

MID-NORTHERN BIRD OBSERVATIONS

By BRIAN GLOVER AND R. SCHODDE

During the period September 5 to 11, 1953, the writers cycled through portion of the lower Flinders Ranges and adjoining coastal country, travelling from Adelaide to Port Augusta and return by train. The route was as follows: via Stirling, through Pichi Richi Pass (Camp 1) to Quorn (Camp 2), then north 36 miles to Wilson, two nights being spent on a large creek lined with Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) at Gordon, 22 miles north of Quorn; then south to Wilmington (Camp 5), and through Horrocks Pass to Stirling (Camp 6), and on to Port Augusta. Several hours were then spent on the tidal flats and the saltbush (?) country across the Gulf from Port Augusta (Upper Eyre Peninsula).

Records of some of the 90-odd species noted on the trip extend their ranges as published by Terrill and Rix (*South Australian Ornithologist*, vol 19, pp. 53-100). The more important observations are given below, the hawks being the only group reported in full.

Peltohyas australis: Australian Dotterel.—A pair on bare, undulating, stony country about 7 miles north of Quorn.

Accipiter fasciatus: Goshawk.—One dead bird at Stirling.

A. cirrocephalus: Collared Sparrowhawk.—Solitary males at Wilmington and in a shrub in an erosion creek on the bare flats immediately west of Horrocks Pass.

Uroaetus audax: Wedgetailed Eagle.—Single birds only at widely scattered localities—between Stirling and Port Pirie, between Quorn and Willochra, between Willochra and Gordon, Wilson, Horrocks Pass, and the flats west of Horrocks Pass.

Hieraetus morphnoides: Little Eagle.—One between Stirling and Port Pirie and a pair along the creek at Gordon. The call heard from flying and perching birds was a three-note call somewhat similar to that of the Red-tipped Pardalote, but much louder and stronger. In the air, one (possibly both) of the Gordon birds had the habit of closing the wings and gliding for a few seconds with its wings folded, in a similar fashion to the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, this being repeated several times during a flight.

Haliastur sphenurus: Whistling Eagle.—Odd birds only at Stirling, Pichi Richi Pass, between Quorn and Wilson (several), and the flats west of Horrocks Pass.

Milvus migrans: Fork-tailed Kite.—One at Stirling and three near Quorn.

Elanus notatus: Black-shouldered Kite.—Several noted from the train, from Islington to as far north as Port Germein. One between Quorn and Wilmington.

Falco subniger: Black Falcon.—One seen from the train at Burnsfield.

F. berigora: Brown Hawk.—Several noted from the train and odd birds at Quorn and Gordon.

F. cenchroides: Nankeen Kestrel.—The most numerous hawk seen, small numbers being recorded at most localities throughout the trip. Appeared to be nesting in a hollow of one of the dead gums lining the former course of the Willochra Creek, north of Quorn.

Kakatoe sanguinea: Corella.—Flocks (one of over 100 birds at Stirling) seen at many places throughout the trip, and in several areas this species appeared to outnumber the ubiquitous Galah (*K. roseicapilla*).

Platycercus adelaidae: Adelaide Rosella.—The yellow form of this species was recorded along the Pichi Richi Pass, between Quorn and Wilmington (Red-gum creeks), and at Wilmington.

Barnardius spp.: Ringnecks.—Mallee Ringnecks (*B. barnardi*) were seen along timbered creeks in most areas, and in a clump of box-thorns (*Lycium ferocissimum*) in otherwise bare country west of Horrocks Pass. One bird seen under excellent conditions by R.S. half-way through Pichi Richi Pass would appear to be the Port Lincoln Parrot (*B. zonarius*), it differing markedly from the typical *B. barnardi* seen in the pass and elsewhere. The head was black (the head of *barnardi* although darker than that of more southern mallee birds is greyish-green on crown and nape); the red frontal band was lacking; it showed a much wider yellow abdominal band than *barnardi*, and the body coloring also differed. The green on the breast and belly of *zonarius* (?) was mid-

green with an olive tinge, the back and wings being the same shade. On *barnardi*, however, the breast and ventral regions were light grass-green, while the back and wings were distinctly a deep bluish-green.

Although both the dark and light-headed races of *barnardi* show a wide golden bar on the shoulder of the wing in flight, this bar was absent in the example of *zonarius* seen by us; it is quite distinct in museum skins. Call, flight and size of both species appeared the same.

Neophema elegans: Elegant Parrot.—A pair between Quorn and Willochra, and a flock of over 20 between Willochra and Gordon. Small flocks and odd birds seen from the train between Stirling and Port Pirie appeared to be of this species.

Halcyon pyrrhopygius: Red-backed Kingfisher.—One bird on telegraph wires in Quorn.

