

Australia's Mocking Bird.

—By Edwin Ashby, F.L.S., M.B.O.U.—

The Victorian Lyre-Bird (*Menura novæ-hollandiæ victoriæ* Gould).—Although the season for the Lyre-Birds to be calling had not arrived, Easter Monday, being very wet, one of my friends suggested that we should go into the Fern Gullies, and try and hear this wonderful bird, as heavy rain seems to

brighten them up. We had hardly reached a deep gully (that had once been rung out, but is now fast going back into luxuriant scrub) with rain pouring down, when we heard a Lyre-Bird calling "chunk, chunk," with a metallic ring in this loud note, which my companion told me was the bird's natural note, not an imitation cry. We took off our mackintoshes, because of the swish they make as one pushes through the scrub, and hoped the rain would ease off a bit, as we preferred not to be soaked to the skin. The bird was calling some quarter of a mile away, on the top of the ridge, of which the fern-gully formed the foot.

On reaching the top of the ridge, we found that the bird we were after was still a quarter of a mile further on, but another then commenced calling nearer to us, so we, with the greatest care, worked our way, moving only when the bird was calling, and stopping dead when the bird was silent, and at last, by this method, succeeded in working our way through the scrub till we were under 50 yards from the bird. We then waited for a long time, enjoying the treat of its wonderful performance.

(1) It had been uttering its original cry for some time—"chunk, chunk," repeated in duplicate, with a short breathing space between each repetition.

(2) It went through the flute-like whistle of the Butcher-bird (*Bulestes torquatus olindus* Mat.), giving the full run of liquid, flute-like notes of that bird to perfection. Then a pause, while the Lyre was listening, then came

(3) the strange, long-drawn-out notes of the Gang Gang Cockatoo (*Callocephalon galeatum* Lath.). These were repeated several times, and again absolute silence; followed by

(4) the two long-drawn-out notes of the Coach-Whip Bird, ending with the resounding "crack" for which that bird is noted. Again silence, and then the flute-like notes of the Butcher Bird greeted our ears; in fact, these notes recurred several times throughout the performance.

(5) The impressive silence was followed by the weird wailing notes of the Funeral Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus xanthanotus* Gould), several wails being given before the next silence.

(6) Then came the harsh, guttural call of the Wattle Bird, (*Coleia carunculata tregellasi* Mat.), so familiar to us all; this followed by the swish and rustle of the bird's beautiful tail as he shook it over his back, and rustled the long tail feathers together. We were just too far away to get this sound properly. This part of the performance was immediately followed by

(7) the piping flute notes of the White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca leuconota* Gould); again a stillness that could be felt, and

(8) then came the shrill whistle of the Crimson Parrot (*Platycercus elegans elegans* Gmelin), very similar to that of the Adelaide Rosella, which most of my readers know so well. Silence was then followed

(9) by the call of the Grey Crow Shrike (*Neostrepera versicolor* Vieill.) but better known as (*S. cuneicaudata* Vieill.), a bird I have never seen in any other part of Australia, and it is just 34 years since I previously collected it within 20 miles of Yinnar. In spring and summer this bird keeps to the higher ranges and forest country, only coming down to the orchards as winter approaches.

(10) After a short pause we listened to a perfect imitation of the familiar whistling of the Victorian Grey Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica victoriae* Mat.); the usual "Bob, bob Whitehead" series of notes was most plain.

(11) The whistle of another parrot was distinguished by my companions, but being unfamiliar to me, I did not recognise it, namely the Victorian King Parrot (*Alisterus cyanopygius neglectus* Mat.); its whistle was rather dovetailed in with others.

(12) The last production that we were able to easily recognise was that of the Victorian White-throated Thickhead (*Pachycephala pectoralis youngi* Mat.); only a portion of the full Nightingale-like notes of this splendid songster were produced, but there was no doubt as to their identity, the typical "swish sound" completing the series.

(13) In addition to the foregoing, the twittering of some of the small insectivorous birds were imitated splendidly.

While we were careful to record the series, the order of production was not accurately preserved; for instance, the Butcher Bird's long run of flute-like notes was produced several times during the performance, as were the notes of several others—the Wattle Bird and the Thickhead, being imitated more than once.

To the above record of the performance of this particular bird as heard by the writer, my friends with whom I was staying (and who have lived 30 years in the locality) were able to add some interesting examples of the powers of mimicry of the Lyre Bird.

Mr. John Walker, when in the Jumbuck Range of mountains, saw a Lyre Bird fly and settle in a spot not 20 feet away from where he stood; he kept perfectly still, when the bird commenced imitating a bitch dingo with pups, the whimpering of the litter of pups as they tried to follow their parent as she travelled through the bush, was, he tells me, quite perfect.

This record is of particular interest, as nowadays it is difficult enough to get an opportunity of hearing dingo pups in the bush, much less to hear a perfect imitation thereof.

Mr. Joseph Walker told me of an instance, when he was close to a Lyre Bird which was imitating the clink and ringing sound made by the knocking together of two metal wedges used by the woodsmen in felling timber; this sound is common when the wedges are thrown down after splitting a log. He also heard the bird imitate perfectly the sound of a crosscut saw. My son also in the same locality watched a cock Lyre Bird going through a wonderful performance on a log, and amongst its other items was the sound of stapling a wire fence; the peculiar ringing sound caused by the vibration of the wire was got to a nicety; all these records have been obtained on the Walkers' property.

On paying a second visit to the same gully where I had listened to the cock's performance, I heard in the bottom of the gully a loud, guttural note, repeated in couplets, best described as "chunk chunk," but less metallic and more guttural than the cock-bird's natural note; this had also a sort of quaver in it, quite distinct from the other. I managed to get quite close, and then saw the boughs of a tall wattle moving as a heavy bird jumped from bough to bough, thus ascending the tree till 15 or 20 ft. high, when the bird (a hen) volplaned down to the bottom of the gully in full view about 20 paces away from me, tail held straight out behind.

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