

*CLELAND—Birds of Central Australia.***Birds Noted Between Alice Springs and Mount
Liebig, Central Australia.**

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In August, 1932, under the auspices of the Board for Anthropological Research of the University of Adelaide, in conjunction with the South Australian Museum, another expedition to study the natives visited Central Australia. As previously, the major portion of the expense incurred was borne by funds provided by the Rockefeller Foundation, and administered by the Australian National Research Council. The objects of the expedition were essentially anthropological, and this left no time for ornithological observations for their own sake. An attempt was, however, made to study the surroundings of the natives in all their various aspects, and this necessarily included a consideration of the animal and vegetable life of the region visited. The birds seen were, on the whole, few in number, and, with the exception of Eagle-down used for decorative purposes, played little part in the life of the natives. Emus are, of course, used by the natives, but none were seen. The site chosen for the camp was Mount Liebig at the extreme western end of the MacDonnell Ranges. The distance by motor track was about 220 miles from Alice Springs, though the distance as the Crow flies is much less than this. The route that had to be followed was along the Darwin track for about 12 miles until it emerged

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from the Ranges on to the Burt Plain. We then passed, more or less, due west along the northern side of the MacDonnells, occasionally passing outlying hills or mountain masses to the north of us, and hugging more or less closely the main ranges to the south. The track followed the plain, but necessarily had to deviate frequently, either to allow sandy watercourses to be negotiated at suitable crossing-places or to escape denser patches of Mulga scrub or to avoid hills and rocky masses, or to pass around bolder mountains. The plain itself varied to some extent, being mostly open savannah with scattered shrubs and small trees, diversified by belts of Mulga which were open or dense or by patches covered only with dry grasses and low Chenopodiaceous undershrubs such as *Bassia*. The larger watercourses, passed at wide intervals, were lined by Redgums (*Eucalyptus rostrata*) and other trees and shrubs.

Most of the country passed over was very dry, no rain having fallen for many months. Here and there, however, a thunderstorm had started the vegetation growing and there was an abundance of flowers, chiefly Everlastings and other Composites and species of *Trichanemum*. In these spots, birds were quite numerous, and the silence was enlivened by their singing. Songlarks (*Cinchorhamphus*), probably both species, Pallid Cuckoos, Horsfield Bronze Cuckoos, and Crimson Chats (the latter nesting) were numerous.

The mountain masses at Haast's Bluff and at Mount Liebig were singularly picturesque and bold. The vegetation on their faces was chiefly *Triodia* (Porcupine Grass), but in the clefts, especially near their bases, many shrubs and other plants were growing. At Mount Liebig our water-supply was obtained from rockholes found on the lower slopes in the cleft down which torrents descended after rain. In spite of the scarcity of water in the neighbourhood, these rockholes showed the presence of very few birds.

The list that follows shows the species of birds seen on the journey. This may be supplemented by the following notes on the birds seen at the camp and various halting places:—

Dromaius novae-hollandiae.—No Emus were seen. The natives stupefy these birds by poisoning the water where they come to drink by adding the leaves of *Duboisia Hopwoodii*, the so-called "pituri." These leaves are not used by the natives for chewing as a narcotic, the leaves so used being those of *Nicotiana excelsior*.

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Burhinus magnirostris.—Southern Stone-Curlews were heard when camped at Ya Ya Creek, a few miles east of Mount Liebig.

Eupodotis australis.—Australian Bustards are evidently still quite numerous in Central Australia, though frequently shot for food. Three were seen on a plain eight miles south of Alice Springs, and three birds were shot (but not by members of our party) on the journey out to Mount Liebig and brought into the camp there.

Halcyon sp.—A *Halcyon*, apparently *H. sanctus* (Sacred Kingfisher), was seen on a plain ten miles south of Alice Springs.

Melanodryas cucullata.—Hooded Robins were seen at intervals throughout the journey, and were noted also at Ya Ya Creek and Mount Liebig. At the latter place a nest was found resting in the fork of a dead uprooted Mulga. It was formed of bark and cobweb, and was admirably camouflaged. It contained one young bird which remained quite still and rigid with closed eyes even when touched.

Pachycephala rufiventris.—The Rufous Whistler was seen at Ya Ya Creek.

Pomatostomus rubeculus.—Companies of the Red-breasted Babbler were seen at Alice Springs and on the Darwent at Haast's Bluff.

Epthanura tricolor.—Crimson Chats were numerous in patches where, after comparatively recent rain, the plants were flowering. In such an area, near Redbank Station, a nest with three eggs was found.

