

PARSONS and McGILP—Birds' Notes on Trip to Panitya, Vic.

Bird Notes Taken on Trip to Panitya, Victoria.

By F. E. Parsons and J. Neil McGilp.

Adelaide was left 2nd September, 1933, by motor at 9 a.m. The weather was threatening, over one inch of rain having fallen the previous day over all the country through which we had to travel. A stop to boil the billy for lunch was made a few miles east of Tailem Bend, beside a small patch of pine scrub. Quite a number of species of birds were seen while having lunch. They included:—Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*); White-backed Magpie (*G. hypoleuca*); Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*); Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*); Diamond Firetail (*Zonaeeginthus guttatus*); Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*); Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*); Brown Weebill (*Smicropnis brevirostris*); White-winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*); Black-capped Sittella (*Neositta pileata*); Little Thornbill (*Acanthiza nana*); Red-tailed Thornbill (*A. hamiltoni*); Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*A. chrysorrhoa*); Striped Honeyeater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*); Brown-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*); Red Wattle-Bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*); Narrow-billed Bronze Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalus*); Brown Hawk (*Falco berigora*); Crested Bellbird (*Oreoica gutturalis*); Mülga-Parrot (*Psephotus varius*); Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*); Eastern Whiteface (*Aphelocephala leucopsis*); Hooded Robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*); Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*); Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*); Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novaehollandiae*); Brown Songlark (*Cinclorhamphus cruralis*); Crow (*Corvus* sp.).

We motored on leisurely, stopping to examine a Grey Butcher-Bird's nest at the side of the road, on which the bird was sitting closely. The nest contained the unusually large clutch of seven eggs. We pushed on to Lameroo, where we stayed for the night, covering 136 miles for the day. The following morning we continued on the road to Pinnaroo, and over the Victorian border to Panitya, which is six miles from Pinnaroo. Here we turned due north along the road which South Australia once claimed as the boundary between S.A. and Victoria, but now is definitely part of Victoria.

Six miles north of Panitya we arrived at Mr. Roy Ribbons' farm, where we made our stay for two weeks, having travelled 175 miles from Adelaide. Mr. Ribbons is a very keen observer of the birds in his district, and his knowledge of their habits and

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the class of country preferred by the different species enabled him, with little delay, to lead us to the different birds sought after, and he was very successful in locating their nests. We visited many different patches of scrub during our stay, going as far as 25 miles from the farm. In this way we travelled 326 miles in the car during our stay of two weeks, and by the time we arrived back in Adelaide had travelled 676 miles. The scrub visited at the greatest distance from the farm was well worth the trip, as it was there that the Mallee Emu-Wrens (*Stipiturus mallee*) were found. The mallee is fast being cleared, and it will not be very many years before the vast number of birds making this class of country their habitat will be forced to adapt themselves to other surroundings, or be exterminated. Mr. J. A. Ross, of Melbourne, a Past President of the R.A.O.U., joined us for the last week of our stay, and we had some very enjoyable rambles together. Our main object in making this trip was to get into contact with the Whipbird that has recently been reported from this district in "The Emu," but in this we were disappointed. Two old nests of the species were found, but the birds in no other way made their presence known. Mr. Ribbons, who knows the call well, said that if the bird was calling within a quarter of a mile of us we would be sure to hear it. The Whipbird was reported in "The Emu" as being similar to the Western Australian form, but this surmise was made after examining one female which had been collected. The male has never been collected, and so may prove to be a distinct species. Mr. Ribbons, who spends quite a lot of time in the scrub, observing the different birds, admitted that, although he has many times heard the call and found several nests containing the characteristic eggs, yet he has never seen a bird, excepting the one female, which Mr. Ross had collected.

The Striated Grass-Wrens (*Amytornis striatus*) were very plentiful. Wherever we came upon a patch of fairly high spinifex (porcupine grass) there we were sure to find the *Amytornis*. Many hours were spent searching for their nests and eggs. Several were found, some just being built, and five which contained two eggs each. One *Amytornis*' nest was found which contained one egg of the Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo, but no eggs of the host. This nest was marked down, and although over 20 miles from the homestead, the nest was subsequently visited by Messrs. Ribbons and Ross, when the nest contained besides the Cuckoo's egg, two eggs of the *Amytornis*. The nests are placed in the spinifex tussocks near the top, but in nearly

