

Birds on the River Murray.

By A. M. Morgan, M.B., Ch. B.

This trip was not undertaken, in the first place, for ornithological purposes, but as a considerable amount of bird observation and a little collecting was done, I think the results are worth recording.

My wife and I left Morgan on March 31st, at 6 p.m., in the Gem Company's river boat "Ruby", calling at Cobdogla, Moorook, Pyap, and Loxton on April 1st, and reaching Renmark on the morning of April 2nd. That day was the most interesting of the trip, for the river between Renmark and the border is but little settled, and water fowl were numerous. April 3rd was spent between the border and Wentworth, and April 4th at Mildura. From Mildura we returned to Renmark by the boat reaching that town early on Good Friday morning. A week was spent at Renmark at the excellent hotel. Our days being occupied in exploring the surrounding country under the guidance of Mr. Herbert Shields, who kindly gave up much of his time in assisting us. Renmark was left on April 7th by motor for the four and a half hours' run to Morgan through the mallee scrub. I may say that we found the river boat very comfortable, with good food, and a most obliging staff. It is also very gratifying to be able to state that shooting from the Gem Co. boats has been absolutely stopped. Formerly much useless slaughter took place from these boats, both protected and unprotected birds, none of which were, of course, recovered. I am sorry to say not a single emu was seen upon the trip. He heard that they are becoming very scarce near the river frontage, though a few are still to be found further back. The mallee hen we also heard spoken of as rare, though formerly the mallee scrub of this district was one of their strongholds, we saw nothing of it.

As most of the birds observed were identified with the field glasses, the subspecific name is given only when it had been previously ascertained, or when a specimen was obtained. Even then it is usually not possible to identify the sub species from Mr. Mathews' meagre descriptions. 96 species in all were identified.

Birds observed:—

Geopelia placida tranquilla (The Peaceful Dove)—Common near the river banks throughout the trip.

Ocyphaps lophotes (Crested Bronzewing).—Common in the malle scrub about Renmark. Only seen once on the river bank. A number of them was seen near Paringa about a heap of "cocky chaff."

Phaps chalcoptera (Bronzewing Pigeon).—A single bird seen on the river bank near Renmark.

Gallinula tenebrosa (Moorhen).—Only two birds seen throughout the journey. Each was swimming in the river, and ran up the bank on the approach of the steamer.

Fulica atra tasmanica (Coot).—Seen, in pairs or small flocks, throughout the trip. Nowhere numerous.

The bald coot *Porphyrio melanotus* was not seen at all, although there was no lack of situation suitable for it.

Lobibyx novae-hollandiae (Spur-winged Plover).—Seen in pairs throughout the trip; generally on sandspits jutting out into the stream. Not numerous.

Zonifer tricolor (Black-breasted Plover).—One large flock seen on a dry bare flat near Renmark.

Elseyia melanops (Black-fronted Dotterel).—Seen in pairs throughout the trip, on the river bank and the edges of swamps.

Burhinus magnirostris (Scrub Curlew or Stone Plover).—Frequently heard at night. One pair seen on a gum flat near Renmark.

Carphibis spinicollis (Straw-necked Ibis).—Common about Renmark, and from there to Wentworth; not seen lower down the river. The white Ibis was not seen.

Platibis flavipes (Yellow-billed Spoonbill).—Seen occasionally from Renmark upwards. At a place on the Victorian part of the river, where there is a large heronry, these birds were seen in numbers flying over the tree tops. Dr. Chenery, of Wentworth, who visited this heronry early in March, found nankeen night herons, white-necked herons, egrets, and spoonbills nesting in numbers in the tall gums. All the birds except the nankeen herons, which were still sitting, had large young. From the steamer only a few nests were visible, but nankeen herons, white-necked herons and spoonbills were flying over the tops of the trees in great numbers, and hundreds of young nankeens were roosting in the trees near the water. We did not see any white egrets. They had probably all left, as a month earlier Dr. Chenery found full grown young ones. Over this heronry about forty whistling eagles were constantly soaring, probably on the lookout for dead young birds or dropped fish.

