

# THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ORNITHOLOGIST

Official Journal of the South Australian Ornithological Association.

(First appeared 1914.)

President: PROFESSOR J. B. CLELAND. Vice-President: LIEUT.-COL. A. H. LONDON.

Hon. Secretary: MR. S. E. TERRILL.

Address: 167 Napier Terrace, Westbourne Park, Adelaide.

Editorial Committee: F. M. ANGEL, J. B. CLELAND, A. G. EDQUIST.

Vol. XVII

DECEMBER, 1944

Part 4

## BIRDS BREEDING IN THE MILLICENT DISTRICT

By ALLAN E. EY.

Emu (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*).—Common along the coastal area of Millicent during months from October to April, where it feeds on berries from different types of bushes. Located a nest containing 9 eggs on 4/6/38.

Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*).—Common. Breeds on small rocky islands along the coast. An island visited on 26/11/39 contained many nests with young and eggs at all stages.

Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*).—Very common. Some breeding seasons it nests very freely. Other seasons not a bird can be found in the district.

Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*).—Very rare. A few years ago this bird used to be very common, but at present it is getting very hard to locate.

Brush Bronzewing (*Phaps elegans*).—Very common.

Lewin Water rail (*Rallus pectoralis*).—No doubt this species and the following 3 species are more plentiful than what I have seen of them, as they are very difficult birds to observe here on account of the swamps being so thickly overgrown. Have found nests of this species containing 4 eggs on 1/11/37 and 2 eggs on 6/11/40.

Banded Landrail (*Hypotaenidia philippensis*).—Located a nest containing 6 eggs on 5/10/41.

Australian Spotted Crake (*Porzana fluminea*).—Located a nest containing 3 eggs on 1/11/37.

Marsh Crake (*Porzana pusilla*).—Nest containing 6 eggs on 2/10/38.

Dusky Moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*).—Common. Nests with 7 eggs on 8/11/37 and 11 on 9/11/41.

Eastern Swamphen (*Porphyrio melanotus*).—Very common. Breeds in practically every swamp.

Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*).—Common.

Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). Breeds in small colonies on small rocky islands along the coast. Young birds able to fly and many old nests were observed in September a few years ago. Have not observed their nests containing eggs yet.

Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*).—Common. Breeds in colonies similar to the above species. They usually start laying their eggs about April 1. Usually 2 or 3 eggs form a clutch; only on one occasion have I found a nest with 4 eggs.

Little Pied Cormorant (*Microcarbo melanoleucus*).—Very common. On 15/10/38 was the first time to my knowledge that this species nested in the district. Since then it has had large colonies in several parts of the district.

Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*).—Large colonies nest on islands along the coast.

Silver Gull (*Larus novae-hollandiae*).—Very common. Breeds on all islands along the coast.

Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*).—Rare. Only occasional birds seen along the coast. Located a nest containing 3 eggs on 12/12/43.

Spurwing Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*).—Very common.

Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*).—Very common. Within 200 yds. of my home I observed 6 nests containing 4 eggs each in August, 1943.

Hooded Dotterel (*Charadrius cucullatus*).—Common along the sea beach. Very seldom do they nest near the high water mark,

though occasional nests are located there. They prefer for a nesting site usually about quarter of a mile to half a mile from the sea, on the big, clear sanddrifts. Two or 3 eggs form a clutch.

Red-capped Dotterel (*Charadrius ruficapillus*).—Very common. Breeds anywhere where there is water. Located a nest containing 3 eggs on 12/12/43. This is very unusual, as the clutch is nearly always 2 eggs.

Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*).—Rare. Occasional nests found with 3 eggs.

White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus leuccephalus*).—Likely to breed on any swamp, but seldom returning to the same locality the following year.

White Ibis (*Threskiornis molucca*).—Common. A large colony breed here in teatree on an island in Lake Bonney. The island covers an area of about 3 acres. The White Ibis occupied an area of about half an acre. Their nests are placed on the ground and in tea-tree up to heights of about 15 feet or wherever there is an available place to build a nest. Usually 2 or 3 eggs to a clutch.

