

## The Birds at Salt Creek, Coorong.

By J. Sutton.

The following particulars refer to the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union's camp-out at Salt Creek, on the Coorong, from 11th to 17th October, 1929. Seven of our members attended. The party of 17 left Adelaide by motor-cars on 11th October, arriving at Salt Creek, 131½ miles from Adelaide, on the same day at 4.50 p.m. On the 12th we went to the Pelican Islands, in the Coorong, 6½ miles north of Salt Creek. On the 13th the Freshwater Lakes, 8½ miles east of Salt Creek, were visited. On the 14th the intention was to get to the Washpool, about nine miles south-east of Salt Creek; but after motoring some seven miles the track was so rough and narrow, and tree-branches had to be so continually fended, that it was decided to stay at the furthest place reached and work the spot. On the 15th we motored at first two miles along the Coorong, past the beginning of the pipeclay track (which was at the time under water), then we went to a place on the track to the Washpool. Some also visited the Wild Dog Islands, a mile from Salt Creek. On the 16th, portion of the party left for Adelaide, and the balance went to a cutting-grass swamp on the way to the Freshwater Lakes, and left the following morning for Adelaide. The country at Salt Creek along the Coorong has teatree, samphire, and occasional salt swamps; inland from that patches of mallee and big gumtrees, a few cutting-grass flats and undulating heathy country, the chief vegetation on which was dwarf specimens of *Banksia ornata* and *Casuarina* sp.

One hundred and thirty-five species of birds were seen during the whole trip, 117 in the Salt Creek district. The number of birds noted was 14,680; 935 nests referable to 51 species were seen. The numbers in parentheses after the names in the following list represent the individuals noted. The species seen in the Salt Creek district are marked with an asterisk.

\**Dromaius novae-hollandiae*, Emu (5); \**Leipoa ocellata*, Mallee-Fowl (1); \**Coturnix pectoralis*, Stubble-Quail (3); *Geopelia placida*, Peaceful Dove (1); \**Phaps chalcoptera*, Common Bronzewing (2); \**P. elegans*, Brush Bronzewing (14); *Ocyphaps lophotes*, Crested Pigeon (7); \**Gallinula tenebrosa*, Dusky Moorhen (2); *Porphyrio melanotus*, Bald Coot (1); *Fulica atra*, Coot (200); *Podiceps cristatus*, Great Crested Grebe (1); \**P. ruficollis*, Little Grebe (210); \**P. poliocephalus*, Hoary-headed Grebe (15); \**Phalacrocorax carbo*, Black Cormorant (1); \**P. ater*, Little Black Cormorant (25); \**P. varius*,

Pied Cormorant (335); \**Microcarbo melanoleucus*, Little Pied Cormorant (7); \**Pelecanus conspicillatus*, Pelican (1,222); \**Chlidonias leucopareia*, Marsh Tern (1,270); \**Hydroprogne caspia*, Caspian Tern (12); \**Sterna nereis*, Fairy Tern (93); \**Larus novae-hollandiae*, Silver Gull (804); \**Haematopus ostralegus*, Pied Oystercatcher (31); \**Erythrogonyx cinctus*, Red-kneed Dotterel (8); \**Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*, Spur-winged Plover (54); \**Zonifer tricolor*, Banded Plover (110); \**Charadrius cucullatus*, Hooded Dotterel (2); \**C. ruficapillus*, Red-capped Dotterel (85); \**C. melanops*, Black-fronted Dotterel (11); \**Himantopus leucocephalus*, White-headed Stilt (2); \**Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*, Banded Stilt (166); \**Recurvirostra novae-hollandiae*, Red-necked Avocet (211); \**Tringa nebularia*, Greenshank (11); \**Erolia testacea*, Curlew Sandpiper (20); \**E. ruficollis*, Red-necked Stint (268); \**E. acuminata*, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (717); \**Threskiornis spinicollis*, Straw-necked Ibis (4); \**Chenopsis atrata*, Black Swan (1,341); \**Casarca tadornoides*, Mountain Duck (3); \**Anas superciliosa*, Black Duck (29); \**Querquedula castanea*, Chestnut Teal (2); \**Q. gibberifrons*, Grey Teal (3,277); \**Spatula rhynchotis*, Blue-winged Shoveller (4); \**Malacorhynchus membranaceus*, Pink-eared Duck (10); \**Nyroca australis*, Hardhead (153); \**Biziura lobata*, Musk Duck (11); \**Circus approximans*, Swamp-Harrier (4); \**Astur fasciatus*, Australian Goshawk (4); \**Uroaetus audax*, Wedge-tailed Eagle (3); \**Haliastur sphenurus*, Whistling Eagle (6); \**Falco cenchroides*, Nankeen Kestrel (12); \**Trichoglossus moluccanus*, Blue Mountain Lorikeet (45); \**Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*, Purple-crowned Lorikeet (74); \**Calyptorhynchus funereus*, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (2); \**Platycercus adelaidae*, Adelaide Rosella (6); \**P. eximius*, Eastern Rosella (11); \**Barnardius barnardi*, Ring-neck Parrot (5); \**Psephotus haematonotus*, Red-backed Parrot (24); \**Neophema elegans*, Elegant Parrot (3); \**Podargus strigoides*, Tawny Frogmouth (2); \**Aegotheles cristata*, Owlet-Nightjar (9); \**Dacelo gigas*, Laughing Kookaburra (5); \**Cuculus pallidus*, Pallid Cuckoo (3); \**Cacomantis flabelliformis*, Fan-tailed Cuckoo (7); \**Owenavis osculans*, Black-eared Cuckoo (2); \**Chalcites basalis*, Horsfield Bronze Cuckoo (11); \**Lamprocoryx plagosus*, Golden Bronze Cuckoo (3); \**Hirundo neoxena*, Welcome Swallow (52); \**Cheramoeca leucosterna*, White-backed Swallow (3); \**Hylochelidon nigricans*, Tree-Martin (12); \**Rhindura flabellifera*, Grey Fantail (28); \**R. leucophrys*, Willie Wagtail (15); \**Seisura inquieta*, Restless Flycatcher (1); \**Microeca fascians*, Jacky Winter (4); \**Petroica multicolor*, Scarlet

