

Birds Observed in a Motor Trip, Adelaide to Wentworth,
N.S.W.

By Edwin Ashby, F.L.S., C.F.A.O.U.

The party consisted of my wife, daughter, and myself. Start was made on 7th August, 1928. A number of White-faced Herons (*Notophoxyx novae-hollandiae*) were noted stalking about the grass paddocks near the Abattoirs. Scarlet Robins (*Petroica multicolor*) were seen at Eudunda, showing that they come down to the margin of the mallee during the winter months. Between Eudunda and Morgan the following birds were noted:—White-browed Babbler (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*), several companies; Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*) were everywhere numerous; Australian Pipits (*Anthus australis*); *Acanthiza* sp. (?), several were seen, probably the Red-tailed Thornbill (*A. hamiltoni*); Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*); only the White-backed Magpies (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*); Common Bronzings (*Phaps chalcoptera*); Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascians*); and a few Crested Pigeons (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) were feeding on the seeds of artichokes, or giant blue thistles,

quite near to Eudunda. Morgan was reached after dark, and before breakfast the next morning, 8th August, the writer followed up the bank of the River Murray. Hoar frost covered the grass and plants, and the air was very keen. A White-faced Heron that was fishing between an anchored barge and the bank was much startled by the intruder, but for a few moments perched up on the rail of the barge within a few yards of the spectator; waving its long neck about in a menacing manner, it several times croaked with gaping beak in the face of the intruder. At such close quarters the hoarse croak was very loud, and evidently was intended to have a terrifying effect, but as the writer stood his ground the Heron appeared to give it up as a bad job, and flapped slowly across to the other side of the river. I have hitherto supposed that the Heron's croak was induced by fear, but upon this occasion it seemed to use it as an attempt to intimidate the visitor. Singing Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga virescens*) were calling incessantly from near the timber trees both up and down stream. Magpie-Larks (*Grallina cyanoleuca*) were making a deal of noise in the tops of the big gumtrees. White-plumed Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga penicillata*), Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, White-backed Magpies, and the Red-tipped Pardalote (*Pardalotus ornatus*), all were joining in the chorus of bird voices. Several Laughing Kookaburras (*Dacelo gigas*) were busy with their morning laugh. Crows (*Corvus* sp.) flying back and forth were continuously in evidence. Near by several pairs of Red-backed Parrots (*Psephotus haematonotus*) were chattering and seemingly interested in some likely-looking nesting-hollows, and across the river a Brush Bronzewing (*Phaps elegans* (?)) could be easily heard calling from a lofty perch on one of the distant redgums; the tone of its call reminded me rather of *P. elegans* than *P. chalcoptera*. Two Galahs (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*) flew overhead calling loudly, and a Brown Hawk (*Falco berigora*) flew by, much to the discomfort of the smaller birds. A Dusky Moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*) added its notes to the general chorus, and several pairs of Yellow Rosellas (*Platycercus flaveolus*) flew over my head, the horizontal sun lighting up the yellow plumage of their undersides vividly; one pair showed distinct red intermingled with the yellow on the breast. After seeing so much red in the plumage of specimens of this species from the Flinders Range and having shot an extensively red specimen at Schuetze's Landing many years ago, I have felt almost certain that *P. flaveolus* is only a yellow race of the Adelaide Rosella (*P. adelaidae*). Willie Wagtails were numerous, and Tree-Martins (*Hylochelidon nigricans*) were hawking for insects along the banks. So altogether a most delightful half-hour was

spent amongst the birds while engaged in their matins or "morning song."