Acanthiza chrysorrhoa.—Yellow-tailed Thornbills were seen at Ya Ya Creek.

Cinclorhynchus cruralis.—As mentioned, Songlarks were plentiful where thunderstorms had resulted in recent showers. On one such area, south of Alice Springs, the Brown Songlark was obtained.

Anthus australis.—A Pipit, halfway up, was the only bird seen on ascending the *Triodia*-covered slopes of Mount Liebig.

Meliphaga virescens.—The Singing Honeyeater was found at Mount Liebig.

M. penicillata leitavalensis.—The White-plumed Honeyeater was seen near the Darwent at Haast's Bluff.

Myzantha flavigula.—The Yellow-throated Miner was noted at Mount Liebig.

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Cracticus nigrogularis.—Pied Butcher-Bird, often spoken of as the "Jackaroo." These beautiful singers were heard in the very early morning at Mount Liebig and at the Darwent near Haast's Bluff. Their note is heard with the appearance of dawn, but we did not hear them again after sunrise, nor did we get a sight of the birds. It is remarkable how they hide themselves away during the day time.

In addition, at Mount Liebig the following species were noted:—*Uroaetus audax* (Wedge-tailed Eagle), *Leptolophus hollandicus* (Cockatoo-Parrot), *Barnardius zonarius* (Port Lincoln Parrot), *Melopsittacus undulatus* (Budgerygh), *Cuculus pallidus* (Pallid Cuckoo), *Chalcites basalis* (Horsfield Bronze Cuckoo), *Taeniopygia castanotis* (Chestnut-eared Finch), and *Corvus* sp. (Crow).

Only two skins were secured, namely:—*Lophophaps plumifera* (Plumed Pigeon), ♀, Mount Liebig. Iris, chrome yellow; lower lid, translucent; bare space in front of and behind the eye, coral pink; bill, black; pharynx, black; legs, purplish black; soles, pallid; total length, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches; span of wings, 13 inches. * *Cinctorhamphus cruralis* (Brown Songlark), ♀, eight miles south of Alice Springs; total length, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches; span of wings, $10\frac{5}{8}$ inches.

In the following list of birds seen on the journey to Mount Liebig and back, a distance of about 220 miles, the first figure indicates the number of individuals observed on the way out, and the second those on the return journey:—*Geopelia cuneata* (Diamond-Dove), 2, 0. *Lophophaps plumifera*, 2, 0. *Ocyphaps lophotes* (Crested Pigeon), 0, 3. *Uroaetus audax*, 1, 0. *Falco hypoleucus* (Grey Falcon), 0, 1. *Falco berigora* (Brown Hawk), 3, 2. *Falco cenchroides* (Nankeen Kestrel), 4, 2. Hawk, white under wing tip, 0, 1. Dark Hawk, 0, 1. Hawks, 5, 1. *Calcyptorhynchus banksi* (Red-tailed Black Cockatoo), 81, 0. *Leptolophus hollandicus*, 73, 13. *Barnardius zonarius*, 2, 13. *Psephotus varius* (Mulga-Parrot), 0, 2. *Melopsittacus undulatus*, 430, 276. *Halcyon* sp., 1, 0. *Cuculus pallidus*, 0, 1. *Chalcites basalis*, 1, 1. Cuckoos, large, 3, 0. *Cheramoeca leucosterna* (White-backed Swallow), 1, 1. *Rhipidura leucophrys* (Willie Wagtail), 4, 9. *Petroica goodenovii* (Red-capped Robin), 1, 0. *Melanodryas cucullata*, 0, 7. *Oreoica gutturalis* (Crested Bellbird), 2, 4. *Coracina novae-hollandiae* (Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike), 3, 1. *Lalage tricolor* (White-winged

Triller)?, 1, 1. *Pomatostomus* sp., 0, 8. *Epthianura tricolor*, 9, 15. *Cinclorhamphus* sp., 2, 3. *Artamus personatus* (Masked Wood-Swallow)? (apparently black throat) 40 (at one time), 0. *Artamus melanops* (Black-faced Wood-Swallow), 15, 43. *Meliphaga* sp., 5, 1. *Myzantha flavigula*, 7, 5. *Anthus australis*, 0, 10. *Taeniopygia castanotis*, 70, 115. Crows sp., 9, 4. *Gymnorhina*, some certainly *G. tibicen* (Black-backed Magpie), 0, 5. Unidentified, 27, 34. Totals—Outward, 804; Inward, 583. (Kangaroos, 5, 0).