Herodias alba symmatophora (The White Egret).—Not common. A single bird was seen near the mouth of the Ana-branch, and a flock of about a dozen near Rufus Creek, the entrance to Lake Victoria.

Notophox nova-hollandiae (White-fronted Heron or Blue Crane).—Very common. There was no time throughout the trip that a dozen or more were not in view.

Myola pacifica (White-necked Heron).—A few birds seen below Renmark, but from there to Wentworth they were very common.

Nycticorax caledonicus australasiae (The Nankeen Night Heron).—Common from Renmark upwards. About a dozen of these birds breed on Goat Island, near Renmark. The nests were unoccupied at the time of our visit, but Mr. Shields, who formally owned the island has seen them in use.

Chenopsis atrata (The Black Swan).—Seen occasionally throughout the trip. A pair was seen near Lake Victoria Station with young unable to fly.

Chenonetta jubata (Wood Duck or Maned Goose).—Uncommon below Renmark. Above that place they become very plentiful. Flocks of fifty or sixty were constantly rising before the boat. A pair was seen with young in the down.

Anas superciliosus (Black Duck).—Fairly plentiful throughout the trip, but much more common above than below Renmark. Several pairs were seen with young unable to fly.

Virago giberrifrons (Grey Teal).—Common throughout the trip; but as with the other waterfowl, much more numerous above than below Renmark. Young birds unable to fly were seen.

Nyroca australis (White-eyed Duck).—Only seen twice. Once a flock of about a dozen, and once a pair—on both occasions within a few miles of Renmark. The flock dived to avoid the steamer instead of rising from the water.

Biziura lobata (Musk Duck).—Solitary birds seen occasionally throughout the trip.

Phalacrocorax carbo novae-hollandiae (Large Black Cormorant).—Solitary birds seen occasionally throughout the trip. On one occasion near Renmark four were seen flying with a flock of little black cormorants.

Mesocarbo ater (Little Black Cormorant).—Common on all parts of the river bank, generally in flocks of about a dozen.

Hypoleucis varius hypoleucis (Orange-faced Cormorant).—three solitary birds seen.

Microcarbo melanoleucus (Little Pied Cormorant).—Common throughout the trip, in flocks up to about twenty.

Anhinga novae-hollandiae (Darter).—A single bird seen fishing in the river.

Catoptropelicanus conspicillatus (Pelican).—Seen in numbers between Renmark and Wentworth.

Uroaetus audax (Wedge-tailed Eagle).—Only two birds seen.

Haliastur sphenurus (Whistling Eagle).—Very common. Seen in pairs throughout the trip, and once in a flock circling over a heronry. Many nests were seen in the tall gums of the river bank.

Ieracidea berigora (Striped Brown Hawk).—Only one bird seen near Paringa.

Cerchneis cenchroides (Kestrel).—Common both on the river banks and on the borders of the mallee near Renmark.

Spiloglaux boobook (Boobook Owl).—Heard at night near Wentworth. Mr. Shields has also heard them at Goat Island.

Cacatoes galerita (Sulphur Crested Cockatoo).—Very common throughout the trip.

Eolophus roseicapillus (Galah).—Common from Renmark to Wentworth. Near Paringa a flock was seen about a heap of "cocky chaff."

Polytelis anthopeplus (Rock Pebbler or Black-tailed Parrot).—First seen at Loxton where a flock of about twenty flew along the bank. From there to Wentworth they were frequently seen, but always in pairs. A pair was shot at Ral Ral creek, near Renmark. The measurement of this pair were:—

♂. Total length, 40.5 c.m.; spread, 52 c.m.; wing, 18.5 c.m.; bill (culmen) 2 c.m.; tarsus, 1.80 c.m.

♀. Total length, 38 c.m.; spread, 53.5 c.m.; wing, 18.5 c.m.; bill, 2 c.m.; tarsus, 1.90 c.m.

Stomach contents:—Triturated vegetable matter. Crop contents:—Small shelled seeds. Irides, dark brown, with orange outer ring; bill, bright rose red, tips brown; feet, black, mottled with grey; inside mouth, light yellow.

