

What Bird is That?—the Native Bird quilt (1934)



There was some small recovery from the early Depression years by 1934, but making do, enduring the makeshift, and making the most of things persisted for many people

in day-to-day living, and the mutual help among women readers of the *Chronicle* and other papers continued and strengthened. For example, women gave clues to others on making hooked rugs from old woollen garments, and on how to make a needle of fencing wire with a niche filed one end like a crochet hook, the other end on a piece of round wood for a handle.

Several *Chronicle* readers suggested the bird quilt to follow the flower quilt, and women readers enthusiastically voted for it. The twenty-five Native Bird quilt designs were published weekly on Thursdays from 8 February 1934. The full bird pattern with the artist's suggested placement for light and bold balance was in the *Chronicle*, 5 April 1934. Again, the designs were best cut to size by means of a cardboard template.

Twenty-nine bird quilts were exhibited at the 1934 Show, three of which were painted. Mrs B.O. (Emily) McKay's green linen quilt with paler alternating squares with a drawn-thread

⁴⁶ 'Handicraft Show Attractions', *Advertiser*, 26 April 1933, p.8.

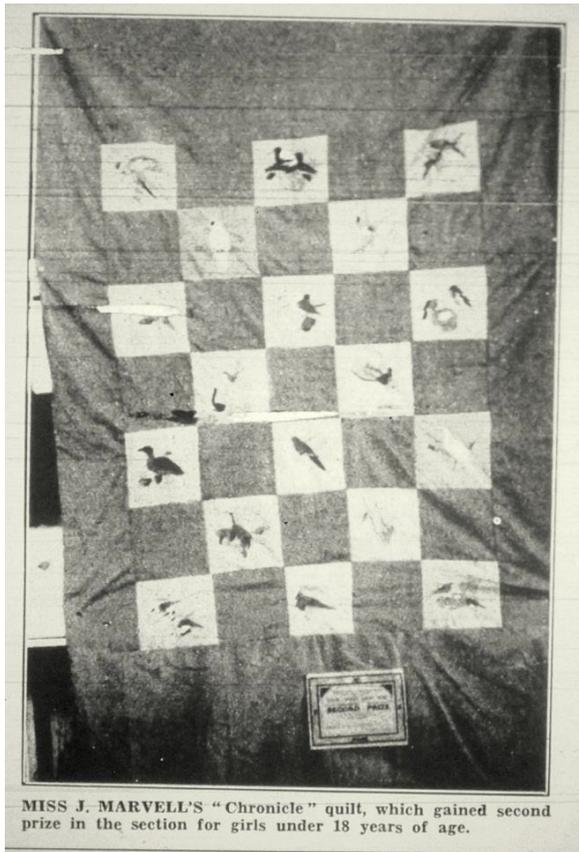
⁴⁷ 'Up-to-date ideas in Shopping for Overseas Christmas Gifts', *Advertiser*, 21 Oct 1936, p.8.

A suggested arrangement for the Native Bird Quilt in the balanced placement of light and bold designs (*Chronicle*, 5 April 1934, p.55)

The 1934 bird quilt patterns were of magpies, plover, pelican, Rosella parrots, Princess Alexandra Parrot [the Princess Parrot or Queen Alexandra parrot], Black Ducks, Blue Wrens, Rainbow or Gouldian Finches, White Cockatoo, Mallee Fowl, Scarlet Breasted Robin, Budgerigar (Shell Parrot), Garrulous Honey Eater, Kookaburra, Spotted Bower Bird, King Parrot, White Egret, Native Companion, Spotted Ground Thrush, Bronzewing, Lyre Bird, Reed Warbler, and Cape Barren Goose.



First prize in the Australian Bird Quilt competition was won by Mrs. B.O. (Emily) McKay of Semaphore Park, South Australia. 165cm x 204cm. 1934. (Embroiderers' Guild Museum: M2013.003)



Miss J. Marvel's second prize quilt, girls under 18 section ("The Chronicle" Quilts at the Royal Show', *Chronicle*, 11 October 1934, p.46).

