must admit we paid most attention to the call notes that seemed to correspond with those of the Spotted Pardalote rather than those of the Striated. In a lofty tree in the Upper Liffey a Pardalote we supposed to be *P. striatus* was making a call that was not quite familiar, but the attempt to shoot it was unsuccessful, probably from being out of range.

When passing through Melbourne on the return journey to South Australia the writer called at the Botanic Gardens with the object of learning all that was possible connected with Mr. St. John's getting many years ago the (I believe, unique) skin of the King Island representative of the Forty-spotted Pardalote. Mr. St. John said that he heard a Striated Pardalote calling in the top of a tree, and shot what he supposed was the bird that was calling. The bird he had shot was *P. quadragintus*, but whether it was the bird that was calling or not it was impossible to determine, but the instance is very suggestive: It looks as if we had been "on the wrong scent" all the time; or, shall we say, "barking up the wrong tree."

For two nights our party were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Reg. Lyne at Riversdale. Our host joined Coleman and the writer in a quest after the Tasmanian Water-Hen (*Tribonyx mortieri*) soon after sunrise, as we expected to see plenty of these wary birds at that hour of the morning. We tramped several miles along the grass paddocks bordering the River Wye, but while from time to time we saw one or more of these birds speeding towards the banks of the river, having located us while still hundreds of yards away, we did not get a shot.

After breakfast our host, promising us better success, took us boating on the Swan River, and left a dog on the land to find the Water-Hens for us. The banks of the river are clothed to a large extent with thick bushes, which make good cover for the birds. The dog drove out several of these fine Coots, but in each case they took to the water and dived. They swam long distances under the water without any difficulty, although there is not the slightest webbing on their toes. For some reason the birds did not seem to be nesting: Several nesting sites out on tussocks or branches floating near the water's edge were examined. Bits of long grass or water plant had been brought together, but in no case had any attempt been made to build the nest. Mr. Lyne stated that usually at this season of the year incubation was in full swing, but for some unaccountable reason the birds were very scarce and no nests were found. Three skins were made, all being males, which suggested that the hens were sitting, but the absence of nests in the usual nesting sites rather disproves this. That this bird must be numbered with "The Flightless Rails" seems quite certain, for while the wings, although small for the weight of the bird, are fully developed, the wing muscles are wasted and almost atrophied, whereas the leg muscles are abnormally developed. All observers united in stating that they never fly, and I believe they can even be run down on horseback, but of this latter I have no personal experience.

In the afternoon of the same day we motored to a neighbouring sheeprun, where later in the year *Synoicus ypsilophorus*, the Swamp Quail, are usually in numbers. Wishing to get a specimen of this particular race, we tramped miles over grassy flats, but only flushed one pair and secured one specimen. The single skin does not furnish sufficient material for comparison with the birds from the mainland. Mr. Lyne informed me that during the winter of 1894 there had been an irruption of the Great Tasmanian Wattle-Bird or the Yellow Wattle-Bird (*Anthochaera paradoxa*). He stated that there must have been hundreds of thousands at that time in this part of the East Coast. He had shot 300 to 400 for eating, and Mr. W. L. May stated that at the time quite a number had appeared around Sandford 90 miles further south. It was eight years since the birds had appeared in the Swansea district in any numbers.

Making an early start from the hospitable home at Riversdale on the 25th, the run to Campbelltown was for the first half of the way through virgin forest. It was a steady climb to the summit of the divide, which is, I believe, between two and three thousand feet in altitude. We only had time for a short stop, hoping to hear a strange Pardalote call, but, as before stated, we were disappointed in this. The run down the western slope of the range was through tall straight timber. Towards the foot the road came out into open grass country with scattered isolated trees; here we kept a sharp look out for *Neophema*, but saw not a sign of them, although the locality is very favourable.

