

first seen by Mr H. R. McKenzie and myself on February 8, 1942, in a flock of *finschi*, and we had no doubt that it had recently arrived with them from the South Island. It was regularly seen throughout the winter, and when other *finschi* departed in early spring it remained behind and attached itself to a colony of stilts breeding on fresh water pools just behind the beach. While it was here I noted that it had a poor thin voice and, hard though it tried, it could not produce the ringing, piercing "tweep" of a full-blooded *finschi*. It was still present on January 2, 1943, but sometime after that it disappeared. It may have travelled farther north with other *finschi* that were passing through. However, on January 2, 1944, it was back again. We concluded it must be the same bird, for it behaved in the same way and haunted the same places. On May 21 it was obviously showing much more colour. We had always noted an underlying "gingerishness" on certain parts of its plumage, particularly on the upper back, and this was now darkening. On August 20, when last seen, it was a surprisingly different bird. From the head down to the lower chest it was a correct *finschi*. But though the fore edge of the wings was black, their near edge was white, as was also the tail. In flight it was a striking bird, all black in front, all white behind; except, of course, for beak and legs, of which the colour was now almost normal.

I have given these details because I know of no other instances when an albino has assumed almost normal plumage. When we last saw our bird it must have been at least nearly three years old; and if, as seems likely, it was a juvenal when it first reached the Firth of Thames, it seems that as it matured its proper pigments belatedly started to function.

The taxonomic status of *finschi* is still in doubt. As one who for many years was familiar with *Hæmatopus ostralegus* in Britain, perhaps I may state my reasons for believing that *finschi* must be considered a sub-species of *ostralegus*. In the field the two forms are very alike. Plumage differences are slight, perhaps the most obvious being that in winter British oystercatchers show a white patch on the throat. In voice and habits, too, here is general agreement. Both forms show a strong tendency to flock and migrate, but whereas some British oystercatchers nest inland, it appears that all *finschi* do so.

THE WHITE-FACED HERON.

By B. A. ELLIS.

The white-faced heron (*Notophox novae-hollandiae*) is not an uncommon bird in the lower Shag Valley. About the spring of 1941 a pair of herons was noticed in the vicinity, and they chose for their nesting site one of the many bluegums surrounding a homestead, and only a few hundred yards from a creek where food was obtained during nesting. Here they successfully reared a family of two, and so have

annually returned to this location to nest. It has been noticed that the young are permitted to remain until the next season, when they are driven off by the original pair.

Nesting begins in October, and for the last three years two young herons have been flying by early December. One young heron which broke its wing in leaving the nest was cared for at the homestead for some time, and would come at call for scraps of meat, of which it took large quantities. Eventually, however, it was drowned in a flood.

This season was the only one in which a second nest was built, apparently as the first was marauded, one downy young bird being found dead beneath the tree. I climbed to this second nest, with the disappointing knowledge that the two young had left only two or three days before (about 15th January). It was built about 60-70 feet up next to the trunk of a macrocarpa tree which stood among bluegums, and consisted entirely of dry bluegum twigs—mostly about a foot long and a little thinner than a lead pencil. It was about one foot six across, and nearly nine inches deep, and built rather like a pigeon's nest, only more cup-shaped. It is interesting to note that a sparrow's nest was placed in one corner, and it seemed that the two families had been present at the same time. For about two days the young herons flew to and from this nesting tree to another tree, apparently "getting their wings."

A few days later I watched, after a very careful approach, the herons feeding at a pond in the hills. The birds would wade knee-deep in the water with wary and measured step then swiftly lunge their beaks into the grasses and usually, though not always, lift up a kicking frog, which, after a peck or two, was devoured. It was amusing to watch the grotesque attitudes assumed when a harrier flew low over the swamp.

A BLACKBIRD NESTING STORY.

By H. R. MCKENZIE.

The nest was built on the bare window-sill behind a screen of climbing geranium mixed with a strong growth of *Muhlenbeckia australis*, heavily screened from without by the greenery, but with only the window sash and glass between it and the inside of the room. I could see the bird on the nest by raising my head a few inches from the pillow only five feet away. She did not become very tame, and great caution had to be used, especially in the earlier stages. I work away from home, so most of the observations are for morning and evening only. Details of times and dates were carefully kept, and the averages given are exact for the periods of observation.

The building of the nest was not pursued steadily..

26-27/9/42.—The hen bird visited the site each morning.

28/9/42.—7 a.m.: Noted a scanty ring of grass on the sill.

29/9/42.—The whole framework of the nest was erected, with some mud on the inside.

30/9/42.—The hen started work at 6.45 a.m., making trips every two to three minutes. She ceased at night when some fibre lining