

R. A. O. U. NEST RECORD SCHEME.

Most readers will already be aware of the Nest Record Scheme which is being started by the R.A.O.U. this year, and of the success and value of similar schemes in other countries. However, the opportunity to present an outline of the scheme in a journal devoted to the interests of bird-banding is very eagerly and gratefully accepted, because there can, and perhaps should, be a close and important link between the banding of young in the nest and the accurate recording of the nesting data.

There is absolutely nothing complicated or difficult about the scheme. Its essence is merely the recording of straightforward facts on individual cards for every nest found and inspected. The essential point is accuracy and the recording of only what is seen. The completed cards are returned at the end of each season to a central organisation, where they will be available for study and analysis, at least when the number of cards for any one species makes such study worth while.

The scheme aims to provide comprehensive data on statistical aspects of the breeding of Australian Birds, about which comparatively little such information is at present available. Five main facts can be derived from the cards completed for a species:

1. The extent and peaks of each breeding season.
2. Clutch-size and its variations in time and place.
3. Intervals between laying of eggs, and incubation and fledging periods.
4. Breeding success, i.e. young fledged from eggs laid or, more broadly, the proportion of successful or partially successful nests.
5. Nest site and breeding habitat.

There is really no need to elaborate on the practical and scientific importance of accurate information on these lines, since anyone can immediately realise how details of nest site and habitat will be of concern to conservationists, and most people are aware of the scientific problems which surround such aspects as breeding seasons, clutch-size, breeding success and the like. However, analyses in other countries have shown that many of the factors given above vary from year to year, from month to month within a year, and also with geographical location and altitude. Moreover,

some of the factors themselves may interact, e.g. breeding season and breeding success of one species may vary in different habitats. Since many species are confined to Australia, a condition which does not often happen in other political entities where nest record schemes are operating, it seems possible that here in Australia we may have the opportunity of acquiring detailed information of more than usual interest from the entire breeding range of particular species.

For the individual observer who takes part in the scheme, there are two sources of satisfaction. One is the recording of information which might otherwise have appeared too ordinary to be worth collecting, or if it was collected, probably remained hidden in private notebooks. The other is the knowledge that instead of thus lying hidden, good use will be made of it when analyses of the cards can be made. People often object that they only find perfectly common nests and then probably only see them once. But these are no drawbacks and one of the objections is, in fact, an advantage. It is information on the really common species which we want; it can be collected most readily; a large collection of cards can quickly be assembled; and with such a large sample a more convincing statistical analysis can be made and one can feel much more sure that the problems have been correctly defined, which will then lead on to further work on the same or different species. The accurate record of a single observation of a nest found by chance has a great deal of value, far more than the triviality of the event seems to warrant. Admittedly two or three records of the same nest at different times have much more than twice or thrice the value of a single record, but all the same that single record can be most valuable and illuminating.

Bird banding originally started with the banding of young birds in the nest as its chief activity. The advent of mist-netting and other forms of large scale trapping distracted the attention of banders from the original method, at least as regards small passerines, and this has been found to be such a disadvantage that in Britain anyway in recent years appeals have been made to banders to return to the banding of nestlings. The importance of knowing the birthplace of birds in migration studies is quite obvious, and in finding out this fundamental knowledge it seems to me that banders could have plenty of opportunity of benefitting many other branches of ornithology through the Nest Record Scheme with little additional trouble to themselves.

The R.A.O.U. Scheme is being organised and operated from Canberra by the undersigned. Cards are already available; of two sorts, one a standard card for the recording of individ-

ual nests, the other or Colonial type for recording single visits to breeding colonies of herons, ibises, cormorants and such birds. Any competent and capable person may participate, whether a member of the R.A.O.U. or not, though in the interests of accuracy it is necessary to ask any one under 18 to supply a reference for their abilities from a recognised observer. Each contributor will receive a sheet giving full instructions as well as hints for observing and recording.

Such a scheme, however, costs money, even though at present expenses are limited to printing of cards, postage and sundry items of stationery. The Council of the R.A.O.U. has, therefore, decided that each participant should be asked to contribute £1 for the supply of 100 cards which will be replaced gratis, when returned completed. This will help to defray part of the running costs.

I would therefore urge anyone who feels that he is likely to find even one or two nests during a season to take part in the scheme. Every contribution from one or two cards upwards is welcome. The scheme depends essentially on the amateur for collection of data and its success depends on the collection of a large amount of data from as wide a range as possible. I shall be only too pleased to do my best to answer any inquiries and to supply further information. Please consider carefully whether you are likely to have anything to contribute, remembering that nearly everyone interested in birds finds one or two nests each year, and that old records may well be most valuable if they fulfil a few basic requirements of time, place and contents, and then participate.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS.

Members are reminded that with this, the final issue of The Australian Bird Bander for 1964, subscriptions again fall due. Prompt payment would be appreciated in order to keep the Association's finances on a sound basis and to facilitate the work of the Hon. Treasurer.