Campbelltown, 41 miles from Riversdale, was quickly passed, the next 40 miles to Longford being through charming pastoral country with extensive patches of timber towards the southern end. This country is similar and not very distant from the old breeding haunts of the two Grass Parrots (*Neophema chrysostoma* and *N. chrysogaster*), but we did not see a sign of them. A pair of Mountain Ducks (*Casarca tadornoides*) were noted on a small reservoir quite near the road, and just after crossing the Lake River, south of Cressy, we counted the remains of a score of Water-Hens which had been taken out of the rabbit-traps and hung on the wires of the fence. It is evident that this flightless bird maintains its numbers in spite of the changed conditions brought about by man's occupation. A search was made in the tall forest through which the road passes between Deloraine and Latrobe for the Forty-spotted Pardalote, for both the other two species were calling in the tops of the trees, but no evidence of the stranger was forthcoming.

Two nights were spent with Messrs. Martin and Arnold Wells at Latrobe, and there we found that the Water-Hens were comparatively tame, coming out of the thick Tea-tree swamp that adjoins the garden of our hosts' house and feeding with the fowls. On 27th October an early start was made from Latrobe, the road following within sight of the sea most of the way to Smithton, almost the extreme north-west corner of Tasmania. The country passed through is some of the richest agricultural land in the island, or, in fact, anywhere. The soil is the result of the decomposition of basalt and other volcanic rocks. The coastal belt of rich ground is mostly cleared of its original luxuriant forest, and away to the south the lofty mountains that form the northern wall of the great Central Plateau are always in sight, and here and there at the altitude of 4,000 feet show patches of snow. At one point a good view was obtained of Cradle Mountain, the second highest peak in the island.

Inland from Stanley, and from there to Smithton, the road we took throughout almost the entire distance passed through peaty swamps and heath land, seemingly almost uninhabited. Mile after mile was a riot of wild-flowers, mostly dwarf flowering shrubs or herbaceous plants. On reaching Smithton we found that the tidal conditions were unfavourable for us to go out to Robbins Island that day, so we had perforce to wait the tide of the following morning. Although it was raining fairly heavily, we could not resist the temptation to explore the low-lying swampy and heathy country to the west of the town. The rainy conditions were not favourable to the observation of bird life, but we were able to make a charming collection of wild-flowers, including several species of orchids. The next morning, the 28th, we boarded the motor-launch which was to take us the 15 miles to the island. Robbins Island consists of 26,000 odd acres, the property of Messrs. Holyman Bros., whose generous hospitality we enjoyed during our brief stay.

As the launch followed the course of the Duck River towards its mouth, a variety of Waders were seen on the mud flats. Amongst them were some large flocks of a hundred individuals or more of the Curlew (*Numenius cyanopus*), so conspicuous by their long curved beaks. These birds evidently had just arrived, at what must be almost the southern limit of their range, from their distant breeding-grounds in the north of Asia. As the launch was passing through a narrow channel in a sandbar, upon which the waves were breaking, the motor failed us altogether, and the strong sea breeze was rapidly driving us ashore. The skipper, only in the nick of time, succeeded in getting his sail up, Mr. May taking the tiller. Ultimately we reached the little

landing-place on Robbins Island, but not without another little incident, for the sail that had been seemingly so reluctant to be pulled into position in the earlier emergency now hung fire when half-way down and thus completely obscured the view of the posts marking the narrow passage, with the result that we carried away one of these important guides.

Mr. Burnie was waiting for us with horse and cart, and we soon found ourselves settling in at Captain James Holyman's charming homestead, where for the next two and half days we greatly enjoyed the generous hospitality of the Captain, although he was away in Launceston at that time. The Island is stocked with cattle and sheep, and where improved there was a wonderful growth of grass. About a fourth of it is forest or partially cleared forest and the rest heathy country. In most of the sandy bays a pair of Pied Oyster-catchers (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*) were to be seen. Probably all had nests which are placed in the sand at the foot of the sandhills. One clutch was taken. The Sooty Oyster-catcher (*H. unicolor*) was less common, but a pair frequented most of the rocky points, where, we were informed, they lay their eggs amongst the rocks. Our marine work took all our available time, and no nest of this species was found. On the low rocky point east of the homestead a flock of about half a dozen Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) had located themselves a day or so before our arrival, but they were very shy. A flock of Lesser Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominicus*) had also selected the same location. When settled amongst the pebbles of the upper beach, they were almost invisible. Often they could be detected only when making some movement. Another flock was noted at a similar stony point two or three miles further round the coast, and a specimen was secured. All these Waders had just completed their long southward migration. One would have liked to have had the exact dates of their arrival recorded.