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all instances the nest can be seen without opening up the bush. One nest was found built quite on top of the tussock. The favourite position is near the top of a tussock which is overhung by a broom-bush or small mallee. The most interesting birds met with were the Red-throated Whistlers (*Pachycephala rufogularis*). These birds, although not common, were more plentiful than they were found to be near Karoonda, S.A. This latter district is the only one where the species has been recorded from in South Australia. It is not yet definitely agreed by all ornithologists that *P. rufogularis* and the Gilbert Whistler (*P. inornata*) inhabit the same localities, and on this trip several pairs of each were found in the same paddock. There is not a great deal of difference in the males of these species, both having the rufous throat of about the same shade. The male of *P. rufogularis*, however, has a distinct rufous wash over the abdomen; which in *P. inornata* is grey. Another point of distinction in the males is that *P. rufogularis* has the lores rufous; whilst *P. inornata* has the lores black. Contrary to the usual case, the females of the two species have outstanding differences. The female of *P. rufogularis* has a rufous throat and rufous lores only a slight shade lighter than in the male, and has also the rufous wash over the abdomen, but the female of *P. inornata* is a very plain bird, as the name implies. She has grey throat and lores; in fact, the whole bird is grey, the undersurface being slightly lighter than the upper. *P. rufogularis* is also a larger bird; there is not very much between them, but quite enough to be conspicuous.

The following are measurements of birds collected by F. E. Parsons:—

<i>P. rufogularis.</i>				<i>P. inornata.</i>			
	Total Length.	Spread of Wings			Total Length.	Spread of Wings.	
♂	8	inches	12 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches	♂	7 $\frac{1}{2}$	inches	11 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches
♂	8	"	12 "	♂	7 $\frac{1}{2}$	"	11 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
♂	7 $\frac{3}{4}$	"	— "	♂	8	"	11 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
♂	8 $\frac{1}{4}$	"	— "	♂	7 $\frac{1}{4}$	"	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Average	8	"	12 $\frac{1}{8}$ "	♂	7 $\frac{1}{4}$	"	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
	8	"	11 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	Average	7 $\frac{1}{2}$	"	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
♀	7 $\frac{3}{4}$	"	11 "	♀	7 $\frac{3}{4}$	"	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
♀	7 $\frac{1}{2}$	"	12 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	♀	7	"	10 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
♀	7 $\frac{3}{4}$	"	— "	♀	7 $\frac{1}{4}$	"	9 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Average	7 $\frac{3}{4}$	"	11 "	Average	7 1-3	"	10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

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Mallee Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus mallee*). This bird was described in "The Emu," Vol. 8, page 34, 1908, by A. J. Campbell, from a male specimen forwarded to him, but strangely enough the point of greatest difference from the Southern Emu-Wren (*S. malachurus*) and sub-species was not mentioned. That difference is the colour of the ear-coverts, which are brown in *S. malachurus* and sub-species which inhabit damp country, whilst in *S. mallee* the ear-coverts are blue, agreeing with the blue ear-coverts of the other dry country species, the Rufous-crowned Emu-Wren (*S. ruficeps*). So the damp country birds have brown ear-coverts and dry country species have blue ear-coverts. A. J. Campbell in his description gives the lores, throat and chest as the only blue parts. Mathews, in his Folio work, does not figure *S. mallee*, but in his description says:—"Throat, supra-loral streak, which is continued over the eye and fore-neck, pale blue," so that he also missed the blue ear-coverts, possibly through not having a specimen before him, and following Campbell's description, as skins of this bird are still very rare in collections. We found these little birds inhabiting the spinifex tufts about 26 miles north-north-east of Panitya. We hunted diligently for nests, but were unsuccessful, and came to the conclusion that they were not yet nesting. Three males and two females were collected, and the condition of these birds also pointed to the fact that it was a little 'early for their nesting. One pair of skins was presented to the Melbourne Museum, through Mr. Ross, and a male specimen went to the Adelaide Museum. These shy birds can be procured for specimens by exercising patience, but because of the clearing of the scrub by farmers it will very soon be too late to get them in the mallee. About a fortnight after our return to Adelaide, Mr. Ribbons took a beautiful set of three eggs from a porcupine bush in this area. These eggs are now in the S.A. Museum.

(Birds Recorded on the Trip East of the River Murray.)

Coturnix pectoralis (Stubble Quail).—A farmer reported that a nest with five eggs was found at the end of August.

Phaps chalcoptera (Common Bronzewing).—Numerous. They were seen at pools on the road, and were found nesting.

Ocyphaps lophotes (Crested Pigeon).—Flushed from the road at Panitya.

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Zonifer tricolor (Banded Plover).—Plentiful on cleared land; nesting.

Peltohyas australis (Australian Dotterel).—We were surprised to find these birds so far south. Two sets of eggs were shown us, collected by Mr. Ribbons.

