

*McGILP—Birds Seen about the River Murray.***Notes on a Few of the Birds Seen About the River
Murray. October, 1933.**

By J. Neil McGilp.

The country passed through may be defined as that area bounded by a line drawn due north from Morgan, on the River Murray, for a distance of 45 miles; this line then runs in a north-easterly direction to meet the New South Wales border at

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a point 60 miles north of the river; continues down the border fence to the river, and thence along its northern bank back to Morgan.

Generally speaking, however, most of my observations were made in what is known as the County Hamley, due north of the Renmark district. The country is of a sandy nature, covered with fairly dense scrub, chiefly mallee, black oak, pine, bullock-bush, hop-bush, cassia, and shrubs of all description. The area in the northern part contains very poor pasture, most of which has not been developed to any extent. There are also heavy belts of sandhills, most of which are clad with porcupine grass. Some nice open grassy flats are occasionally met with, and upon these, or, at their edges, the majority of the birds were noted. Towards the river the country improves, more open land is found, and this extends south until the valley of the Murray is reached. This valley is at periods more or less subject to inundation. It chiefly comprises swamps, billabongs, and small creeks, all of which are fringed with box and gum trees. Many of these trees have drooping branches of heavy foliage, and form cover for Honeyeaters and the like of Weebills and Thornbills:

Since the erection of locks along the river, many of the small creeks have permanent water, where previously they contained water only at high river. Along these creeks a great many birds were found. The orchards of oranges, probably on account of the heavy foliage, appeared favourite spots for many Honeyeaters and Parrots. Throughout the trip there appeared to be a fair population of the avian family, several of which were seen by the writer for the first time, and attracted attention.

A few observations with reference to the more interesting birds seen on the trip might be of some value. It should be pointed out that little opportunity was given for observations actually along the river bank, my work taking me out on to the country. Early rising on the occasions we camped on the river produced many interesting results:—

Peltohyas australis, Australian Dotterel.—A small party of these interior birds was seen close to some claypan country about 45 miles north of the river. It is interesting to record their presence, as this species nested in the Pinnaroo district this season, and it would appear that the birds journey along this route from the interior.

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Polytelis anthopeplus, Rock Pebbler.—This Parrot was very numerous on the river. Great flocks were to be found in the "Chowilla" orchard, but after making inquiry I was informed that these birds do not eat any fruit from the trees, but feast upon any rotting fruit that may be left on the ground. Occasionally oranges are knocked off when the birds are suddenly flushed from the trees. I was surprised to see these birds so plentiful, as I was under the impression that they were rather scarce. Its call can be construed into "Rock, Rock, Rock," as it passes overhead with peculiar flight. I understand the native name is "Gorrik." This is something like the call.

Platycercus flaveolus, Yellow Rosella.—This bird is very common along the river, away from the irrigation areas. I rather think it is not welcome in the soft-fruit gardens, for I noted very few about. This applies also to the Rock Pebbler.

Merops ornatus, Australian Bee-eater.—Very numerous. I was told that the species had recently put in an appearance; its arrival is usually at the end of September.

Cinclosoma castanotum, Chestnut Quail-Thrush.—Several pairs were seen in mallee north of the river. A specimen should be secured, as the birds appeared to differ from the true mallee Quail-Thrushes.

Pomatostomus ruficeps, Chestnut-crowned Babbler.—Very common in scrub and saltbush country out from the river, the bulky nest first calling attention to their presence. The White-browed species (*P. superciliosus*) was more common near the river.

Epthianura albifrons, White-fronted Chat; *E. tricolor*, Crimson Chat; and *E. aurifrons*, Orange Chat.—A few birds of each species were noted on a grassy flat at Triangle Bore, north-east of Renmark. No other observation of the Crimson or Orange species was made, though the "Tintacs," or White-fronted species, were noted frequently throughout the trip.

Acanthiza uropygialis, Chestnut-tailed Thornbill.—This little bird is extremely numerous in the mallee scrub. I have never met with it in such numbers before. The nest was found on several occasions. It was invariably placed in a small knot-hole in a dry mallee, and was snugly lined with coloured feathers. Each nest examined contained three young birds.

Malurus melanotus, Black-backed Wren.—A few birds were seen in the porcupine-grass country north of the river. The

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male is a beautiful creature. I did not see any White-winged Wrens (*M. cyanotus*), which rather surprised me, but the Purple-backed Wren (*M. assimilis*) was rather common, more especially in the gardens along the river.