Robin (5); \**P. goodenovii*, Red-capped Robin (2); *Melanodryas cucullata*, Hooded Robin (1); \**Pachycephala pectoralis*, Golden Whistler (4); \**P. rufiventris*, Rufous Whistler (2); \**Colluricincla harmonica*, Grey Shrike-Thrush (68); \**Grallina cyanoleuca*, Magpie-Lark (16); \**Oreoica gutturalis*, Crested Bellbird (2); \**Coracina novae-hollandiae*, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (20); \**Lalage tricolor*, White-winged Triller (26); *Cinclosoma punctatum*, Spotted Quail-Thrush (1); \**Drymodes brunneopygia*, Southern Scrub-Robin (27); \**Pomatostomus temporalis*, Grey-crowned Babbler (15); \**P. superciliosus*, White-browed Babbler (72); \**Epthianura albifrons*, White-fronted Chat (141); \**Smicrornis brevirostris*, Brown Weebill (3); \**Aphelocephala leucopsis*, Eastern Whiteface (8); \**Acanthiza lineata*, Striated Thornbill (7); \**A. pusilla*, Brown Thornbill (31); \**A. hedleyi*, Dark Thornbill (16); \**A. reguloides*, Buff-tailed Thornbill (3); \**A. chrysorrhoa*, Yellow-tailed Thornbill (43); \**Sericornis frontalis*, White-browed Scrub-Wren (31); *Pyrrholaemus brunneus*, Redthroat (3); \**Hylacola cauta*, Shy Ground-Wren (4); \**Calamanthus campestris*, Rufous Field-Wren (28); \**Cinchorhamphus cruralis*, Brown Songlark (12); \**C. mathewsi*, Rufous Songlark (1); *Megaturus gramineus*, Little Grassbird (1); *Acrocephalus australis*, Reed-Warbler (7); \**Stipiturus mallee*, Mallee Emu-Wren (10); \**Malurus cyaneus*, Superb Blue Wren (88); \**M. assimilis*, Purple-backed Wren (2); \**Artamus personatus*, Masked Wood-Swallow (90); \**A. superciliosus*, White-browed Wood-Swallow (73); \**A. cyanopterus*, Dusky Wood-Swallow (32); \**Neositta pileata*, Black-capped Sittella (4); \**Dicaeum hirundinaceum*, Mistletoe-Bird (1); \**Pardalotus xanthopygus*, Yellow-tailed Pardalote (34); \**P. ornatus*, Red-tipped Pardalote (9); \**Zosterops halmaturina*, Grey-backed Silvereye (91); \**Melithreptus brevirostris*, Brown-headed Honeyeater (56); \**Plectorhyncha lanceolata*, Striped Honeyeater (8); \**Gliciphila melanops*, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater (48); *G. albifrons*, White-fronted Honeyeater (10); \**Meliphaga virescens*, Singing Honeyeater (23); \**M. cratitia*, Purple-gaped Honeyeater (4); *M. penicillata*, White-plumed Honeyeater (6); \**Meliornis novae-hollandiae*, Yellow-winged Honeyeater (204); \**Myzantha melanocephala*, Noisy Miner (63); \**Anthochaera chrysoptera*, Little Wattle-Bird (115); \**A. carunculata*, Red Wattle-Bird (182); \**Acanthagenys rufogularis*, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (76); \**Anthus australis*, Pipit (69); *Mirafra javanica*, Horsfield Bushlark (1); *Zonaeginthus guttatus*, Diamond Firetail (1); \**Corvus coronoides*, Raven (68); \**Corcorax melanorhamphus*, White-winged Chough (1); \**Strepera melanoptera*, Black-