Strawnecked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*).—Very common. They also nest on the island in Lake Bonney. The White Ibis have a very small colony compared with the colony the Straw-necked have there. I would say three-quarters of their nests are placed in tea-tree, the others on the ground. There are a few small patches of dense tea-tree on the island which the Ibis don't seem to penetrate, these patches of tea-tree being inhabited by Nankeen Night-herons. Usually 3 or 4 eggs form the Straw-necked Ibis clutch.

Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*).—These birds have several small colonies of about 3 or 4 nests in each, scattered throughout the Ibis colony. Their nests are usually placed in the topmost branches of tea-tree, where they have a good surrounding view. Usually 4 eggs form their clutch.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill (*Platalea flavipes*).—Rare. Have only found one nest of this species in the district and that was on 15/10/38. A small colony of 18 nests of the Little Pied Cormorant surrounded the Spoonbill's nest. The colony was situated about 30 ft. high in a Red Gum tree, overlooking a small swamp. The nest contained 3 eggs.

White Egret (*Egretta alba*).—Usually about 30 birds can be seen here at any time of the year, but it was not until 7/2/43 that they

were found breeding here. Two nests were placed in tea-tree about 17 ft. high, only a few feet apart. One nest contained 3 fully fledged young. Am not certain as to how many young were in the other nest, as they disappeared amongst the hundreds of young Ibis that were in the tea-tree.

White-faced Heron (*Notophoxyx novae-hollandiae*).—Common. Usually 4 or 5 eggs form their clutch, but occasionally 6 eggs are noted.

Nankeen Night-heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*).—A colony of about 200 nests was seen in the thickest part of the tea-tree on the island where the Ibis nest. The height of their nests from the ground varied from about 2 ft. to about 10 ft., but usually about 6 or 7 ft. In most cases their nests were so thinly built that one could count the number of eggs in the nest by looking through it from the ground. Three eggs form their clutch, although on one occasion a few years ago I found a nest containing 4 eggs.

Brown Bittern (*Botaurus poeciloptilus*).—Rare. Two nests were found resting on reeds in a swamp about 10 ft. apart on 11/11/38. Each contained 4 fresh eggs. A nest with 5 eggs was found on 15/11/36.

Black Swan (*Chenopsis atrata*).—Very common.

Chestnut-breasted Shelduck (*Casarca tador-noides*).—Rare. Pairs of birds with small young are observed occasionally on swamps.

Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*).—Very common.

Chestnut Teal (*Querquedula castanea*).—Rare. A bird was observed on the Lake with 8 very small young about 3 years ago.

Grey Teal (*Querquedula gibberifrons*).—Very common.

Blue-winged Shoveler (*Spatula rhynchotis*).—Common. A nest was found in a tussock, containing 11 eggs, on 5/9/38.

Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*).—Very common. Usually 2 eggs form their clutch, but on rare occasions have found up to 6 eggs.

Swamp Harrier (*Circus approximans*).—Very common. Usually 4 eggs form their clutch. On two occasions have found nests containing 5 eggs.

Australian Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*).—Very common. Three or 4 eggs form their clutch.

Wedgetail Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*).—Rare. Know of 7 breeding nests within a radius of about 15 miles from Millicent.

Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*).—Very common.

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).—Very rare. Only know of one pair in the district, where they nest in a very large hollow of a dead Red Gum. The hollow is about 30 ft. up. This hollow has been in use by a pair of Falcons every year since 1934 when I found it. Three eggs usually form their clutch.

Brown Hawk (*Falco berigora*).—Very common. Usually 3 eggs form their clutch, although on 24/9/35 I found a nest containing 4 eggs.

Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*).—Common. About 12 years ago 3 eggs was the usual clutch to be found in this district. It was not until about 4 years later that I found a nest containing 4 eggs. In my opinion this was much more common then than it is now. During the last 2 or 3 years it has been a very rare occurrence to find a nest with less than 5 eggs.

Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*).—Common. Nests containing 2 or 3 eggs quite frequently found.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*).—Rare. Some years about January, February or March these birds were quite frequently picked up dead, in very poor condition. Have found nests with 4 eggs 24/10/37, 3 eggs 3/12/38.

