

SOME BIRDS OF NORTH-EASTERN EYRE PENINSULA, S.A.

J. B. COX

Received November, 1973

Knowledge of the birds in the north-eastern districts of the Eyre Peninsula is still rather scanty; and the writer hopes that the records below will fill a few gaps. Not all species seen in the district are included in this report, but only those that it is thought would be of interest. Relatively few visits were made to the outlying areas; and longer periods in the field in such areas would be required before generalisation about many species could be justified.

For two weeks in January, 1972; from July 29, 1972, until September 28, 1972; and from December 2, 1972, until April 7, 1973, the writer resided at Whyalla. Much of this time was spent in the field, including many evenings as well as all week-ends, as it is the writer's habit to observe intensively wherever located. These are the types of habitat searched extensively, in the order in which attention was given to them. Firstly, coastal mangrove, samphire and sand-dune areas; secondly, mulga and inland salt-bush areas; thirdly, mallee. Access to the Saltfields was severely limited by rain in the summer of 1972-73.

The records in this report are all from an area which extends from Port Augusta and Nonning in the north, west to Kimba, and south to Cleve and Cowell, with the Spencer Gulf forming the eastern boundary. Visits were made outside these borders, but as they were infrequent accounts of them are omitted. Also omitted are accounts of species seen during the 1972 S.A.O.A. Campout in areas to the north of Kimba on which the writer was present.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

59 REEF HERON *Egretta sacra*. On September 4, 1972, a single bird was seen on rocks by the slipways of the Whyalla Shipbuilding Yard. Thereafter it was seen almost daily until September 19. It became very tame and almost oblivious to shipyard personnel and to the general commotion nearby.

102 BLACK KITE *Milvus migrans*. One seen near Cowled's Landing on February 27, 1972.

103 SQUARE-TAILED KITE *Lophoictinia isura*. One bird was observed flying over saltbush country three km inland from Whyalla on August 25, 1972. Another was seen over mallee Country near the northern shore of False Bay on December 17, 1972. The species was recognised by a noticeable white patch near the bases of the primary feathers on the underwing, the wings held in a very shallow "V" whilst gliding or soaring, and a pliant, square-ended tail.

112 WHITE-BREASTED SEA-EAGLE *Haliaeetus leucogaster*. One adult bird seen over the Whyalla Shipyard basin, April 6, 1973.

113 SPOTTED HARRIER *Circus assimilis*. One adult at Eight Mile Creek, September 20, 1972.

114 SWAMP HARRIER *Circus approximans*. Only two records, one near Whyalla on January 30, 1973, and one at Eight Mile Creek on February 12, 1973. Both were jumped to be immature because of their dark brown plumage.

119 LITTLE FALCON *Falco longipennis*. At Whyalla, flying over built-up areas, one on January 15, 1973, and one on February 27, 1973.

120 PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*. A single bird observed at the Whyalla Saltfields on July 29, 1972, and September 9, 1972.

124 STUBBLE QUAIL *Coturnix pectoralis*. This species was found to be common in most localities, at all times.

128 LITTLE QUAIL *Turnix varia*. Common in the Gawler Ranges between Siam and Nonning on January 6, 1973.

134 SPOTTED CRAKE *Porzana fluminea*. Three observed on the banks of a tidal creek, among mangroves at the Whyalla Saltfields on September 9, 1972.

147 GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*. Two at Lucky Bay on December 28, 1972, and 10 on December 30, 1972. 120 plus at the Whyalla Saltfields on February 13, 1973.

151 DOUBLE-BANDED DOTTEREL *Charadrius bicinctus*. Two on the beach at the Whyalla Saltfields on March 4, 1973.

152 MONGOLIAN DOTTEREL *Charadrius mongolus*. Two birds at the Whyalla Saltfields on February 17, 1973.

158 TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*. One, in summer plumage at the Whyalla Saltfields on September 9, 1972.

159 EASTERN CURLEW *Numenius madagascariensis*. Two at Lucky Bay on December 28 and 30, 1972. One at Whyalla Saltfields on March 3, 1973.

