

A Visit to the Breeding Grounds of Swan and Pelican on the Coorong:

By S. A. White, C.M.B.O.U.

Some few years ago a misguided Government was paying blood-money for cormorants and pelicans. Many thousands of these useful birds were destroyed in spite of all the efforts of ornithologists to prevent it. Eventually the South Australian Ornithological Association was able to obtain a lease of the islands in the Coorong, upon which the swans and pelicans nested.

A caretaker was recommended by the Association and appointed by the Government. Notices were erected upon the islands, and all went well till Mr. Goldfinch left on active service, and another caretaker had to be appointed.

Of late, reports had reached the Association that things were not altogether satisfactory, so upon the authority of the Association, the writer left by train for Milang upon a trip of inspection. Crossing Lake Alexandrina from Milang by steamer, thence through the passage and over Lake Albert, Meningie was reached the same evening. Mr. Thos. McCallum was there to meet me, and before leaving the township arrangements were made with a resident to drive over to Woods Point taking with him a boat, which would be in readiness on the third day. My kind friend motored me out to his well known station, McGrath's Flat. Next morning we rode to some high ground



S. A. White, Photo. YOUNG PELICANS AWAITING THE PARENT BIRDS' ARRIVAL WITH FOOD.

overlooking the Coorong for many miles on either side. One of the most wonderful and pleasing sights opened out before me. The fine sheet of water was dotted over by many small islands and rocks, but the water itself was covered in wild-fowl, swans in thousands, mountain ducks, black ducks, and teal in countless numbers. The beautiful white egrets and spoonbill cranes, relieved the dark masses of ducks. Some of the islands were covered with silver gulls, and pelicans in small parties were dotted all along. After breakfast Mounted Constable Kaine arrived from Meningie, and my host motored us over to Hack's Point. M.C. Kaine wished to see Mr. Appelkamp in reference to a report he had sent in. After a long conversation with Mr. Appelkamp, the caretaker, upon the birds under his care, we made arrangements to meet after lunch at the same spot, and then row up to the islands upon which the swans nest. Mr. McCallum having kindly supplied me with a horse, M.C. Kaine accompanied me to the appointed spot, where the caretaker was waiting with a boat, and we started off upon a long and a hard pull along the Coorong, passing many islands on the way. But it is only those islands completely surrounded by deep water upon which the swans will nest. Reaching the first swan island the boat was pulled into a small cove, and we landed near a beautiful little spot of sandy beach which made an ideal landing place for the swans because it shelved to the higher ground. It was a glorious sight that we beheld upon the top of the island, for amongst the tussock grass dozens of nests of the beautiful swans were placed; they contained from three to six eggs, and each nest was placed well out of the reach of its neighbour. The birds were swimming close up to the island and giving forth their plaintiff calls. Having seen other islands we made our way back in the dark. All had a hard pull, for in the dark we missed the channel upon several occasions, and became entangled in the water weed. After leaving the boat we had a scramble up the cliffs in the darkness, and a hunt in the low scrub for our horses. Even when mounted our progress was very slow, owing to the ground being honey-combed by rabbits. Consequently it was very late when we reached McGrath's Flat, and our host met us on the track thinking something had happened to us. Next day Mr. McCallum took us in his car and we started out to the spot where the boat was to be in readiness to take me off to Pelican Island. The old overland track to Melbourne was in a bad state, and the car had to negotiate one of the bad sanddrifts. Having reached

the meeting place the man who had gone up from Meningie was in waiting with the boat, and we put off for the island. A large white patch of birds was soon seen on the elevated part of the island, and there was a great string of birds coming and going, some on their way to the Murray River, and others on their way back with a load of golden carp for their young. Pulling up to the high side of the island we landed, and I crept quietly up and looked over the top. It was a fine sight to see so many pelicans. They were of all ages, from squabs not long hatched, to many ready to leave the island, and there were also many old birds watching over their young. I examined much of the food which had been vomited up by the young birds in their agitation, and found that there was not one marketable species of fish amongst the lot, the bulk of the food being imported golden carp, a useless fish, and amongst them a few congolly. A yellow-faced cormorant rookery was close by, but only a few young birds remained, which joined company with the young pelicans upon my approach. After a few photographs had been taken I withdrew and returned to the boat. Upon my return I visited the scene of an early massacre, where a mass of headless bodies of young pelicans still remained to mark the spot at which some cold-blooded scoundrel had chopped off hundreds of these fine birds' heads for the paltry sum of one penny each.

It is grand to think those days are past, and that those who authorised and took part in the shocking work now see the mistake. Reaching the mainland we lit a fire, boiled the billy, and partook of a lunch which our kind host had prepared.

We reached the homestead before dark, and next morning my kind friend motored me in to Meningie to catch the early morning boat. So ended a pleasant trip to the home of the pelican and the swan.

I am under a deep debt of gratitude to the McCallum brothers of McGrath's Flat for all their kindness, and I was delighted to make the acquaintance of such an energetic officer and friend of the birds as M.C. Kaine.
