

# THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ORNITHOLOGIST

Official Journal of the South Australian Ornithological Association.

(First appeared 1914.)

President : PROFESSOR J. B. CLELAND. Vice-President : MR. E. A. BROOKS.

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

JANUARY, 1946

Part 8

---

## REFERENCES TO SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BIRDS BY GEORGE FRENCH ANGAS IN 1847

EXTRACTED BY J. B. CLELAND.

In 1847, the artist George French Angas published in two volumes "Savage Life and Scenes in Australia and New Zealand," London, Smith, Elder and Co. The following references to birds occur in Volume I. In quotations, the printing in italics of the names of the birds mentioned is mine, as are also statements in brackets.

On the Murray, near what is now Wellington, Angas notes (p. 74) that 'flights of the *White Cockatoo* are continually on the wing, or sporting amongst the branches of the gum-trees along the banks of the river; and occasionally, when feeding on the ground, searching for seeds and insects amongst the soft soil, they completely whiten the surface for a considerable extent, so numerous are these birds in this portion of Australia.'

Speaking of the natives (p. 85), Angas says that the men adorn themselves for a corrobory or dance with the feathers of the emu, pelican and cockatoo.

On Lake Alexandrina, the following method was used by the natives for snaring ducks (p. 90):—'One man, having a long slender rod, with a noose at the end, goes into the water and swims towards the ducks, his head being carefully covered with weeds, so that the fowl mistake it for something floating on the water; he then slips the noose over the head of one, drags it under water, breaks its neck, and fastens it to a girdle round his waist. Another and another are thus quietly despatched, until his girdle is filled with the spoil. Upright sticks are placed in the water, at a short distance

from the shore, in such situations as *shags* and *cormorants* are known to frequent, and whilst the birds roost upon these sticks, the natives swim towards them and snare them in the same manner as the ducks. So expert are these people in stealing upon their prey that I have known them approach *pelicans* whilst swimming, dive underneath the water, and catch them in their arms as they rise, breaking their legs and wings to prevent escape. During dark nights they drive out the shags from the trees in which they are accustomed to roost, and climb into those where the frightened birds take shelter, catching them in their hands as they settle. In this sport they frequently receive severe bites from the shags upon their naked limbs.' The entrails of the pelican (p. 92) they make into 'sausages, by filling them with fat; when heated to the consistency of oil, an orifice is made at one end, and the delicacy is then handed round, each member of the family sucking out a mouthful of the fat.' *Rolcoorolca* is the noise of the emu; *Ungoontah-ungoontah*, the stamping of the emu; *Peetpeerim*, the whistle of a bird.' The down of the *musk-duck* and of the *black swan* is twisted into fillets and bound round the head.

'An elegant species of fly-catcher. [*Rhipidura leucophrys*, the Willie Wagtail—similarly disliked by the natives of Central Australia], of a black colour, which continually hovers about in search of insects, performing all manner of graceful manoeuvres in the air, is regarded by them as an

evil spirit, and is called *mooldtharp*, or devil. Whenever they see it, they pelt it with sticks and stones, though they are afraid to touch or destroy it.'

