

NOTES ON BIRDS SEEN ON THE PORONGORUP MOUNTAINS (NEAR ALBANY), GERALDTON, AND OOLDEA (TRANSCONTINENTAL LINE).

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NEW SOUTH WALES.

AS I was able to visit parts of Western Australia not visited by other members of the Union, some notes on the birds of these districts may be of interest.

I stayed at Ooldea, near the eastern edge of the Nullarbor Plain, on the return journey, mainly to find out what the numerous Eagles and Hawks noted on the Nullarbor Plain were feeding on. As far as I could learn, their food was rabbit-eared and fasciated bandicoots, rat-kangaroos, rats of three species, and some smaller marsupials, and, to a lesser extent, rabbits. Animals on this waterless plain were numerous; they apparently get their moisture from the succulent plants and the blood of their victims. Bird-life at Ooldea was abundant and of great interest, and the birds themselves, being quite undisturbed, were very tame. The list given is not by any means complete, for many of the smaller species were not identified.

Emu (*Dromaius novæ-hollandiæ*).—Emus were reported to be numerous near Yuna, in the middle North-West, and the local farmers had some difficulty in keeping them off the wheat crops. A female with five half-grown young and several odd birds were seen about 30 miles out from Geraldton. Mr. Crawford, the Chief Rabbit Inspector of Western Australia, stated that he had driven an Emu for 10 miles in a car, and that its speed was 31 miles per hour, beyond which it could not go.

Mallee-Fowl (*Leipoa ocellata*).—A nest was found at Ooldea, or, rather, the excavation ready for the leaves, &c.; this was perfectly circular, 5 feet 6 inches in diameter, and the slope from the middle to the circumference accurately graded on all sides. The depth in the centre was about 18 inches. There was no sign of the birds.

Australian Snipe (*Gallinago australis*).—One of these birds was noted at Ooldea, on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain; it was resting on the grass, and was probably over a hundred miles from the nearest surface water.

Bustard (*Choriotis australis*).—I was pleased to find the Bustard numerous on the open grass country near Geraldton. A large flock of 32 birds made an interesting sight as they stalked slowly along, eating up grasshoppers; curiously enough, they were all males.

Straw-necked Ibis (*Carphibis spinicollis*).—The Ibis was fairly numerous on the salt-pans between Perth and Geraldton.

White-fronted Heron (*Notophox novæ-hollandiæ*).—Odd pairs of the White-fronted Heron were seen out from Geraldton.

Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*).—The Black Duck was found with young birds about 40 miles out from Geraldton. The celerity with which the young birds could disappear, and the extreme

difficulty of seeing them among the dead brushwood, was astonishing.

Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).—At 6 a.m., at Ooldea, I saw a black object approaching from the south-west; it turned out to be a Black Shag, flying steadily about 50 feet up, and it disappeared in the distance, travelling in a direct line, evidently making for one of the salt lakes in the North-West.

Nankeen Kestrel (*Cerchneis cenchroides*).—One of these little Hawks was found nesting on a ledge in a "blowhole" on the Nullarbor Plain. In the same hole were a pair of Chestnut-faced Owls, which roosted a few feet lower down.

Chestnut-faced Owl (*Strix castanops*).—These Owls were the rather strange fellow-boarders with the Nankeen Kestrel in the "blowhole" last mentioned; they roosted a few feet below the Hawk, and when disturbed flew to the bottom of the hole and disappeared in a further cave. I climbed down, but could not locate them, as the entrance to the continuation cave was only a few inches. Numerous pellets collected showed that they were feeding on birds (35 per cent.), rodents (45 per cent.), small marsupials (10 per cent.), and rabbits (10 per cent.) Included in the marsupials taken were two moles, two Banded Ant-eaters, and others not determined.

Purple-crowned Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*).—These little Lorikeets were numerous in the south-west. They had a favourite feeding-patch close to a wire-netting fence, and the owner of the gardens told me that they frequently flew into the wire, and were maimed or killed. A flock of about 20 did this when I was there, and four were more or less injured.

White-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus baudini*).—These fine birds were, with the exception of the Tit-Warbler (probably *Acanthiza inornata*), the commonest bird in the South-West. Flocks up to 25 in number were seen feeding on the seed of the grass-tree and also on the seeds of the red-flowering gum (*Eucalyptus ficifolia*). It was a marvel to me how the birds could extract the black seed from the hard nut. They inserted the tip of the upper bill into the top of the nut and pulled out the seed from the narrow, circular top opening. I failed to do this trick with a good penknife; but the bird's bill must be specially constructed for the job, for these seeds seem to form their chief food. Odd pairs were starting to nest.

Yellow-cheeked Parrot (*Platycercus icterotis*).—I found many of these handsome Parrots in the South-West. They were feeding on the ground, and when disturbed flew up vertically to a low tree, and were not at all shy.

Short-winged Frogmouth (*Podargus brachypterus*).—One of these birds was noted on the Porongorup Mountains.

Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*).—Bee-eaters were numerous between Perth and Geraldton. According to Mr. M'Kenzie Grant, they arrive every year at about the same date in his district (14th October).

Tree-Martin (*Petrochelidon nigricans*).—The Tree-Swallow was fairly common on the Porongorups. One pair were seen entering a hollow limb about 200 feet from the ground.

Allied Brown Flycatcher (*Micrceca assimilis*).—Several were seen on the Porongorups, where they are locally called "Stumpers," from their habit of sitting on stumps.

Western Scarlet-breasted Robin (*Petroica campbelli*).—A pair of these Robins were noted in a cleared paddock on the Porongorups. In actions and notes they were similar to the eastern birds.

