

located, at a height of about 6 feet from ground-level. The parent-birds soon responded, and though refusing to enter the box, fed the nestlings through the wire.

When I examined them the same evening, the two chicks were completely covered with the excretion of the mistletoe-berries, the parent-birds, of course, being unable to attend to them. There was nothing I could do but sponge off the covering with warm water and cotton-wool and, after drying, the chicks were replaced in the box on some bird wire to try to minimise the trouble. Some "shivery-grass" was also placed in the box below the wire. Although this proved partially successful I found it still necessary to carry out ablutions each evening.

Naturally enough, much time was spent with them and with the parent-birds who soon came to accept me as a sort of friend in adversity. But, of course, eventually the time came for them to depart. I released them and so accustomed had they become to me and their artificial surroundings, that at first they made no effort even to move away. I then placed them on the branch of a nearby Cootamundra wattle and it was only after insistent calling and similar coaxing that the parent birds succeeded in inducing the young birds to join them. They were still in the tree the next day but thereafter they became two of the number of Painteds then inhabiting the locality.

A chance happening, an extra heavy gust of wind, provided me with the opportunity to reap much in the way of knowledge of the species; leaving behind it also a persisting sympathy for *Grantiella picta* and his housing-hazards.

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## Bird Survival in a Whirlwind

By J. N. HOBBS, Buronga, N.S.W.

During the afternoon of December 3, 1960, a series of violent hailstorms passed over Dungog, New South Wales. Eye-witnesses described the falling hailstones as "big as your fist", "as large as a teacup", etc. Exaggerated as these descriptions may sound, they are not far from the truth. I measured conglomerate hailstones with a diameter of 4 inches, and it is possible that stones falling nearer the storm centres may have been larger. During one of these storms, a whirlwind developed in the mountain gullies north of the town and subsequently swept across some 10 miles of open and forested country, leaving a strip of devastation, 300 yards wide, in its wake. A number of houses in the track of the whirlwind were completely demolished, their roofs and walls being carried for distances of up to a mile; a sedan car with its occupants was picked up and thrown some 60 feet over a fence; another car had the major part of the paintwork stripped off by flying dirt and debris. Not a tree was left undamaged; for the most part being either uprooted, twisted off at the butt or having every branch

pulled off, only saplings of less than 3 inches in diameter withstanding the wind to any degree. Trees of up to 3 feet or more in diameter at the base were not only uprooted but thrown scores of yards from their original positions. Eye-witness accounts of huge branches and trees floating around over 500 feet above the ground were probably correct. It may well be imagined that no bird could survive such a storm.

My official duties took me into the devastated area within minutes of the passing of the whirlwind and, although my attention was mainly directed to assisting the persons in the demolished homes, I could not fail to observe that small birds were active in the area. An hour after the passing of the wind I commenced to walk and climb along the blocked roads looking for trapped vehicles, and I was able to take note of the bird life. There was no apparent diminution in the numbers of birds present. Both ground-feeders, such as the wrens and some thornbills which could possibly have found some protection, and birds of the high foliage, such as honeyeaters and Mistletoe-birds which it might be assumed would have had no chance to survive, were present. Swallows and martins were already darting among the twisted stumps. Parrots were perched on fallen trunks and a Kookaburra used a twisted steel telegraph pole as a vantage point. The only form of wild life apparently disturbed by the destruction was the glider family (*Phalangeridae*), several members of which were seen clambering over fallen limbs, blinking at the unaccustomed daylight.

The next day I returned to some of the worst affected areas, choosing those places of which I had a fair knowledge of their previous bird population.

I could find no evidence that any birds, other than nestlings, had been destroyed. In one small spinny in which every tree had been uprooted, I was able to find everyone of the previous inhabitants. These were a pair of Ravens (*Corvus coronoides*) who had lost a nest of full grown young (I could not find the tree let alone the nest); a pair of Pied Butcher-birds (*Cracticus nigrogularis*); two pairs of Rufous Whistlers (*Pachycephala rufiventris*); a pair of White-throated Warblers (*Gerygone olivacea*); four pairs of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga chrysops*); two pairs of Dusky Wood-swallows (*Artamus cyanopterus*) each feeding 3 young birds which had left the nest less than a week earlier and had managed to survive; two parties of Blue Wrens (*Malurus cyaneus*) and a mixed party of Thornbills (*Acanthiza sp.*). Although I had a less intimate knowledge of other timbered areas, I was able to locate other "old friends" in their old haunts, apparently unperturbed by their new look. A pair of Grey Goshawks (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*) still circled their favoured brush gully despite the fact that not a tree now stood higher than the lantana. A Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*) sat overlooking his usual pond in a small quarry although his nesting tree lay shattered on the ground.

Undoubtedly many nests had been destroyed but in some amazing manner the majority of adult birds had been able to survive the tempest. How they managed to remain alive is a matter for conjecture. Probably the preceding hailstorms had forced them into some cover. When the first of the giant stones had started to fall I had watched a White-throated Treecreeper (*Climacteris leucophaea*) wedge itself tight against the main trunk of a tree in the joint under a large branch. Perhaps such positions were sought out by other birds and there they clung whilst airborne or hurled to the ground. One is left wondering, however, how they could withstand the suction of the strong wind, which in the same area was able to suck a motor car from under a viaduct where the driver had sought shelter and throw it many feet away across a culvert and a fence.

Then there is the case of the flock of flightless Muscovy Ducks which, whilst quacking happily in the downpour on their dam, was seen to be whirled into the air to disappear from sight. While we may query what happened to the intuition that these domesticated birds must once have shared with their wild brethren, the unfortunate owner queries where his ducks are, for no trace of them has since been found.

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## The Nesting of two Species of Nightjars

By LEN N. ROBINSON and EDGAR J. WHITBOURN

Having been informed that the Spotted Nightjar (*Eurostopodus guttatus*) was nesting at Inglewood, Victoria, the writers and Mr. Peter Robinson made a visit to the district on December 3, 1960, when we were shown one of the birds and its egg. The single egg, pale green with about six scattered dark spots, was resting on flat, bare ground amongst dead leaves, sticks and stones in a patch of mallee eucalypts growing on a ridge. On our arrival, one of the adult birds was resting on the ground several feet away from the egg, but, as we did not desire to disturb the bird, we left the vicinity without making any observations.

Nearby, while walking beside a fence that separated a patch of mallee from an area of suckering-mallee scrub, an Owlet-Nightjar (*Aegotheles cristata*) was disturbed from within a fence post. Upon investigation we found a nest in the post that contained two small nightjar chicks, estimated to be three or four days old. They were covered with white down and their eye-lids were closed. In a short time the parent bird returned and entered the post.

That evening attempts were made to photograph the adult Owlet-Nightjars. With the aid of a torchlight we saw that the young were more active and had their eyes open slightly. They frequently uttered a low, trilling call which increased in volume whenever one of the adults alighted on the post. From 8.30 p.m. until almost midnight the young birds were fed at intervals of