

A TRIP TO DARWIN VIA ALICE SPRINGS

By L. S. FRANCIS

The following birds were seen during a trip from Alice Springs to Darwin by tourist 'bus, August 29 to September 9, 1948.

The portions of the trip northward from Parafield to Alice Springs on August 29 and the return trip from Darwin to Parafield on September 10 were made by 'plane, which accounts for the absence of many birds from the list.

The flora around Alice Springs comprises the graceful Ironwood (*Acacia estrophiolata*), Desert Oak (*Casuarina decaisneana*), desert fuchsias (*Eremophila* spp.), at that time bearing red flowers, *Cassia* spp. in full flower somewhat like a *Boronia* but yellow, Corkwood (*Hakea lorea*), and *Eucalyptus* spp.

This flora continues with the addition of Mulga (*Acacia aneura*) and Native Poplar (*Codonocarpus cotinifolius*) to Aileron (approximately 80 miles north of Alice Springs).

From Aileron to Tennant Creek Spinifex (*Triodia* sp.) was seen flowering, occasional Bean trees (*Erythrina vespertilio*), Wild Orange (*Capparis* sp), species of *Eremophila* and *Cassia*, Native Poplar (*Cod. cotinifolius*), species of *Grevillea* and *Hakea*, various small acacias, and the Ghost gum (*Eucalyptus papuana*) were common.

North of Tennant Creek, the Spinifex and Ghost gums continued, and broad-leaved blue gums were then seen.

Near Elliott, the western portion of the Barclay Tablelands was passed through, and Flinders grasses (*Iseilema* sp.) and Mitchell grasses (*Astrebla* sp.) appeared.

From Elliott northward the flora now changed to Bohemia (*Bauhinia* sp.), which bear red flowers and large pods, Lancewood (*A. crassicarpa*), and Bloodwood (*Eucalyptus* sp.).

The country around Daly Waters is park-like, with trees of various types such as Bauhinia, Ironwood (*Erythrophloeum* sp.), tall Eucalypts (where occurs the beautiful Red-collared Lorikeet), Bloodwoods, and other species of trees not identified on the trip. Much of the ground was covered by tall dry grasses.

The Roper River near Mataranka is bordered by tall paperbark Tea trees (*Melaleuca leucadendron*), known in the north as Cadjaput, some of these being encircled by thick climbing plants, and back from the river we drove through a scrub consisting of Cotton tree, Kapok, Wild Fig (*Ficus* sp.), and Bauhinia.

The Wild Kapok (with yellow flowers and green pods) and Eucalypts continued to Pine Creek, after which we entered Pandanus Palm country. North of Pine Creek and almost to Darwin we drove through hilly country very similar to the Mt. Lofty Ranges, except for the unfamiliar *Pandanus* and *Zamia* Palms, Kapok, etc.

At Darwin we experienced humid weather, which continued right through each day and night.

The cliffs along the harbour are densely covered by trees of unfamiliar types and unknown to the writer, but large Banyan Fig trees (*Ficus* sp.) were the haunts of several species of birds.

On the flats back from the cliffs there are very tall trees known locally as Milk trees, very similar in appearance and flower to our Native Myrtle (*Myoporum* sp.), and quite a number of introduced trees have been planted in and around the town, such as the Tamarind, Frangipani, Banana Palm, and Mango (*Mangifera indica*).

Two flights were made over Koolpinyah Station, near Darwin, and later a day was spent driving around the Station lagoons through dense forest of *Pandanus* and *Zamia* palms, tall Eucalypts, Paperbark Tea trees (*Melaleuca* sp.), and another type of Ironwood—quite a different species to that seen in the vicinity of Alice Springs, the northern one being *Erythrophloeum* sp.

LIST OF BIRDS SEEN

Emu (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*).—One between Devil's Marbles and Tennant Creek; one south of Banka Banka; four near Powell Creek.