Near Lake Alexandrina, approaching what is now Wellington, Angas states (p. 24) that here and there a *swamp parrot* [evidently the Ground-Parrot, *Pezoporus wallicus*] suddenly rose from the grass, 'uttering its short and rapid note of alarm.' Near Lake Albert and the Coorong, some *Cape Barren geese* were shot (p. 132). In the smooth little bays along the Coorong, '*red-legged gulls*,  *plovers* and *sandpipers* were for ever busy in search of marine insects' (p. 135). Two *emus* were seen later and hundreds of *black swans* swimming in the Coorong (p. 136). Near the 'Narrows,' 'myriads of *ducks*, *swans*, *pelicans*, and every variety of sea-fowl, darkened the water,' and *bustards*, *ground-parroquets*, *bronze-winged pigeons*, *robins*, and a variety of birds of brilliant plumage were constantly seen as they crossed the country (p. 138). Near the lower end of the Coorong, *emus* were abundant (p. 147). On April 26, at Ross's Creek, near Lacepede Bay, thousands of ducks and teal were feeding on the marshy weed and rushes, and some were shot for food. Here the party found wicker-work snares used by the natives for bird-catchings, 'about four feet high, erected on the flats. Near these snares were formed small covered places, just large enough for one person to squat in; the native, concealing himself in this ambush, with his snaring rod protruded from a small aperture in the side, imitates the voice of the birds and, as they alight upon the wicker-work, dexterously slips the noose around their necks, and snares them into his retreat' (p. 148). Near Lake Hawden on April 30, occasional *swamp parrots* (*Pezoporus wallicus*) 'fluttered up from the grass (p. 152). Falling in with a whaling ship in Rivoli Bay, the party went off in the whale-boats to an island lying off Cape Jaffa, which they called *Penguin Island* (p. 159) 'from the vast quantity of these birds which we obtained there. The entire island was perforated with their burrows, and out of many of the holes we took their eggs, which resembled those of the common fowl, and were good eating. The species . . . is the *Aptenodytes minor*.' Then follows a description of the bird. The surface of the island 'was overspread with a low green

weed, and with sea-shells; brought up by *gulls* and other birds.' 'On the edge of a chasm, which had cleft the island nearly in two parts, there stood an eagle's nest, about four feet high, and built of layers of sticks. The *white-tailed eagle* [White-breasted Sea-eagle] was hovering round its eyry; and a little *robin* had fearlessly constructed its nest amongst the sticks of that of the monarch bird' (p. 160). [What can this 'robin' be? *Petroica* would not be found out at sea. It may have been the nest of a Willie Wag-tail. I saw one at Cape Buffon, south end of Rivoli Bay, about 1892, built on the rocks of a cave up to which the waves came.]

On May 5, near what is now Millicent, Mr. Burr shot a *turkey* [*bustard*] (p. 164). At Mt. Gambier (p. 170), Angas states that 'some *tern* [?] were skimming over the lake'; in the evening the party heard the shrieking of an owl [Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)]. *Swallows* were disturbed when Angas visited what was probably Umpherstone's Cave at night (p. 172). On May 8, near Mt. Bluff ranges on their way towards Mt. Burr, 'a small black and green cockatoo, of a species never seen before, was observed in the eucalyptus trees by several of the party' (p. 172). On May 11, they re-crossed the Murray and at night the wild dogs mingled 'their fiendish yells with the cry of the *curlew* [Southern Stone-Curlew] and *bittern* [Brown Bittern] feeding in the marshes' (p. 179).

In a trip by sea in the autumn to Rivoli Bay, Kangaroo Island and Port Lincoln, Angas states that near Cape Jervis, 'the sun was very hot, and the *penguins* [*Eudyptula minor*] continually popped their heads above water, uttering their singular cry' [This, it may be noted, was in daylight] (p. 181). He notes that *pelicans* abounded on the lagoons of Kangaroo Island and that the islanders periodically visited the Althorpes for *mutton-bird* eggs and young, the latter being dried and pickled (p. 185). Anchored at night off Althorpe Island, 'the confused tumult arising from the screams of innumerable sea-fowl uttering their wild harpy-like shrieks, was deafening to us, and is distinctly heard for miles' (p. 186). Near Marble Range, they killed an *emu* (p. 203). On L. Waungarrie were multitudes of *black swans* (p. 204), and they obtained some ducks and an *emu* (p. 205).

In describing the Murray Flats between

Angaston and the River, Angas says that here the meyarako, or *scrub-pheasant* (*Leipoa*), makes its nest: it is formed of sand, like an ant-hill, and is thirty feet in diameter; in the centre, which is hollowed out, the bird lays four eggs of a delicate salmon or pinkish

colour, and, covering them with sand, leaves them to hatch by the heat of the sun' (p. 217). On the Murray near Moorundi, thousands of *white cockatoos* were seen, and also 'the elegant *crested pigeon* of the Murray' (*Ocyphaps lophotes*)' (p. 219).