Platyercus flavcolus (Yellow Parrot).—Common near the river banks throughout the trip. These birds are locally known as "smokers."

Barnardius barnardi (Mallee Parrot).—Common on the river banks, gum, and box flats, and also in the mallee. They have a bad name at Renmark as almond eaters.

Psephotus haematonotus (Red Rumped Parrot).—Common in the big gums of the river bank throughout the trip. They do not go far back from the river.

Psephotus varius (Many-coloured Parrot).—Seen only in the big mallee near Paringa. Not common.

Aegotheles cristata (Owlet Nightjar).—A single bird was flushed from a hollow stump in the mallee near Paringa and was shot.

Measurements:—Spread, 35.5 c.m.; wing, 11.25 c.m.; bill (culmen), 0.80 c.m.; tarsus, 1.80 c.m. Total length, 20.5 c.m. Sex, ♀. Iris, dark brown; feet, pale grey; inside of mouth, flesh colour. The stomach contained the remains of a beetle. This bird was moulting.

Dacelo gigas (Laughing Jackass).—Very common in the gums of the river bank. It does not leave the big timbered country.

Sauropatis sancta (Sacred Kingfisher).—Seen once at Renmark and once crossing the river near Ned's Corner.

Neochalcites basalis mellori (Narrow-billed Bronze Cuckoo).—A single bird seen on a box gum flat near Renmark.

Hirundo neoxena (Welcome Swallow).—Common throughout the trip. A pair or two were always to be seen skimming the river in front of the steamer.

Cheramoeca leucosternum (White-breasted Swallow).—A few birds seen on the telegraph wires between Renmark and Morgan on the overland journey. Mr. Shields informed us that they bred in the banks of the river at Goat Island.

Hylochelidon nigricans (Tree Swallow).—Only seen twice—once in the big gums of a bend, near Ned's Corner and once on the overland journey to Morgan. They were never seen skimming the water like the welcome swallow.

Lagenoplastes ariel (Bottle Swallow).—Every cliff, throughout the journey, had groups of the nests of these birds upon it, but no birds were seen.

Microeca fascians (Brown Flycatcher).—Common both in the big timbered river flats and in the mallee.

Whiteornis goodenovi (Red-capped Robin).—Common on the box flats and in the mallee. It does not come into the big gum country.

Melanodryas cucullata vigorsii (Hooded Robin).—Seen twice near Renmark on a box flat, and a dry polygonum swamp.

Smicrorhis brevirostris viridescens (Short-billed Tree Tit).—Very Common in all classes of country. Two nests were

found, one on April 6th, with young birds, and one on April 7th, ready for eggs. Both near Renmark.

Lewinornis rufiventris inornatus (Red-breasted Thickhead).—Common on the box gum and tea-tree flats, and in the big mallee country. This bird proved to be the southern form, not the pale bird of the northern dry country. A specimen collected measured—total length, 16 c.m.; tarsus, 1.70 c.m.; sex, ♂. Iris, bright reddish brown; bill, black; feet, greyish black; inside of mouth, black. The stomach contained the remains of spiders, grasshoppers, and caterpillars.

Gilbertornis rufogularis gilberti (Red-throated Thickhead).—A large thickhead has several times been seen and heard in the big mallee near Paringa, but no specimen could be secured, so the subspecies could not be determined.

Leucocirca tricolor (Wagtail).—Common throughout the trip in all classes of country.

Seisura inquieta (Restless Flycatcher).—Common throughout the trip near the river banks, not seen in the mallee.

Coracina novae-hollandiae melanops (Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike).—Seen occasionally near the river banks throughout the trip. Not seen in the mallee.

Cinclosoma sp. (Ground Thrush).—A bird of this genus ran across the track in front of the motor car near Paringa. It was probably *C. castanotum*, but as the specimen was not secured, I cannot be certain.

