

CROWS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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For many years the recognition of the various forms of the genus *Corvus* in Australia has been a difficult one, and at the present time the position is still confused owing to the varying opinions offered by many ornithologists. Mathews (4) reviewed the classification adopted by various authors, and concluded that three species are recognisable, namely the Raven (*Corvus coronoides*), the Crow (*C. ceciliae*), and the Little Crow (*C. bennetti*). These species were adopted in the R.A.O.U. Checklist (1926 edition).

In 1926, Meinertzhagen (6) recognised only two species, namely *C. coronoides coronoides* and *C.c. bennetti*, lumping *C. ceciliae* with the latter. Three years later Hartert (3) suggested that *C. coronoides* and *C. bennetti* were distinct species, and regarded *C. ceciliae* as a subspecies of *C. macrorhynchus*, which occurs in East Asia, Malaya, and the islands to the north of Australia. About the same time Campbell (2) reviewed the genus in Australia, and suggested that the Crow and Raven were distinct species, but considered that the Little Crow (*C. bennetti*) was a geographical race of the first-named.

In his most recent work Mathews (5) follows Hartert.

In my opinion many Museum specimens have been wrongly identified by some of our leading ornithologists, and bear wrong names on the labels. Furthermore, existing records of the occurrence of the genus *Corvus* in South Australia are in most cases worthless, because the characters and distribution of the various forms have not been properly understood. Most cases of wrong identification appear to have arisen from the fact that the bases of the nape feathers were believed to be always dusky-grey in the Raven (*C. coronoides*) and white in the Crow (*C. ceciliae*). It has now been established that various shades of grey or white occur in the feather bases of the Raven, while juvenile Crows of both species usually do not have white bases on the feathers of the nape. The presence or absence and size of the hackles of the throat have also not been properly considered, and

I have outlined the principal phases in a previous paper (1).

After critically examining about 120 specimens, both from my own collection and those of the South Australian Museum and Professor J. B. Cleland, I consider that there are three species recognisable, which may be distinguished in the adult as follows:

I. Hackles longer than 31 mm., grey or dirty-white base to nape feathers not sharply defined from black.....*coronoides*. (Occurs on Eyre Peninsula, Yorke Peninsula, Flinders Ranges, Mt. Lofty Ranges, Olary Spur, Murray Flats and Murray Mallee, South-east of S.A., Kangaroo Island, Pearson Island, also Lake Frome Basin, and Lake Eyre Basin east of long. 138 deg.)

II. Hackles less than 31 mm., dirty-white or snow-white bases sharply defined:

(1) Dimensions: culmen over 50 mm., tarsus over 60 mm.....*ceciliae*. (Occurs in the north-west of South Australia and in the Lake Eyre Basin west of long. 138 deg., approximately north of about 33 deg. latitude.)

(2) Dimensions less than above..*bennetti*. (Occurs generally north of lat. 32 deg. S., west of Flinders Ranges, south to Port Germein; Murray Flats south to Kinchina and Murray Bridge; also Murray Mallee south to about 36 deg. lat. S.)

A frequent source of confusion has been that many Ravens in the southern districts of Australia sometimes have the extreme bases of the feathers of the nape whitish-grey or even dirty-white, instead of the more usual dusky-grey. Most collectors have regarded these examples as Crows, despite the possession of long hackles. An extreme example of this kind of individual Raven is in the S.A. Museum (No. B 11023), a male from Islington, South Australia. Here there is an abnormally wide bar of dirty-white at the base of each nape-feather, and the grey section is much narrowed. Nevertheless, there is no sharp demarcation between the black and white areas as in the Crow, and the hackles are Raven-like.

I have seen no skin of the Australian Crow from any locality in southern South Australia. Skins in the South Australian Museum from South Australia labelled "*Corvus cecillae*" are typical examples of the Raven (*Corvus coronoides*).

Little appears to be known about the southern distribution of the Crow in South Australia. A male, No. 825, from Ernabella, Musgrave Ranges, has been examined from the collection of Dr. J. B. Cleland. Several skins from the Adelaide Plains in the S.A. Museum are labelled "*Corvus bennetti*"—the Little Crow—but in my opinion they may be juvenile Ravens, comparable with certain dwarfs of that species which have come to my notice from various localities, and which I hope to discuss more fully in a later communication.

It is considered that the plumage of the Crow and Little Crow is softer and more glossy than in the Raven, and with usually less purple and more blue reflection on the crown and ventral surface. The extent of intergradation of the dimensions of the two

Crows requires further investigation, as also does the sequence of plumage and other changes due to age. Further data as regards colors of the eye and pharynx, and sexual differences are also needed.

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- (4) Mathews, G. M., 1927: Birds Aust., p. 401.
- (5) Mathews, G. M., 1931: List Bds. Australasia.
- (6) Meinertzhagen, R., 1926: Nov. Zool., p. 57.