After breakfast a start was made for Renmark, and a few miles out it was noticed that the Black-backed Magpies (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) had replaced the White-backs (*G. hypoleuca*), and from this onwards until Blanchetown was reached on the return journey all the Magpies identified were of the Black-backed species. The birds noted from the car during this day's trip were Ringneck Parrots (*Barnardius barnardi*). Near Taylorville a number of Crested Pigeons were disturbed, and odd ones throughout the day. One flew out of a prickly bush (*Acacia rigida*) almost on the track; on examination it was found to have flown off a nest apparently completed for eggs, though none was laid. We saw scores of the huge nests composed of sticks of the Chestnut-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficeps*). A stop was made, and a number of the nesting sites visited, but only one bird was ejected from any nest; that was in a low tree about nine feet above the ground. Later on a flock were seen hopping about the ground from bush to bush, probably a dozen in number; one specimen was secured. It was fairly evident that actual nesting had not commenced, though pairing was just beginning. Yellow-throated Miners (*Myzantha flavigula*) were numerous. White-eared Honeyeaters (*Meliphaga leucotis*) and Eastern Whitefaces (*Aphelocephala leucopsis*) were scattered about amongst the saltbush and small clumps of larger bushes and small trees. A flock of White-winged Choughs (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) was so tame that they refused to fly, and would hardly hop out of the way of the car. Hooded Robins (*Melanodryas cucullata*) and a flock of the brilliant Mulga-Parrots (*Psephotus varius*) were disturbed. While we passed through some nice patches of saltbush, the scrub most of the way between Morgan and Renmark was poor mallee showing signs of a dry season. Except for some very handsome bushes of *Acacia rigida* in full flower, a rich golden yellow, there were very few flowers to be seen. On the morning of the 9th August we started soon after breakfast for Mildura, crossing the river to Paringa. On the river-flat which borders the township a flock of Crested Pigeons and a flock of Mulga-Parrots were both feeding on the seeds of some prostrate plants. Instead of turning to the left at Paringa and following the old mail route up the river, we took the turn to Loxton Road to the right, and then took the second turn to the left, the signpost showing "To Yamba." This led us to the Victorian border, and thence by the new grubbed track to Mildura, 89½ miles from Renmark. This road is from 50 to 70 miles quite straight, no metal, but

the timber has been grubbed, the car running in the wheeltracks with grass and herbage between. The track is undulating; the cut through the scrub is visible from horizon to horizon, almost entirely without fences, although postholes were in many places dug, so this feature will soon disappear. The bush on either side is at present unspoilt—a great deal of fine native pine (*Callitris robusta*) mixed with various species of eucalypts, tall-growing hakea, and many species of large bushes and small trees. A large flock of the Regent Parrot (*Polytelis anthopeplus*) was feeding on the track—I should estimate about threescore. Their loud cries were new to me, and very beautiful the birds looked in the sunshine with their bright yellow-green plumage and graceful long tails. This flock must have been quite near the border. A few miles further on a flock of Blue-bonnet Parrots (*Psephotus haematogaster*) was disturbed; in some the brilliant scarlet abdominal patch was most striking as the birds flew. This Parrot I had only seen in the bush a few times in my life, but during this journey we must have seen hundreds, although this flock a few miles from the border fence was the only time when we noted a dozen or more gathered in a flock. The examples seemed to become more numerous as we approached Mildura till within a few miles only of that town; over many miles we put up from two to four of these Parrots every few hundred yards. Besides the flock of the Mulga-Parrot noticed at Paringa, another flock was seen near Mildura, but the previous species was much the most numerous member of the Parrot family along the Murray Highway. Little companies of the Ringneck Parrot were also common; their plumage at this season of the year is exceptionally brilliant. A halt was made for lunch at about 45 miles from Renmark, about half-way to Mildura. This was an ideal place for a camp, and an ideal locality for birds. During the half-hour available the following were noticed:—A few Tree-creepers (*Climacteris*) were thought to be the White-browed Tree-creeper (*C. affinis*), but species was undetermined. The Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*), very numerous. The only *Acanthiza* was the Chestnut-tailed Thornbill (*A. uropygialis*). The Grey Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) was heard in several directions and seen; one was uttering an unfamiliar call, but time did not avail for locating it. White-eared Honey-eater, Yellow-throated Miner, Black-backed Magpies, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, a company of Sittellas (*Neositta*) (sp. undetermined), Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*), Willie Wagtail, several of the Parrots already noted, and a *Pachycephala*, which was followed for some distance, but whether it was the Gilbert Whistler (*inornata*) or the rarer

Red-throated Whistler (*rufogularis*) could not be determined; the gun misfired. When it is remembered that this brief opportunity was at the hour of the midday meal, the foregoing list will give some idea of the variety of species, as well as the numerical strength of bird life that still exists in this unspoilt spot.