Hooded Robin (*Melanodryas bicolor*).—Several specimens were seen on the sand-hills at Ooldea.

Western Whistler (*Pachycephala occidentalis*).—In the high timber growing on the ironstone ridges on the Porongorups these beautiful songsters were seen and heard answering each other with their lovely notes, which scarcely differ from those of the eastern birds.

Rufous-breasted Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*).—This most charming of songsters was numerous in the scrub on the sand-hills at Ooldea.

Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*).—A pair of "Scissors-grinders" were seen in an open paddock in the South-West. They were evidently new arrivals in the district, for a Willie Wagtail (Black-and-White Fantail) was taking an interest in their movements.

White-browed Babbler (*Pomatorhinus superciliosus*).—These Babblers were very numerous at Ooldea, inhabiting the low trees on the sand-hills. Flocks of about eight were flitting about, and one occupied nest was located.

Crested Bell-Bird (*Oreoica cristata*).—These birds were numerous in the more open bush country round Ooldea. Their clear notes could be heard from every quarter. Several nests were found.

Bush-Chats (*Ephthianura*).—Three species were noted in the open country round Ooldea. The Tricoloured (*E. tricolor*) was nesting and had young on the wing; the White-fronted (*E. albifrons*) were in flocks of about 25; while the Orange-fronted (*E. aurifrons*) was less numerous and more scattered.

Western Tit-Warbler (*Acanthiza inornata*).—This familiar little bird was very numerous on the Porongorups, and at Ooldea they were noted in the open scrubby country, keeping to the low trees and bushes, either in pairs or small flocks of about half a dozen.

Yellow-tailed Tit-Warbler (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*).—These lively and tuneful Tits were also numerous on the Porongorups, and were just as tame and as confiding as the eastern form. They inhabited the open forest country.

Two other species of *Acanthiza* were noted, but were not identified.

Redthroat (*Pyrrholæmus brunneus*).—This sweet songster was numerous in the open scrub country at Ooldea. Some of them were very tame, and approached to within a foot of the observer.

Banded Wren-Warbler (*Malurus splendens*).—This splendid

Wren was found on the hills close to Perth, occupying sheltered gullies, and also at Geraldton on scrub-covered sand-hills.

Chestnut-backed Ground-Bird (*Cinclosoma castanotum*).—One bird was found nesting at Ooldea, just on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain. Two roundish, darkly-marked eggs were placed in a bark-and-stick nest, neatly made, under a small blue-bush. The birds were very shy, left the nest like a flash, and disappeared in the bushes; they could not be flushed again.



Nest of Ground-Bird under a Blue-bush.

PHOTO. BY A. S. LE SOUËF, R.A.O.U.

Red-winged Wren-Warbler (*Malurus elegans*).—Noted in deep gullies on the Porongorups.

Purple-backed Wren-Warbler (*Malurus assimilis*).—This species was very numerous in some scrub-land bordering the Greenough River, near Geraldton, and also in the scrub on the sand-hills at Ooldea.

Black-backed Wren-Warbler (*Malurus melanotus*).—The Black-backed Wren was numerous in the more open country round Ooldea.

Masked Wood-Swallow (*Artamus personatus*).—A flock of about 100 of these birds was noted near Ooldea. They were feeding

on insects and caterpillars on the acacia trees, and were searching the fresh young foliage at the tips of the branches.

Buff-bellied Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla rufiventris*).—This species was fairly plentiful on the Porongorups. I heard what was probably this species at Ooldea, but the only bird I saw for a moment had a dark brown chest and abdomen, similar to that of *C. woodwardi*.

Whiteface (*Aphelocephala leucopsis*).—Whitefaces were numerous in the open country round Ooldea; they were very tame.

Rufous Tree-creeper (*Climacteris rufa*).—The Rufous Tree-creeper was numerous on the Porongorups, where their habits were somewhat different from those of the eastern birds in that they fed high on the trunks of the large trees. I did not see one fly to the base of a tree and run up, as the Brown Tree-creeper (*C. scandens*) does. One specimen alighted on a large dead eucalypt about 100 feet up, and started his upward run from there.

White-browed Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus superciliosus*).—A fair number of this Spinebill was seen on the Porongorups. They are much quieter, less demonstrative, and have weaker notes than has the eastern bird.

Brown Honey-eater (*Stigmatops ocellaris*).—I was glad to hear this cheerful songster at Mr. M'Kenzie Grant's station near Geraldton. It was singing with its Reed-Warbler note in exactly the same way as we heard it at Stradbroke Island, Queensland, last year.

Bush-Lark (*Mirafra horsfieldi*).—This bird was very numerous in the vicinity of Geraldton. One often saw small flocks of them fly up from the fields and roadside.

FORGOTTEN FEATHERS.

BY A. J. CAMPBELL, C.M.B.O.U.

[Read at Perth Session R.A.O.U., 20/10/20.]

It is stated that in 1843 Gray, Gould, and Strickland examined the Watling drawings,* not knowing their origin, except that they were formerly in the possession of a Mr. A. B. Lambert and afterwards became the property of the Earl of Derby. There were three volumes, or about 300 painted pictures, depicting Australian birds. The set was finally bequeathed to the British Museum.

In "Notes on Australian Artists," by William Dixon (*Journal*

* In his entertaining chapter on the Winking Owl (*Ninox connivens*), "Birds of Australia," vol. v., p. 338, in reference to the mysterious "Watling Drawings" and discussions by various writers thereon, Gregory M. Mathews says:—"Of course, the action of the above writers (meaning North and Campbell) was due to prejudice and ignorance of the drawings and their history." I called them the crude drawings of a "botanist." Now it appears that Mathews has himself possibly missed the original history of the drawings. Who was Watling?



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