

Birds in a Private Garden.

By J. Neil McGilp, King's Park.

A few evenings ago, as I sat with my family on our veranda watching the birds flit to and fro amongst the shrubs, creepers, and flowers of our garden, my little daughter asked me if birds were thicker in the scrub than in our garden. I said, "Yes." Then I began to realize that I had given little thought to the matter, and had given the reply which is conventional, one that I had formed from reading.

As we sat watching we saw a party of four Spinebill Honey-eaters, each hanging head downwards on a spike of red salvia, which, by reason of the weight of the bird, had bent right over. With its long sickle-like bill each bird was probing the flowers after honey. A pair of Willie-Wagtails was observed, busily engaged darting here and there in short flights after insects, and several little Silver-eyes were threading their way through the rosebushes after insects, while we knew from experience that there were other Silver-eyes at work on our peaches, grapes, and figs in the back yard. As we watched we noticed with pleasure that the pair of Blue-Wrens that had recently taken up quarters with us, thereby filling a blank caused by the loss of a pair that had lived and bred in our garden for years, were quite at home as they worked along the ground amid the flower-beds, dashing here and there with tails erect after insects and grubs that they had disturbed. Then our attention was called, by a call of "Chickawee," to a pair of White-plumed Honey-eaters, familiar to us as "Greenies." These birds were enjoying life as they searched for honey in a honey-suckle, ever and anon rising after an insect that tried to escape. Its food is, I believe, more insect than honey. We heard also the weird "Chock" from the back yard, where the three Wattle-Birds took toll of our peach and nectarine crop. This we begrudge them, as they come only in the fruit season. We saw also a company of five Yellow-rumped Tits working in and out of our hedge after insect life; also many introduced birds. The little Goldfinch was hanging on to some dead seedpods of a yellow daisy, the Sparrow was hunting through and through the hedge, while we heard the little chuckle of the Blackbird as it made a find when scratching up the earth under a dense broombush. Later on we know that our garden will be visited by other native birds, such as the Scarlet Robin, the Flame Robin, and the little White-shafted Fantail, and many others will call for a day or two at least.

Now, there are thousands of gardens larger than our own. I know of one less than an acre in extent where the owner on one afternoon showed me nests with eggs or young of four "Bluecaps," as he called the Blue-Wren, two "Greenies," and the remarkable nest of the "Yellow-tail," the Yellow-rumped Tit.

My little daughter's question has opened up a new aspect to me. I am not now inclined to accept the well-worn idea that the building of a city diminishes native bird life. I know that certain forms of bird life must go out of the occupied area, but I realize that numbers of other species that can adapt themselves to the altered conditions do increase.

As one walks along our streets one might imagine that bird life is very scarce, but it is in the gardens and back yards that hundreds of birds that otherwise would not be living on the same area of virgin land are found.

I think that we are too apt to look on introduced birds as pests. Individually they do as much good as a similar native bird, and it is only when they arrive in great numbers that they become a nuisance. So would it be with our native birds that were of similar habit.
