

Ornithological Observations in the Sutherlands and Mount Mary Districts, S.A.

By E. F. Boehm.

The past three seasons, 1934-36, have been dry ones, and the conditions prevailing appear to have been unfavourable for some of the migratory and nomadic species of birds because they were not so numerous as is usual in the better seasons. It has been the aim of the writer to carefully check published records of species occurring in the district by making additional observations during the three years, and a good watch has been kept for species not previously recorded. The observations recorded below have been made since those published in the "South Australian Ornithologist," Vol. XII, 1934, p. 154:—

Dromaius novae-hollandiae, Emu.—Parties of from three to seven birds were noted in September, 1935. On 25th June, 1935, a single bird was seen in a scrub of black Oak (*Casuarina lepidophloia*) north-west of Bower. It came to within about five yards of a bush in which the writer was hiding, and, after grunting several times, it walked slowly away.

Coturnix pectoralis, Stubble Quail.—Have been uncommon, and were not observed breeding. One was found dead under a fence on 19th June, 1935, and it appeared that it had been killed by flying against the wires.

Turnix velox, Little Quail.—Was slightly more common than the Stubble Quail, and a few chicks were seen.

Geopelia cuneata, Diamond Dove.—One was observed on the railway fence near St. John's Church, Sutherlands, on 26th September, 1935. This was the second bird to be noted in this part of the State, and as no aviary birds of the species are known here, it seems probable that stray wild birds occasionally come into the district from the more northern areas.

Phaps chalcoptera, Common Bronzewing.—This fine Pigeon is becoming rarer with the passing of the years. About twenty years ago it was not unusual to see up to sixty birds in a flock at certain times of the season. Nowadays, they are rarely seen in small flocks of five or six individuals. Usually, only single birds are seen.

Ocyphaps lophotes, Crested Pigeon.—Observed in flocks of up to twenty birds on occasions. There does not appear to be any decrease taking place in their numbers.

Phalacrocorax ater, Little Black Cormorant.—A new record. One flew over the writer's home on 3rd June, 1935. Many years ago the species occasionally paid visits to the district, but it has not hitherto been recorded.

Microcarbo melanoleucus, Little Pied Cormorant.—Several birds were noted at dams and tanks.

Sterna bergii, Crested Tern.—A new record. One was seen about a mile south of Sutherlands on 5th September, 1934. It was flying about in showery weather with a strong wind.

Larus novae-hollandiae, Silver Gull.—One was noted at a dam on 20th April, 1935.

Charadrius melanops, Black-fronted Dotterel.—Single birds or pairs are occasionally observed at dams. The species can always be found at the Saltwater Creek, a permanent stream, south of Sutherlands, and although chicks have been seen there, nobody appears to have ever found a nest.

Erolia acuminata, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.—A single bird was shot at a dam near the homestead, at Sutherlands, on 1st October, 1937. A new record for the district.

Burhinus magnirostris, Southern Stone Curlew.—A pair was flushed from some mallee shoots in scrub near Bower on 10th

November, 1936. Several birds have been seen in scrub north-west of Sutherlands during the past year (1936).

Notophoxyx novae-hollandiae, White-faced Heron.—Seen at dams, especially in dams where there are yabbies.

Notophoxyx pacifica, White-necked Heron.—A new record. On 11th July, 1937, a bird was noted at a dam near Sutherlands. Some years ago one was seen here, but it was not recorded.

Querquedula gibberifrons, Grey Teal.—On 22nd October, 1936, a flock of fourteen was observed near Sutherlands. In December, 1936, a single bird spent about a week at a dam.

Circus assimilis, Spotted Harrier.—A few have been seen, but there was no evidence of breeding activities.

Accipiter cirrocephalus, Collared Sparrowhawk.—Several single birds and a few pairs were observed. No signs of nesting were seen.

Uroaetus audax, Wedge-tailed Eagle.—This species is noted at intervals, and especially at lambing time.

Haliastur sphenurus, Whistling Eagle.—A nest containing one egg was found between Sutherlands and Bower on 2nd October, 1935. It was situated in a tall mallee.

Falco hypoleucus, Grey Falcon.—Two were flying over Sutherlands on 25th September, 1936. The species is very rare here.

Falco peregrinus, Peregrine Falcon.—A new record. One was seen near Sutherlands on 2nd January, 1934, and another on 4th February, 1935.

Glossopsitta concinna, Musk Lorikeet.—Small flocks were occasionally seen flying over.

Kakatoe roseicapilla, Galah.—Flocks of up to eighty birds have been observed on freshly-sown wheat paddocks.

Leptolophus hollandicus, Cockatoo Parrot.—Scarce during the period under review. In the spring of 1935, which was a drought year, only a few migrating birds were noted.

Platycercus adelaidae, Adelaide Rosella.—Appears to be increasing. It was far less frequently seen here about ten or fifteen years ago.