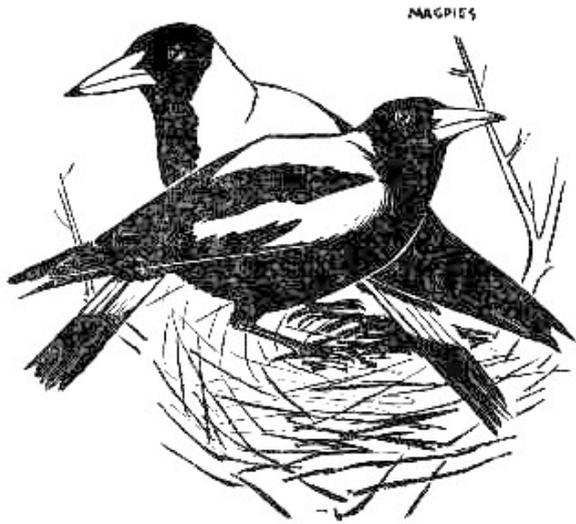
There were some problems

Some quilters' expressions were reined in by the newspaper. 'If colored appliqued designs are worked on the squares between the birds for the Native Bird Quilt, would it be eligible for competition in the Adelaide Show?' The answer was a decided no, only plain or quilted squares were to be used in between.⁴⁹

'One competitor disobeyed instructions by working a flower design in between the bird patterns. The majority ... left the alternate squares quite plain, while others added a small quilting design, in self colors ... and another placed squares of rucked and tucked pink silk in between. Three quilts were hand painted ... two others had a heavy silk fringe all round, another was worked in fine cotton thread, and another one in fine wool ... [The] first prize [quilt] was in two shades of green/?grey linen, the lighter tone forming the alternate squares and carrying a drawn-thread design and ... most exquisitely worked in tiny, even and closely stitched satin stitch, in colors that were as near to life as possible. Mrs. B.O. McKay was the winner.'⁵⁰

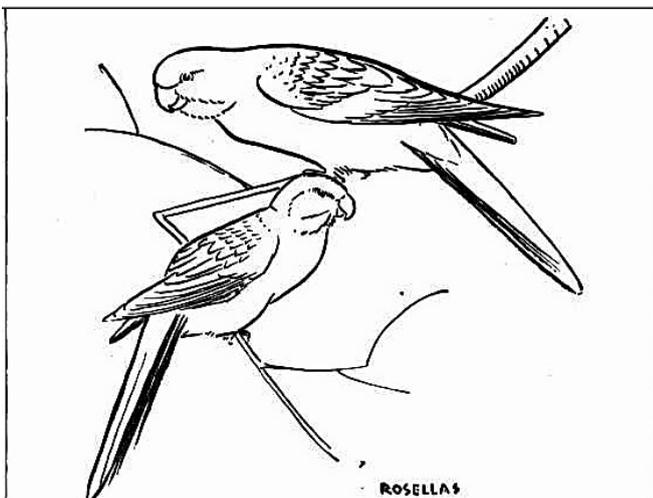
⁴⁹ 'Bird Quilt Query', *Advertiser*, 28 March 1934, p.10.

⁵⁰ 'Of Interest to Women', *Chronicle*, 4 October 1934, p.52.



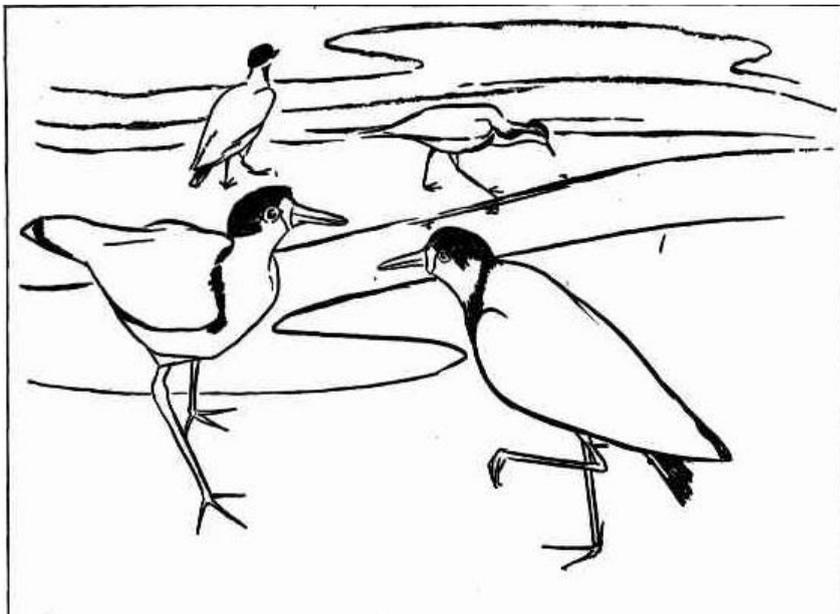
No.1. Magpies (*Chronicle*, 8 February 1934, p.53).

