

BIRDS ON ISLANDS IN SALT LAGOON*

By MARK BONNIN

Report to the Minister of Agriculture on an entry made on September 18, 1966.

Entry was made under permit in the company of Dr. Brown Dobyns of Ohio, U.S.A., a visiting ornithologist. The weather was fine. The water was at its usual level and about eighteen inches deep in the middle of the lagoon and six inches deep under the teatrees. Apart from a few square feet in a few places there was no dry land. The teatree appeared to be surviving in spite of being completely bare of foliage and seemingly dead around the edge of the lagoon and the whole circumference of the island, the site of cormorant rookeries.

The southern island was explored and the southern part of the northern island was circumnavigated. Thirty-six species of birds were identified. Notes on some of the larger species follow. It was impossible to make a count so that the numbers of adult birds mentioned are a rough estimate only.

WHITE EGRET

Sixty birds were either on or near nests. No young were seen and it was presumed the nests contained eggs only. The birds were rather more diffusely distributed than in previous years and were nesting amongst the smaller species of cormorants on the eastern side of the lagoon.

WHITE IBIS

One hundred birds were nesting in rookeries with the Straw-necked Ibis.

STRAW-NECKED IBIS

One thousand. All areas of lignum were used as nesting sites. The only colony counted consisted of forty-seven clutches, mostly of three eggs and some of two. Eggs were heavily incubated. Only one pair of White Ibis was nesting in this colony. An adjacent colony contained chicks but was not approached for fear of frightening the larger fledglings from the nests into the water.

ROYAL SPOONBILL

One hundred. These birds were nesting in the tallest trees on the north-east part of the island, their usual site.

YELLOW-BILLED SPOONBILL

Fifty. Nests were mainly on the western side of the lagoon in the tallest trees. No nests of either species were inspected but no young birds were seen.

GLOSSY IBIS—Nil.

BLACK CORMORANT

Ten thousand. Nests were situated around the circumference of both islands, some only a few feet above water. Many nests contained almost fully grown young, some of which took to the water at our approach, dived like experts and were joined by their parents at a "safe" distance from the boat.

PIED CORMORANT

Six thousand. Nesting was mainly on the southern and western sides of the main island. Young were in all stages of growth.

LITTLE BLACK CORMORANT

Four thousand.

LITTLE PIED CORMORANT

Two thousand. These smaller species predominated in the centre of the island but nests were scattered amongst those of the larger species.

BLACK SWAN

One pair had six cygnets and another a nest with three eggs.

NANKEEN NIGHT HERON

Fifty. The heronry in the dense teatree on the north-western corner of the island was not visited. At 4.30 p.m. these birds were scattered amongst the cormorant rookeries, hopping or flying from nest to nest. Five were seen to eat newly hatched featherless cormorants.

DUCKS

Grey Teal and White-eyed Ducks were the most predominant followed by Blacks Ducks and Chestnut Teal.

* Situated east of section 78-80 in the Hundred of Baker, County Russell. This is the area referred to by G. R. Beruldsen in *The Emu*, 63, 1963, pp. 224-233. It may not be legally entered without a permit.

(Concluded next column).

BIRDS ON ISLANDS (Continued)**HAWKS**

One pair of Whistling Eagles and one pair of Swamp Harriers remained on the island during our visit.

INTRODUCED SPARROW

The flock observed last year was not seen.

COMMENT:

Inspection was made some six weeks earlier than in previous years. This probably explains the absence of the Glossy Ibis and the enormous numbers of the larger species of cormorants seen on this occasion.

These islands remain a most valuable breeding ground for many species of water birds.