

By J. W. Mellor, "Mellor Park," Lockleys.

—December, 1926.—

A few birds have still been breeding, owing, doubtless, to the continued cool weather, with showers, right up to Christmas and New Year. Several pairs of White-winged Trillers (Caterpillar-eaters) (*Lalage tricolor*) have been about this season, and all have nested. Their nests are so fragile that it is with difficulty they can be seen, and are always placed in the fork of a horizontal bough, and composed of a little cobweb and bits of material such as cocoons, scraps of soft bark, or fluff from seeds. One pair nested in a fruit-tree of a neighbour, whose garden adjoins my place, and the female bird was so tame that while she was sitting on the nest one could go up quietly and stroke the bird, which only nestled closer to her eggs, and never attempted to fly away. On the 10th of the month I noted several Red-backed Parrots (*Psephotus haematonotus*) coming into the top of a Norfolk Island pinetree near the house. They were chattering and flying round, and were being disturbed by the Noisy Miners (*Myzantha melanocephala*), who objected to their presence there. The Parrots were evidently coming to the pine to roost, as it was just dusk on their arrival. Red-tipped Pardalotes, known also as Striped Diamond-Birds (*Pardalotus orriatus*) have been about Mellor Park all the season, and have been very active of late, calling in their pretty bob-o-link notes, and prying about in the leaves of the old redgum-trees, apparently seeking for food to supply their young. On 13th December I noted a Brown Hawk (*Falco berigora*) flying over the trees. The smaller birds were making a great fuss over its presence, calling in their usual alarmed manner. On the 15th a brood of young Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) were brought out by the parent birds from a nest in an outhouse near by, and after being cared for for a few days were able to skim about and secure their own food. On the last day of the month a Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*) was seen flying swiftly through the trees, while the Noisy Miners made quite a hubbub over his presence, and flew about in an alarmed way, trying to frighten him, without much success.

—January, 1927.—

During the month some extremely hot weather prevailed, and for a week the thermometer registered a hundred degrees

and thereabout, and during this hot spell the birds were extremely thirsty, attacking soft fruit for preference. Numerous birds came to drink at the dripping taps, or at vessels placed about with water in them for their especial benefit. I think that a practice of this sort, if carried out generally, would tend to draw the birds away from the fruit, as they often go to the fruit to allay their thirst. Just towards the close of this heat spell, on 13th January, I observed quite a lot of Fork-tailed Swifts (*Micropus pacificus*) circling high in the air, hawking about on their rakish wings, apparently after insect food, but they did not stay long. They appeared just before midday, and in an hour's time not a single bird was to be seen. The direction of their flight was about north-east, and it was apparent that the heat wave was at an end, and that these harbingers of a change were racing before it, for within 24 hours the change arrived, with wind and storm. Several White-fronted Herons (*Notophya novae-hollandiae*) have been about the River, and are the young of the parents that have bred in the old gumtrees in the paddocks adjacent. They are doing good work, now that the water is low, in eating the yabbies that burrow into the banks. Small flocks of Purple-crowned Lorikeets (*Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*) have been about during the month, flying about in the flowering redgums. On the 8th I noticed an Australian Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*) at the River flying in pursuit of the smaller birds. The useful little Nankeen Kestrels (*Falco cenchroides*) have been much in evidence about the paddocks of late, hovering over certain spots in search of mice. These pretty little Hawks have bred in the hollows of the old gumtrees, and both the parent birds and the young stay about all the year round. Quite a number of Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) have been about. I noted numbers settling in rows on the wire fence; they seemed to be young birds that were congregating.

—February, 1927.—

Even during this month there have been a few young birds about. On the 17th February I noted a pair of Noisy Miners (*Myzantha melanocephala*) feeding young just out of the nest with African boxthorn berries. Several Little Falcons (*Falco longipennis*) have been actively flying about in the back paddock, their presence being heralded by the alarm calls of a number of birds. The Noisy Miners have a very quarrelsome disposition. A few days ago I saw several flying quickly after a European Blackbird, which they chased and pecked unmercifully, until it fell exhausted to the ground beneath some bushes, and the Miners settled all round watching for the Blackbird to

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fly out again, ready to attack it at a moment's notice; but the fugitive evidently thought discretion the better part of valour, and remained in shelter until his pursuers had departed. There is no doubt that the Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*) is one of the most useful birds we possess, and repeatedly I have had evidence of its great value to the agriculturist and orchardist. The other day I was walking across the paddocks when one of these little birds flew up from a thick grassy spot in a neighbouring orchard, and in its talons it held a mouse.

