

Notes on a Motor Trip from Adelaide to
Western Queensland.

—By F. E. Parsons, R.A.O.U.—

I have always had a desire to traverse the country into the central portion of our continent, so was very pleased when the opportunity offered to accompany Mr. Stan Sinclair, of Sinclair, Scott & Co., station owners, on a business trip which took us well into Queensland. The trip occupied just seven weeks,

and was at a time when the vast inland plains never looked better, the country having been blessed with copious rains which caused the herbage to quickly respond, and the whole country-side was beautifully green with either waving fields of cane grass or varying kinds of saltbush.

We left Adelaide by motor on August 21st, 1920, and motored up the northern line to Hawker. Here we put the car on a truck and trucked it to Hergott Springs, because the road from Hawker to Hergott was badly cut about by washouts, caused by the heavy rains. A day was spent at Hergott in getting supplies and packing our load securely, and I managed to get out for about two hours for a walk in a direction due east from the town. I had barely left the station yard before strange note arrested my attention. It was a low, sweet monotone whistle, repeated about eight or ten times in quick succession, and although the whistling continued close to me, yet I could see no bird. I was on an almost bare, inhospitable, stony plain, and it was quite five minutes before I was able to locate the little bird, standing with its back to me, which so well harmonised with the stones that but for its moving, a few feet, I should never have seen it. It was my first glimpse of a living desert chat. These birds were afterwards constantly met with on all the stony patches right from Hergott Springs in South Australia, to well over the tropic in Queensland, but always singly or in pairs. They do not group together in the way that the *Epthianura* do. The desert chats were nesting. Three nests were noticed, each containing three young birds.

I walked as far as the Frome River, which was quite dry, but the bed of the river could be traced by the larger bushes and scattered trees. Here an *Amytis* was flushed, probably *Amytis goyderi*, it being very plainly marked, and with a short, thick bill. There were many nests of the short-billed crow, containing five, and in one case, six eggs. A Brown Hawk flew from a nest which was lined with green leaves, but contained no eggs. The pale form of the Greenie (*Ptilotis penicillata leilavalensis*) and the White-shouldered Caterpillar-eater were much in evidence.

Next morning, August 27th, we started in earnest on our long tour, taking the Birdsville track, past the date plantation at Lake Harry, which I was told was bearing good fruit, and went on to Dulkaninna Station, which is owned by Sinclair, Scott & Co., and used as a depot for storing fat cattle preparatory to trucking. Although it doesn't seem much to write that we went from Hergott to Dulkaninna, yet the distance was not so very easy to negotiate because the track in places was very

boggy, necessitating the use of chains on the wheels, and all times the shovel had to be resorted to.

A walk along the bore stream was full of interest, because it was lined with timber, and as very few trees grew away from the stream, the birds had congregated here for nesting. The bare-eyed cockatoos and rose-breasted gallahs were nesting freely. They didn't mind if the hollow was only a foot or 18 inches from the ground, so long as, it was large enough to receive their white eggs. The red-brewed pardalot was seen entering a spout, but had not completed its nest. Odd nests were noticed of the fork-tailed kite, containing two eggs.

The yellow minah had a nest with four eggs, and a pair of pied *Grallina* were rearing five chicks. A patch of reeds harboured several reed warblers, which appeared to be each trying to sing louder and sweeter than its neighbour, while white-headed stilts, with their pretty pink legs were wading in the shallows with a pair of black-fronted dotterel, darting after insects on the edge of the water, and a little distant was a pair of mountain duck. On returning to the homestead a little back from the bore stream, the desert chat was again met with, and a pair of Australian dotterel, while at any time a dozen fork-tailed kites could be counted hovering just overhead.

We followed the Birdsville track over the Cooper River. and in trying to cross the bore stream we got hopelessly bogged, the rear wheels and petrol tank going clean under the mud and slush. This meant three hours' hard work in building a small coffer dam and baling out the slush before we were safely across and on firm ground again. Cooper's Creek, at this point, is thickly timbered with Coolibah, and although, a sharp lookout was kept for the new sub-species of tree creeper that was collected from Cooper's Creek by Capt. S. A. White, nothing was seen or heard of it. Several red-backed grass parrots and blue-bonnets were noticed. and the bare-eyed cockatoos and rose breasted cockatoos had taken possession of nearly all the suitable nesting hollows. Soon after leaving the Cooper's Creek we came into country that was flooded by the flood waters of the Diamantina which forced us to leave the regular track and pick our way, making a big detour around the margin of the flood. While skirting this flooded country we came across a great number of Australian dotterel and Australian Pratincoles. and several fine pairs of the native companions were passed within about 30 yards of the car. They were not at all alarmed by the motor, and in most cases did not trouble to fly unless we

