

By E. F. Boehm.

Sutherlands, 20/8/29 to 18/10/29.

A Spotted Nightjar (*Eurostopodus guttatus*) was seen near Sutherlands during the first week of September. It flew up from the base of a mallee and settled again after flying only a few chains, and squatted flat on the ground, presenting the appearance of a lizard rather than that of a bird. On the same day a pair of Shy Ground-Wrens (*Hylacola cauta*) was kept under observation for over half an hour. They were exploring the undergrowth of the scrub, and permitted me to approach within a few feet of them. Several times one bird jumped over a foot off the ground to catch a passing insect, and then gave it to its mate. A Crested Bellbird (*Oreoica cristata*) was seen feeding on termites (or white ants) at a place where a mallee stump had just been grubbed out. A family of Purple-backed Wrens (*Malurus assimilis*) and a female Hooded Robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*) also took part in the feast. I imitated the call of a Bellbird, and received an answering call from an

apparently distant bird. Judge of my surprise when I discovered that the "distant" notes came from the bird under observation, not more than ten feet away. He continued answering my calls, and at length his inquisitiveness impelled him to come within a yard of me. A number of Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*) was seen in a thick scrub composed of mallee shoots and *Geijera*. They were feeding on the seeds of the latter. Bronzewing are also fond of the fruits of the Ruby Saltbush (*Enchylaena*) and the Wild Cherry (*Exocarpus*). The seeds of several species of Acacia, notably *Acacia oswaldii*, also provide food. I have occasionally seen some of the birds beneath Bullock-bushes (*Heterodendron*); presumably they eat the fallen seeds. Two Elegant Parrots (*Neophema elegans*) were seen on the railway-line between Sutherlands and Deep Creek. They were feeding on the seeds of Barley-grass (*Hordeum*), Speargrass (*Stipa*), and *Zygo-phylum*. Many White-winged Trillers (*Lalage tricolor*) have been seen during the past two months, but Cuckoos appear to be rare this season. A few Pallid Cuckoos (*Cuculus pallidus*) are the only *Cuculidae* that have been definitely identified. Many Honeyeaters were seen along the Saltwater Creek recently. They were getting nectar and insects from the flowering eucalypti on the banks of the creek. Several Diamond Firetails (*Zonaeginthus guttatus*) were seen in a clump of Teatrees (*Melaleuca pubescens*), and a few Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*) and Singing Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga virescens*) were exploring some native Boxthorns (*Lycium australe*) near a small waterfall. Black-fronted Dotterels (*Charadrius melanops*) were running about in the shallow water among the reeds, and a chick was seen crouching against the bank of the creek near the water. Its parents did the "wounded-bird" trick while I was in the neighbourhood. A few solitary Nankeen Kestrels (*Falco cenchroides*) have been noted. Their food consists almost entirely of small lizards and beetles at present, as other food is scarce, owing to the dry season. The Copper-tailed Skink (*Himula taeniolata*), Snake-eyed Skink (*Ablepharus boutonii*), and the smaller Dragons (*Amphibolurus*) constitute the chief articles of diet, though a fair number of reddish brown Dung Beetles are also eaten. Occasionally a Nankeen Kestrel will take a chicken, but I think this is more than balanced by the good services of the species during seasons when mice are numerous. I have known a pair of Nankeen Kestrels to rear their young within a stone's-throw of a shed where about 70 domestic Pigeons were breeding, and never on any occasion did the Kestrels interfere with the

Pigeons.. Some weeks ago, while walking along a gully which leads across an open paddock, I saw a family of Blue-and-White Wrens (*Malurus cyanotus*) among some native boxthorns and *Acacia collettioides*. I followed the birds for a while, but they soon became aware of my presence, and flew up into a large spreading *Acacia oswaldii*, and refused to be flushed from it. The Purple-backed Wrens (*M. assimilis*) inhabit the neighbouring scrub, but they rarely venture into the open, which is the territory of the Blue-and-White Wrens. While working some thick scrub one early morning, I heard many Chestnut Quail-Thrushes (*Cinclosoma castanotum*) and a few Southern Scrub-Robins (*Drymodes brunneopygia*) calling. The Scrub-Robin will sit on top of a *Geijera* or on a mallee-bough and give vent to its feelings with a far-reaching "Chip-ip-pee" or "Chip-pee." By imitating these calls I have sometimes induced the bird to come within a few feet of me. The Chestnut Quail-Thrush is not so confiding. The usual call of this bird is a plaintive piping whistle which sounds like "Pee-pee-pee-pee-pee-pee," but when perched on a bough or bush they have a different call, which I find impossible to write phonetically. A Black-winged Currawong (*Strepera melanoptera*) was noted near Sutherlands, and a few Crimson Chats (*Epthamvura tricolor*) have been seen in several parts of the district. Red-tailed Thornbills (*Acanthiza hamiltoni*) and Gilbert Whistlers (*Pachycephala inornata*) were seen twelve miles north-east of Sutherlands. Both birds are fine singers. At the same place I saw several Rufous Whistlers (*P. rufiventris*) and a few White-eared Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga leucotis*). The White-browed Babblers (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*) and the Chestnut-crowned (*P. ruficeps*) were also seen. The Masked Wood-Swallows (*Artamus personatus*) are very numerous at present, and the Red-backed Kingfisher (*Halcyon pyrrhopygius*) and a few Rainbow-Birds (*Merops ornatus*) have been noted during the week.

25/11/29.

The recent rain has revived some of the fodder plants, but much more is required to have a marked effect on the country. The comparatively small number of birds I have noted nesting here this season is a striking feature, and I cannot do otherwise than blame the drought for the state of affairs.