The manager's house is situated on the top of a sandy bluff which slopes very steeply seaward, the soil being light loam or sand, held together with long grass and bushes. This face is riddled with the burrows of the Mutton-Bird (*Puffinus tenuirostris*). So close is this rookery to the house that at the time of our visit several of the birds had made their burrows under one of the outbuildings of the house. We were told that at night the noise of the birds was almost deafening. At the date of our visit, 29th October, the birds were coming in after dark and spending the night in clearing out their respective holes. When this operation was completed, we were informed that the birds would disappear, returning again, I think the manager said,

in about a fortnight, when the real business of incubation would commence. To the much-discussed question as to the regularity and co-ordination shown by the whole of the birds in each rookery, we were able to contribute an interesting little fact.

The chief object of our visit to the island being marine research rather than ornithological, we were, owing to the limitation of time, unable to wait till dusk and see the birds come in, much as we should have liked to have done so, so our inspection was paid early in the afternoon. Much to our surprise, we found one of the birds at home, apparently busy with the duties of incubation. The bird made its presence known by keeping up an angry sort of purring sound as long as any of the party were at all near its burrow. Evidently the bird was sitting closely, but was too far down the hole for us to reach it. The scolding became more emphatic as we attempted to do so. This discovery seems to disprove the statement that the whole of the birds in one rookery commence incubating on the same date. I regret that we had no time available to carry this investigation a little further.

In the rung forest country, the Dusky Robin (*Amurodryas vittata*), a bird peculiar to Tasmania, was very numerous, a pair and a juvenile being collected, the latter showing in a marked degree the striped plumage so typical of the young of its near allies. Here also was another peculiarly Tasmanian bird, the Black Crow-Shrike (*Strepera fuliginosa*). The skin secured, a male, is much browner than are the skins of those taken later at the altitude of 3,000 feet near the Great Lake; this may possibly be due to immaturity. Swamp Quail were noted in many different spots on the island, and is probably a very common bird there.

On the beach small companies of the Hooded Dotterel (*Charadrius cucullatus*) were unusually numerous, five birds being in one party, no doubt representing the two adult birds and three young from a clutch of three eggs.

The return to Smithton by the launch was made without any mishap early on the 30th, the motor-car bringing our party to Penguin by evening. Some idea of the immense volume of water flowing from the mountains northwards into the sea along this portion of the north coast of Tasmania may be gathered from the fact that we crossed in the 52 odd miles between Smithton and Penguin no less than nineteen bridges, most of them over very respectable rivers carrying a heavy flow of water. Two nights were spent at Penguin, most of the time being devoted to marine research, but in the morning of the 31st three of the party walked about 2½ miles to a charming spot called Myrtle

Falls. No fresh birds were noticed, but an interesting example of the curiosity of an Olive Whistler was obtained. The foot-track leading to the Falls followed the bed of the rivulet, which with the gradient of a cascade wound its way under tree ferns and here and there a large "Myrtle." The sides of the gully were very steep and clothed with thick bushes and saplings. Where the entry to the gully was made, an Olive Whistler commenced singing and continued, following the disturbing party the whole way up the gully until the Falls were reached. The climb up was made very slowly, search being made all the while for objects of interest, but, although completely invisible, the Whistler was never more than a few yards away from one or other of the party, its location being ascertained by its oft-repeated song or whistled melody. While the other two, of the party found their way above the Falls, the writer sat for some time on a rock in the middle of the rivulet at the foot of the Fall. When the two climbers had passed on, the Whistler almost ceased to sing, but evidently was watching the seated intruder, for once or twice only did it repeat its song. At last, after quite a long period of silence, the bird flew out into the open, coming so close to the writer that by holding out the hand he could almost have touched it. It passed on to the other side of the pool at the foot of the Falls and disappeared in the thick scrub, and did not again whistle during the return journey down the gully.

