

## In the Pine and Mallee.

By J. W. Mellor, R.A.O.U.

### Part I.

In October last it was my good fortune to be able to pay a somewhat hasty visit to the pine and mallee country in the Hundred of Bookpurnong, S.A., the immediate locality examined being situated east of Loxton, and near the Victorian border.

Leaving Adelaide on the 9th it took the full day by train to travel by way of Murray Bridge and Tailem Bend, thence along the Paringa line. Night was just closing in when the train pulled up at the little siding of Pungonda, and I was dumped down in the wilderness. My first anxiety was finding

a suitable place to camp, this being extremely difficult in a new country, darkness having set in. However, I was fortunate in finding a friend in need, in the person of two out back farmers' sons, Mr. J. A. Forby and a friend, who came to meet the train for mails, etc., and with their assistance I removed my tent and camping kit about half a mile distant to a secluded clump of the so called Murray Pines (*Calitris*). Having temporarily pitched my tent, I was glad of some rest after the long day's journey, and even the hard ground did not banish Nature's sweet restorer "balmy sleep". Next day I was up betimes, and straightened up camp a little before getting out into the surrounding country, which is chiefly of a chocolate sandy clay nature, carrying large mallee and numbers of fine Murray pines. These trees attain a large size, and when growing in patches give to the more open country a park-like appearance. In these quite a number of birds make their abode, the first to catch my eye was the southern singing honey-eater, while the yellow-throated Miner made the locality resound with its loud and continued calls. The chestnut-crowned babbler was also quite numerous, and it was interesting to watch the antics of these birds as they hopped and flew about in "follow the leader" fashion from tree to tree, threading their way through innumerable bushes and fallen pines en route, all the time uttering their sharp whistling calls, and bobbing their tails up and down as if worked on springs. They are extremely animated birds, and in these parts quite take the place of the white-browed species, which was rarely seen. The Pink Cockatoo also known as Major Mitchell was quite a common bird in the open country, and was breeding in the large mallee. The Rose-breasted Cockatoo or Galah was by no means rare, and doubtless was also breeding, although no nests were found. These two birds fly about in company, and feed together on the grassy flats where seeds are plentiful, and make a pretty sight as they rise and fly into the dark foliaged pines, the delicate pink of the Major Mitchell with its beautiful crest erected being very conspicuous. Shell parrots were about on the open grass land in large flocks, and ever and anon a cloud of them would pass swiftly by, uttering their small rattling notes, and alighting on a dead pine, the tree would instantly be transformed into a living green, with the green "leaves" swaying in the breeze. Then suddenly the tree

would be quite dead again, as the birds moved off, and alighted on the ground to feed. Cockatoo parrots were about in pairs, and looked very pretty as they darted above the trees. The Blue Bonnet Parrot in its dull olive green garb relieved by yellow and crimson beneath, and by blue face and cap was less conspicuous, and generally seen feeding in pairs. When feeding in the half dry grass it was difficult to detect, the upper coloration harmonizing so well with the surroundings.

Several trips were made to the Victorian border, where the assistance of the Messrs John and Edward Forby, and Mr. and Mrs. Forby, Senr., was most acceptable in finding out fresh fields for inspection. It was here that the beautiful little Black-backed Wren first came into prominence, as it darted through the undergrowth at the edge of the pine and mallee. The males were extremely shy, and darted off like flashes of light, leaving their sombre coloured mates to investigate the "new comer", the male seeming to know that his bright uniform made him a mark far too conspicuous to be examined closely. Gilbert's Thickhead was also in evidence here, and its ventriloquial calls were heard on every side as the birds moved from place to place, not staying in the same situation long, but moving about continually, and making it difficult to get close to them for examination. On one of my twenty mile walks to the Victorian border and back, I came upon an unusual sight in a small dry bush about five feet high. Four fully grown young Butcher Birds were being fed by their parents upon various tit bits of insects, etc.; while in the same bush were three young Lanceolate Honey-eaters, also being fed by the old birds, and all agreeing. For some time I stood watching them, as the parent birds came to and fro, and no quarrelling took place. It was here that I was fortunate to come across a pair of the White-browed Tree-creepers; they seemed to be very quiet birds, and struck me as being in marked contrast with the Brown Tree-creepers, which were quite numerous in the mallee, where they were found nesting. The latter are extremely noisy, and continually making their loud pink-pink-pink and other calls. Upon examination the white-browed species proved to be so very different from the Central Australian form collected by Mr. G. A. Keartland on the Horn's Expedition, that I have decided to describe it at length in this issue as a sub-species under the scientific designation of *Climacteris erythrops parsonsi* in honour of my friend, Mr. Frank E. Parsons, of Adelaide.

---

Vernacularly I propose to designate it the Southern White-browed Tree-creeper. Time and space will not permit of a minute description of all the birds seen, as no fewer than 76 species were identified during my short seven days' stay in camp, which was by no means a bad record in addition to the hundred and one things that claim one's attention in connection with camp life. The end of the week came all too soon, and I packed up and caught the early train on the morning of the 17th, arriving in Adelaide after the usual long tedious day's journey in a slow train.

---