

Stray Feathers

The Origin of Some Bird Names.—The name *Regulus* was originally applied to the Wren in pre-Linnæan days, and took its origin from the fable, in which the birds agreed to accept the highest flier as their king. The Eagle was about to be proclaimed, when it was discovered that the Wren was perched upon his back, and was therefore made king of the birds. Linnæus first applied the name specifically to the Gold-crest as *Motacilla regulus*, perhaps mistaking it for the bird of the fable, or perhaps on account of the gold crest being likened to a crown. Cuvier, in the early part of last century, made a new genus for the bird, taking the specific name, and using it generically, as was so often done in those days. The name *Geobasileus*, meaning King of the Earth, was apparently applied from the association of ideas. The Genus *Acanthiza* was made by Vigors and Horsfield in a paper read before the Linnæan Society on June 21, 1825, and January 17, 1826, which was published in the Transactions of the Society in 1827. In this paper a number of new genera were formed, many still in use, but some obsolete. In each case the derivation of the name is given, the Greek being translated into Latin; no English rendering is given. They give the origin of *Acanthiza* as *Acantheon-dumetum-zao-vivo*. Riddle's Latin Dictionary gives *dumetum* as meaning a place set with bushes, a thicket, a brake. The meaning of the name is therefore Scrub Dweller, and has nothing to do with the beak.—(Dr.) A. M. MORGAN, 206 North Terrace, Adelaide, S.A.

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Colour-Changes in the Silver Gull.—The change which the bill of the Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) undergoes each year, from red to black, appears to correspond fairly closely in regard to time, with the plumage-change of the male Blue Wren [*Emu*, Vol. XXII., page 323]. On 17th February there was a male Wren skulking in a native shrub at Mersey Bluff, in the throes of his moult; the beautiful cobalt-blue of the crown, cheeks, and mantle had become faded and dirty, and the whole plumage had a most disreputable appearance, of which the bird seemed quite conscious. On 26th of same month a party of Silver Gulls was floating on the water near the rock on which I sat; all members of the party had bills either black or, in some cases, midway between red and black, the change to dark being not yet complete. By July, and, in many cases, I think, before that month, these bills will all be red once more, and the Blue Wren, seen only a few yards from the same rock, will have assumed his beautiful nuptial attire. I can find no reference to this seasonal change in the Gull in the Australian books which I have, yet it must be widely known. If there is a change in the tint of the legs also, it must be far less pronounced than in the bills, for the legs of almost all the individuals of the group noticed were red, and are that colour also in winter. The one

or two members who seemed to have darker limbs were probably young birds of the season which had not yet attained the brighter tint. The Gulls were busily engaged, while floating about, in picking some small objects off the water-surface, probably shrimp-like crustaceans, which have been very plentiful of late off this coast.—H. STUART DOVE, F.Z.S., W. Devonport, Tas.

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Birds of a National Park.—In contrast with colder countries, there is no month of the year in Australia when one wild bird or another is not breeding. The present time, however—say, from February to June—is the slackest period for the bird-observer; and, because of this, we were doubly pleased on Sunday last (February 3) to find several birds' nests in active use at the Waterfall end of Sydney's National Park. Prettiest of all was the picture created by a Rufous Fantail that had a dainty nest—shaped like a wine-glass with the bottom broken off—placed in a tree beside a creek, on a small branch about four feet from the ground. The familiar Grey (White-shafted) Fantail is a graceful figure on its nest; to this grace the Red Fantail adds beauty—a really pleasing medley of white, black, and rufous on throat and head, blending into brown on the back, which in turn gives way to a broad expanse of rufous. And the dominating tail (which can be expanded as wide as any fan) folded and extended beyond the margin of the nest, seems to harmonise most amiably with the quaint "tail" that extends below the cup of the nest. Other nests noted were one of the cup-shaped, mossy homes of the cheery Black-faced Flycatcher, and two of the bulky cradles of the sprightly Yellow-throated Scrub-wren. Called by settlers in the north the "Devilbird" and "Black-nest Bird," the Scrub-wren of the yellow throat is notable for its fondness for dark gullies, where it suspends dark rootlets and twigs in untidy masses from vines or branches, usually overhanging watercourses. For all their unkempt appearance, however, these black nests are very cosy within; the babies in each of the two nests examined were very comfortable and healthy.

There was once (and probably still is) a common impression that the Lyre-bird, admittedly a master mocker, has to "take the knock" in respect of one particular bird-call, to wit, the laughter of the Kookaburra. It may be, of course, that some Lyre-birds have failed in attempting this (and good observers have testified to the failures, through only hearing the quaint cackle on rare occasions). At all events, we had abundant evidence that the Lyre-bird is not only able to mimic the Kookaburra, but can render that extraordinary vocal jumble created by two Jacks chortling together. Nor was this cleverness confined to one Lyre-bird; two birds, miles apart, performed the same feat. It was, indeed, a pleasant surprise to find the *Menuras* so voiceful in February; their best efforts are made in the early spring. Listening to one bird for five minutes or so, we jotted down the names of fourteen different birds which it mimicked



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