Erolia acuminata (Sharp-tailed Sandpiper).—A solitary bird found wading in a pool on the road.

Circus assimilis (Spotted Harrier).—Mr. Ribbons had collected two eggs of this species.

Uroaetus audax (Wedge-tailed Eagle).—Bird sitting on road fence-post.

Falco berigora (Brown Hawk).—Three birds seen on the wing.

Falco cenchroides (Nankeen Kestrel).

Ninox boobook (Boobook Owl).—One bird roosting in a large broom-bush.

Glossopsitta porphyrocephala (Purple-crowned Lorikeet).—A few noticed flying past.

Kakatoe roseicapilla (Galah).—Bird flushed from hollow containing three eggs.

Barnardius barnardi (Ringneck Parrot).—Only a few noticed along the roads.

Psephotus varius (Mulga-Parrot).

Aegotheles cristata (Owlet Nightjar).—One bird flushed from hollow in a mallee.

Eurostopodus guttatus (Spotted Nightjar).—Several flushed from the ground.

Cuculus pallidus (Pallid Cuckoo).—Two birds only seen.

Chalcites basalis (Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo).—Birds seen and one egg found in *Amytornis*' nest.

Hirundo neoxena (Welcome Swallow).

Cheramoeca leucosterna (White-backed Swallow).—The birds were drilling their nesting tunnels.

Rhipidura leucophrys (Willie Wagtail).

Seisura inquieta (Restless Flycatcher).

Petroica goodenovii (Red-capped Robin).

Melanodryas cucullata (Hooded Robin).

Pachycephala pectoralis (Golden Whistler).

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Pachycephala rufogularis (Red-throated Whistler).

Pachycephala inornata (Gilbert Whistler).—The three species of Whistlers were seen in the same patch of scrub.

Colluricincla harmonica (Grey Shrike-Thrush).—Several nests with eggs found.

Grallina cyanoleuca (Magpie-Lark).

Oreoica gutturalis (Crested Bellbird).—Nests found with eggs.

Coracina novae-hollandiae (Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike).

Cinclosoma castanotum (Chestnut Quail-Thrush).—Nest with two eggs found.

Drymodes brunneopygia (Southern Scrub-Robin).—Several nests found with the characteristic single egg.

Pomatostomus superciliosus (White-browed Babbler).—Several nests with eggs.

Epthianura albifrons (White-fronted Chat).—Nesting in brush at side of road.

Smicromis brevirostris (Brown Weebill).—Building a nest in low mallee.

Aphelocephala leucopsis (Eastern Whiteface).

Acanthiza nana (Little Thornbill).

Acanthiza hamiltoni (Red-tailed Thornbill).—Very common. Nests and eggs found.

Acanthiza uropygialis (Chestnut-tailed Thornbill).

Acanthiza chrysorrhoa (Yellow-tailed Thornbill).

Hylacola cauta (Shy Ground-Wren).—Nests found, but we were too late for eggs.

Cinclorhamphus cruralis (Brown Songlark).

Amytornis striatus (Striated Grass-Wren).

Stipiturus mallee (Mallee Emu-Wren).

Malurus melanotus (Black-backed Blue Wren).—Two birds seen by Mr. J. A. Ross.

Malurus assimilis (Purple-backed Wren).—A nest found being built.

Artamus cyanopterus (Dusky Wood-Swallow).

Neositta pileata (Black-capped Sittella).

Pardalotus xanthopygus (Yellow-tailed Pardalote).—Nests found in tunnels two feet long, containing eggs.

Pardalotus ornatus or *P. striatus* (Red-tipped or Striated Pardalote).—This bird was not definitely identified.

Melithreptus brevirostris (Brown-headed Honeyeater).

Gliciphila melanops (Tawny-crowned Honeyeater).

Meliphaga ornata (Yellow-pluméd Honeyeater).

Myzantha melanotis (*obscura*) (Black-eared Miner).

Anthochaera carunculata (Red Wattle-Bird).

Acanthagenys rufogularis (Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater).

Anthus australis (Australian Pipit).

Zonaeginthus guttatus (Diamond Firetail).—Seen near Taillem Bend.

Corvus sp.?—No bird was collected.

Corcorax melanorhamphus (White-winged Chough).—Nest with four eggs.

Strepera melanoptera (Black-winged Currawong).—Nest and egg found.

Cracticus torquatus (Grey Butcher-Bird).—Nests with four eggs and seven eggs.

Gymnorhina tibicen (Black-backed Magpie).—Nesting.

Gymnorhina hypoleuca (White-backed Magpie).—Only one bird was seen. All others noted were Black-backed.