Pigeons and Doves

Torrès Strait Pigeon (*Myristicivora spilorrhoea*).—One bird only seen flying over cliffs at Darwin Harbour.

Peaceful Dove (*Geopelia placida*).—Twenty feeding on ground near Mataranka Station, Berry Springs; numbers at Darwin.

Bar-shouldered Dove (*G. humeralis*).—Two on ground in Darwin Railway Station; one in shrubs near cliffs; one at lagoon on Koolpinyah Station.

Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*).—At Mt. Eba and Alice Springs; twenty in poultry yard at Aileron; from fifty to sixty drinking at water trough at Daly Waters, then perching on dead tree.

Water Birds

Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).—at Lagoon on Koolpinyah Station.

Pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*).—A few on lagoon at Koolpinyah Station.

Tern (*Sterna* spp.).—Several terns seen near West Point (Darwin) from launch. These appeared to be white, without any markings.

Silver Gull (*Larus novae-hollandiae*).—Not a single bird seen at Darwin or identified with certainty during trip.

Masked Plover (*Lobibyx miles*).—A few seen at a lagoon on Koolpinyah Station.

Australian Pratincole (*Stiltia isabella*).—One seen at Pine Creek near drain. Allowed observer to approach within a few feet before flying low for a short distance. Black patch on white tail.

Bustard (Plain Turkey) (*Eupodotis australis*).—One flew up from road just missing side of bus near Larrimah.

Brolga (Native Companion) (*Grus rubicundus*).—Two seen walking near edge of a lagoon on Koolpinyah Station. Others pointed out from plane by pilot over Howard River swamps.

Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*).—A large flock at lagoon on Koolpinyah Station. Eight in Darwin Botanical Gardens. Two near cliffs at Darwin.

Spoonbill (*Platalea* spp.).—A few seen at lagoon on Koolpinyah Station.

Jabiru (Black-necked Stork) (*Xenorhynchus asiaticus*).—Several at lagoon on Koolpinyah. Some seen from plane over Howard River swamps.

White Egret (*Egretta alba*).—A considerable number at lagoon on Koolpinyah. Some seen from plane over Howard River swamps.

White-neck (Pacific) Heron (*Notophoxya pacifica*).—One in swamp near Dunmarra.

Pied (Magpie) Goose (*Anseranus semipalmata*).—A number at lagoons on Koolpinyah.

Hawks and Eagles

Various species of hawks were seen in large numbers at Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin, etc., but in many cases the species could not be determined owing partly to the speed of the bus.

Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*).—One previously shot by a resident of Katherine was hanging on a fence. Bus-driver stated the wing span measured seven feet.

Red-backed Sea-Eagle (*Haliastur indus*).—One of these seen flying with hawks near cliffs at Darwin Harbour.

Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*).—An occasional bird heard whistling and also seen—at Roper River, Katherine River, also Darwin and Koolpinyah.

Black (Fork-tailed) Kite (*Milvus migrans*).—Seen with other hawks at Alice Springs, about twenty-five in a flock in the vicinity of some crows feeding on the ground at Tennant Creek.

Black-breasted Buzzard (*Hamirostra melanosterna*).—One of these seen at Darwin. White patch under wings seen when bird in flight.

Parrots and Cockatoos

Red-collared Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus rubritorquis*).—First seen at Daly Waters. A number (about a dozen at a time) seen drinking out of a trough with Galahs and Crested Pigeons. Others in tall gums at Berry Springs.

Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*).—Seen north of Katherine River. Frequently seen in Darwin district in forests of Eucalypts, Pandanus and other palms. Red on tail seen when birds in flight near Koolpinyah lagoons.

White Cockatoo (*Kakatoe galerita*).—Two near Manton Dam.

Pink Cockatoo (Major Mitchell) (*Kakatoe leadbeateri*).—Six seen near Central Mt. Stuart.

Little Corella (*Kakatoe sanguinea*).—Three of these birds were seen swinging on wires at Tennant Creek. A resident stated that these were escaped cage-birds.