Musk Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta concinna*).—Rare, although very common some years about February or March, when it comes here to feed on fruit in the orchards. Occasional nests found, with 2 eggs on 3/12/38 and 2 eggs on 19/10/36.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptrorhynchus funereus*).—Common: flocks of two or three hundred quite frequently seen feeding on seeds of Pine trees. Occasional pairs breed in the dense Stringy-bark forests near Millicent.

White Cockatoo (*Kakatoe galerita*).—Very rare. Nest found containing 2 eggs on 26/9/38.

Galah (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*).—About 4 years ago 4 birds came to this district. A pair successfully reared young the same year that they arrived. Since then they have nested here each year and at present there are about 30 birds in the flock.

Crimson Rosella (*Platycercus elegans*).—Rare. Have found nests containing 5 eggs on 13/11/38, 3 eggs on 13/11/38.

Eastern Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*).—Common. Usually 5 or 6 eggs form a clutch.

Red-backed Parrot (*Psephotus haematotus*).—Very common. Seven eggs is the largest set I have observed.

Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*).—Common. Observed a nest containing 3 eggs on 22/9/36.

Owlet Nightjar (*Aegotheles cristata*).—The only bird I have seen in the district was flushed from a nest containing 3 eggs, about 8 years ago.

Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*).—Very common.

Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*).—Rare. Have only found 2 eggs of this species; one was in a Goldfinch's nest (*Carduelis carduelis*) and the other in a Blackbird's (*Turdus merula*).

Fantail Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*).—Rare. Have observed this species' eggs in Striated Thornbills' nests and White-browed Scrub-wrens' nests.

Horsefield Bronze Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*).—Common. I have found this species' eggs in the nests of Yellow-tailed Thornbills, Scarlet Robins, Blue Wrens, and Eastern Whitefaces.

Golden-Bronze Cuckoo (*Lamprocoryx plagusus*).—Have found this species' eggs only in Yellow-tailed Thornbills' nests, and that on four occasions.

Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*).—Very common.

Tree Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*).—Common. Four or five eggs usually form their clutch.

Fairy Martin (*Hylochelidon ariel*).—I have not seen this species in the district yet, but their bottle-shaped nests can be seen in several caves. They have not bred here during the past 10 or 12 years to my knowledge.

Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*).—Common. Three eggs usually form their clutch, but occasionally 4 are found.

Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*).—Common.

Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*).—Rare. Occasional nests found containing 3 eggs.

Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascinans*).—Rare. Have found only one nest, containing 2 eggs, in January, 1943.

Scarlet Robin (*Petroica multicolor*).—Common. Usually 3 eggs form their clutch.

Hooded Robin (*Melanodryras cucullata*).—Rare. Have found nests containing 2 eggs each on 23/10/37, 30/9/39, 8/10/39, and 19/11/39.

Southern Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*).—Common. Usually 2 eggs, occasionally 3 eggs, to the clutch.

Olive Whistler (*Pachycephala olivacea*).—Common. Usually their nests are placed in the densest part of tea-tree. Often where tea-tree has been burnt off and young saplings come up very thickly, if they are about 8 or 10 ft. high, the Whistler has a great liking for this type of tea-tree for its nesting site. The nest usually ranges from about 3 ft. to 8 ft. from the ground, and is built on the thinnest of twigs, depending on the density of the tea-tree for support of its nest. One pair of birds may build up to 4 nests before successfully rearing young. Eggs are laid in each of the nests. Some of the eggs are in quite good order, others are broken. On one occasion I located a Whistler's nest containing 2 small young. The sitting bird could almost be touched before she flushed. About 3 ft. from this nest another new nest contained 2 broken eggs. And yet another, about 8 ft. away contained 2 damaged eggs. I have also found nests resting on a tussock in thick tea-tree. In 1941 I found nests containing 2 eggs each on October 15, October 18, and December 14.

Grey Shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*).—Very common.

Magpie Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*).—Very common. A pair nested here this year on a telegraph pole, and yet big trees were in abundance a hundred yards away.

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina novae-hollandiae*).—Common. Nests observed with 3 eggs on 22/10/39 and 26/11/39, and 2 eggs on 23/10/39.

Grey-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus temporalis*).—Only know of five families in the district. On several occasions have located their nests containing 5 eggs.

Australian Ground Thrush (*Oreocincla lunulata*).—Very rare. Occasional nests found containing 2 or 3 eggs.

