

## NEST AND EGGS OF THE CHESTNUT-BREADED WHITEFACE

by G. B. RAGLESS.

As far as I have been enabled to determine, the nest and eggs of the Chestnut-breasted Whiteface (*Aphelocephala pectoralis*) have never been described. The purpose of this paper is to fulfil this need.

On July 26, 1968, while walking with a companion on gibber plains at Myrtle Springs Station, about 14 miles south-west of Lyndhurst, we located an old nest built in a bush of *Kochia pyramidata* Benth., which we were unable to identify. It was probably over two years old and in a very poor condition, but having a knowledge of nest construction of species common in the area, we were convinced that this was the work of a bird unknown to us. Shortly afterwards our attention was drawn to a pair of birds of the above species. Some watching and waiting eventually showed them at a nest under construction of the same type as the one first found. On August 10 this nest contained three eggs, and a further two old nests were found in the area.

### HABITAT

Open tableland covered with gibber, treeless, and moderately grazed by sheep. Following the bad drought years of 1966 and 1967, plenty of annual herbage had germinated after the heavy rains of early 1968.

Among the plants growing were *Rolypoly Salsola kali* var. *strobilifera* Benth., a Bindyeye species *Bassia limbata* Black (1922), a *Sisymbrium* sp., *Zygophyllum prismatothecum* FvM., and three annual Composites *Calotis hispidula* (FvM.) FvM., *Helipterum microglossum* (FvM. ex Benth.) Maiden & Betche (1897), and *Helipterum pygmaeum* (DC.) Benth. The only permanent bush growing in the area was *Kochia pyramidata*, which had sprouted fresh growth above dead twigs caused by the drought.

### NEST

Placed about 12 inches above the ground in the centre of a *Kochia* bush with the entrance pointing towards the south-east. A globular type, measuring 5 inches in length

and 4 inches in thickness, with entrance of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter at the side towards the top. The nest was very loosely constructed of dead twigs of the bush in which it was placed. There was no other dry material or grass in the area. It was lined with a little sheep's wool and fine feathers, mostly of the Cinnamon Quail-Thrush. The twigs used in its construction were of the same type as used by the Banded Whiteface (*Aphelocephala nigricincta*) in the construction of its nest, and the bush had a resemblance to ones used by this species. The chief difference was the complete absence of any spout or tunnel entrance, said to be up to 9 inches in length, used by *nigricincta*.

See photograph p. 86.

### EGGS

Three in number. Rounded oval in shape, pale pink ground colour and without gloss in each case.

- (a) Measures 17.45 mm. x 13.05 mm., covered with purplish grey markings, being dark and dense on the large end.
- (b) Measures 16.60 mm. x 12.75 mm., marked in same colour but less heavily.
- (c) Measures 18.00 mm. x 12.95 mm., marked in same manner as (b).

Compared to eggs of the Eastern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis* they are decidedly smaller, much duller in colour and lack their gloss.

### GENERAL NOTES

Both birds frequently called with a weak chatter in some respects resembling the Eastern Whiteface. Except when moving in short flights, they remained on the ground, which made them very difficult to detect. The area is seldom visited by observers, and I would be surprised if the bird is not in good numbers in view of the hundreds of square miles of suitable country. The three old nests (and others?) indicate a previous breeding, which could have taken place about March, 1966, when the country was in reasonably good condition following rains. The Eastern Whiteface (prob. *A. l. pallida*)

was noted about 6 miles away on a subsequent visit. Other birds noted in the area were Brown Songlark, Blue-and-White Wren, Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo, Crimson Chat, Orange Chat, Cinnamon Quail-Thrush, Rusty Field-Wren, Australian Pipit, Stubble-Quail and Little Quail. All except the last three had evidence of breeding.

#### TAXONOMY

Dr. A. Keast<sup>(1)</sup> has reviewed the genus, but knowledge of distribution is limited. John Gould in 1871 described and named the species from a specimen received from F. G. Waterhouse, said to have been taken at Port Augusta. This rather loosely named type locality has not been the scene of any further recordings, despite some able workers being in the area. A hundred years ago no other towns were in the vicinity, which could be used to more precisely fix the position. The collector may have been F. W. Andrews, and the habitat in the Pimba-Woomera area appeals to me as the likely locality.

Captain S. A. White<sup>(4)</sup> found the species West of Oodnadatta (1914) at Wantapella<sup>(2)</sup> Swamp and near Todmorden (1919). During this period of 44 years

without records there appears to have been some hesitation to accept it as a true species. It was hinted that the 1870 specimen may have been an immature Banded Whiteface (*A. nigricincta*)—rather an injustice to Gould. The issue was settled in 1921, when J. N. McGilp<sup>(3)</sup> secured young of the latter species clearly showing the black band.

#### RECENT SIGHTINGS

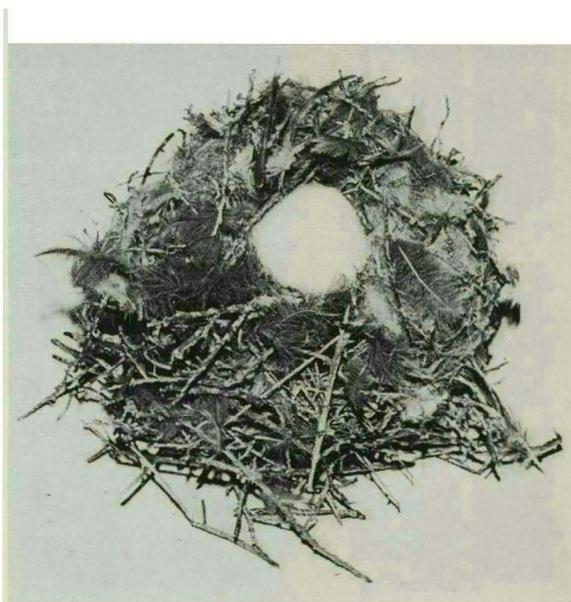
See Bird Report, 1966-67 (*S. Aust. Orn.* vol. 25 (1968) p. 27).

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Messrs. Morrie and Norman Smith for permission to visit Myrtle Springs Station, and Mr. Richard Schodde for identification of plant material.

#### REFERENCES

- (1) Keast, Dr. Allen (1955-56). 'Variation in the Australian Whitefaces.' *Proc. Zool. Soc. N.S.W.* pp. 39-40.
- (2) Mathews, Gregory (1923). *Birds of Australia*. vol. 11. He gives three spellings of this place when describing the species.
- (3) McGilp, J. N. (1921). 'The Black-Banded Whiteface.' *Emu* vol. 21, 49-50.
- (4) White, Capt. S. A. (1914). 'A Long Lost Bird.' *S. Aust. Orn.* vol. 1 part 4, 26. See also *Tran. R. Soc. of S.A.* vol. 39 (1915).



Nest of Chestnut-breasted Whiteface  
(*Aphelocephala pectoralis*). See p. 98.