

HAWKS OF YORKE PENINSULA

By GORDON BERULDSSEN

During my travelling around Yorke Peninsula over the past six months I have concentrated most of my observing on the Hawks, etc., as I found my time for observing very limited. Hawks are birds that are easily seen from the car whilst driving and generally do not require any undue delay in identification, and most species can be identified by their flight pattern, sometimes, with fieldglasses, at considerable distances. Also they are easily flushed from patches of scrub and do not require lengthy searchings as is often required to locate some of the smaller birds. My records have been compiled from the whole of the Yorke Peninsula south from a line drawn from Wallaroo through Kadina to Kulpara and down to the top of St. Vincent's Gulf. However, the records are rather few and far between from the area south of Warooka and Corny Point and west of the Warooka fault line due mainly to the fact that much of that country is still virgin scrub and roads are few and far between, and the roads that are there are very rough.

The type of country on the Peninsula is mainly open farming country interspersed with varying sized patches of scrub, chiefly Sclerophyll scrub. There are a few quite large patches of scrub left, particularly around Minlaton and Port Vincent, and the whole area south of Warooka and Corny Point and west of the Warooka fault line is scrub. Generally the trees are small and stunted; however in a few places very large gums are to be found, some around Maitland but mainly at Minlaton, where there are a few quite large areas of big gums.

Records are mainly my own observations, but where otherwise note is made; birds are listed in Checklist order.

SPOTTED HARRIER (*Circus assimilis*)

This bird is not uncommon but is more often met with north of a line drawn across the peninsula through Urania. Usually seen flying over open country singularly or in pairs and appears to prefer areas away from the coast. I found it breeding near Maitland (1 pair), and between Kadina and Weetulta (2 pairs), in November and December.

SWAMP HARRIER (*Circus approximans*)

I have records from Port Julia; one bird

flying back and forth along the cliff edges overlooking St. Vincent's Gulf, 17/10/55; Daly Head, one bird flying low over a crop of barley, 19/10/55, and a pair seen a number of times over the six months past between Wallaroo and Moonta, usually just inland from the beach. In none of these areas is there any suitable swamps for the birds to breed in, in fact I doubt very much whether there would be any suitable swamp anywhere on the peninsula. The birds observed between Wallaroo and Moonta appeared to have a nest in October; however, I could not locate it and presume it must have been well hidden in a standing crop. I could never get closer than a mile or so before the birds would rise (often one was in the air before I arrived in the area), and it was very difficult to see exactly where they came from.

AUSTRALIAN GOSHAWK

(*Accipiter fasciatus*)

Until this month (April, 1956) I had not seen this bird on the peninsula, possibly because it is usually confined to the scrubs and does not often venture far out into the open. However, I do not think it is very common here. On my last trip I saw two single birds, one flushed from trees by the road between Edithburgh and Yorketown and the second in a similar place between Yorketown and Minlaton. I have a record of a bird being seen in large timber just north of Minlaton by G. B. Ragless.

COLLARED SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter cirrocephalus*)

This bird, like the Goshawk, tends to stay within the confines of the scrub; however, I have a number of records and believe that this bird is more common than the Goshawk. In all cases both male and female were seen but sure identification was gained from the color of their backs. Records are two birds seen nine miles south-west of Warooka, 19/10/55; two birds seen on two occasions between Yorketown and Edithburgh; two birds seen, 18/2/56, near Wauraltee and a report of a bird in the same district from J. Bartlett; two birds at Kadina and two birds near Curramulka. The birds at Curramulka were found nesting in late October,

and have been observed frequently in the same patch of scrub since then. Their nest was exceptionally small, being about the size of a Yellow-throated Miner's nest, shallow and lined with green leaves. It contained three heavily incubated eggs when found. The birds attacked me when I climbed to the nest.

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE (*Uroaetus audax*)

I have seen this bird only once, and that one was flying low over the sandhills at Wauraltee. I have been told by people in the district that two pairs of these birds nest regularly in the sandhills between Port Victoria and Port Rickaby, and when time permits I shall check on this information and endeavor to locate the nests.

