

ON THE SPREAD OF PINES AND BRIDAL CREEPER BY BIRDS

[From a letter (dated 16-10-69) to Sir John Cleland following notes on this subject by Sir John in this journal, vol. 25 (1969) pp. 110 and 112.]

Over the years, having seen many young pines growing in odd places, my conclusions are that the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo is solely responsible. When a flock of these birds settle in pines to feed a bird will select a cone and bite it off at the stem. The cone is then held in one foot, and starting at the base each segment is lifted and the seed extracted and eaten.

On many occasions, when the feeding birds are suddenly startled and take wing, several of the cockatoos will fly some distance carrying a partly eaten cone in the bill, and will often re-settle in the nearest tall tree to finish the meal, or else drop the cone after flying perhaps half a mile from the feeding site.

This is quite a common practice and has

been seen many times on my own property, hence young pines shoot up in most unlikely spots.

Finding the agent responsible for the spread of Bridal Creeper is more difficult. These berries do not appear to be really palatable to any particular bird, and the distribution of seeds is probably brought about by several species of casual feeders. Sparrows and Starlings eat a small quantity and Silvereyes take a few; while along the coast, from Robe to Beachport, Singing and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters have been seen feeding in the creeper. All of these would be eating the berries for fruit and not for seeds and so would help to spread the pest.

Bridal Creeper is already strangling acres of coastal scrub and strong measures are needed to prevent its further encroachment on areas of native vegetation.

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