

ACUTENESS OF HEARING IN BIRDS

By A. G. EDQUIST

The following notes concerning an Australian Bustard or Wild Turkey (*Eupodotis australis*) and a Rose-breasted Cockatoo or Galah (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*) were passed on to me by Mr. Harry Raven, of Farrell Street, Glenelg. For some years Mr. Raven was the owner of the King of Creation gold mine in the Erliston district, north of Laverton in Western Australia. During the years spent there Mr. Raven became very friendly with the aboriginals who roamed this semi-desert region, and in return for food supplies and other kindnesses the native women who frequently camped near the water supply presented Mrs. Raven with the young Bustard and the Galah.

These birds became very tame and roamed the garden at will, although the cockatoo was housed in a cage as sleeping quarters. Very soon the Galah learned to talk and seemed to understand the significance of some of the words spoken. As the mine was very isolated, comparatively few people visited the locality and when they came it was in a motor. The coming of a motor load of mining men was the occasion for a rest, with some refreshment. The sound of the approaching car naturally called forth the words, "There's a motor-car!" and preparations were made to receive the prospective visitors. It was not long before the Cockatoo learned to say, "There's a motor-car. There's a motor-car. There's a motor-car." At the same time the Bustard became very excited and uttered a series of sounds, the meaning of which were known only to itself, although its human companions regarded the sounds as notes of warning. These performances of the two birds took place quite an appreciable time before the human ears could detect any sounds made by an approaching car.

The birds were never known to give a false alarm, and their warnings concerning distant noises indicate that their hearing was far more sensitive than that of human beings. This is all the more interesting when one regards the absence of pinnae to the external ears of the birds and the fact that in most cases the opening to the middle ear is covered with feathers or bristles apparently to protect the ear from foreign matter.

It would be interesting to know if other bird observers can add further observations.

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