An early start was made on the morning of the 10th August, first to get some idea of the character of the town and suburbs of Mildura, and then we crossed the river at the bridge *en route* for Wentworth in New South Wales, 22½ miles from Mildura. We found it a little more. The River flats were extensive, and covered with scattered timber, which was locally called grey box (*Eucalyptus*); in these trees the Yellow Rosella was numerous. Also, on the margin of the river flats the Red-backed Parrot was in large numbers and Ringneck Parrots quite common. A pair of Brown Songlarks (*Cinclorhamphus cruralis*) were disturbed by the car out on a samphire flat, and the pair looked very funny each with tail and head erect doing a sort of "follow-my-leader" alongside the car, making no attempt at flight. The Grey Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*) was noted. Wentworth was reached at midday, and we motored on a few miles up the River Darling for lunch. In the river gums the Noisy Miner (*Myzantha melanocephala*) was very numerous and noisy. A Butcher-Bird settled on a dead stick standing up on a sandy rise some 200 yards from the big gums lining the river. While watching this bird through a field-glass I saw a large bird attack it and drive it off. One was greatly interested to note that the newcomer was a splendid specimen of the Blue-faced Honeyeater (*Entomyzon cyanotis*). The plumage was golden green, and the bare skin of the face was of the most lovely shades of blue; when in life, truly a gem of a bird. These birds, Dr. Chenery told me, do not nest quite so early, but they were certainly pairing. In a small patch of small scattered trees back from the river the Brown Tree-creeper (*Climacteris picumnus*) was astonishingly numerous; one wondered how it could obtain a sufficient food supply. The following were noted during this rest on the banks of the River Darling:—White-plumed Honeyeaters, Singing Honeyeaters (on the sandy rises near the river only), Crested Pigeons, Black-backed Magpies, Regent Parrots, and Mulga-Parrots. From Dr. Chenery I learnt that the Spotted Bower-Bird (*Chlamydera maculata*) is not uncommon about 50 miles out of Wentworth, and he gave me a skin of one that had been brought in to him to identify. It had been eating the berries of a pepper-tree (*Schinus molle*), and, being a stranger, the settler shot it.

The journey from Wentworth to Renmark on the north side of the river was compassed on the 12th August; the distance is a little over the reputed 103 miles. This journey cannot be undertaken without grave difficulty after recent rain, as a good deal of the track is across river on boggy flats (after rain), and by turning away from the river (which can be distinguished by the line of big redgums) many people have lost their way. Parts of the journey were alongside beautiful stretches of water, others through belts of scrub, and some through what in wet weather are veritable swamps in which grow graceful weeping wattles. Many of the birds already recorded were seen on this section of the journey. Near the manager's home of the Victoria head station a number of Galahs were feeding in company with many Yellow Rosellas, Ringneck, and Mulga-Parrots on a haystack which stood on a cliff immediately above the River Murray. Here also were noted both the Little Eagle (*Hieraaetus morphnoides*) and the Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*), as well as Kestrels. Towards the Renmark side of the journey several flocks of Bare-eyed Cockatoos (*Kakatoe sanguinea*) and a few of the beautiful Pink Cockatoos (*K. leadbeateri*) were seen feeding on the ground; also a good many Galahs were noted at various places. The Yellow-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga ornata*) was getting honey out of the flowers of the beautiful cream-coloured *Eremophila*.