Morganornis superciliosus (White-browed Babbler).—Seen occasionally in the mallee and on the box flats, not at all common. A bird shot for identification proved to be a male in breeding condition. Measurements:—Total length, 20 c.m.; spread, 23.5 c.m.; bill, 2.5 c.m.; wing, 7 c.m.; tarsus, 2.6 c.m. The stomach contained remains of insects and a few small black seeds. Iris, reddish brown; bill—upper mandible, black; lower, light horn colour at the base, black at the tip; inside of beak, black; palate, horn colour; feet, blackish grey.

Ephthiamura albifrons (White-faced Tin Tac).—Seen occasionally on the salt bush and box flats near Renmark.

Conopodera australis (Reed Warbler).—Only seen once in some bull rushes beside a creek at Renmark. They may have been more common, but as they were not singing they would be difficult to locate.

Poodytes gramineus (Little Grass Bird).—Heard in the same situation as the last bird. They were not actually seen.

Acanthiza uropygialis (Chestnut-rumped Tit).—Very common in the dry country away from the river at Renmark. Two specimens were shot. The first was too mangled to skin or sex. Its iris was white, bill black, under jaw lighter, feet, black; inside of mouth black. The second was a male. Total length, 8.80 c.m.; spread, 16.50 c.m.; wing, 4.7 c.m.; bill, broken; tarsus, 1.60 c.m. The stomach contained remains of insects.

Geobasilus chrysorrhous (Tomtit).—Seen at Mildura and Renmark in the settlement, also at Renmark on the box flats.

Pyrrholaemus brunneus (Redthroat).—Common on the salt bush and samphire flats near Renmark. Their song at this season is not so full and melodious as it is in the breeding season. A specimen measured:—Total length, 12 c.m.; spread, 17 c.m.; wing, 5.3 c.m.; bill, 1 c.m.; tarsus, 1.9 c.m. Sex, ♀; Iris, reddish brown, with lighter outer rim; feet, dark grey brown; bill, brown; under jaw, lighter; inside of mouth, blackish grey. The stomach contained remains of insects.

Hallornis cyanotis (White-winged Wren).—Two families were seen on a samphire flat near Renmark; they were very shy, and were not singing.

Leggornis lamberti assimilis (Purple-backed Wren).—These birds were fairly plentiful in the large salt bush ground, amongst the box gums, and also in the dry polygonum swamps, but they were very shy, and quite silent, so that it was only with difficulty that a specimen was secured. Measurements:—Total length, 12 c.m.; spread, 12 c.m.; wing, 3.50 c.m.; bill, .80 c.m.; tarsus, 2.10 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, black; bill, black; legs and feet, brown. The stomach contained ants and insect eggs.

Artamus leucorhynchus leucopygialis (White-rumped Wood Swallow).—First seen near Loxton in the large gums of the river side, from thence to Mildura they were seen occasionally in similar situations. They do not seem to leave the river bank, and are mostly in pairs or groups of four or five. An adult and a young bird were shot on Goat Island. The adult measured:—Total length, 17.5 c.m.; spread, 35 c.m.; wing, 10 c.m.; bill, 1.5 c.m.; tarsus, 1.3 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, very dark brown; bill, light blue; tip, black; feet, mealy grey; inside of mouth, black. Stomach contents, flying ants, identified by Mr. A. M. Lea as of the genus *Iridomyrmex*. The young bird measured:—Total length, 17 c.m.; spread, 33.5 c.m.; bill, 1.40 c.m.; tarsus, 1.40 c.m. Sex, ♀. Stomach con-

tents, flying ants and a grasshopper. Bill, brown; other parts as in adult.

Campbellornis personatus (Masked Wood-swallow).—Seen on two occasions near Renmark flying overhead; not seen to settle.

Campbellornis superciliosus (White-browed Wood Swallow).—Seen on two occasions flying overhead in company with the former bird.

Pseudartamus cyanopterus (Wood Swallow).—Seen at intervals throughout the trip, near the river banks. Not seen in the mallee.

Colluricincla harmonica (Grey Shrike Thrush).—Seen and heard at intervals throughout the trip.