The party spent the night of the 1st November at Deloraine, and next morning, in spite of much warning, decided to attempt the journey to the Great Lake. The route for a good many miles after leaving Deloraine is through open forest country, a splendid hunting-ground for birds; then winding under Quamby Bluff it crosses a typical fern gully called Stella Glen. The sides of this gully are covered with very fine timber of the Evergreen Beech, more generally known as Myrtle (*Fagus cunninghami*—Hook). Here the Pink-breasted Robin, the Brown Scrub-Wren, and the Olive Whistlers are in numbers. Passing on into open forest, parties of the Black Crow-Shrike were heard and seen. The track greatly improves, in fact, becomes a good road, after the sawmills are left behind, and the scenery becomes very rugged and fine. Wild, precipitous crags rise a thousand feet above one's head, and the road, performing a series of S bends, makes the ascent possible, and is a piece of really fine engineering work. The serpentine road rose at a steep grade, passing through a wealth of Waratah bushes (*Telopea truncata*), which a little later in the season will be a glorious sight with their carmine-coloured blossoms. At last we passed over the "rim" of the great fault which forms the

northern rampart of the great central plateau. The summit of this lip is a little over 4,000 feet in altitude, and is bare and rocky in the extreme, but the view over the plains with distant Bass Strait 4,000 feet below is splendid. The road led past the Pine Lake at 4,000-foot level, which in winter is said to be frozen with an icecrust of eight inches or more, to a little clump of the very peculiar King William Pines (*Arthrotaxis*), and then descended a thousand feet in the next few miles to the Great Lake, where the welcome warmth and hospitality of the Resthouse were greatly appreciated. The level of the Great Lake, which is 3,000 feet above sea-level, has recently been raised another 30 feet by increasing the height of the outlet at the southern end, and we were informed that the distance by rowboat from the extreme northern to the extreme southern end of the Lake is now 23 miles. In most places the land slopes steeply into the water, but the effect of the added depth of the water has been to submerge to that extent the timber that was growing round the Lake's margin. Many of these trees have 20 feet to 30 feet of their trunks under water, with the result that those farthest out are dying or dead. The country surrounding the Lake is mostly bare, rocky, and bleak. Here and there, especially near the Lake, there are scattered Gumtrees, mostly Cider-gum (*Eucalyptus gunni*). On the rising ground, to the west of the Resthouse, there are fairly extensive patches of forest; and a rocky promontory running out into the Lake to the northwest is thickly covered with rather stunted Gumtrees, but all these rises are so thickly strewn with rocks that, even when walking across rising ground, the water is trickling or oozing between the stones and dwarf shrubs, the soil between the rocks being of a peaty nature.

Although we were favoured with a good deal of sunshine, scudding clouds were often touching the tops of the rocky rises, and the air was so keen that one required all possible clothing. In the timber, Tasmanian or Yellow Wattle-Birds were numerous, but most difficult to stalk. One would locate them in a certain spot and keep one's eyes on the tree, as far as the rocky nature of the ground would permit, only to find that the birds had given him the slip and were then calling in loud and weird tones from the top of a tree a hundred yards or so further on. Their loud cries are mostly very distinct from those of other species of Wattle-Birds, but they have one hoarse call, very similar to that of the Red Wattle-Bird. The wattles of *A. paradoxa* are long yellow pendants one and half inches in length, looking all the world like gold ear-pendants.

Apparently the birds were not nesting, although when Mr. May visited the same spot some years earlier at about the same season he found many nests. On the occasion of our visit neither the gums were in flower nor the berry-bearing bushes in fruit, which probably accounted for it.

The Black Crow-Shrike is very common around the Lake, its extraordinary notes being entirely different from the "cart-wheel squeak" of the Black-winged Crow-Shrike of South Australia. It has a variety of loud harsh cries, but in addition gives forth a long series of pleasing notes that almost suggest a human conversation. On the morning of 3rd November I was up at daylight, though I could induce no one else to join me, and found scores of Black Crow-Shrikes feeding on the grassy flats. So tame were they that some of them allowed me to approach in the open to within 10 yards, and still continued their feeding. Their superb coalblack plumage, set off by the large golden eye, was a delightful sight, and one was able to watch some of them at this close range for quite a while. This is the more remarkable because this bird, I was informed, is a very favourite table bird with people who live in the bush country.

