

## *Geopsittacus occidentalis*, Night-Parrot.

By J. Neil McGilp.

During a trip into the interior of this State last June (1930) I made numerous inquiries with regard to the long-lost Night-Parrot. It was not until I reached Macumba Station, slightly east of north from Oodnadatta, that I had the good fortune to get in touch with anyone who satisfied me he knew the Night-Parrot. At this station I had a long and interesting chat with Mr. John McDonald, and from him secured some information that I now pass on to others who, like the writer, are keenly interested in the search for the long-lost bird. As Mr. McDonald has for many years known the country in and about

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Macumba Creek, the type locality of *Amytornis goyderi*, Eyrean Grass-Wren, two specimens of which I inspected in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, London, four years ago, I took the opportunity of asking if he knew the bird. Mr. McDonald knew the *Amytornis* family quite well, but when I gave him the description of *A. goyderi* he definitely said he had not seen it.

Mr. McDonald knew the Night-Parrot as being fairly numerous in the late 'seventies and early 'eighties when living on Cootanoorina Station, south and slightly east of Oodnadatta. At one time he had four young ones in an aviary. The young he described as being a greyish-green colour, with a black spot in the centre of each feather. They used to spend practically all of the time at the bottom of the cage, and he never saw them on the perch, which was from three to four feet from the ground. These birds were taken from a nest in the centre of a bunch of porcupine. The nest was entered through a tunnel starting low down on the side and almost under the bunch. At the end of the tunnel there was an enlarged cavity, in which the birds had placed some small sticks. The nest was found by seeing the bird flush out when a mob of pack-horses in the cattle-mustering outfit was driven over the patch of porcupine grass, thereby disturbing the bird. Mr. McDonald informed me that he had never seen the Night-Parrot in flight unless the bird was disturbed, and that only by contact with the bush. He had never seen more than one bird at a time. When flushed the bird flies but 20 to 40 yards, drops to earth very suddenly, and then runs off at right angles to its line of flight. I gathered during the course of our conversation that Mr. McDonald had seen at least three or four nests, one of which he describes as being in a samphire-bush. This bush grew plentifully in the vicinity of the dry salt lakes and was of a low dense structure. The nest was made by forming a runway, or tunnel, into the centre of the bush, where a fair number of small sticks made a platform between the central branches of the bush. In no instance did Mr. McDonald find the bird had nested on the ground under the bush, but said that during the daytime the bird crouched in a "squat," similar to that of the hare, under a dense bush, and he had on occasions flushed the bird from this position. The eggs were four in number and white, and about the size of a "Pigeon's egg," referring to the Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*).

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When camped at waterholes Mr. McDonald had often heard the Night-Parrot coming to water in the evening, and he was emphatic in stating it was always between eight and nine o'clock. The birds have a sweet low two-note whistle, uttered frequently in flight during their trip to and from water, and apparently several birds made the trip in company. Mr. McDonald had never heard the call from any wild bird during the day, but his young ones used to answer him at any time he spoke to them during the day or night.

I asked Mr. McDonald how he could account for the disappearance of the Night-Parrot, and he said: "If you tell me what happened to much of our former day bird and animal life I'd say that was the reason. What, for instance, has caused the almost total disappearance of most of our small marsupials?" He considered that the domestic cat gone wild had accounted for many birds and animals, but they were not responsible for all the damage or shortage. He mentioned that stocking had cut up the country where the Parrots used to frequent, and drought had gone on with the job, so that to-day he hardly knew the country on which, in years gone by, he had spent so much time in searching for cattle and horses.

In the course of my duty as a member of the Pastoral Board I hope to visit Cootanoorina Station, and I shall keep an eye open for a long-wished-for sight of the Night-Parrot.

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