Grallina cyanoleuca (Magpie Lark or Murray Magpie).—One of the commonest birds on the river. There were always several in sight throughout the trip.

Gymnorhina tibicen (Black-backed Magpie).—This bird was first seen near the Ana Branch Station, in N.S.W., but on our return to Renmark we found that it was common in that district in the big mallee and box flats. Magpies of any kind are uncommon in the big timber near the river. On the overland trip to Morgan this species was the only one seen till about 10 miles east of Morgan, where both species were seen. From that point to Adelaide only the white-backed were seen. The black back species probably extends from near Morgan to near Wentworth, where Dr. Chenery tells me the magpies are all white backs, he only having seen one black back since he has been there.

Gymnorhina hypoleuca leuconota (White-backed Magpie).—Only seen near Morgan.

Cracticus nigrogularis (Black-throated Butcher Bird).—Seen and heard at intervals from Renmark to Mildura, near the river bank.

Bulestes torquatus (Butcher Bird).—Common from Morgan to Mildura, both near the river and in the mallee.

Oreoica cristata (Crested Bell Bird).—Heard several times in the mallee near Renmark. Not common.

Aphelocephala leucopsis (White face).—Fairly common in the mallee and salt bush flats near Renmark, but in nothing like the numbers in which one sees them in the dry northern country. A bird shot measured:—Total length, 10 c.m.; spread, 17 c.m.; wing, 5.9 c.m.; bill, .80 c.m.; tarsus, 1.6 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, white; bill, black; feet, black; inside of mouth, black. The stomach contained the remains of insects.

Climacteris erythrops superciliosa (White-browed Tree Creeper).—Fairly common in the mallee near Renmark. A bird shot measured:—Total length, 14.5 c.m.; spread, 25.5 c.m.; bill, 1.3 c.m.; wing, 8.1 c.m.; tarsus, 2 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, dark brown; legs and feet, black; inside of mouth, greyish black. Stomach contents, insect remains. The specimen is somewhat darker in general coloration than birds from the north-west of Port Augusta.

Neoclimia picumna (Brown Tree Creeper).—Fairly common in the big timber near the river.

Pardalotus punctatus xanthopygius (Yellow-rumped Diamond Bird).—Fairly common near Renmark, both in the big timber and the mallee. A specimen measured:—Total length, 8.80 c.m.; spread, 16.50 c.m.; wing, 4.7 c.m.; bill broken; tarsus, 1.60 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, brown; feet, brown; inside of mouth, flesh colour. Stomach contents, insect remains.

Pardalotus striatus subaffinis (Striped Diamond Bird).—Common throughout the trip in big gums and mallee. A specimen measured:—Total length, 10 c.m.; spread, 19 c.m.; bill, .60 c.m.; wing, 5 c.m.; tarsus, 1.60 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, greyish black; bill, black; base of lower jaw, light horn colour; inside of mouth, white; feet, blackish grey. * Stomach contents, insect remains and a large green caterpillar.

Melithreptus atricapillus mallee (Brown-headed Honey Eater).—Seen occasionally near Renmark on the box flats, and in the mallee. Two specimens were shot. The first measured:—Total length, 13 c.m.; spread, 18 c.m.; wing, 6 c.m.; bill, 1.20 c.m.; tarsus, 1.50 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, dark brown; bill, black; legs and feet, brown; inside of mouth, yellow. Stomach contents, insect remains. The second measured:—Total length, 12 c.m.; spread, 16 c.m.; wing, 6.10 c.m.; bill, 1 c.m.; tarsus, 1.40 c.m. Sex, ♀. Iris, brown; bill, black; bare skin around eye, dull yellow; feet, brown. Stomach contents, insect remains and a small green caterpillar.

Plectorhyncha lanceolata (Striped Honey Eater).—A small flock seen feeding in the large red gums on Goat Island. One specimen shot measured:—Total length, 21 c.m.; spread, 31.5 c.m.; wing, 9 c.m.; bill, 1.60 c.m.; tarsus, 2.20 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, dark brown; bill, upper jaw, dark horn, lower jaw, light horn at the base, tip darker; feet, blue grey; inside of mouth, light horn colour. Stomach contents, beetles and some triturated vegetable matter.