winged Currawong (24); \**Cracticus torquatus*, Grey Butcher-Bird (11); \**Gymnorhina hypoleuca*, White-backed Magpie (216). Birds seen, but species not identified:—Bronzewing, 3; Grebe, 1; Tern, 5; Plover, 1; Avocets (?), 50; Stints and Sandpipers, 143; Duck, 680; Parrots, 5; *Neophema* sp., 1; Blue Wren, 2; Wood-Swallows, 452.

#### Nesting and Other Details.

The Pelican Islands.—Two of these islands were visited, the party having to be divided, as only two boats were available. The nearest and northernmost island has an area of about six acres, and the nesting site of the Pelicans occupied about half an acre. The birds gradually left as we approached, and the balance as we appeared over the edge of the summit of the island, some 20 feet high. The Pelicans alighted in the Coorong a little distance from the island, and I calculated the number of birds to be 600. There were about 200 nests, some over three feet apart, some one foot, but the average may have been two feet apart. The largest nest was 56 cm. across, circular in form, very shallow, constructed of water-weeds, dried herbage, pieces of stick, and a few feathers (some off the bird itself). Many nests were very scanty. Some single eggs were on the bare ground. Three nests had three eggs each, a good many had two eggs each, but there were more with a single egg. The grass round the site was about two feet high, but a portion of that was beaten flat by the birds sitting on it. There were 14 Swan's nests—the birds left when we were 150 yards away in the boats—with three, two, four, five, three, four, five, four, two, two, six, six, six, three eggs respectively, and a nest just being built. These nests were built in marshmallow, ryegrass, stinging-nettle, and King Island melalot. One nest, containing six eggs, was constructed of dead marshmallow sticks, and measured 125 x 90 cm., and on the highest side was 18 cm. high.

The second division visited the second island with an area of about half an acre. I was informed that they found 22 Silver Gulls' nests—six with three eggs each, 12 with two eggs each, two with one egg each, one with two nestlings, and one with one nestling. One hundred and five Pied Cormorants' nests, constructed of freshly-plucked branches of a succulent plant (*Suaeda australis*), and lined with green samphire branchlets. One nest with four eggs, one with three eggs, one with two eggs, one with an egg, many nests empty, one nest with three Cormorants' eggs and a newly-hatched Pelican, some nests with young. In the larger ones of the young Cormorants the feather tracts were plainly visible. Their call was a

“quark,” something between the bark of a dog and the call of a duck. One chick was cracking the shell, and before it left the egg it was “quarking.” About twenty of the eggs had holes in them, and the hole was on the under side. The Pied Cormorants’ and Pelicans’ nests were on a limestone platform, almost the highest point of the island; sloping to the west there was a short drop of three feet, and scattered nests of Pelicans and Pied Cormorants were built there. The south and south-western sides slope steeply to the shore, with outcrops of fretted rocks, and there the Silver Gulls were nesting. Birds were seen on the third island apparently nesting. It would therefore appear that this last island is occupied for nesting first, then the second island, and finally the northernmost island, on which only Pelicans and Black Swans were nesting.

Wild Dog Islands.—On 16th October Dr. Morgan and I went to these islands. The first island is about 300 yards from the mainland; the water was about 18 inches deep, and the bottom was firm. On the first island we found 32 Silver Gulls’ nests newly built but empty; 18 contained one egg each, 48 two eggs each, 14 three eggs each. In a number of the nests were some gastroliths\* out of Yabbies (*Parachanna bicarinatus*). The vegetation on this island was barley-grass and Cape weed.

The second island (L) was 40 yards from K, and the channel shallow. On this second island we found Silver Gulls’ nests—43 newly constructed but empty, 22 with one egg each, 40 with two eggs each, and 11 with three eggs each. At the south-western point of this (second) island Fairy Terns were flying about and calling frequently. Dr. Morgan walked to the point and found a ternery, 60 feet from the water and about five feet above water-level. The ternery measured 25 x 9 feet, but three of the nests were outside this area. Sixteen nests contained one egg each, seven had two eggs in each, and two had three eggs in each. The nests were shallow hollows scraped out in the sand amongst stones and small shells.

