

THE CALL OF THE TAWNY FROGMOUTH

By G. B. RAGLESS

The Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) is by no means a common bird on the Adelaide Plains, so it was with a degree of pleasure that I noted a bird on July 7, 1953, perched upon a short dead limb of a gum tree. Being adjacent to my home, it was observed daily for nearly a month, when it changed its resting place. On February 2, 1954, I found it at a higher elevation and in a denser situation. It was shortly after this that I first heard its call, and being closer to the house it was audible inside. I noticed that it appeared to call often soon after dark and up to midnight, and occasionally around 5 a.m. Following the long daylight rest one would have thought that the first part of the night would have been devoted to feeding, but this is not so.

The plan of calling would consist of a number of calls followed by a short period of silence, to be followed by another period of calls; the whole being repeated again and again. After a period of silence of about 30 minutes, another session would be given. Sessions vary in length from 5 to 40 minutes. The following table sets out a typical session starting at about 9.35 p.m. 23/4/1954:

23 calls in 30 secs., 11 secs pause; 38.41.15; 25.27.6; 26.30.7; 21.26.10; 17.22.14; 6.8.10; 7.8.4; 24.28.14; 28.33.5; 20.26.8; 32.37.12; 19.25.9; 21.27.4; 22.27.10; 26.32.8; 26.33.5; 16.21.16; 12.19.4; 33.40.8; 25.30.16; 13.17.14; 21.26.37; 35.46.12; 10.13.12; 10.14.10; 29.38.14; 33.43.17; 19.25.10; 25.33.30; 32.42.33; 33.45.50; 18.23.77; 17.20.60; 22.28.34; 36.48.11; 16.21.Ceased.

It will be noticed that towards the end of the session the pause between the run of calls became longer (up to 77 seconds), possibly because the bird became tired. The calls are regular in length, spacing and tonal quality. Often the call has been described as "oom," but to my ears the note is more like "ood" with the "oo" drawn out as in "cooee." On a calm evening the call could be heard at a distance of 50 yards and appears to be very penetrating. Some confusion has occurred at times by crediting the Podargus with the "more pork" call, and many arguments have taken place on this point. This latter call is made by the Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*), which at

times could be heard calling near here at the same time as the Frogmouth.

On two occasions I have heard the bird calling in a freak manner, i.e., in daylight. This was on November 29, 1954, at 7.15 p.m. (still light) and the following morning at 7 a.m. in full daylight. The manner of calling seemed to be the same as that during the hours of darkness. I walked under the tree and watched the bird calling, and noticed that the body heaved as each call was made. The bird was reasonably tame, as after driving under the tree with a car the calls have been resumed a few minutes later. Walking under the tree seldom causes interruption, but shining a torch up into the foliage brings instant silence. As far as I can ascertain there is only one bird in the area which has called almost nightly for a year. The locality frequented by the bird comprises a row of large Red-gum trees alongside of a small creek with a roadway on the other side.