Gliciphila albifrons (White-fronted Honey Eater).—Seen at Paringa in the big mallee, and at Ned's Corner on a box flat. Two specimens were shot, both young birds. The first measured:—Total length, 15 c.m.; spread, 21 c.m.; bill, 1.30 c.m.; wing, 7 c.m.; tarsus, 1.70 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, dark brown; bill, black; feet, blackish grey; inside of mouth, yellow; bare spot at outer angle of eye, dull red. Stomach contents, remains of insects. The second measured:—Total length, 15.75 c.m.; spread, 20 c.m.; bill, 1.50 c.m.; wing, 7.1 c.m.; tarsus, 1.90 c.m. Sex, ♂. Soft parts as in the first. Stomach contents, insect remains.

Meliphaga sonora (Singing Honey Eater).—Seen and heard once near Renmark.

Lichenostomus ornatus taileni (Yellow-plumed Honey Eater).—Seen in a patch of big mallee near Paringa, where they were fairly numerous. A specimen measured:—Total length, 16 c.m.; spread, 22.5 c.m.; bill, 1 c.m.; wing, 6.70 c.m.; tarsus, 1.70 c.m. Sex, ♂. Iris, dark brown; bill, black; legs and feet, greyish brown; inside of mouth, yellow. Stomach contents, remains of insects. The sub species is diagnosed from locality only.

Ptilotula penicillata (White-plumed Honey Eater, or Greeny).—Very common in the big gums near the river throughout the trip. Not seen in the mallee.

Myzantha melanocephala (Noisy Minah).—Very common on the river banks throughout the trip; they do not leave the big gums.

Myzantha flavigula (Yellow-throated Minah).—Common in the big mallee back from the river. They never come into the big timbered country near the river, not, I think, because they do not want to, but because the noisy minahs will not let them, because at Laura, where the present bird was the only species of the genus, they were more common in the big gums than in the dry scrub. The bird seen was not *m. f. melanotis* which was collected by Capt. White at Turner's Well near Bow Hill. The latter bird is in my opinion a good species, for it resembles *m. melanocephala* as much as if not more than *m. fl. flavigula*.

Acanthogenys ruficularis (Spiny-cheeked Honey Eater).—Very common in all classes of country throughout trip.

Entomyza cyanotis (Blue-faced Honey Eater).—A single pair seen feeding in a gum tree on the river bank.

Microphilemon orientalis (Yellow-throated Friar Bird).—Very numerous on Goat Island. Two specimens were shot.

Both young birds with marked yellow throats. The first measured:—Total length, 27 c.m.; spread, 36.5 c.m.; wing, 12 c.m.; tarsus, 2.5 c.m.; bill, 2.5 c.m.; sex, ?. Iris, dark grey; bill, black; legs and feet, lead colour; inside of mouth, yellow; bare space of face, black. Stomach contents, small beetles. The second measured:—Total length, 27.5 c.m.; spread, 41.25 c.m. Sex, ♂. Inside of mouth, flesh colour; other parts coloured as in the first bird. Stomach contents, yellow and black wasps.

Anthus australis (Ground Lark).—Seen on the cleared land near Paringa, and on a box flat near Renmark. Not common.

Taeniopygia castanotis (Chestnut-eared Finch).—Common in and about the settlement at Renmark.

Corvus coronoides (Raven).—Seen occasionally throughout the trip. They were common between Renmark and Morgan on the overland journey.

Corcorax melanorhamphus (Chough or Jay).—Seen occasionally near the river throughout the trip; also in the big mallee and box gum flats near Renmark. They were especially numerous on the overland journey to Morgan. They were always in flocks of about a dozen or twenty.

INTRODUCED BIRDS.

Sparrows and starlings were fairly plentiful at Renmark, but we were told by the fruit growers that they did very little damage.

We saw only two goldfinches, and Mr. Shields informed us that they were the first he had seen there.