Galah (Rose-breasted Cockatoo) (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*).—Flocks of these birds were seen from Alice Springs to Darwin. Eighteen near Devil's Marbles; fifty at Dunmarra; about twenty at Daly Waters drinking out of trough with Crested Pigeons and Red-collared Lorikeets; others near Birdum.

Cockatiel (Cockatoo-Parrot) (*Leptolophus hollandicus*).—Sixteen seen in tall Eucalypts at Alice Springs.

Northern Rosella (*Platycercus venustus*).—Seen only in aviary at Darwin.

Budgerygah (Shell-Parrot) (*Melopsittacus undulatus*).—A few in Eucalypts at Alice Springs. Many small flocks flew across road in front of the bus or alongside of bus between Alice Springs, Aileron, and Tennant Creek, Attack Creek, and Banka Banka. These presented brilliant flashes of green and gold as they wheeled in the sun.

Kingfishers, Cuckoos, etc.

Blue-winged Kookaburra (*Dacelo leachii*).—First seen at Katherine River; others at Darwin, on Koolpinyah Station, and at Berrimah.

Forest-Kingfisher (*Halcyon macleayi*).—This appeared to be the common Kingfisher of the Darwin district.

Red-backed Kingfisher (*Halcyon pyrrhopygius*).—Birds presumably this species seen at Alice Springs, Central Mt. Stuart, and near Birdum. These Kingfishers were seen from the moving bus and were facing observer.

Rainbow-bird (Bee-eater) (*Merops ornatus*).—Common in and around Darwin. Their peculiar calls were frequently heard as they perched on telegraph wires or were seen near cliffs overlooking Darwin Harbour. A specimen hanging inside the tourist bus appeared to be without the pintail feathers. One seen at magnetic ant hills near Knuckey's Lagoon.

Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*).—One of these was heard near a lagoon on Koolpinyah Station.

PASSERINES

Tree or Fairy Martin (*Hylochelidon* (?) sp.).—A few only, seen near cliffs at Darwin Harbour.

Flycatchers

Willie-Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*).—Seen occasionally along road from Alice Springs to Darwin.

Leadend Flycatcher (*Myiagra rubecula*).—

One in coastal scrub at Darwin Harbour in Banyan Fig Tree.

Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*).—One only seen on telegraph wire at Mataranka. This appeared to be smaller than our southern bird.

Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*).—Seen at Alice Springs. A mud nest in Eucalypts at Bond's camp. Other birds at Aileron, Tennant Creek, Katherine River. In a main street at Darwin fifty-five were counted perched on telegraph wires or flying to these from a tree nearby. Also seen on Koolpinyah Station.

Cuckoo-Shrikes

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina nouae-hollandiae*).—Alice Springs, Roper River, Darwin.

White-breasted Cuckoo-Shrike (*C. hypoleuca*).—Several birds seen in coastal scrub at Darwin Harbour.

Varied Triller (*Lalage leucomela*).—Seen and heard near coast at Darwin. Another Triller (*Lalage* sp.) seen at ant hills near Knuckey's Lagoon.

Fig-Birds

Yellow Fig-Bird (*Sphecotheres flaviventris*).—Male and female bird seen in coastal scrub at Darwin.

Ground Birds

Red-breasted Babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficollis*).—These appeared as very dark birds as they hopped into some small trees. Whitish marks on crown seen. Distinct rufous marks on breast not seen.

Chats

White-fronted Chat (*Epthianura albifrons*).—Three only seen, flying low at Alice Springs.

Thornbill Warblers

White-throated Warbler (*Gerygone olivacea*).—One of these Warblers called from a tree outside our hotel window at Darwin one evening. A white throat was clearly visible, but only dull yellow seen on breast. Distinct yellow feathers on side of tail. White on tips of tail feathers.

Whiteface (*Aphelocephala* spp.).—A few on wires of aerodrome fence at Mt. Eba. Owing to lack of time, the typical white on face was all that was noticed at the time.