160 WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. One at the Whyalla Saltfields on January 2, 1973. A small white rump patch was seen; also the characteristic rippling call-note was heard.

165 MARSH SANDPIPER *Tringa stagnatilis*. A single bird was seen at the Whyalla Saltfields on January 3, 1973, and again on February 13, 1973.

166 COMMON SANDPIPER *Tringa hypoleucos*. One seen by a jetty at Whyalla beachfront on December 9, 1972. Two at Whyalla Saltfields on February 13, 1973, while on February 17 and March 1 only one bird was present.

169 BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*. Seven birds were seen at the Whyalla Saltfields on February 13, 1973.

170 CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*. This species was found to be very common at the Whyalla Saltfields during the summer of 1972-73, where this species probably surpasses in numbers the also common Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*. Flocks in excess of 200 birds were often seen. Also, during December, 1972, was found to be common on the beach at Lucky Bay.

177 GREAT KNOT *Calidris tenuirostris*. 38 were seen on the beach at Lucky Bay on December 28 and 30, 1972. Twelve were seen at the Whyalla Saltfields on February 13, 1973. The Lesser Knot *Calidris canutus* was not recorded.

180 RED-NECKED PHALAROPE *Phalaropus lobatus*. One bird seen at the Whyalla Saltfields on February 17 to 23, 1973, and March 1, 1973. Ref. Cox (1973).

181 BLACK-WINGED STILT *Himantopus himantopus*. This species may be rare, because one bird at the Whyalla Saltfields on September 9, 1972, is the only one to have been observed there by R. W. Bradshaw, despite his previous searching.

182 BANDED STILT *Gladorhynchus leucocephalus*. Occurs, during the summer months, in huge flocks at the Whyalla Saltfields.

183 RED-NECKED AVOCET *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*. According to R. W. Bradshaw there is a breeding colony at the Whyalla Saltfields.

190 SILVER GULL *Larus novaehollandiae*. A breeding colony at the Whyalla Saltfields of about 200 pairs.

192 PACIFIC GULL *Larus pacificus*. Common along the coastline of Spencer Gulf.

202 FAIRY TERN *Sterna nereis*. A breeding colony of about 25 pairs was found at the Whyalla Saltfields on February 13, 1973, when all nests contained eggs. By February 17, some nests had newly-hatched young; but on March 4 only five chicks could be found.

217 PINK COCKATOO *Cacatua leadbeateri*. Observed at Nonning, Corunna, and near Uno Stations. Ten birds together at Nonning on January 6, 1973.

218 LITTLE CORELLA *Cacatua sanguinea*. One or two birds were frequently seen flying about Whyalla, often with Galahs *C. roseicapilla*. I believe these to be "escapees" or merely free-flying captive stock from a local park.

232 PORT LINCOLN PARROT *Barnardius zonarius*. This species is common in most areas where there is mallee, including an area just north of Whyalla, adjoining the Saltfields.

239 BLUE-WINGED PARROT *Neophema chrysotomus*. Condon (1969) does not mention that this species occurs on the Eyre Peninsula. However he does state that "It has been taken as far north as (?) Lake Callabonna . . ." Slater (1970) indicates, by distribution map, that it does occur in the north-eastern portion of the Peninsula. On September 9, 1972, R. W. Bradshaw and myself observed three birds of this species in coastal sand-dune country just south of Whyalla, at Eight Mile Creek. These birds were observed at very close range, and the plumage of all three indicated that they were adult males. The range was such that the blue frontal band could be seen not to reach the eye. The blue on the wing and "shoulder" was obviously very much more extensive and prominent than on the Elegant Parrots *N. elegans* that were also observed on this date at the Whyalla Saltfields. The crown on the Blue-winged Parrots was yellower and the back duller. All three birds were still present on September 20.

240 ELEGANT PARROT *Neophema elegans*. This species is also not indicated by Condon (1969) as occurring on the Eyre Peninsula. Eckert (1972) lists a record from near Cleve. Mr. R. W. Bradshaw

and myself observed clearly a party of nine birds at the Whyalla Saltfields on September 9, 1972. Also on a few occasions I have seen birds which were almost certainly this species flying over mangrove and samphire country to the south of Whyalla, while some other birds seen flying over this habitat have probably been the Rock Parrot *N. petrophila*.