White-fronted Chat (*Epthianura albifrons*).—Very common.

*Gerygone*.—I located a nest 12 ft. up in a Blackwood tree on 12/11/38. The bird flushed and it contained 3 fresh eggs. Comparing this bird with Neville Cayley's description of the White-throated Warbler in "What Bird is That?" I could see very little difference. I have not seen the bird here since.

[These eggs correspond with known eggs of the White-throated Warbler (*Gerygone olivacea*) in the McGilp Collection in the South Australian Museum. The nest

has been described by J. Neil McGilp at the end of this article. This species is therefore to be added to the List of Birds recorded for South Australia. The eggs are at present on loan to the Museum.—Editors.]

Eastern Whiteface (*Aphelocephala leucopsis*).—Common. One of our earliest breeders. Usually start nesting about the beginning of July.

Striated Thornbill (*Acanthiza lineata*).—Very common.

Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*).—Common. A favorite nesting site of this species is in grass overhanging the sides of a small drain.

Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*).—Very common. Probably one of our commonest birds.

White-browed Scrub-wren (*Sericornis frontalis*).—Common. The rats have decreased this species considerably during the past few years. Once where they were quite numerous in the tea-tree that surrounds Lake Bonney, one can hardly locate a bird now. The majority of their old nests that are still left in the tea-tree are inhabited by rats.

Striated Field Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*).—Common. Nests quite frequently found. Located a nest containing 4 eggs on 16/8/38. The usual clutch is 3 eggs.

Brown Songlark (*Cinclorhamphus cruralis*).—Common. Nests containing 3 eggs quite common, but occasionally 4 eggs are found in their nests.

Rufous Bristle Bird (*Dasyornis broadbenti*).—Common. Their large, dome-shaped nests are probably one of the simplest to find in this district. They usually prefer a small bush, with rushes growing up through the centre of it. The nest is generally always in the centre of the bush. The height of the nest from the ground is usually from 2 ft. to about 3 ft. 6 ins. The highest nest found was about 6 ft. 6 ins. I have not yet found a nest containing more than 2 eggs. Located a nest on 19/9/39 containing a pure white egg and a normal egg of the Bristle Bird; both eggs were the same size.

Little Grass Bird (*Megalurus gramineus*).—Rare. Occasional nests containing 3 or 4 eggs found.

Golden-headed Fantail-warbler (*Cisticola exilis*).—Rare. Have not found a nest of this species yet, but observed a good many young birds just able to fly in January this year.

Southern Emu Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*).—These birds are only located on a

small area of about 200 acres, about 7 miles south of Millicent. I have not seen them anywhere else in the district, and yet they are fairly numerous in this locality. I located a nest containing 3 small young on 4/11/38. The nest was situated about 3 ft. up in thick rushes growing through a small tea-tree.

Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*).—Very common.

Dusky Woodswallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*).—Common. Usually 3 or 4 eggs form their clutch.

Black-capped Sittella (*Neositta pileata*).—Common. Have observed nests containing 3 eggs each on 15/10/36, 15/10/38, and 12/11/39.

White-throated Treecreeper (*Climacteris leucophaea*).—Common. Nest containing 1 egg and 1 young on 3/12/38.

Grey-backed Silvereye (*Zosterops halmaturina*).—Very common.

Brown-headed Honey-eater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*).—Rare. Occasional nests observed containing young. Have not found a nest containing eggs yet.

Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*).—Very rare. Have found only one nest which contained 2 eggs.

Singing Honey-eater (*Meliphaga virescens*).—Very common. Usually 2 or 3 eggs form their clutch.

White-plumed Honey-eater (*Meliphaga penicillata*).—Common. The usual clutch of 3 eggs occasionally observed.

Yellow-winged Honey-eater (*Meliornis novae-hollandiae*).—Very common. Two or 3 eggs form their clutch.

Noisy Miner (*Myzantha melanocephala*).—Rare. Many elderly people in this district have told me that this bird used to be one of the commonest to be found here years ago. It is rarely seen now. I have not observed any more than 3 eggs in their nests yet.

Little Wattle Bird (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*).—Very common. Usually 2 eggs, occasionally 1 egg, form their clutch.

