

INTRODUCED AND FERAL BIRDS ON THE DUDLEY PENINSULA, KANGAROO ISLAND

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The Dudley Peninsula, an area of only 421 km² at the eastern end of Kangaroo Island, South Australia, is inhabited by 13 non-native bird species. Feral Chickens *Gallus gallus* are kept on most rural properties as free-ranging birds, but few, if any, have gone wild, as they have in the Capricorn Group, Queensland (see Storr 1984: 38 and Blakers *et al.* 1984: 655).

Predators perhaps controlling the spread of feral and introduced species in this area would include feral Cats *Felis catus*, Wedge-tailed Eagles *Aquila audax*, Swamp Harriers *Circus approximans*, Australian Goshawks *Accipiter fasciatus*, Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides*, Black Tiger Snakes *Notechis ater niger* and Rosenberg's Goanna *Varanus gouldii rosenbergii*. I have also noted Grey Currawongs *Strepera versicolor melanoptera* and Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen*, taking small chicks from free ranging poultry, particularly turkeys. I would expect Little Ravens *Corvus mellori* to also be predatory, although I have no proof of this. There are no Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* on Kangaroo Island, and this is probably the reason that so many ground-nesting feral species survive. There also are no rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* on Kangaroo Island to act as grazing competitors with geese and gallinaceous birds.

DOMESTIC GOOSE *Anser* sp.

About 40 birds are on free range ca 5km W of Lashmar's Lagoon. In some years, the eggs of these birds' nests, if found, are gathered and fed to pigs in an effort to restrict the numbers. Editor's note: Observers of feral geese are encouraged to note the colours of the bill and legs of feral geese in order to help clarify their at present incompletely understood origins.

PEAFOWL *Pavo cristatus*

My wife remembers this species being present at Willson River, where she lived as a child, about 1920. That population apparently died out. About 1972 Mr G. Trethewey re-introduced Peafowl to his property (section 142w) with four or five hens from a property near the eastern shore of Murray's Lagoon, in the hundred of Macgillivray, and two cocks, both from different other areas. About the same time two birds were released by Mr M. J. Willson on section 85 near

Snapper Point. These have increased to twelve. The birds at Willson River thrived, and by May 1986 the population had expanded to about 80. Harvesting then took place and the flock was reduced by about half. During the intervening years a group of birds arrived at Antechamber Bay, their source being unknown, but probably from Willson River and apparently without a male bird. A local resident obtained a cock bird from Willson River in 1980 and released it with this group, which is now variously estimated to number perhaps 30-40 birds. After the young are reared on free range the Willson River birds converge on the homestead sheds and mingle with fowls and turkeys (also on free range) where they are fed some grain.

COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*

This species was introduced from the mainland to two separate areas simultaneously during the late 1970s. Approximately 24 half grown chicks were released in three batches on section 142w at Willson River. An unknown number (probably less than 24) was released about 5 km S of Penneshaw, in an area sometimes referred to locally as Grassy Flat. It would seem that the Pheasant has not thrived as did the Peafowl, although birds are occasionally seen in widely scattered areas. Odd, single birds have been reported from Grassy Flat, Blue Gum Gully, Willson River, the mouth of Willson River, Porky Flat, Antechamber Bay (near Lashmar's Lagoon) and near Cuttlefish Bay. There is an unconfirmed report of a sighting near Cape St Alban.

HELMETED GUINEA FOWL *Numida meleagris*

Guinea Fowl were present on Section 59 at Antechamber Bay in the mid-1920s when several birds were kept with fowls around the homestead by the then proprietor. These disappeared when the property changed hands, probably about 1930. The next record of this species was in the late 1970s, when a single chick arrived accidentally with a batch of Pheasant chicks. This was released on Section 142w with the pheasants and survived. The landowner took pity on it and obtained another, which proved to be the required opposite sex. Although the pair produced many eggs, they reared very few young. Those that were

reared, were hatched under domestic fowls. The population at present numbers 15, made up of eight adult birds and seven chicks about five months of age. These birds live around the homestead sheds with other domestic poultry, where they are fed some grain.

TURKEY *Meleagris gallopavo*

Turkeys became popular in the 1950s and 1960s as a farming industry sideline, and most rural properties in this area keep them on free range. Annual harvesting has taken place for many years. Predators take a heavy toll of the young chicks. I have seen a feral cat to take full grown turkey hens from the roost at night and partly eat them below the perch. I was eventually able to shoot this cat. Cats seem to prefer eating the upper part of the breast. However Australian Ravens are probably the most severe predator. They rob the eggs from turkey nests by piercing the eggs with their bills and then carrying them off, usually only a short distance, where they devour the contents, within perhaps 50m of the nest. Alternatively, two or more (usually only two) ravens approach a young brood, and while one distracts and is chased by the hen the other flies in and carries off a chick. A pair of ravens will very quickly devour a brood of poults. It is also not unusual to find the bones of turkeys in nests of the Swamp Harrier and Wedge-tailed Eagle.

FERAL PIGEON *Columbia livia*

During the 1930s there was a small breeding colony of this species in a cliff at Cape St Alban on the eastern tip of the peninsula. This colony no longer exists. Birds are often noted at Cuttlefish Bay where a small colony probably exists.

SPOTTED TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia chinensis*

I first recorded this species on Kangaroo Island in May 1949 at Muston, near American River, when a single bird was seen to fly up from the road in front of a motor vehicle. The species was observed again in the same area in November 1949. (Muston is separated from the Dudley Peninsula by the American River lagoons.) The first appearance on the Dudley Peninsula was in November 1951 at Antechamber Bay. I have no further records until 1970 when one bird frequented the Kent Park homestead near Antechamber Bay for about a week. Numerous records exist for the Antechamber Bay area from

that time onwards. They are mostly of one or two birds and mostly from the area south of Lashmar's Lagoon. In 1977 three were seen on two occasions, and in 1978 four were frequently noted. In 1986-87 two birds were seen north of the lagoon and Chapman River area, but it was not determined whether this is a new group or an offshoot from the southern one.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*

This species first came to my notice on 31 May 1971 near Point Coutts. It has since appeared at Cape Willoughby and Antechamber Bay.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

I first found this species breeding at Antechamber Bay in 1938 when a bird flushed from a nest containing four eggs in a paperbark *Melaleuca* sp. at Lashmar's Lagoon. In 1964 I found another nest containing three eggs located in a paperbark growing on an island in Lashmar's Lagoon. The species is observed infrequently, usually as single birds, in the Lashmar's Lagoon — Chapman River area, but is more frequently heard calling than it is seen. Occasional sightings have been made in the Willson River area.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

A species that has been abundant for the 65 years that I can remember.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

The Goldfinch was abundant in the 1930s but declined in numbers until about 1960 when it was rarely noted. Since then, however, numbers have very gradually increased, and in June 1983 a flock of 20+ was noted near Penneshaw. I feel that possibly the heavy use of chemicals (weedicides and insecticides) during those earlier years may have had a bearing on the decline in numbers.

COMMON STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

Large flocks are conspicuous as they wheel in the skies in late afternoon in autumn, before roosting in Boxthorns *Lycium ferrocissimum*. They have been common for the 65 years that I can recall.

REFERENCES

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