
NOTES ON SPOTLESS CRAKE (*PORZANA PLUMBEA*)

By H. J. MORTON

Adjoining my property at Jervois, River Murray, is a low-lying area of land, approximately half a mile long and from 20 to 30 yards wide, covering an area of some 3 acres. It is known as "Mason's Creek."

Prior to the Jervois Irrigation Area being reclaimed, Mason's Creek was the lowest part of the swamp and acted as an inlet and outlet to the river. Even now it is very wet and very boggy near the river, and it is always a danger point during floods in the river.

For the most part, Mason's Creek is covered with a growth of tall bullrush in the water and on the edges with fine rushes, tussock rushes, dock and other aquatic plants and *paspalum* grass.

Cattle, periodically, graze through the area and, unfortunately, disturb the birds and interfere with nests.

Previous to the 1939-45 war and since my discharge from the Army, I have located many nests of the Spotless Crake in Mason's Creek. Possibly 5 pairs of these birds nest regularly there. The greatest number of eggs had been 4 to the clutch. On January 11, 1951, however, a set of 5 eggs was found, this being unusual it was taken and sent to the McGilp Egg Collection in the S.A. Museum, the eggs, particularly one of them, were smaller than average.

On November 13, 1952, whilst walking along the edge of Mason's Creek the familiar bubbling notes—not unlike the noise made when a small bottle is dipped under water to fill—of the Spotless Crake were heard. After a quarter of an hour's search a small saucer-shaped nest was found. It was built with fine dead rush stems into fine rushes growing at the base of tall bullrushes. It contained 6 eggs, partly incubated and typical in size and color.

Six eggs, I believe, are so unusual in a clutch that I thought it worth while to write these notes.

A further note of interest is that on 9/11/50 a nest containing 9 eggs of the Banded Landrail was found in Mason's Creek. The nest was a shallow saucer-shaped structure of fine dry rush stems placed on the side of a broken-down tussock rush, surrounded by tall bullrushes and reeds. It was about 18 inches up from the wet, boggy ground. The nest was hardly large enough to hold the 9 eggs, for 3 of them were resting on top of the others in the clutch.

Mason's Creek is a favorite resort of Tiger Snakes (*Notechis scutatus*); they are in numbers yet there has been no evidence that they interfere with the bird life or nesting operations.