Psephotus varius, Mulga Parrot.—Pairs of this species visit the nursery of the Sutherlands Fodder Plants Acclimatisation Committee when the stud rows of Bladder Saltbush (*Atriplex vesicarium*) are fruiting and they feed on the seeds.

Psephotus haematogaster, Blue Bonnet.—Have been noted breeding. The species is nowhere common.

Neophema elegans, Elegant Parrot.—Rarely observed. Single birds are sometimes seen flying over and are heard calling early in the morning. They fly fairly high. One was noted at rest on 31st March, 1935, and it was approached fairly closely.

Melopsittacus undulatus, Budgerygah.—Uncommon during the three seasons, and not observed at all in 1935.

Aegotheles cristata, Owlet Nightjar.—On several occasions remains of this species have been found in a barn frequented by domestic cats.

Halcyon pyrrhopygius, Red-backed Kingfisher.—Several nesting tunnels found in the bank of a creek contained eggs.

Merops ornatus, Australian Bee-eater.—Young birds not long on the wing have been noted, but no nests have ever been found.

Micropus pacificus, Fork-tailed Swift.—Ten were flying about over the Acclimatisation Committee's Plots, Sutherlands, on 26th February, 1935, at 12 noon. There was a cool wind from the north-east and the temperature was 97 degrees. At the same place about thirty were observed on 6th March, 1935, at 5 p.m. The weather was calm, warm, and cloudy, and there had been a few drops of rain.

Cuculus pallidus, Pallid Cuckoo.—Observed each season, but no eggs have ever been discovered.

Chalcites basalis, Horsfield Bronze Cuckoo.—Not so frequently seen as the Pallid Cuckoo.

Rhipidura flabellifera, Grey Fantail.—Rarely seen. Has never been known to breed in the district.

Melanodryas cucullata, Hooded Robin.—A few nests with eggs or young were found.

Pteropodocys maxima, Ground Cuckoo-Shrike.—One observed flying and heard calling near Sutherlands on 18th September, 1934.

Pomatostomus ruficeps, Chestnut-crowned Babbler.—A few nests containing from three to five eggs were discovered.

Epthianura tricolor, Crimson Chat.—Has been very rare. Only a few birds were noted and none was found nesting.

Epthianura aurifrons, Orange Chat.—Single birds were observed on very rare occasions.

Acanthiza nana, Little Thornbill.—Eight were noted in a clump of flowering *Myoporum platycarpum*, south of Sutherlands on 3rd December, 1935.

Cinclorhamphus cruralis, Brown Songlark.—Uncommon during the period under consideration.

Malurus cyanotus, Blue-and-White Wren.—Seven companies were noted near Mount Mary on 10th October, 1936. They were in Australian Boxthorns (*Lycium australe*).

Malurus assimilis, Purple-backed Wren.—A nest near Peep Hill, north-west of Sutherlands, on 11th November, 1936. The female flushed from the nest and the male was observed nearby. There were three eggs in the nest, which was in a scarlet-fruited Ruby Saltbush (*Enchylaena tomentosa*) growing in a blown-down *Dodonaea viscosa* in scrub comprising Black Oak, Hoppbush (*Dodonaea* spp.), *Cassia* spp., and Coastal Saltbush (*Rhagodia baccata*).

Neositta pileata, Black-capped Sittella.—Nests found during the course of their construction have invariably been deserted by the birds.

Pardalotus xanthopygus, Yellow-tailed Pardalote.—Burrows of this species have been noticed each season at the base of mallee shoots.

Zosterops halmaturina, Grey-backed Silvereye.—Birds did much damage to ripening grapes in the garden of Mr. C. G. Wutke during April, 1937. A flock of nine was seen in *Geijera* scrub on 15th April, 1937.

Melithreptus brevirostris, Brown-headed Honeyeater.—No signs of breeding activities were observed during the period.

Anthochaera carunculata, Red Wattle-Bird.—A small number have been noted.

Acanthagenys rufogularis, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater.—Nests found in Hoppbush (*Dodonaea attenuata*), usually about seven or eight feet from the ground, and containing three eggs. Built of *Stipa* stems, the nests were lined with the woolly fruits of *Bassia sclerolaenoides* and the wool of sheep.

Anthus australis, Pipit.—About twenty-five were in an empty dam on 29th January, 1934. The temperature was 114 degrees in the shade, and when the birds were supplied with water in a shallow dish they immediately gathered around it and drank.

Zonaeginthus guttatus, Diamond Firetail.—Several nests were found, and one of them contained five eggs. The latter nest was twenty feet up in a tall mallee and built under the nest of a Brown Hawk (*Falco berigora*).

Corcorax melanorhamphus, White-winged Chough.—Observed breeding in several localities. Small flocks were noticed pulling up young wheat plants each season.

Gymnorhina hypoleuca, White-backed Magpie.— One was noted catching a house mouse (*Mus musculus*) on 21st November, 1936. Several birds did considerable damage on the nursery of the Fodder Plants Acclimatisation Committee by pulling up imported Vulgare and Durum wheats in the stud rows early in June, 1937.