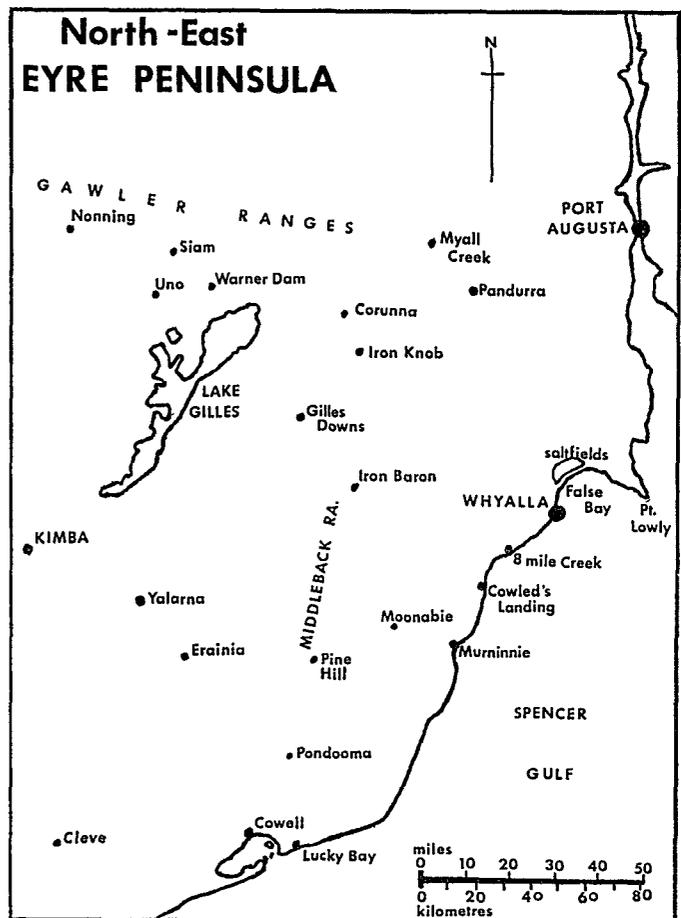
261 FORK-TAILED SWIFT *Apus pacificus*. 200-plus at Eight Mile Creek on November 30, 1972. A very rough estimate of 1500 over Whyalla on December 4, 1972. A single bird at Eight Mile Creek on January 22, 1973.

271 WHITE-BACKED SWALLOW *Cheramoeca leucosternum*. Three near the north shore of False Bay on December 17, 1972, and six at Corunna on January 6, 1973.

294 CRIMSON CHAT *Ephthianura tricolor*. About 20 near Siam on January 6, 1973.

295 ORANGE CHAT *Ephthianura aurifrons*. Common in most areas during December 1972 and January 1973. 30-plus seen at Point Lowly on December 16, 1972.

311 SPOTTED SCRUB-WREN *Sericornis frontalis*. Condon (1969) indicates that this species occurs along the western shores of the Spencer Gulf north to Cowell. Certainly I have found this species to be very common about Whyalla in mangrove areas.



314 FIELD-WREN *Calamanthus fuliginosus*. Frequently seen in samphire areas from about 15 km north of Whyalla south to Murrinnie. Also seen near Port Augusta on the western side of the Spencer Gulf. I have in addition observed this species on the eastern side of the Spencer Gulf, and these are presumed to be *C. f. campestris* as listed by Condon (1969). The birds about Whyalla are presumed to be *C. f. suttoni*, the type-specimen having been taken south-west of Whyalla (Condon, 1969). It would be interesting to ascertain whether these two forms meet at Port Augusta. The "Eyrean Barrier" which runs through Port Augusta has been found to separate other species or races of birds. These two races of *Calamanthus* may be similarly divided, if the birds which I have seen near the western side of Port Augusta are referable to *suttoni*.

315 REDTHROAT *Pyrholaemus brunneus*. Common over much of the area, and extends to the Spencer Gulf shore near Point Lowly. It seems to avoid the mallee areas.

