

Notes on Some Interior Birds.

By J. Neil McGilp.

The writer has, during the past six months, spent most of the time in travelling in the interior of this State. It is not proposed to give a detailed account of the birds noted, but a few notes are given of the more important observations. A real bird-lover's paradise was visited when we called at Coongy Station. This station, long since deserted, is situated on Cooper's Creek, where it flows into the chain of Coongy Lakes. Here in the space of half a day the following species were noted either on the waters of the Creek or Lakes or in the recently-flooded ground each side of the Creek:—Stubble-Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*), only two flushed; Peaceful Dove (*Geopelia placida*), plentiful; Diamond Dove (*G. cuneata*), common; Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*), one only; Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*), hundreds seen; Black-tailed Native Hen (*Tribonyx ventralis*), in thousands; Bald Coot (*Porphyrio melanotus*), only a few seen; Coot (*Fulica atra*), several noted; Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*) (?), five which flew over were thought to be this species; Pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*), a flock of seven; Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochebidon nilotica*), dozens hawking over swamps; Silver Gulls (*Larus novae-hollandiae*), several noted; Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*), several pairs evidently nesting; Red-capped Dotterel (*Charadrius ruficapillus*) and Black-fronted Dotterel (*C. melanops*), parties of each were on shores of Creek and Lakes; Red-necked Avocet (*Recurvirostra novae-hollandiae*),

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about 100; Brolga (*Grus rubicundus*), several pairs; Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*), about 30; Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) and Yellow-legged Spoonbill (*P. flavipes*), both species seen on Creek; White-faced Heron (*Notophox novae-hollandiae*), two seen; White-necked Heron (*N. pacifica*), a pair nesting on a large gumtree in the water; White Egret (*Egretta alba*); six birds identified as this species; Black Swan (*Chenopsis atrata*), a pair with five cygnets; Wood-Duck (*Chenonetta jubata*), very plentiful; Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*), only about ten; Grey Teal (*Querquedula gibberifrons*), in great numbers; Plumed Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna eytoni*), in fair numbers; Pink-eared Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*), in hundreds; White-eyed Duck (*Nyroca australis*), common; Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*), only a single male bird; Spotted Harrier (*Circus assimilis*), a pair noted; Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*), about a dozen; Fork-tailed Kite (*Milvus migrans*), about 50; Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*), a single bird; Nankéen Kestrel (*F. cenchroides*), two pairs nesting; Galah (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*) and Bare-eyed Cockatoo (*K. sanguinea*), scores of these species; Cockatoo-Parrot (*Leptolophus hollandicus*), a flock of 23; Budgerygah (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), in thousands—many nesting; Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*), only a few seen; Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*), two pairs nesting in an old hut; Tree-Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*), very common—nesting; Fairy Martin (*H. ariel*), a large colony nesting in a deserted house; Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*), two pairs noted; Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*), only a male bird seen; Grey Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*), two birds noted; Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*), several pairs, one nest noted; White-winged Caterpillar-eater (*Lalage tricolor*), dozens in gumtrees; Orange Chat (*Epthianura aurifrons*), common in flats; Brown Songlark (*Cinclorhamphus cruralis*), plentiful on flooded flats; Rufous Songlark (*C. matheusi*), common in gumtrees; Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*) and Little Grassbird (*Megalurus grammacus*), these species were not seen, but were distinctly heard on Cooper's Creek; White-breasted Wood-Swallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*), common; Brown Tree-creeper (*Climacteris picumnus*) (?), a Tree-creeper not identified clearly enough to be certain of the species, but most likely the Southern Brown bird; Red-browed Pardalote (*Pardalotus rubricatus*), common in gumtrees; White-plumed

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Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*), not common, but the only Honeyeater noted; Groundlark (*Anthus australis*), dozens on the flats; Chestnut-eared Finch (*Taeniopygia castanotis*), in thousands, no other Finches; Crow (*Corvus ceciliae*), only three seen.

No wonder I refer to Coongy Lakes as a bird paradise. I would have enjoyed a week there, but, alas, time did not permit. Probably other birds could be added to the list, as several other species were noted a few miles away.

Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (*Pteropodocys maxima*).—A flock of seven was noted in a "minaritchie" (red mulga) watercourse, near Patchewarra Bore. They were feeding on the ground, and when disturbed settled in trees. Another flock of five birds was noted on "Cadelga," close to the Queensland border fence; these also were disturbed from the ground and flew into some bean-trees (*Bauhinia*).

Doves (*Geopelia*).—It was rather curious to note that while the Peaceful Dove (*G. placida*) was the only Dove seen near Innamincka on Cooper's Creek, both Peaceful and Diamond Doves (*G. cuneata*) were plentiful further to the west at Coongy Lakes. Going further to the westward along the Diamantina, hundreds of Diamond Doves were noted, but only a few of the Peaceful Dove. Still westward, on Hamilton, Blood's, and Stevenson Creeks, just about 70 miles north of Oodnadatta, only the Diamond Dove is met with; also at Kopperamanna and Killalpaninna, near the western limit of Cooper's Creek, only the Diamond Dove is to be found.

Babblers (*Pomatostomus*). — During my travels in the interior I have paid special attention to this genus. The Red-breasted (*P. rubeculus*) was noted at Hamilton Bore, a flowing artesian bore about 50 to 60 miles north of Oodnadatta. A party of nine birds were chattering loudly in the minaritchie, or red mulga, and box trees that line the stream. Their peculiar note first called my attention to them, and a specimen was taken. It is a beautiful bird, its pearly white throat and the chestnut breast being clearly seen at a fair distance. Many large stick nests were noted in the trees, higher up than is usual with the genus, and were taken as belonging to these birds; none contained eggs or young, but some were apparently ready for duty. [This is the first record of this species in South Australia.—EDDINGS.] The White-browed Babbler (*P. super-*

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cilius) is to be found everywhere in the interior, but in fewer numbers as one goes northward. The Chestnut-crowned Babbler (*P. ruficeps*) was noted in the sandhill locality between Lake Frome and the New South Wales border and up as far as Caraweena on the Strzelecki Creek, also in sandhill country. No other birds of this species were noted in other parts of the interior.

Fairy Martins (*Hylochelidon ariel*).—An interesting note. At Goyder's Lagoon Bore, about 200 miles north-east of Marree, on the Birdsville track, a 400-gallon square iron tank was standing within a few dozen yards of the flowing artesian bore. A colony of Fairy Martins had taken possession. They entered through the manhole, which was at the top of the tank, and had constructed so many retort-shaped nests to have almost taken up every inch of the available space on the underside of the top of the tank. Quite a large heap of broken nests were on the bottom of the tank. At Coongy Station, the deserted home of pioneer settlers of 1880, the *piise* walls are still standing, and the Fairy Martins nest under the door and window lintels, every inch being taken up by the mud nests. Another favourite situation for home-building with these Martins was the underside of a leaning box or coolabah tree growing in the creeks of the inland. As many as 67 nests were noted in such a position on one boxtree near Pandie Pandie.

Honeyeaters.—So far as the writer's observations have gone, there appear to be very few of this family in the interior as residents, but evidently some visit it periodically. Those noted are the White-plumed, Singing (*Meliphaga virescens*), Spiny-cheeked (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*), White-fronted (*Gliciphila albifrons*), Pied (*Certhionyx variegatus*), and the Yellow-throated Miner (*Myzantha flavigula*). No other Honeyeaters have been identified north of Marree since February last, though two birds after the style and description of the Singing were noted out east of the Old Peake Telegraph Station. Those birds were hanging amid the topmost branches of high gums in a creek; their note was very unlike the Singing. It is suggested that possibly they were the Grey-headed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga keartlandi*).

Australian Dotterels (*Peltohyas australis*).—These open plains and gibber tableland loving birds were noted almost everywhere from Marree to Oodnadatta, then westwards to Mount Darling. Right up the Innamincka track birds were

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noted, while the Birdsville track produced more frequent notes of this species. Nests were noted in several localities.