The special object of our visit to the Great Lake was to study the habits and secure a specimen of the Hill Crow-Shrike (*Strepera arguta*). This bird is almost a replica of the common *Strepera* of South Australia (*S. melanoptera*), except that *S. arguta* has a very distinct white wing-speculum, which is most conspicuous when the bird is flying. The note is similar to that of the South Australian species, resembling a squeaking unoiled cartwheel, this sound being made when the bird is in flight. But for this it would have been almost impossible to locate the bird. We were fortunate on the afternoon of our arrival in locating a pair that frequented a certain rocky point in the Lake, a mile and a half from the Resthouse, but we had found it almost impossible to get within range of the birds, so I had determined to go out to this rocky point the next morning at sunrise. The birds were interested in what was either an old nest or the beginnings of a new one, built in one of the partially submerged Gumtrees standing perhaps 30 yards from the steep rocky shore. Neither of the birds actually visited the nest or were at any time driven out of it, but still they always came back to the same clump of trees after an absence of an hour or more. All this was ascertained overnight, and thus the next morning at dawn I took my seat on the rocky point awaiting the arrival of one or other of the birds. After a wait of perhaps half an hour one of the birds put in an appearance, keeping at first well out over the water. At last I got a chance when the bird was in a tree

sufficiently near the margin of the Lake to justify one in thinking that it might be reached by wading. I shot the bird, which fell, as I expected, sufficiently near the edge to justify the venture of a wade or short swim out in the ice-cold water. The sun had just risen and up till then there had not been a breath of wind, but no sooner was the dead bird floating on the water than an offshore breeze started and the bird I had taken so much trouble to get was slowly drifting out into the Lake. Being encumbered with much extra clothing, overcoat, gaiters, cardigan, and so on, the process of disrobing was therefore perforce somewhat prolonged—the buttons would not give way and had to be properly undone. The water was at last entered, and I realized that, if the prize was to be won, it was a matter of rapid swimming. The bird was reached at about 35 yards from the shore, and every ounce of strength was put into the homeward swim, no attempt being made to keep the bird dry. Mighty glad was I when the shore was reached, after the coldest swim I have ever experienced in my life. In conversation afterwards with a gentleman at the Resthouse, who is much interested in native birds, and who has spent seven summers at the Lake, I learnt that the Hill Crow-Shrike is never numerous in that district, but that a few pairs put in an appearance from time to time. He knew its note well, and if any birds were within a half a mile of one their loud cry uttered whenever they are in flight would make their presence known. This gentleman had never previously handled a specimen of this bird. Although the Black Crow-Shrike is so often shot for food, he had never known one of these birds shot in that district, and others confirmed his statement. Its extreme wariness may, of course, partly account for this. Nevertheless, I am satisfied that the existence of both species in the same locality has led to the assumption that it is common there, large numbers of the other birds having been credited to this species wrongfully. I suggest that the name "Hill Crow-Shrike" is a misnomer, and would recommend the Check List Committee to take this into consideration when choosing a more appropriate name. Perhaps a name founded on the specific name *arguta*, such as "loud" or "squeaking," might be more appropriate. It certainly seems to be a lover of the open country and the name "Plains Crow-Shrike" would best meet the need. Mr. Herbert Thompson, of Launceston, one of the best bird observers in Tasmania, tells me that it frequents some of the open plain country in the north-east of Tasmania, and he has known it nest near Launceston. This statement was confirmed to me by another observer, who evidently knew the bird because he described its squeaking note. I noticed several very rich-coloured Flame Robins