Pachyptila inornata: Gilbert Whistler.—Seen and heard in *Acacia* (shrub) scrub between Stirling and Horrocks Pass.

Sphenostoma cristatum: Wedgebill.—In an area of shrubby scrub (*Acacia* sp. and Boxthorn) interspersed with patches of a low saltbush type of plant along both sides of about four miles of the road between Stirling and Horrocks Pass, this species was very numerous, being exceeded in numbers only by the White-winged Wrens. Many birds were seen or heard in roadside shrubs and one was even perched on a telegraph pole. The call heard was a loud "Wu-cheer" (the last syllable resembling the call of the Pipit), with slight variations from different birds. The birds all appeared to be in pairs and were mostly very timid.

Pteropodocys maxima: Ground Cuckoo-shrike.—Four birds were seen in the above saltbush(?) *Acacia* area. In flight, when seen from the side and from a distance, the appearance was rather stilt-like—the body and basal portion of the tail appearing white, the wings black and the black distal half of the long tail giving the impression of trailing legs. The call was a loud "Eer" repeated several times; the flight was not undulatory.

Epthianura aurifrons: Orange Chat.—A pair, and a flock of 13 were located in an area of blue-bush adjoining the stony country

in which *Peltohyas* and *Ashbyia* were observed.

Ashbyia lovensis: Gibber Bird.—A pair were seen in the same bare stony area in which *Peltohyas* was recorded. One bird (male ?) was noticeably brighter in color than the other and had a yellowish forehead which the female (?) lacked. In the field they had more the appearance and action of Pipits than Chats. A call heard was a shrill note repeated several times fairly rapidly.

Pyrholaemus brunneus: Redthroat.—One pair seen in shrubbery along an erosion creek entering the large creek at Gordon, and others heard on a shrubby hill nearby.

Calamanthus campestris: Rufous Field-wren.—Odd birds or pairs were seen or their attractive song heard in the saltbush (?) country between Stirling and Horrocks Pass, and in similar country across the Gulf from Port Augusta. Very shy and elusive.

Malurus spp: Wrens.—The Turquoise Wren (*M. callainus*), which inhabits the country between Port Germein and Port Augusta, was not seen. The White-winged Wren was very numerous in saltbush (?) and bluebush country wherever this occurred (Stirling, between Stirling and the ranges, between Quorn and Wilson, Upper Eyre Peninsula, etc.), but was replaced by the Purple-backed Wren (*M. assimilis*) wherever larger shrubs occurred (Stirling, Pichi Richi Pass, Gordon, the "Wedgebill" area, etc.). Both species were frequently seen within a few yards of one another, but each in its own preferred type of vegetation. Although each party of *M. assimilis* seen contained at least one fully-plumaged male, very few male *M. leuconotus* in similar condition were seen.

Artamus melanops: Black-faced Woodswallow.—A small party between Horrocks Pass and Stirling, and one between Stirling and Port Augusta.

Corvus spp.: "Crows."—Recorded in all localities. Both Ravens (*C. coronoides*) and Little Crows (*C. bennetti*) were represented, the former being the more numerous, although at Stirling the numbers appeared almost equal. *C. bennetti* was not recorded in either Pass or at Wilmington, and between Quorn and Wilson the only records were of a pair on a scrubby hill at Gordon

and a bird heard in *Casuarina* scrub at Wilson. A few were seen or heard about Quorn, between Quorn and Wilmington, and on Upper Eyre Peninsula.

One of us (R.S.) recently spent several days in the field with Mr. E. F. Boehm of Sutherlands, who has devoted much time to the study of "Crows," and the field identification of *C. bennetti*, as learned from Mr. Boehm, is given below, there being very little published information on this subject. The size of *bennetti* is approximately 90% of that of *coronoides*, and is distinguishable in the field if both species are together. However, the call of the former species is longer and more melancholy, and can be written phonetically "Gwarr gwarr carr carrrrr---r." Sometimes *coronoides*' calls are rather similar to *bennetti*'s, but they always lack the rich, nasal quality peculiar to *bennetti*.

When calling the Little Crow frequently undulates its flight, and R.S. has often noticed this species circling in the manner of the Goshawk (*Accipiter fasciatus*). The Raven rarely resorts to these antics except in display, and then its call is a dreary wail.

Gymnorhina spp.: Magpies. — Magpies were recorded in all areas, both the Black-backed (*G. tibicen*) and White-backed (*G. hypoleuca*) species being present and hybridization being apparent by the number of intermediate birds seen. Apart from one bird with a thin black saddle recorded in the Port Germein area, all birds seen to the west of the Flinders Ranges were typical *G. hypoleuca*. Both species were present through both Passes and at Quorn, the proportion of *G. tibicen* increasing to the north (no typical *G. hypoleuca* being seen north of Willochra) but decreasing to the south, being in the minority at Wilmington.