A quiet day was spent on the 12th August, and the following birds were noted on the flats on the Renmark side of the Renmark and Paringa bridge across the river:—Noisy Miner, White-plumed Honeyeater, Red Wattle-Bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*), Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*), Grey Shrike-Thrush, Red-tipped Pardalote, Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*), Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*), Yellow Rosella, Red-backed Parrot, Laughing Kookaburra, Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*), these last gathering mud for their nests.

On 13th August went to Border Cliffs near the Victorian boundary. Here I saw the figtree to which the Spotted Bower-Birds come when the figs are ripe; then we went back on our tracks to the turn-off, and followed the mail track further up the river on the Victorian side of the boundary; here I secured a juvenile Blue-faced Honeyeater, in which the bare skin of the face was green instead of blue, and also a male of *Acanthiza hamiltoni lingerandi*. In this form the tail-coverts are a bright chestnut of the same shade as the Chestnut-tailed Thornbill. The eye was a beautiful yellow, with the slightest shade of red around the outer margin of the iris. The Parrots

and Honeyeaters have already been noticed, but the influence of man on this scrub is very marked; the better pines have been cut out, and birds are nothing like as numerous as they were on the Murray Highway. The Brown Weebills (*Smicromis brevirostris*) were here noticed, and away back in the tall mallee scrub a bird with a white breast was seen on the topmost bough of a dead mallee. It was shot because the location so far from open country in the centre of thick mallee seemed so unlikely for the White-fronted Chat (*Epthianura albifrons*), but sure enough that is what it was, a fine male bird. Red-capped Robins, Hooded Robins, and Chestnut-crowned Babbblers were noted in some numbers. At a place some eleven miles from Renmark on the river flats below the cliffs I was told of the spot where a year or so back a Spotted Bower-Bird had made its bower amongst the polygonum bushes.

Renmark was left for Loxton on the morning of the 14th August. At a point ten miles from the latter place a stop was made to explore a block of standing mallee. Several companies of Chestnut-crowned Babbblers were watched. Both the Red-tailed and the Chestnut-tailed Thornbills were seen; a pair of the latter were building a nest in the split or crack in the trunk of a mallee. The Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*) was present—a bird I hardly expected to see in the mallee in this dry country. Pallid Cuckoo, Eastern Whiteface, Yellow-throated Miners, Singing Honeyeaters, Peaceful Doves (*Geopelia placida*), Grey Butcher-Bird, Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*), Red-capped Robin, Brown Weebill, Scarlet Robin, and of Parrots the Red-backed and Ringneck; Pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*). Between Loxton and Waikerie the next day, 15th August, we stopped off at a piece of scrub about ten miles out of Loxton *en route* for Waikerie. Here were noted Hooded Robin, Restless Flycatcher, Crested Pigeon, Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*), Mistletoe-Bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*), Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Eastern Whiteface, Chestnut-tailed Thornbill. Here I noted a strange bird-call. It can best be described as a series of soft whistling notes, reminding one of the soft tremulous notes of the Fantailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*). It was most difficult to locate the source, for the call, although so soft-toned, could be heard several hundred yards away, and seemed to possess ventriloquial properties. Ultimately I found the vocalist perched 12 feet up in a mallee, and it continued "whistling" when I was right under it, bobbing its head forward when making the call. I shot the bird with what was intended to be a pinch charge of No. 12 shot, but so damaged the specimen that it was impossible to skin. It was a fine male bird of the

