

## The Birds of the Mallee.

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It seems well worth while to give some account of a brief visit to a practically unexplored, as far as ornithologists and other scientists are concerned, belt of Mallee within easy reach by motor from the City of Adelaide. My companions were two of our most enthusiastic members, Messrs. F. A. Parsons and J. N. McGilp, and to them is due the credit of finding all the eggs obtained on the trip. We started from Blackwood a few minutes past 6 a.m., September 1st, 1919, and travelled via Mount Barker and Woodchester. The visit to the latter township took us a few miles out of our way, but we noted a grass parrot *Neonanodes*, close to Woodchester, as it made off to a considerable distance we made no attempt to follow it up. We entered the belt of

mallee a mile or so beyond Woodchester and travelled continuously in the mallee for some miles along the road that was metalled 40 or 60 years ago, with the intention of its becoming the main coach road to Melbourne, via Wellington. The road as far as we traversed it is still in excellent condition for motoring. The original heaps of metal, broken probably more than half a century ago, are still met with every few chains, but as there is practically no traffic; the road has never needed repair. We penetrated the mallee for several miles and only met with one settler's cottage, and that was uninhabited. We met the owner of the few sheep that are run in this bush and he told us that a few pairs of the Mallee Hen *Leipoa ocellata* still nest each year about a mile off the road. We made some attempt to find a fresh nest but were unsuccessful, although we saw several old ones. The road is known as Chances Line, a gentleman of that name having been instrumental in getting the road made into the mallee at the public expense. We reached the furthest point of our journey by 9.15 a.m. and commenced our field work at that hour.

A *Phaps chalcoptera* (Bronzewing Pigeon) was flushed as we pulled up the car, but while several Bronzewings were seen the rarer *Phaps elegans* was not identified. One of the first true mallee birds met with was *Hylacola cauta*, and later on several specimens were secured, the cock birds especially at sunrise pouring forth their sweet melody from the top of some low mallee or other bush. The movements of this bird are almost as mouse-like as those of the *Sericornis*, Mr. McGilp was successful in finding a nest with a full clutch of eggs partly incubated, placed under a fallen bough. We thought that both the Redthroat, *Pyrrholaemus brunneus* and *Calamanthus campestris* were both heard and seen, as no specimens were obtained the identification must be considered doubtful. Of Honey Eaters, those most in evidence were the two *Gliciphila albifrons* \**incerta*, and *G. malanops chandleri*, it was seldom that their whistle was not to be heard. Nests with both young and eggs of the latter species were found but only one nest in the course of building of the former. The low yet penetrating double call of the Scrub Robin (*Drymodes brunneopygia*) called our attention to its whereabouts and after a considerable amount of search it was seen running rapidly from clump to clump. A pair were shot, the female having a fully developed egg in its ovary.

Several were heard during the day, but the continuous wind made it difficult to locate sounds. Wattle Birds (*Coleia carunculata tregellasi*) were very numerous and several clutches of eggs obtained. The Spiny-Cheeked Honey Eater (*Acanthagenys refogularis cygnus*) were also common but no nests were found. Its loud, very attractive notes contributed towards the music of the scrub. *Meliornis novae-hollandiae* was hardly as numerous as the foregoing, the specimen shot did not appear to differ from the normal form. Several small flocks of the Brown Honey Eater (*Melithreptus atricapillus mallee*) were noticed, our attention being attracted to them by their familiar cry. The White-Eared Honey Eater (*Nesoptilotis leucotis depauperata*) was very numerous. Included in their repertoire are some notes suggesting a musical Bull Frog; another far less musical note, almost identical with the call note of *Ptilotis sonora*, we heard constantly through the bush, and ascribed it to the species. One can hardly think that Mr. Mathews was justified in separating the South Australian Mallee Bird from the Victorian form found in their mallee. In the 1913 list he calls one *mallee* and the other *depauperata*. No nests were found although the birds had evidently paired. We decided to make our night camp further back where the mallee had not been burnt out, and on our way there disturbed several *Neonanodes*. The motor was pulled up as quickly as possible and my companions soon got on the track of a flock which turned out to be *elegans*. Specimens were obtained several of them showing the abdominal orange blotch. On getting through the fence a little to the right of where the others had gone I flushed another parrot which settled in a low bush and I shot it with a small charge, and was delighted to find that it was a fine male *Neonanodes chrysostomus*, the Blue-winged Parrot, a bird I have been searching for for years. On firing the shot a small flock of about eight birds rose, but as I kept my eyes on the bird I had shot I did not see the direction the flock took. Concluding that Messrs. Parsons and McGilp were getting the same species, I was much disappointed and surprised to find that the flock they were after were all *elegans*. We came back next morning but were only able to flush that species. I have no doubt that there were two separate flocks, one of each species. This surmise is borne out by the fact that the *chrysostomus* was replete with fat, whereas all the *elegans* obtained were only in fair condition. The accident of following the wrong flock was most disappointing.

We noted three species of *Acanthiza*, the mallee form of *pustilla*, named by Mr. Mathews *hamiltoni*, or the Red-rumped tit, and *uropygialis*, the Chestnut-rumped Tit; but whether to ascribe this latter to the race called by Mathews, *augusta*, from the Port Augusta District, or to the Victorian *ruthergleni*, one can hardly judge—the differences are so slight. The third species we were unable to identify. *Leggeornis lamberti morgani* (Southern Blue-breasted Wren) was fairly common. Mr. Parsons was successful in shooting a very nice male Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*) which was perched on a tall gum tree about half a mile from the mallee. The flute-like whistle of the Mallee Butcher-Bird (*Bulestes torquatus coleii*) were heard continually and a nest with two fresh eggs was found. The whistle of another characteristic mallee bird was heard from time to time—that of the Crested Bell-Bird (*Oreoica cristata clelandi*). I stood for some time listening to the ventriloquial powers of one of them. The little Yellow-rumped Pardalote (*Pardalotus xanthopygus*), as well as its more common relative, *Pardalotinus striatus subaffinis* were noted. Altogether 41 species were identified, apart from the birds whose habitat is more properly the hills, which were seen in going and coming.

The belt of country visited is rich in Mallee flora, two possibly three, species of *Boronia*; several *Prostanthera*; the Scarlet *Coccinea*, and a mauve one that would be an ornament to any garden; many interesting and beautiful shrubs, including several species of *Acacia*, which were "mounds of golden glory"; a very fine series of Orchids (*Caladenia tentaculata*); the still more local *C. Caivusiana*; and the little *Pterostylis mutica*—besides a great many others that are familiar to those of us that dwell in the hills.

We hope that this brief account will open what is almost a new hunting ground, both for the Ornithologist and the Botanist. The nearest extensive belt of Virgine Mallee country to the City of Adelaide, is easily reached and penetrated by motor car. Enough has been said to show that the fauna and flora are typical of first-class mallee country and it may be that some of the rarer forms still exist in this large block of mallee, comparatively near our homes, that have been driven back elsewhere to the more distant parts of the State, by the encroachment of the farmers.

I should like to urge in the Government the desirability of making a "Fauna and Flora" Reserve of several square miles of this mallee. At present it is held, I believe, under leases that are of little profit to those that hold them—a few

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hundred sheep only grazing over a large extent of bush. As a place easily reached from Adelaide where indigenous fauna and flora can be preserved it could be made a real educational asset to the State. Evidences of kangaroos were fairly numerous and one of our party saw a fine fellow quite close.

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