

## Correspondence.

To the Editors "The South Australian Ornithologist."

Dear Sirs,

I was interested in Mr. Pearse's notes on the Florieton District birds in the "South Australian Ornithologist" of April, 1908, and would like to say a word on a couple of points.

Of the Fork-tailed Kite (*Milvus migrans*) Mr. Pearse writes that one has become very tame, stooping to snatch up scraps of meat thrown to it, and he adds, "It has incidentally swooped on my chickens, too, without success," which the writer infers was done with evil intent. But was it? I have been bird-watching a great many years in Western Queensland, where this Kite is very common indeed, and I have read widely in Australian ornithological literature, but I have never seen one of them attempt to injure a living bird or\* read of any one else having done so. They are constant attendants about bush homesteads out here, on the look-out for scraps, and I have frequently seen one dive among poultry, which it scattered; and rise again, not with a chicken in its talons, but with the scrap of meat or chop-bone that the fowls were pecking at. The fowls show not the slightest uneasiness at *Milvus migrans*, but seek shelter with

cacklings of dismay should a Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*) or a Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*) show up. The Kite, I'm afraid, is blamed, by the unobservant, at times for the sins of the former of the two mentioned. *Milvus migrans* is one of the most valuable birds we have, being 100 per cent. good.

A further point I would touch on is in connection with our song-birds. Writing of the Grey Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*), Mr. Pearse quotes W. Hatfield as saying that having heard the English song-birds, including the Nightingale, he gives the palm to this Butcher-Bird. Personally, I would vote for the Nightingale; but it's not fair to compare the notes, the voices of these two birds being of such widely different types and different timbre. †Environment, too, seems to act, like accompaniment to the human voice; the Butcher-Bird is at its best in the early morning, in bright sunlight, with all nature on the move around it, while the Nightingale is heard only in the silence and stillness of a summer (May) night‡, the delicate scent of wild flowers and moist woodland soil making background. The Butcher-Bird has glorious notes, the Nightingale has wondrous song. Of the Nightingale, how says old Izaak Walton? "Lord, what music hast thou provided for the Saints in Heaven, when thou affordest bad men such music on earth!"

Most people name only two Australian song-birds, Butcher-Birds and Magpies. But the Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus*

[\* We can find only one reference—"South Australian Ornithologist," Vol. XII, p. 263, 1934. Mr. J. Neil McGilp wrote:—"The writer can recall an instance when a Black Kite was seen chasing an enormous flock of Shell Parrots (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), so large, in fact, that it seemed that the Kite must be successful; when the Parrots manoeuvred in a circle it was able to catch up to them, but they opened out and the attacker passed through without harming one of them. After repeating this for some time the Kite gave the job up in disgust."

† Shakespeare, "Merchant of Venice," Act 5, scene 1, lines 104, etc.

Portia.—The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark,  
When neither is attended; and I think,  
The nightingale, if she should sing by day,  
When every goose is cackling, would be thought  
No better a musician than the wren.

‡ Professor Alfred Newton, in A Dictionary of Birds, pp. 635-636, states that:—"Poets and novelists are apt to command at will the song of this bird, irrespective of season. If the appearance of truth is to be regarded, it is dangerous to introduce the Nightingale as singing in England before the 15th of April or after the 15th of June . . . the bird justly celebrated beyond all others by European writers for the admirable vocal powers which . . . it exercises at all hours of the day and night. The song itself is indescribable. . . . It is accordingly to be observed that the cock alone sings. . . ."—[Editors.]

*australis*) and the Brown Honeyeater (*Gliciphila indistincta*) are both exceptionally sweet singers. The former, from its habit of singing at night and the sweetness of its notes, may deservedly be looked upon as the Nightingale's understudy. The owner of a small orange orchard up this way told me that there was a Canary in the orchard which must have got away from captivity. She had not been able to see it, but heard it often. She was, of course, looking for a small yellow bird, while the singer was actually a Brown Honeyeater.

Yours truly, F. C. Berney.

"Barcarolle," Longreach, Queensland,  
13th June, 1938.

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