The third island (M) was 45 feet from the second island, and separated by a shallow channel. Its vegetation consisted of samphire, grass, and Cape weed. On it were Silver Gulls’

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\* In fresh-water crayfishes several discoidal nodules of limy matter are formed a little time before moulting; these are stored in the stomach, and are dissolved after moulting, apparently to supply some of the calcareous material necessary for strengthening the integument. These limy masses, or “gastroliths,” have a characteristic appearance. . . .

—H. M. Hale, “The Crustaceans of South Australia,” Part I, p. 72.

nests—31 newly constructed but empty, 18 with one egg each, 30 with two eggs each, 18 with three eggs each. Some of these nests were not in the "gullery," but were built in samphire. Most of the nests were placed in niches of the limestone shelf of the caps of the islands—about 15 feet above the water-level. An average nest measured 29 cm. over all, cavity 16 cm., and depth 6 cm. It was constructed of green and dry grasses, bits of samphire sticks, dry and green Cape weed, a few feathers (mostly those of Gulls), and dry stinkwort. The eggs varied in ground colour from greyish olive, french green, raw umber to brownish olive, light brownish olive with dark olive or black spots. The commonest colours were brownish olive with fuscous black or bone brown spots (Ridgway's colour charts). In some six nests containing one egg each there was also a stone about the same size as the egg in the nest.

Emu.—The first Emu was seen running through a cutting-grass swamp, two were next seen about two miles from Salt Creek, then two more were seen crossing a very shallow lagoon.

Mallee Fowl.—This bird was seen by Mr. L. K. McGilp in the scrub early one morning. The cafe proprietor informed me that a few birds were about the district, but only occasionally was one seen.

Marsh Tern.—On 11th October, as we were crossing the causeway over the swamp on the east side of the River Murray at Wellington, we stopped to view the waterfowl quite close to the road. We then saw over 1,000 Marsh Terns flying low over the north end of the swamp. Their calls sounded like "Whowp" and a rasping noise. On the 17th October there was not a Marsh Tern to be seen on the swamp. Twenty others were seen near McGrath's Flat.

Common Bronzewing.—A nest with one egg.

Brush Bronzewing.—A nest ready for eggs.

Spur-winged Plover.—A nest with two eggs.

Banded Plover.—Two nests—one with four eggs, the other with two chicks.

Red-capped Dotterel.—Two nests with two eggs in each.

Banded Stilt.—One hundred and fifty-two were seen in Salt Creek district, and 14 on Waltowa Swamp.

Black Swan.—On Pipeclay Lake shortly after 5 a.m. there were numbers of these birds—147 on one occasion. Mr. T. G. Souter and I went there on five mornings to make the birds flush. They generally flew directly away from us. In no case did the birds' wings touch the water when rising. The wings were usually over a foot from the water. The noise is made by the feet striking the water, one after the other, as the birds

are gaining impetus. When the Swans alight on the water their feet are stuck out in front stiffly, presumably with the webs stretched out, so as to avoid the shock to the body or sternum. Pelicans alight on the water in a similar way. On the 15th October, in the motor-cars, we were able to get much closer to the Swans, and they flew across our front, thus enabling those present to see the whole of the method of rising.

Swamp Harrier.—A nest ready for eggs.

Australian Goshawk.—Three nests—one with two nestlings and an egg just hatching, the second with five eggs, the third with one egg.

Whistling Eagle.—A nest 25 feet from the ground in a Sheoak (*Casuarina*), and lined with gumleaves; three eggs. A very small Pelican, almost dead, was in the nest.

Nankeen Kestrel.—Two nests in hollows—one with five eggs, the other with three nestlings and five portions of lizards (tail and hind legs in each case) and four pellets.

Blue Mountain Lorikeet.—Four nests—one with two eggs, two with two nestlings in each, and one ready for eggs.

Purple-crowned Lorikeet.—Four nests—three with four eggs in each, and one was not climbed to, as a beehive was in the way.

Adelaide Rosella.—In the Mount Lofty Ranges, a nest with six eggs.

Eastern Rosella.—Two nests—one with five eggs, the other ready for eggs.

Elegant Parrot (?).—Nest in a hollow in a live gumtree, and 25 feet from the ground. No parent birds were seen, but the nestlings (3) had blue frontal bands and blue on the wings.

Tawny Frogmouth.—A nest with one young bird.

Owlet Nightjar.—Three nests—one with three eggs, another with one egg, and the third ready for eggs.