Artamus leucorhynchus, White-breasted Wood-Swallow.—A resident told me that these birds had just arrived on the river. I saw a good many of them, but unless they had finished breeding they were showing no intention of doing so. They were in small parties.

Climacteris affinis, White-browed Tree-creeper.—I was fortunate to observe a pair of these shy birds in three different localities in the black oak belts, about 30 miles from the river. Time did not permit a hunt for the nests. The Brown Tree-creeper (*C. picumnus*) is common in the boxtrees on river flats, and is occasionally seen on the fringe of sandhill country.

Dicaeum hirundinaceum, Mistletoe Bird.—This pretty little chap was seen on several occasions in the boxtrees near "Chowilla." If this species is responsible for all the parasitic growth of mistletoe it has been "working overtime" in this country.

Of the *Meliphagidae*, Honeyeaters, I noted—*Melithreptus brevirostris*, Brown-headed; *Plectorhyncha lanceolata*, Striped; *Gluciphila albifrons*, White-fronted; *Meliphaga virescens*, Singing; *M. ornata*, Yellow-plumed; and *M. penicillata*, White-plumed.

Myzantha melanoccephala, Noisy Miner.—Was solely confined to the box and gum trees along the river, whereas *M. flavigula*, Yellow-throated Miner, was noted only away from the river.

Anthochaera carunculata, Red Wattle-Bird.—Was seen and heard calling several times in the mallee scrubs, and was once seen at "Chowilla" Station on the river.

Acanthagenys rufogularis, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater.—Was plentiful throughout the trip.

Entomyzon cyanotis, Blue-faced Honeyeater, locally called "Banana-Bird" (a name probably carried along from Queensland).—This splendid, if noisy, bird, was fairly numerous and quite tame along the river. It enters the orange orchard at "Chowilla" freely, but the owner has no complaint about it. I did not see it about the soft-fruit gardens along the river, but I understand it is found as far down as Mannum.

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Philemon citreogularis, Yellow-throated (Little) Friar-Bird.—I was pleased to see, for the first time, this very noisy bird. I had several opportunities to observe this species closely, and consider the identity was correct. Its note, however, becomes rather monotonous and disturbing when one tries to sleep out of doors after daylight.

Chlamydera maculata, Spotted Bower-Bird.—I very much regret not seeing the bird which was an inhabitant of the "Chowilla" garden until recently, but a cat killed it. Its fame as a mimic is high at "Chowilla." One imitation in particular is worthy of record. It imitated the "click click" of the tractor as the machine worked in the orchard in such an excellent manner that on many occasions the owner thought that his men had started to work the tractor without instructions. The species must be very rare along this part of the river, for I heard no other reference to a bird being seen in recent years.

Struthidea cinerea, Apostle-Bird.—Two years ago a small colony of these birds built their cup-shaped mud nest in a mallee near the Paradise Dam on "Chowilla" Station. Several people mentioned this fact to me. From the description of the birds and their nest I am satisfied the identification is correct. The other record for South Australia is that of a specimen received at the S.A. Museum on 5th July, 1868, from F. W. Andrews from Tarpeena, which is about 17 miles north of Mount Gambier, as well as 10 miles from the Victorian border. I am pleased to record that the river people are proud of their birds, and give them all the protection possible.

Strepera melanoptera, Black-winged Currawong.—Seen and heard on several occasions in mallee scrubs north from the river, Careful observation enabled me to identify them as the Black-winged. A pair was nesting on a very thin limb in a very tall mallee, with the nest up amidst the leafy branchlets, far too risky a climb for inspection. The bird sat closely to the nest.

Cracticus nigrogularis, Pied (Black-throated) Butcher-Bird.—I was pleased to see this old northern friend on the river, and to hear residents there say that its piping is far superior to that of the Grey Butcher-Bird (*C. torquatus*). It is uncommon in comparison with the Grey, and is locally named the "Derwent Jack." A pair had just reared young at the Calperum Woolshed. *C. torquatus* is very common along the river, and is called "Butcher-Bird." That bird is called the "Derwent Jack" in other parts of Australia, but along the Murray valley the latter name is applied solely to that beautiful piper the Black-throated Butcher-Bird.