The first pattern was the emblematic Australian Magpie, two birds with their nest, which could be embroidered in wool or silk with outline or the preferred satin stitch.

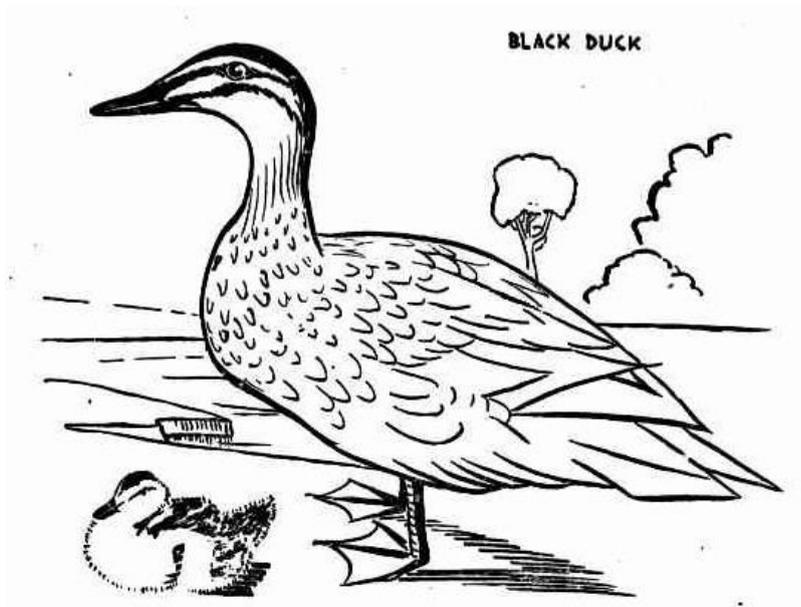




No. 2. Scarlet Rosella Parrots (15 February 1934, p.53)



No. 3. Plover (21 February 1934)

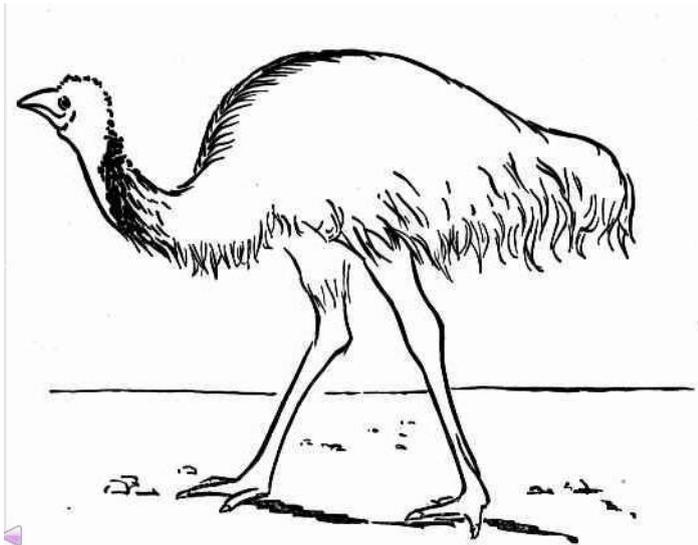


No. 4. Black Duck with duckling (1 March 1934, p.53).

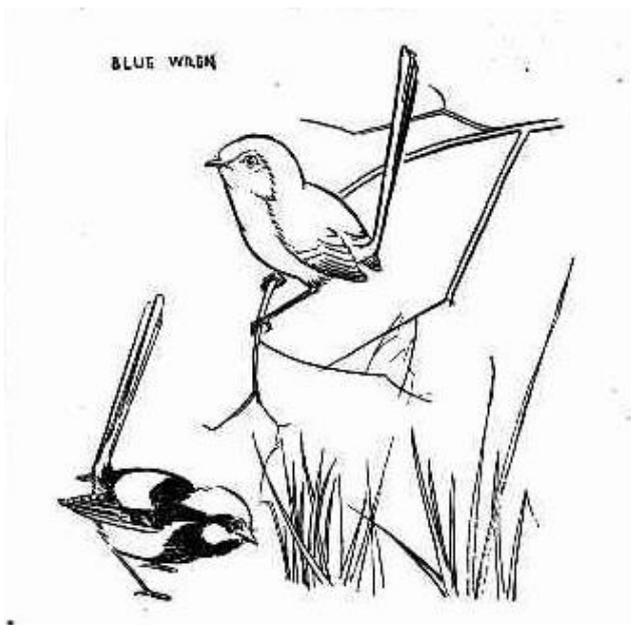


No. 5. Princess Alexandra Parrot (8 March 1934, p.53).