Laughing Kookaburra.—One was heard in the big timber beside the Freshwater Lakes at Salt Creek.

Welcome Swallow.—Two nests. One was built under the bridge over Salt Creek, and it contained at least three nestlings. The other was in a low motor-shed at the Coorong Cafe, Salt Creek. One end of a wire doorscreen had been stuck in between the rafter and the roof; on the other end, which hung down about six inches, the nest was built on the wire, and it contained four eggs. The bird flushed off whenever a motor-car was placed near it in the shed.

White-backed Swallow.—Three burrows found. Two had just been begun, and the third, which went in three feet, contained five eggs.

Tree-Martin.—Three nests—one with at least two nestlings, and the other two were not climbed to.

Willie Wagtail.—A nest with three eggs.

Scarlet Robin.—A nest ready for eggs.

Grey Shrike-Thrush.—A nest ready for eggs.

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike.—Three nests—one with three nestlings and two with three eggs in each.

White-browed Babbler.—Six nests—one with three eggs, another with one egg, and four in course of construction.

White-fronted Chat.—Seven nests—three with three eggs in each, one with three nestlings, one with two nestlings, and two being built.

Dark Thornbill.—Three nests. One built of Broombush (*Baeckea*) stems in a dwarf *Casuarina* in several upright forks and two feet from the ground, opening two inches in diameter receding to an inch, a slanting platform below entrance roughly  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length. The length of the nest over all was 3 13-16 inches and the height over all eight inches; one addled egg and chick just hatched, quite naked and an orange colour. The egg is a long oval, ground colour white and covered uniformly with small greyish brown spots. This nest was found by Mr. J. Neil McGilp. The egg is the first one obtained from the type locality. The other two nests were built in cutting-grass in a dry swamp, both constructed of dried grass-stems; one had a pronounced platform, and contained two nestlings seemingly fully feathered with heads speckled greyish. The other nest was being built.

Yellow-tailed Thornbill.—A nest with three eggs.

White-browed Scrub-Wren.—Eight nests, one with three nestlings, another with two nestlings, four ready for eggs, and two being built.

Redthroat.—At Ashville on 17th October a male and two others were seen. Perched on the top of shrubs, the male sang beautifully. Included in the songs were imitations of a Banded Plover, Yellow-tailed Pardalote, and the short call of the Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo.

Superb Blue Wren.—Two nests, being built.

Purple-backed Wren.—A nest with three eggs.

Dusky Wood-Swallow.—A nest being built.

Yellow-tailed Pardalote.—Three burrows—two just begun, the other nine inches deep, with the nest partly constructed.

Grey-backed Silver-eye.—Four nests—one with a nestling, another with three eggs, a third with two eggs, and the fourth ready for eggs.

Brown-headed Honeyeater.—A nest with one chick.

Tawny-crowned Honeyeater.—Ten nests—one with two nestlings, one with a nestling and one egg, one with two eggs, one with one egg, five ready for eggs, and one being constructed.

Singing Honeyeater.—A nest with two eggs.

Yellow-winged Honeyeater.—Three nests—one with two nestlings, another with an egg, and the third ready for eggs.

Noisy Miner.—A nest with an addled egg.

Little Wattle-Bird.—Two nests—one with two eggs, the other with one egg.

Red Wattle-Bird.—Ten nests—one with three eggs, three with two eggs each, one with two nestlings, one with a nestling, three ready for eggs, and one nest was not climbed to.

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater.—Two nests—one with two nestlings, the other being built.

Raven.—A bird flushed off a nest, but it was not climbed to.

Along the Wellington to Ashville road there were many long regular mounds of stones to be used in metalling the road. As there are very few trees about, nesting sites are scarce, and a fair number of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) flushed from these heaps. Evidently the birds are nesting in the crevices, for on our return journey we saw a Raven on one of the stone heaps eating a young Starling.

Black-winged Currawong.—Two nests—one with two eggs, the other ready for eggs.

Grey Butcher-Bird.—Three nests—one with four nestlings, another ready for eggs, and the third was not climbed to.

White-backed Magpie.—Two nests—one a young bird fluttered out of, and the other had a bird sitting on it, but was not climbed to.

The bird-life of Lakes Alexandrina and Albert, the Coorong, and the South-East of South Australia have been referred to in the "S.A. Ornithologist," Vol. III, pp. 164, 198; Vol. IV, pp. 7, 53, 100; Vol. VI, p. 133; Vol. VII, p. 51; Vol. VIII, p. 75; Vol. IX, pp. 5, 131, 191; Vol. X, pp. 56, 93.

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