

## A Day in the Mallee.

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The new railway from Tailem Bend to Paringa passes through very uninteresting and monotonous looking country for the average traveller; the first 100 miles being through dense dwarf mallee covering slightly undulating sandy soil. The only break in the monotonous outlook being an occasional small galvanized iron humpy, and a clearing of 100 or 200 acres.

To anyone interested in ornithology the country is however, extremely interesting, and suggests great possibilities to one able to spend a few hours in the scrub, for no forms of bird life are more interesting than those whose habitat is the vast unfrequented mallee covered areas between the River Murray and the Victorian border.

During the first week in May I had occasion to go to Pungonda siding, on the Paringa line, and as the trains only re-

turn to Adelaide every other day, I found that after completing my business, I had to wait a day for the next train. My time was fully occupied in observing and collecting some of the many species of birds to be found in the district. The wheat stack at the siding was very dilapidated, due to the ravages of mice, and a large quantity of the grain was loose and strewn about; this had attracted scores of Crested Bronzewing Pigeons (*Ocyphaps lophotes*), Mallee Parrots (*Barnardius barnardi*), and Blue Bonnets (*Northiella haemato-gaster xanthorrhoea*), which seemed to like the idea of being able to secure such a feed without the necessity of fossicking for it.

A specimen of *Barnardius barnardi* was shot from a pine tree, and while the shot holes were being plugged, great interest was being taken in the operation by three striped honey eaters (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*), a butcher bird (*Cracticus sp.*), and a beautifully plumed mallee parrot (*Barnardius barnardi*), all of which were hopping about on the lower branches of the pine tree over my head, while two beautiful pink cockatoos (*Lophochroa leadbeateri*) circled aloft, evidently attracted by the large piece of white cotton wool. Only eight years ago I noticed flocks of many scores of these beautiful cockatoos in this district, but residents inform me that it is rarely many of these birds are seen now.

An unexpected bird was met with on the more open country; the chestnut-crowned babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficeps*). These were present in great numbers; they are extremely energetic and active birds, and at once attract attention by their snow white fronts and peculiar calls. This bird is by far the most rowdy of the three species found in South Australia.

Another unexpected bird procured was the short-billed crow (*Corvus bennetti*). These birds were plentiful in the district, and are shot by the farmers whenever occasion arises, because of their decided liking for fowls' eggs.

Several magpies were seen, all of which were the black-backed variety (*Gymnorhina tibicen*).

Three species of tit warblers were noticed (*Acanthiza pusilla hamiltoni*, *Acanthiza uropygialis*, and *Geobasileus chrysorrhous*). These birds prefer the pine country, and frequently all three species could be seen feeding on the ground together.

Many companies of the black-backed wrens (*Malurus melanotus*) were met with, but unfortunately the beauty of

this little bird was lost, as none of the males was in full breeding plumage.

Some other species identified with certainty were as follows:—

*Geopelia placida tranquillā* (peaceful dove).—These graceful birds, went about in little flocks of 6 or 12 birds, and would come about the doors of the farm houses.

*Zonifer tricolor* (black-breasted plover).—Four or five birds could always be seen in a cleared grass paddock.

*Uroaetus audax* (wedge-tailed eagle).—Only one noticed; it was soaring aloft. A nest was seen of this species, built in a large mallee in a secluded part of the scrub.

*Polytelis anthopeplus* (black-tailed parrot).—Only five birds were seen. I think these birds are plentiful closer to the River Murray.

*Psephotus varius* (many coloured parrot).—Several of these were met with in the scrub, but only a pair at a time; they were very confiding, and could be approached to within a few yards.

*Whiteornis goodenovii* (red-capped robin).—Many pairs of this species were seen; they seemed to be always close to the pine clumps.

*Seisura inquieta* (restless fly catcher).—A very common bird; the residents of the district thought it was the common willie wagtail (*Leucocirca tricolor*), but none of that species were noticed.

*Pseudartamus cyanopterus* (wood swallow).—This species was very plentiful; not many were noticed during the day, but towards dusk they came in large numbers to roost in blackwood trees close to the house. They clustered together, but did not hang on one another like bees swarming, as I understand they do sometimes. First five or six settled on a short bough, then others settled on them, and then others, until a dark mass was formed about 18 inches high, but all the birds were above the supporting bough! Some birds were very much lighter in colour than others; they may have been immature birds, or perhaps a sub-species.

*Oreoica cristata* (crested bell bird).—These were fairly numerous, especially where the growth was not too thick. They would run under a bush and remain stationary for quite a long time.

*Aphelocephala leucopsis* (white face).—These birds were plentiful, and often were in company with *Acanthizae* about the pine clumps.

*Neositta pileata tenuirostris* (black-capped tree runner).—This is a very restless bird, it is never still. Five or six would quickly make their appearance, and just as quickly depart, flying from tree to tree always searching under the bark for insects, working spirally down the tree trunk.

*Pardalotus punctatus xanthopygus* (golden-rumped diamond bird).—A very common bird in the mallee. It can always be detected from the following species by its mournful single note call.

*Pardalotus striatus subaffinis* (red tipped diamond bird).—Also a very common bird, and like the foregoing species very often the first indication of its presence is the snapping of its bill in procuring insects from the leaves sometimes only six or eight feet above one's head.

*Acanthagenys rufogularis cygnus* (spiny-cheeked honey eater).—These birds are very numerous, and have a very varied lot of calls.

*Lichenostomus ornatus tailemi* (yellow-plumed honey eater).

*Ptilotula penicillata*. (white-plumed honey eater).—These two species are the commonest birds of the mallee country.

Although only one day could be spent among the birds, quite a number of interesting forms were met with, and I am sure that it would be difficult to find a tract of country in South Australia more prolific as regards variety and interest, especially in the nesting season.

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