

*BRUMMITT—The White-faced Heron.*The White-faced Heron (*Notophoxyx novae-hollandiae*)—

Some Habits Noted from a Pair in Captivity.

By D. W. Brummitt.

The birds were taken from a nest in a gumtree about half a mile from a swamp near Robe, S.E., S.A., in January, 1932. They were then fully fledged, but unable to fly. They very soon became tame and would perch on one's legs when lying out in the sun, and they even played with the dog.

While still in the South-East they were fed on the flesh of rabbits, which was easily obtainable, but since they have been in the city they have been fed on beef, which is given to them in water so as not to be too sticky. If it is still too sticky they wash it in the pond before swallowing it.

After a meal they always stand with feathers ruffled, and shiver from head to foot for about five minutes. This is only done after meals. Sometimes they ruffle their feathers and have a sham fight accompanied with much croaking. This is done when they are hungry as well as after a meal.

One day while chasing a half-grown mouse in an aviary the mouse escaped through the netting into the garden, only to be caught and killed by one of the Herons which had been standing about six feet away. The bird smashed up the mouse to a pulp, soaked it in water and swallowed it whole. Since then several mice have been provided as food and have been similarly treated.

Another habit, which has been noticed also in another Heron, is that of picking up pieces of grass and sticks and soaking them in water. The birds play with them in the water for a while, and then let them sink when waterlogged. There does not seem to be any evident explanation for this.

The birds obtain quite a large amount of food in the form of flies, which they stalk and catch. When a fly is seen the bird immediately moves to within striking distance, then half extends the neck, which immediately begins to vibrate. After apparently balancing for a few seconds the bird strikes and rarely misses. Often they do the same to pebbles, etc., whether mistaking them for flies, or for practice, I do not know.

Unfortunately, owing to a calcium deficiency in the beef diet the birds developed rickets and one had a very malformed leg. However, cod-liver oil and shellgrit quickly restored the birds to excellent health and they make their portion of the garden very interesting indeed.