(*Petroica phoenicea*) around the Great Lake and made a skin of one. In comparing it with others from various States, I find that the red is a decidedly deeper shade than that of any other skin; also the upper plumage is darker, only one specimen coming at all near to it. On turning up the label I find this latter was one I shot eight years before at Latrobe, not far from the Great Lake and almost at sea-level, whereas the other is from an altitude of 3,000 feet. We motored back to Deloraine on 4th November, spending one night there, and early next morning started on the last day of our trip, determined to explore one of the deep gorges that have been cut into the "Western Tier" by the agency of water. We drove the car as far as it was possible to go up the narrow defile of the River Liffey. The scenery was superb, the road very narrow, but good. The day was splendid, and the valley of the Liffey, especially the Upper Liffey, alive with birds. We stopped for a few hours where the road became a mere bridle-track. A little before reaching this point and while passing a piece of cleared grass land, the motor flushed a small flock of Grass Parrots, and on shooting a specimen we found that it was the Blue-winged Parrot (*Neophema chrysostoma*), a female, non-breeding. It was quite an unexpected find, being miles and miles away from open country and in a narrow winding valley shut in on either side by lofty mountains and virgin forests. During our short stay at the Upper Liffey, in a spot where the river was bordered by a number of treeferns and shaded with fine "Myrtle" timber (*Fagus*), we saw several Pink-breasted Robins. A flock of the Tasmanian Black Cockatoo (*C. funereus*) flew into the trees near by, and I secured an extremely fine male bird. We also had an opportunity of studying the song of the Tasmanian Whistling Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*). I was fully satisfied that many of its notes are distinct from the notes of the mainland birds, and had to admit that its repertoire surpassed our Thrush both in quality of tone and in range. It is quite impossible adequately to tell of the charm of this locality and the wealth of its bird life, our only regret being that our time was so limited.

Our objective was Conara, on the main line from Hobart to Launceston. We intended to join the express there the next morning. We took a cross road from near Cressy, travelling through the northward extension of Epping Forest for about 12 miles before striking the railway. The country passed through was well grassed, with extensive patches of open forest. At one spot we noticed a number of the Little Wattle-Bird (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*), which were feeding on the flowers of the Honey-suckle (*Banksia marginata*). Near the same spot the car

disturbed a small flock of brilliantly-coloured Grass-Parrots (*Neophema*). As the horizontal rays of the sun, that was nearing setting, caught them, the yellow on the abdomen was clearly seen. For a moment they seemed likely to settle, then changed their minds, turned into the shadow of the trees, and were lost completely to view. By the time the car came to a standstill there was nothing to be seen of them, and although we stopped for quite a while we were unable to locate them. I believe them to have been the Orange-breasted Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*), the bird I had been so long looking for, not only on this trip but also on earlier occasions. Because of the brightness of their plumage, it is impossible accurately to determine the various species of *Neophema* without handling the specimens—records otherwise must of necessity be unreliable. It is interesting to have noted this flock, for the fact of having indentified *N. chrysostoma* earlier in the same day makes one more confident that the birds were referable to the rarer species.

The next morning, both before breakfast and after, till the arrival of the train for Launceston, the whole available time was spent in seeking for another flock of Grass-Parrots, and in noting the bird life of that locality. The Green Rosella was in numbers and in splendid plumage. Pardalotes of both the common species were heard almost in every tree-top. The Yellow Wattle-Birds, which have been so numerous at the Great Lake, were here equally common and less wary. Honey-eaters, Tits, and Blue Wrens were exceptionally numerous, but we did not note a single example of the Brown Scrub-Wren nor of the Striated Field-Wren, though that may have been due to the small area we were able to cover within our limited time. This is certain, that this easily accessible forest, which is traversed by the main line of railway, with several sidings and stations within its area, is a splendid observing ground for the ornithologist. I roughly estimate that from north to south it must extend, with some minor breaks, for over 20 miles. Its breadth varies much, in some places including more or less open sheep country many miles in width, in others a mile or so. It is a very fine block of forest country that will certainly repay the closest investigation.

The car covered 650 miles in this most delightful trip, and Mr. May before reaching his home will have added another 100 miles.

The following is a list of the species of birds observed on this and previous visits to Tasmania:—*Synoicus australis*, Brown Quail; *Synoicus ypsilophorus*, Swamp Quail; *Phaps chalcoptera*, Common Bronzewing; *Phaps elegans*, Brush Bronzewing;