Thornbills (*Acanthiza* spp.).—Several among low bushes at Mt. Eba.

Warblers

Wrens (*Malurus* sp.).—Several of these seen and heard warbling in scrub at Alice Springs. No male birds noticed.

Wood-Swallows

White-breasted Wood-Swallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*).—Thirty seen perched at the top of a tall dead tree at Berry Springs. Others on telegraph wires in streets of Darwin.

Masked Wood-Swallow (*A. personatus*).—Two south of Aileron.

Black-faced Wood-Swallow (*A. melanops*).—Numbers seen along track from Alice Springs to Darwin.

Black-tailed Tree-Creeper (?) (*Climacteris melanura*).—A very dark Tree-Creeper (probably this species) perched on the butt of a tree in thick forest on Koolpinyah Station, among Pandanus and Eucalypts.

Pardalotes

Pardalote (*Pardalotus* sp.).—These were heard at Alice Springs (none seen). Probably the Red-browed Pardalote (*P. rubricatus*).

Honeyeaters

Brown Honeyeater (*Gliciphila indistincta*).—Seen at Roper River (Bitter Springs). Song somewhat resembled a Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*). Bird seen in a sapling near the water.

Singing Honeyeater (*Meliphaga virescens*).—Several seen among red-flowering Eremophila bushes on Anzac Hill, Alice Springs.

White-plumed Honeyeater (*M. penicillata*).—Seen at Alice Springs only.

Yellow-throated Miner (*Myzantha flavigula*).—Numerous at Alice Springs, Aileron and Daly Waters. White rump visible, but yellow on throat not apparent. These birds were very annoying with their noisy calls when other birds were being watched.

Silver-crowned Friar-bird (*Philemon argenticeps*).—First seen at Mataranka, later at Katherine and Berry Springs. Residents of the N.T. did not appear to know the Friar-bird, but called these birds "Leatherheads."

Finches

Zebra (Chestnut-eared) Finch (*Taeniopygia castanotis*).—Numbers at Alice Springs and Mt. Eba. At Banka Banka a large number were seen near a water tap while we were having lunch. Some kept in an aviary at Mataranka.

Banded (Double-bar) Finch (*Steganopleura bichenovii*).—A few seen on two occasions near cliffs at Darwin Harbour. The second lot were frightened away by some hawks before closer observations could be made. Some in an aviary at Mataranka were referred to as Owl Finches.

Gouldian Finch (*Poephila gouldiae*).—Seen only in aviary at Mataranka.

Orioles

Olive-backed Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*).—Seen on several occasions in a large fig-tree on cliffs at Darwin Harbour. Distinct dark stripes on breast and throat were seen.

Drongoes

Spangled Drongo (*Chibia bracteata*).—Three of these birds seen in large Banyan fig-tree at Darwin. As these were first thought to be Shining Starlings (*Aplonis metallica*), the typical fish-tail was not seen. On a subsequent visit to the fig-tree, these birds could not be seen.

Apostle-birds

Apostle-bird (*Struthidea cinerea*).—Sixteen birds were seen near a water pipe near a large windmill at Dunmarra. These were later joined by another group, making approximately thirty birds. Several attempts were made to take photographs, but the birds were very wary and flew to a safe distance.

Crows, etc.

Crow (*Corvus* spp.).—Numbers seen at Alice Springs; others at Banka Banka and on Koolpinyah Station, near Darwin.

Pied Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus nigrogularis*).—First heard in early morning at Alice Springs. Call somewhat like a Magpie. These were fairly common at Alice Springs and were seen along track northward to Daly Waters, Berry Springs, and Darwin (Knuckey's Lagoon).

Grey Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*).—One on telegraph cross-arm at Alice Springs.

Magpies

(Only a few of *Gymnorhina* spp. seen in the Territory.)

Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*).—One seen near Banka Banka.

White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*).—One near Central Mt. Stuart; one near Barrow Creek.

Another *Gymnorhina* sp. seen near Elsey.