Pratincoles (*Stiltia isabella*).—This bird, known in some localities as the Spearwing, on account of its long pointed wings, was noted for the first time on Cadelga Station, north of Innamincka. The birds were in pairs or singly scattered over the bare open flats just out from the Cadelga Creek. They appeared to be nesting, though a hunt failed to find a nest. These birds in greater numbers were again met with at Pandie Pandie, on the Diamantina River. Farther south, on Clifton Hills, right down to Goyder's Lagoon Bore, many scattered birds were noted. A hunt after a nest near Piraki Waterhole gave results, as a nest [*sic*] was found containing a young bird apparently only just hatched and a "chipping" egg. There was no sign of the eggshell that had contained the young chick. There was no sign of a nest, just a bare flat surface on a rich dark-soil flat. Near Goyder's Lagoon Bore we nearly ran down a Pratincole, and a search amid the millions of gibbers about the size of marbles failed, though the bird kept close at hand for the little time we could devote to the search. Without doubt, many of these birds were nesting.

Desert Chat (*Ashbyia lovensis*).—Why this little bird is called the Gibber-Bird is hard to understand, as it is very seldom, if ever, found in the gibber country. It prefers the dry, arid flats and loose tablelands. It is not nearly so rare a bird as I imagined prior to my journeys in the interior, as my notes will show. Birds have been seen on Yandama Station, east of Lake Frome, Moolawatana, Murnpeowie, Mount Hopeless, Tinga Tingana, Daralinghie Plain, Innamincka, Cordillo, Ooroowilanie, Mungeranie, Dulkaninna, Marree, Stuart's Creek, William Creek, Anna Creek, The Peake, Macumba, Blood's Creek, and Eringa Stations. Looking over this list it would appear to be fairly well distributed.

Shell Parrots (*Melopsittacus undulatus*).—These beautifully-plumaged birds were in countless numbers along the Cooper and Diamantina, and were nesting almost everywhere. Whilst camped for lunch near Pandie Pandie Station, we were glad to make use of the shade provided by a fine spreading gum on the bank of the Diamantina, and during our stay we noted birds enter eight different hollows in this one tree, and, though I did not investigate, I feel justified in saying each hollow contained

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a "nest." In this same gum was a Diamond Dove's nest and also a nest of the White-winged Caterpillar-eater. A little way along the River I walked past a high creek bank, and was greatly surprised to see a Shell Parrot bustle out of a tunnelled hole in the bank. I at once investigated, and found that what was evidently a home of the Red-backed Kingfisher at one time recently had been used by the Shell Parrot as its cradle for its eggs. I enlarged the tunnel sufficiently to get an egg out, and was satisfied it belonged to Mrs. Shelly. There were two more eggs in the hollow, so evidently the full clutch had yet to be completed.

White-backed Swallows, or Sand-Martins (*Cheramoeca leucosterna*), and Red-backed Kingfisher (*Halcyon pyrrhopygius*).—When walking in the sandhills near Birdsville, Queensland, I noticed a party of White-backed Swallows flying above a sandbank. As I approached nearer the bank appeared to be riddled with holes, from one of which flushed a Red-backed Kingfisher. The hole contained five fresh eggs and quite a number of green coloured wings of some beetle. About five feet away a Swallow's tunnel contained six fresh eggs, and there were apparently five other tunnels containing nests or ready for nests, as the opening was almost circular. Observation has shown me that when the tunnel has been in use for some time the opening is flattened at the bottom of the entrance, caused by the wings of the birds as they land directly in the entrance. These sandbanks are a peculiar feature of the sandhill country; hard-baked sand seems to be formed in some way right in the midst of the soft sand. High winds scour out the soft sand and leave a high mass of hard sand with more or less straight banks. At the foot of the sandbank containing the Swallow and Kingfisher nests was a recently exposed perfect skeleton of an aboriginal.

Chestnut-eared Finches (*Taeniopygia castanotis*).—In countless numbers along the Cooper and Diamantina, and they were busily nesting, placing their nests, built of the very light coloured pepper-grass (*Panicum*), in all sorts of places—in hollow spouts, gatepost openings, houses, and bushes. The light colour of the material used called attention to their nests."