

# More Nest Robbing Reported

*Photos R. Marshall.*

Wildlife Officers with the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife have reported further evidence of nest-robbing involving the destruction of nesting hollows, this time in the extreme north-west of the State.

Although nest-robbing is a widespread problem which has threatened native birdlife for some time in other areas of the State, particularly in the Geraldton and Carnarvon regions, there has been little evidence of it further north. However, the latest finds are not thought to be the work of professional nest-robbers but amateurs intent on securing the birds as pets.

The nests destroyed, near Wyndham, had probably been occupied by either Cockatiels or Red-collared Lorikeets as both species are relatively common the area.

Nest-robbing, taking young birds or eggs from their nests, is not the only way of obtaining native birds illegally but is certainly one of the most destructive. Many species of parrots in Australia nest in hollow tree trunks or limbs and, for robbers to reach the nests, it is often necessary for them to damage the tree.

Nests are often up to 10-15m high and if the tree cannot easily be climbed it may be cut down. Also, access to a large percentage of nest hollows may be restricted either by the smallness of the existing entry hole, the depth of the hollow or an awkward entry angle. In these cases the trapper will determine the





location of the nestlings or eggs by tapping the trunk and listening for a change of note just as you would gauge the depth of water in a tank. Once their location is determined the trapper will use either an axe or a saw to cut a section out of the tree at the base of the nest and take the birds or eggs. The hollow is, of course, rendered useless for further nesting by this practise until time and deterioration causes the hollow to deepen once again. This destruction of the birds nesting habitat has far-reaching consequences to its population, in some cases even greater than the direct predation of the young birds.

Generally, only young birds or eggs are taken by the nest-robbers because of the difficulty of training grown birds to adapt to captivity, to "talk" and to be docile pets. However, taking birds at a very early stage brings with it its own problems in terms of rearing. The nestlings require considerable care if they are to survive.

Nest-robbing of young birds is not a practice carried out for profit alone. Some aviculturists also play their part although they are usually more selective in the species that they take. The methods are generally the same but the motive is not. Aviculturists require "new blood" in their breeding stocks to prevent in-breeding or to produce better quality birds. More often than not, the birds sought are the less common or endangered species with resulting consequences to the species population. Together with the problems of natural mortality, introduced predators and poor food availability due to drought or changing land use, heavy nest predation by nest-robbers poses a serious threat to many native bird species.

Nest-robbers face substantial fines and wildlife officers throughout the state now conduct regular patrols through bird nesting areas during the breeding seasons. However, they have a large task ahead of them and the general public is asked to assist by contacting the Department or one of its district officers with any information which may lead to a nest-robber's apprehension.