LITTLE EAGLE (*Hieraetus morphnoides*)

Records of these birds are from Minlaton, one pair breeding (two young in nest), in November, 1955; Weetulta, one pair breeding (one young in nest), November, 1955, and numerous single birds seen at various times on most of the peninsula to as far as Warooka. These birds seem to prefer the scrubs that contain large peppermint gums, and unlike the Whistling Eagle do not remain in the vicinity of their nests the whole year around. Generally seen singularly or in pairs flying high over open country.

WHISTLING EAGLE (*Haliastur sphenurus*)

Like the Little Eagle this bird prefers the scrubs that contain large peppermint gums. I have records of nests from many parts of the peninsula and it appears that the birds remain in the vicinity of the nests all the year round. The only birds I have seen away from the known nests have been birds in mature plumage. The bird is quite common and is usually seen flying low over open country and open patches of scrub.

FORK-TAILED KITE (*Milvus migrans*)

A bird seen on two occasions in November, 1955 (presumably the same bird). It was flying low over scrub and open country by the side of the road between Kulpara and Paskeville.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE (*Elanus notatus*)

This bird is quite common throughout the peninsula down to Corny Point lighthouse, where I saw one bird, 19/10/55, and twice in the same area since then. During Octo-

ber, November and December it nested freely around Kadina, Moonta and Maitland, and many nests were found with young. J. Bartlett also reported three nests on the farm and surrounding scrubs at Wauraltee. It would appear this bird prefers the better class of country on the western side of the peninsula, as it is far more common down the centre and on that side than it is down the eastern side. Around the Kadina, Moonta, Weetulta and Agery district this bird is often met with as much as the Kestrel, and I would say would run a close second to that bird in numbers.

LITTLE FALCON (*Falco longipennis*)

On 25/11/55 I caught a fleeting glimpse of a bird I thought was of this species near Minlaton. Last week, 12/4/56, I saw a pair of these birds in the same area harassing starlings in a patch of large peppermint gums. These birds appear to reside in that district, and would probably nest there, as there are some ideal nesting places in the area, as well as one or two nests that could belong to this species.

BLACK FALCON (*Falco subniger*)

Unfortunately due to my lack of experience with this bird, I must have missed many records, mistaking them for Brown Hawks. However, since Christmas I have learned to distinguish this bird and have since found that it is not uncommon. I have records of single birds mainly from all parts of the peninsula, including one from Cape Spencer, 13/3/56. It appears to be more common on the northern portion of the peninsula.

BROWN HAWK (*Falco berigora*)

This hawk is very common over all the peninsula, second only in numbers to the Kestrel, except around Kadina, Moonta and district, where the Black-shouldered Kite is more common than the Brown Hawk. It nests freely in almost any patch of scrub, and a large number of birds in mature plumage are to be seen after the nesting season. I have seen both dark and light specimens in all parts of the peninsula, and can find nothing in my records to suggest that any particular phase is more common in any given district. Magpies frequently attack this hawk, more so than any other.

KESTREL (*Falco cenchroides*)

By far the most common hawk, it is found all over the peninsula. Usually seen flying

or hovering over grass or stubble paddocks searching for mice, which appear to form its main food supply. I have seen as many as 27 Kestrels hovering over a paddock of about 70 acres of barley stubble at the one time. On another occasion I saw 19 hovering over the same paddock. The Kestrel nests freely in any timber, even alongside the main roads.

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Three birds were sighted several times flying up and down the coast between Daly

Head and Cape Spencer on May 2, 1956, one bird being in immature plumage. Till recently there were two nests on the boardwalk around the top of the lighthouse at Corny Point, reputed to be of this bird. However, the nests have been destroyed and so far there are no signs of rebuilding.

WHITE-BREASTED SEA-EAGLE

(*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)

Two birds were seen flying together over Pondelowie Bay on May 2, 1956.