Porzana fluminea, Australian Spotted Crane; *Porzana plumbea*, Spotted Crane; *Tribonyx mortieri*, Tasmanian Water-Hen; *Porphyrio melanotus*, Eastern Swamp-Hen; *Puffinus tenuirostris*, Short-tailed Petrel (Mutton-Bird); *Pachyptila turtur*, Fairy Prion; *Diomedea cauta*, White-capped Albatross; *Sterna bergii*, Crested Tern; *Larus novae-hollandiae*, Silver Gull; *Gabianus pacificus*, Pacific Gull; *Catharacta lonnbergi*, Dark Southern Skua; *Haematopus ostralegus*, Pied Oyster-catcher; *Haematopus unicolor*, Sooty Oyster-catcher; *Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*, Australian Spur-winged Plover; *Squatarola squatarola*, Grey Plover; *Pluvialis dominicus*, Eastern Golden Plover; *Charadrius cucullatus*, Hooded Dotterel; *Charadrius ruficapillus*, Red-capped Dotterel; *Numenius cyanopus*, Eastern Curlew; *Numenius phaeopus*, Whimbrel; *Erolia ruficollis*, Red-necked Stint; *Erolia acuminata*, Sharp-tailed Stint; *Notophox novae-hollandiae*, White-faced Heron; *Chenopsis atrata*, Black Swan; *Casarca tadornoides*, Mountain Duck; *Anas superciliosa*, Black Duck; *Querquedula gibberifrons*, Grey Teal; *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Black Cormorant; *Sula serrator*, Australian Gannet; *Circus approximans*, Swamp Harrier; *Astur novae-hollandiae*, Grey Goshawk; *Astur fasciatus*, Australian Goshawk; *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, White-breasted Sea-Eagle; *Ninox novae-seelandiae*, Spotted Owl; *Tyto castanops*, Tasmanian Masked Owl; *Trichoglossus melanocephalus*, Blue Mountain Lorikeet; *Calyptrorhynchus funereus*, Yellow-tailed Black Cuckoo; *Platycercus taledonicus*, Green Rosella; *Platycercus eximius*, Eastern Rosella; *Neophema chrysostoma*, Blue-winged Parrot; *Neophema chrysogaster*, Orange-breasted Parrot (?); *Lathamus discolor*, Swift Parrot; *Podargus strigoides*, Tawny Frogmouth; *Cuculus pallidus*, Pallid Cuckoo; *Cacomantis flabelliformis*, Fan-tailed Cuckoo; *Lamprococcyx plajousus*, Golden Bronze Cuckoo; *Hirundo neoxena*, Welcome Swallow; *Hylochelidon nigricans*, Tree Martin; *Petroica multicolor*, Scarlet Robin; *Petroica phoenicea*, Flame Robin; *Petroica rodinogaster*, Pink Robin; *Amidurbdryas vittata*, Dusky Robin; *Pachycephala pectoralis*, Golden Whistler; *Pachycephala olivacea*, Olive Whistler; *Rhipidura flabellifera*, Grey Fantail; *Myiagra cyanoleuca*, Satin Flycatcher; *Coracina novae-hollandiae*, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike; *Cinclosoma punctatum*, Spotted Quail-Thrush; *Oreocincla lunulata*, Australian Ground Thrush; *Calamanthus fuliginosus*, Striated Field-Wren; *Ephianura albifrons*, White-fronted Tang; *Acanthiza pusilla*, Brown Thornbill; *Acanthiza ewingi*, Tasmanian Thornbill; *Acanthornis magna*, Scrub-Tit; *Sericornis humilis*, Brown Scrub-Wren; *Malurus cyaneus*, Superb Blue Wren; *Stipiturus malachurus*, Common Emu-Wren; *Colluricincla harmonica*, Grey Shrike-

Thrush; *Zosterops westernensis*, Grey-backed Silver-eye; *Pardalotus striatus*, Striated Pardalote; *Pardalotus punctatus*, Spotted Pardalote; *Melithreptus validirostris*, Strong-billed Honey-eater; *Melithreptus affinis*, Black-headed Honey-eater; *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*, Eastern Spinebill; *Meliphaga flavicollis*, Yellow-throated Honey-eater; *Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*, Crescent Honey-eater; *Meliornis novae-hollandiae*, Yellow-winged Honey-eater; *Myzantha garrula*, Noisy Miner; *Anthochaera paradoxa*, Yellow Wattle-Bird; *Anthochaera chrysoptera*, Little Wattle-Bird; *Anthus australis*, Australian Pipit; *Zonaeginthus bellus*, Beautiful Firetail; *Corvus coronoides*, Australian Raven; *Strepera arguta*, Hill Currawong; *Strepera fuliginosa*, Black Currawong; *Cracticus torquatus*, Grey Butcher-Bird; *Gymnorhina hypoleuca*, White-backed Magpie.
