

Observation of Laughing Jackass (*Dacelo gigas*).

BY C. L. CROMPTON.

On Monday 1st September, my sister and I were sitting in the front verandah at Stonyfell, in the early afternoon, our attention was attracted to a large leafless tree close by, by a tap tapping, which we at once saw was made by a laughing jackass

breaking the head of a snake against one of the branches nearest to us, not more than 30 or 40 feet away. We were much excited and at first did not move lest he should fly away. After watching him some minutes my sister went in doors to call the other members of the household—all four came and enjoyed the wonderful sight of the jackass quietly and steadily breaking every bone in the snake beginning at the head. He snapped his beak right along to the tail moving the creature from left to right and then from right to left back to the head again. This he did three times, sitting quite still apparently, so intent that he neither saw nor cared if we were watching him. The first time the snake passed through the beak we could hear the crushing of bones, and the snake was in contracted curves, and each time as it was passed between the bill it hung in a straighter line till finally it hung like a piece of tape, we thought between eighteen inches and two feet long.

This done he dextrously turned the head into his beak and swallowed rapidly, till about six inches of the tail was left hanging down on the right side of the beak, he having his back turned towards us. For some minutes he sat quite still, then a few vigorous chuckles and it was swallowed, he carefully wiping his bill against the branch of the tree to right and left. We laughed and talked and after a minute or two more, he flew to a tree about 35 or 40 yards away looking very heavy and slow in his flight. There he settled to comfortably enjoy his very hearty meal.

Afterwards we learned that the gardener saw the bird pick up his prize in the vineyard where they were ploughing. He took it to be a large frog, so it must have been coiled up. This contradicts the theory that the laughing jackass kills its prey by dropping it on the ground from a height.

