

DISTRIBUTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN CROW IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Over a period of more than fifty years following the publication by Dr. R. Bowdler Sharpe (7), in 1877, of his opinion, based on examination of skins in the British Museum of Natural History, that there were two kinds of large Crows in Australia, a considerable amount of uncertainty existed in the minds of most Australian ornithologists regarding the identification and distribution of the Australian Crow (*Corvus ceciliae*). As a matter of fact, Sharpe confused some specimens of the Australian Raven (*C. coronoides*) with the species. Both Campbell (2) and North (4) gave the Australian Crow altogether too wide a distribution on the mainland and wrongly included Tasmania in its range, just as Sharpe had done.

An important paper by Ogilvie-Grant (5), appearing some years later, did not include South Australia or Tasmania in the habitat of the bird, but the first Official Checklist of the R.A.O.U. (6) still exaggerated the range as "Australia generally."

Capt. S. A. White (9) stated: "They are found all over South Australia, with only one or two exceptions where the short-billed bird is found. The writer has found them nesting in the big gums (*Eucalyptus rostrata*) along the watercourses and in low mulga and casuarina trees in the interior." However, White revealed his uncertainty about the identification of the two large Crows by recording specimens which he had collected in the north-west of the State and in Central Australia under "*Corvus coronoides perplexus*, Southern Raven." (8). The common large *Corvus* of these areas is certainly the Australian Crow, and I know of no skin of the Australian Raven from there. Five skins of *C. ceciliae* taken by Capt. White in South Australia are now included in the G. M. Mathews series in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, according to information courteously supplied to me by Dr. Ernst Mayr.

The total number of skins known from this State are as follows:—

- No. 825. Cleland Collection. Male. Ernabella, Musgrave Ranges. Aug. 11, 1933. Collector: Prof. J. B. Cleland.
- No. 674490. American Museum Nat. Hist. Female. Moorilyanna Soak, near Everard Ranges. July 13, 1914. Collector: S. A. White.
- No. 674485. American Museum Nat. Hist. Female. Wantapella Swamp, east of Everard Ranges. July 10, 1914. Collector: S. A. White.
- No. 674486. American Mus. Nat. Hist. Sex? Wantapella Swamp. July 10, 1914. Collector: S. A. White.
- No. 674487. American Mus. Nat. Hist. Female. Wantapella Swamp, July 10, 1914. Collector: S. A. White.
- No. 674492. American Mus. Nat. Hist. (Original label lost.) South Australia. Collector: S. A. White.

The lastnamed specimen is almost certainly the one listed by Col. R. Meinertzhagen (3) from "Wilgena," a locality where Capt. White did some collecting. Wilgena is situated approximately 225 miles north-west of Port Augusta, as a bird flies, and its latitude is about 31 deg. S. It is the most southern record of the Australian Crow in South Australia. One of Capt. White's skins in the American Museum, No. 674488, female, Aug. 20, 1913, is labelled "Horseshoe Bend, C.S. Australia," and has been wrongly credited to South Australia by Meinertzhagen (loc. cit.) and by Dr. Mayr (in litt.). Capt. White collected in the vicinity of Horseshoe Bend, on the Finke River, N.T., in 1913, and the "Horseshoe Bend" skin undoubtedly came from there.

As has been pointed out by Boehm (1), many skins of the Australian Raven, from southern localities, have been wrongly identified as *C. ceciliae* because of the whitish extreme bases of the nape-feathers. Their true identity is revealed, however, by the gradation of colour on the body-feathers as a whole and the very long hackles on the throat. All skins of large Crows from the agricultural and moister pastoral districts of the State

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which I have seen are *C. coronoides*. The only other species known to be inhabiting some of these areas is the Little Crow (*C. bennetti*).

Much remains to be learned concerning the juvenile and sub-adult phases of the Australian Crow, and about its breeding and feeding habits, and its distribution. In South Australia, it has not been recorded east of longitude 138 deg. E., nor south of latitude 31 deg. S. However, a sparse population may occur in the eastern portion of the Lake Eyre Basin, linking up with populations in Western Queensland. It seems probable also that the species occurs on the South Australian portion of the Nullarbor Plain.

REFERENCES.

- (1) Boehm, E. F., 1942, "South Australian Orn.," XVII, 10-11.
- (2) Campbell, A. J., 1901, "Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds," I, 54.
- (3) Meinertzhagen, R., 1926, "Novitates Zoologicae," XXXIII: 120.
- (4) North, A. J., 1901, "Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania," I: 1.
- (5) Ogilvie-Grant, W. R., 1912, "Bulletin Brit. Orn. Club," XXIX: 71.
- (6) Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, 1913., "Official Checklist Birds of Australia," I: 98.
- (7) Sharpe, R. Bowdler, 1877. "Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.," III: 20, 37-38.
- (8) White, S. A., 1914., "Trans. Royal Soc. South Austr.," XXXVIII: 438; *ibid.* XXXIX: 759; 1915. "Emu," XIV: 191; 1915.
- (9) White, S. A., quoted by Mathews, G. M., 1927., "Birds of Australia," XII: 412.