

## PELICANS BREEDING NEAR MILANG

by JOHN ECKERT

In early October, 1963, Kevin Jones found Pelicans (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) nesting on Reedy Point Sanctuary, a property owned by his father some three miles south of Milang. The colony was brought to my notice by Claude Sim, a member of the Strathalbyn Naturalists Club.

Reedy Point was originally a headland which jutted some miles into Lake Alexandrina. When the barrages were built the resultant higher lake level shortened the point considerably and later the 1956 flood cut a channel which detached the outermost mile making the end of the point an island. The colony was situated on this island.

On October 19th. V. Martin and myself visited this area by boat. We expected to see the birds nesting on a ridge of higher sapphire ground near the middle of the island, but a large congregation of Pelicans was seen grouped on a sandy spit on the southern side. This flock appeared just like the mobs of Pelicans we had seen resting on sand-spits many times before. Only the largeness of the flock, a few sitting up on lignum bushes, and the unusual tameness of the whole group was unusual. It was not until we were within 70 or 80 yards that some began to edge away from us and some young birds could be seen. The adults were making their peculiar frog-like croakings and groanings and were so reluctant to move that as we approached and examined one end of the colony almost half the birds remained in position at the other end. Of those that were disturbed many swam to the other side of a swamp some 200 yards away while the others moved a chain or so out into the lake and waited.

The main colony was situated on a sandy bank with a growth of couch grass and a few lignums. Most nests were just scrapes in the sand rudely lined with pieces of reedy material. However seven nests were placed at varying heights on the lignum bushes, the highest being some four feet up. Here the birds had not used much more nesting material; relying mainly on the mat of trampled lignum to support the eggs. Nesting appeared to have started at the higher part of the knob and spread outwards until all available suitable space had been used. Some small colonies of 10 to 20 nests had also started

at intervals along the southern shore, the furthest being some quarter of a mile distant and comprising 14 nests. A count of about half the main colony revealed 150 nests. With at least 50 nests in the outer colonies it seemed that the total number of nests would have been approximately 350.

Some chicks had already hatched, the largest being somewhat bigger than a rooster. These larger birds walked together and huddled in typical fashion. Many eggs had just hatched or were hatching and nearer the edges the eggs looked progressively fresher until in the outer colonies it seemed likely that laying was not yet completed. Clutch size was mainly two, although one of three and many of one were seen, but doubtless some of these latter were incomplete. The larger young were covered with white down but the newly-hatched chicks were pink and naked. Although the day was only pleasantly warm these small young appeared quite distressed by the direct sun, with mouths agape and panting after a few minutes. I feel that this apparent fragility of the young may have been the reason for the reluctance of the parents to leave the nests at this stage.

Some food was lying on the ground near some of the small chicks. It consisted mainly of minnows and yabbies in a partly digested state. A small carp and a tench were seen. The small naked chicks made nodding motions with beaks agape but whether this was begging or aggression I know not. Some accepted food placed in their mouths, others would not. A certain amount of mortality was evident but did not seem excessive. Some eggs appeared as though Ravens had pecked holes in them, while others were intact but abandoned. One outer colony had apparently been placed on a spot that was too low and after waves had splashed over it the eggs had been abandoned.

Not wishing to upset the colony unduly we stayed only a short time, moved along the shore inspecting the smaller groups and then left. We had both been surprised that a nesting colony of Pelicans should look so similar to an ordinary group of resting birds, and agreed that had we not been told of it, we might well have passed within a few hundred yards of the colony without suspect-