Red Wattle Bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*).—Rare. Usually 2 eggs form their clutch. Located a nest containing 3 eggs on 2/12/34.

Spiney-cheeked Honey-eater (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*).—Very common. Two or 3 eggs form their clutch.

Australian Pipit (*Anthus australis*).—Very common.

Horsfield Bushlark (*Mirafra javanica*).—Common. These birds are very numerous in

crops of oats and barley, etc. about November and December. Through the rest of the year they can be met with in pairs or single birds anywhere in open country. I have only found 3 sets of their eggs and each varied much in colour.

Beautiful Firetail (*Zonaeginthus bellus*).—Rare. Usually 5 or 6 eggs form their clutch.

Red-browed Finch (*Aegintha temporalis*).—Very common. Have observed as many as seven nests in one tree. Eight eggs is the most I have found in one nest.

Australian Raven (*Corvus coronoides*).—Common. Nests quite frequently found containing 5 eggs. These birds generally like the Red Gums or tall Stringy-barks to nest in.

*Corvus?*—There is another species which inhabits this district. It is restricted to the coastal area or within about 3 miles of the sea. The bird is smaller than the Raven. Its nests are usually placed in Sheoak trees about 15 or 20 ft. from the ground. Five to 7 eggs form a clutch, and are much smaller than typical Raven's eggs.

[A specimen sent to the S.A. Museum proved to be Little Crow (*Corvus bennetti*).—Editors.]

Black-winged Currawong (*Strepera melanoptera*).—Rare. Occasional pairs breed here. A nest contained 3 eggs on 29/9/41.

Grey Butcher Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*).—Common. The usual clutch of 4 eggs is often observed.

White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*).—This bird is our commonest. The different places I have observed this bird to nest are: in tussocks, on windmills, telegraph poles, old machinery standing out in paddocks, on the bare ground, and on the top wires of a fence. I mentioned before in these notes about the Kestrel's sets of eggs being on the increase. The Magpie in this district is definitely decreasing in number of eggs to the clutch. Ten or 12 years ago 4 or 5 eggs in a Magpie's nest was quite common. During the last four or five years I have examined a few hundred nests and on not one occasion have I found a nest containing 5 eggs. I kept a record of nests examined within a short distance of my home. I did not keep a record of nests that contained young but only those that contained eggs. They were examined between August 1 and the end of October. In all, 55 nests with eggs were examined, 38 contained 3 eggs, 15 had 2 eggs and 2 had 4

eggs. These birds are much more numerous now than they were a few years ago. There is an albino of this species in the district at present which can quite frequently be observed.

Description of the Eggs and Nest of the White-throated Warbler (*Gerygone olivacea*) found near Millicent.—The eggs of the clutch, 3 in number, are pointed oval in form, the texture of the eggs fine, with a slight gloss on the surface. Two of the eggs are very alike in size, shape and markings—the ground color of the shell is white, slightly tinted with pink, and the surface is marked with dots and irregular splashes of reddish brown and chestnut, the markings being more prominent towards the larger end of the egg, where they form a distinct ring of colour, almost giving a zonal effect. The other egg is smaller and more pointed, and carries a deeper or warmer tone of pink on the shell and markings of reddish chestnut of a more diffused character and covering most of the surface, but more pronounced and forming a zone of brighter colour at the large end. At first impres-

sion the smaller egg looked like that of a Narrowbilled Bronze Cuckoo, but this is not so. The dimensions of the eggs in inches are: A., .69 x .47; B., .69 x .48; C., .66 x .47.

The nest, which was suspended from a three-pronged branchlet of a Blackwood tree 10 feet from the ground, is constructed almost entirely with fine shreds of "Stringy Bark" bark, with some very fine, hairlike plant fibres woven tightly together. A fair quantity of spiders' web and a few small cocoons are on the outside of the nest. It is lined with a small quantity of thistle-down and feathers at the bottom. The entrance, approximately 1 inch in diameter, is about one-third of the distance from the top of the nest, and has a well-defined hood. The length overall is approximately 7 ins., the width from side to side 3.25 ins., and the depth from front to back 2.75 ins. There is a tail 2.25 ins. long, but probably larger and broader originally.

As the nest has been rather knocked about, the measurements are approximate only.—J. Neil McGilp.