'Like Joseph's coat . . . This gay parrot has a blue-green head, an orange eye, with a black centre, and an orange beak. Beneath the pink throat is a grey breast. The first section of the underwing is bright green, and the quills are grey merging to black tips, but the lower corner of the wing is white. The feathers of the body bear the legs are bright red. The legs are grey. The tail feathers are pink, with black edges. The two longest tail feathers are black.'

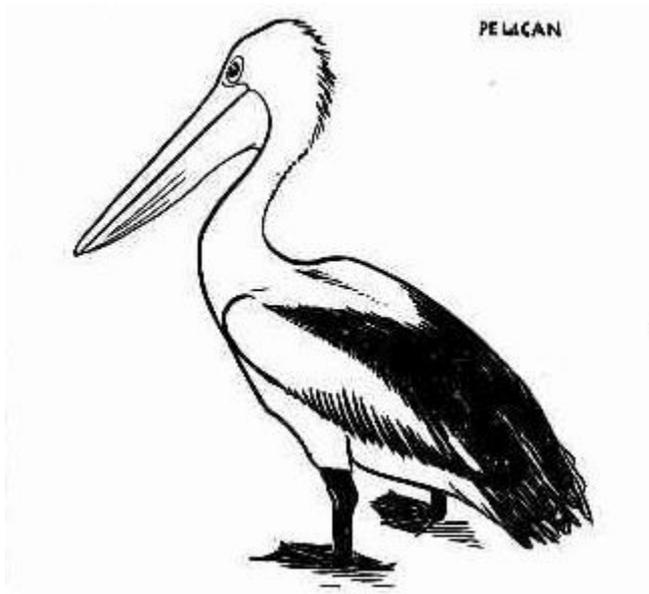


No. 6. Emu (15 March 1934, p.53). The emu is 'not noted for its good looks, but a little ingenious blending of colours by clever fingers will work wonders with even such an "ugly duckling."



No. 7. Mr. and Mrs. Blue Wren (22 March 1934, p.53)

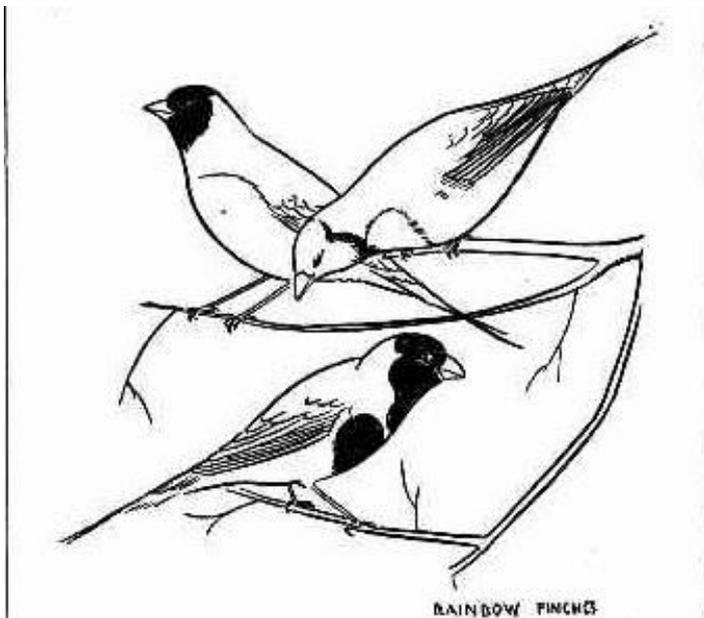
'Blue, orange, and black are the chief color points of popular Mr. and Mrs. Blue Wren . . . The male bird has a blue head and back; the rest of the head is black. Wing tips are white, the eye is orange with a black centre and a black spot underneath the eye. His bill and feet are orange. Mrs. Blue Wren is light brown on top of the body and white underneath.'



No. 8. Pelican (29 March 1934, p.53).

The pelican has white plumage with the exception of the black markings. The back of the neck and head is a grey smudge, the top of the beak is yellow, and lower jaw is slate blue. The eyes and eye rings are black and so are the feet.





No. 9. Rainbow or Gouldian Finches (5 April 1934, p.54).

Beetee, standing in for the journalist Elizabeth George while she was abroad, warned competitors that she had noticed judges at the Show 'always ... take as much interest in the back of the work and the finishing off and joins, as they do of the front', so if the quilt is lined, leave the lining tacked on.