Chestnut Quail-Thrush (*Cinclosoma castanotum*). I was hitherto quite unaware that this quiet bird had any habit of calling in this manner, and I wonder whether other ornithologists have noted this striking habit. After passing Moorook the road runs close to a billabong. Here the Yellow Rosella was numerous, also the Red-backed Parrot and one or two examples of the Regent Parrot, which were calling loudly, probably seeking the other members of the flock. Nearer Blanchetown Banded Plovers, and at Blanchetown Silver Gulls (*Larus novae-hollandiae*) were noted. On 16th August a start was made for Truro via Swan Reach, and at the latter place a fine White Egret (*Egretta alba*) was seen. Five miles west on the Sedan track a stop was made and the following birds noted in this piece of scattered pine scrub:—Chestnut Quail-Thrush (breeding), White-browed Babbler (the Chestnut-crowned Babbler was not seen this side of the River Murray after crossing at Blanchetown), Rufous Whistler, Eastern Whiteface, Jacky Winter, Chestnut-tailed Thornbill, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Singing Honeyeater, Willie Wagtail, Crested Pigeon, Brown Tree-creeper (very numerous indeed), and the Grey Shrike-Thrush.

SPECIMENS TAKEN DURING THE MURRAY RIVER TRIP.

Polytelis anthopeplus, Regent Parrot, near Renmark.—♀, not breeding; total length 15¾ in.; expanse of wings 23 in.; iris dull red; feet grey; bill apricot pink.

Barnardius barnardi, Ringneck Parrot, Border Cliffs.—♂, total length 14 in.; expanse of wings 19½ in.; iris walnut; feet grey; bill silver-grey (13/8/28).

Platycercus flaveolus, Yellow Rosella, Lake Victoria Head Station, N.S.W.—♀, iris walnut (11/8/28). Border Cliffs.—♀, not breeding; total length 13 in.; expanse of wings 18½ in.; iris dark walnut; feet grey; bill light grey; moulting incomplete (13/8/28).

Psephotus haematogaster, Blue Bonnet, "Murray Highway."—♂, iris inner ring pale grey-brown, outer ring dark walnut; feet grey; bill pale grey (9/8/28). ♂, iris dark walnut; feet grey; bill pale grey (10/8/28). ♀, iris dark; feet dark grey; bill grey (10/8/28).

Cinclosoma castanotum, Chestnut Quail-Thrush.—♂, breeding; iris dark chestnut; feet dark grey; bill black (16/8/28).

Pomatostomus ruficeps parsonsi, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, Border Cliffs.—♀, iris light walnut; feet and bill black (13/8/28). Near Overland Corner.—♂, near breeding;

- total length 9 in.; expanse of wings $11\frac{1}{2}$ in.; iris dark reddish brown; feet black; bill grey black (8/8/28).
- Epthianura albifrons*, White-fronted Chat, Border Cliffs, in centre of the mallee.—♂, iris yellow; feet and bill black (13/8/28).
- Aphelocephala leucopsis*, Eastern Whiteface, near Overland Corner.—♀; iris pale yellow.
- Acanthiza hamiltoni lingerandi*, Red-tailed Thornbill, Border Cliffs.—♂, breeding; iris rich yellow, a mere peripheral line of reddish tinge; feet and bill black (13/8/28).
- Acanthiza uropygialis*, Chestnut-tailed Thornbill, 45 miles Murray Highway.—♂, iris yellow; feet and bill black (10/8/28).
- Meliphaga leucotis mallee*, White-eared Honeyeater, near Overland Corner.—♀, iris grey white.
- Meliphaga ornata tailemi*, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Renmark.—♂, iris whitish.
- Myzantha flavigula*, Yellow-throated Miner, Overland Corner.—♀, iris red; feet yellowish; bare skin and eyelids Indian yellow; bill yellow; feet yellowish (8/8/28).
- Acanthagenys rufogularis*, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Border Cliffs.—♀, non-breeding; iris pale blue-grey; feet grey; bill, base flesh-colour, tip horn, gape base of bill tinge of mauve, rest flesh-pink (13/8/28).
- Entomyzon cyanotis*, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Wentworth, N.S.W.—♂, breeding (i.e. paired); iris pale cream; bare skin about eye, below deep blue, upper half pale blue; feet pale slate grey; bill, base pale bluish grey, tip dark horn (10/8/28). Border Cliffs.—♂, juv., iris dead white; bare skin above and behind eye bright yellowish green, below eye slight shade of blue (13/8/28).
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