317 WESTERN GRASS-WREN *Amytornis textilis*. Condon (1969) lists this species as "rare". They are at first hard to find owing to their unobtrusive habits. But once their call-notes are learned they can easily be located, and I believe that the species is common in most of the area (except in mallee or *Triodia*) that this paper covers. Localities where I observed it are: Whyalla Saltfields, Eight Mile Creek, near Murrinnie, Mt. Laura (west of Whyalla), Iron Baron, Corunna and near Uno. When I first encountered this species, I could not tell it in the field from the Thick-billed Grass Wren *A. modestus* (now known as *A. textilis modestus*, Parker, 1973). Certainly it did not resemble the *A. textilis* illustrated by McGill (1970); nor did it inhabit "spinifex" as Condon (1969) says. John Eckert took some specimens on February 27, 1972, at Eight Mile Creek; and when these were compared with skins of *A. (textilis) modestus*, which Shane Parker then possessed, they were found to be almost the same except in their slightly darker plumage and minutely thinner bill. On the other hand, specimens of the Dusky Grass-Wren *A. purnelli* (formerly known as *A. textilis purnelli*) were obviously very different. Parker (1973) completely reviewed the taxonomic status of these species, and suggests the vernacular name Thick-billed Grass-Wren for all forms of *A. textilis*, which I think would be wise. *A. purnelli* is the Dusky Grass-Wren which is obviously the species depicted by McGill (1970) as *A. textilis*. The Whyalla birds would, if one follows Condon (1969), be referable to *A. textilis myall*, Myall Creek (type locality) being 40 km north of Whyalla.

320 STRIATED GRASS-WREN *Amytornis striatus*. Four birds were seen in mallee country, with *Triodia*, near Pine Hill on December 30, 1972.

326 TURQUOISE WREN *Malurus callainus*. Common in most mallee areas south to the Middleback Ranges, being particularly numerous on the edges of a mallee area bordering the Whyalla Saltfields and the northern shores of False Bay. Condon (1969) gives the Gawler Ranges as the species' southern limit. I found it as far south as the mid-western Middleback Ranges (70 km W.S.W. of Whyalla). During August, 1972, males of this species had an all grey-brown plumage apart from very bright blue wings and tail. By September, many birds had attained partial "summer plumage".

346 GILBERT WHISTLER *Pachycephala inornata*. Probably widespread in small numbers north-west of Lake Gilles. Also one male observed near Moonabie on December 30, 1972.

364 SILVEREYE *Zosterops lateralis*. This species was common about Whyalla at all times.

370 YELLOW-FRONTED HONEYEATER *Meliphaga plumula*. This species was found to be common in the Gawler Ranges from Siam to Nonning on January 6, 1973. It was not recorded further south.

384 WHITE-FRONTED HONEYEATER *Phylidonyris albifrons*. This species was common in mallee country just north of False Bay during December 1972 and January 1973. It was also observed in Whyalla gardens on January 20, 1973.

411 GREY WOOD-SWALLOW *Artamus cinereus*. This is the commonest member of the genus in the more northerly, non-mallee areas, although the birds appear not to form large flocks typical of some other types.

Acknowledgements are due to John Eckert and Shane Parker for clarifying the taxonomic relationships of the Grass-Wrens. Also to Mr. R. W. Bradshaw for his help in many ways, and to the Broken Hill Proprietary Co. Ltd. for allowing me access to the Whyalla Saltfields.

REFERENCES

- Condon, H. T. (1969), A Handlist of the Birds of South Australia.
 Cox, J. B. (1973), A Further Occurrence of the Red-necked Phalarope in South Australia, *S. Aust. Orn.*, 26: 116-117
 Eckert, John, (1972), Notes on Eyre Peninsula Bird, *S. Aust. Orn.* 26: 42-47.
 McGill, Arnold, R., (1970), Australian Warblers.
 Parker, S. A. (1972), Remarks on distribution and taxonomy of *Amytornis textilis*, *modestus* and *purnelli*, *Emu*, 72 4: 157-166.
 85B, Jetty Road, Brighton, S.A. 5048.