passed too close to them, when they would go bounding over the ground with outstretched wings, bouncing like a rubber ball. Several wild turke's were also seen; they likewise would not fly it, but would run to the nearest bush and squat under it. It was in this part that we saw the first emu on the trip. It was accompanied by seven or eight half-grown young birds. The Queensland border was crossed about 50 miles east of Birdsville. It was very noticeable that there were very many more kangaroos and emus on the Queensland side of the border fence. The emu is very inquisitive, and we found that if we pulled up the car, they would run up to within a few yards of us and have a good look, then leisurely run off. Although ducks had been plentiful in S.A., yet on the swamps in Queensland we found them much more plentiful, and whereas those previously seen were either black duck or teal, the predominating species were. now the plumed whistling duck. We passed through Davenport Down Station. It was from here that Mr. H. L. White secured the eggs and skin of the letter-winged kites. We ascertained that the letter-winged kites had been seen a few days previous to our visit about 40 miles to the westward, but our time was limited, so we reluctantly had to pass on. At Diamantina Gates Station, which is just about on the tropic, we counted 30 kites, and estimated that they were about a third of the flock that were hovering just over the station buildings. Our, tour extended close on to Winton, and the return journey covered pretty much the same route, as the outward one, excepting that the country that was previously flooded by, the Diamantina flood waters had quite dried up, so that after striking the main track at about Clifton Hills, we were able to keep to the track all the way to Hergott, where we left the motor and returned to Adelaide by train. The speedometer registered 1,665 miles on our trip.

So that the route might be readily followed on a map, the stations passed through are given in their order

South Australia.

Maree (Hergott)	Mira Mitta
Lake Harry	Mt. Gason
The Clayton	Goyder's Lagoon
Dulkaninna	Clifton Hills
Etadinna	Apperamanna
Kopperamanna,	Miranda.
New Well	Cadelga
Mulka	Queensland Border
Oorawilanie	

Queensland.

Queensland Border	Palparara
Mt. Leonard	Davenport Downs
Daroo	Diamentina Gates
Toorajumpa	Mayne Hotel (at the Junction
Mooraberree	of Diamentina and the
Currawilla	Mayne Rivers).

BIRDS SEEN DURING TRIP.

1. Emu (*Dromiceius novaehollandiae*)—Many birds seen, mostly in pairs, also saw several broods of young with old bird. They are very curious, and if the car is stopped will approach to within 20 yards. Many more birds seen in Queensland than in South Australia.

2. Little Quail (*Austroturnix velox*) - Only two or three birds seen.

3. Diamond Dove (*Stictopelia cuneata*) Very common bird. Always present in low timber or bushes. Several nests noted.

4. Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*)—Very common bird. Several nests with eggs noted. A favourite position for the nest is in a lignum.

5. Rock Pigeon (*Petrophassa rufipennis*) —Only one pair seen. They were at Tourajumper, Queensland. Very quiet, could get within five or six yards of them.

6. Black Moor Hen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*) —Common birds, in flocks, over lignum and cane grass swamps.

7. Bald Coot, (*Porphyrio melanotos*)—Very few birds seen.

8. Black-throated Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*). Several pairs seen on water holes.

9. Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*)—One bird seen flying at Miranda.

10. Red-kneed Dotterel (*Erythrogonys cinctus*)—Often met with on the cane grass swamps.

11. Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novaehollandiae*)— About, a dozen pairs noted. . They frequent the bore drains.

12. Black-breasted Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*)—Only a few pairs noted.

11. Red-capped Dotterel (*Leucopoliis ruficapillus*) —These birds were often met with on the bare gibber plains. The only water for miles being a few shallow pools that formed after the last rain, and would be quite dry again a week after.

12. Black-fronted Dotterel (*Elseya melanops*)—A very common bird; several pairs could be seen on every waterhole.

15. Australian Dotterel (*Peltohyas australis*)—Very common. Eggs were found. Several times while on the track we disturbed covies of perhaps 20 or 30 birds. They run very quickly, and one has to walk briskly to keep up to them.
16. White-headed Stilts (*Himantopus leucocephalus*)— Often seen on swamps and bore drains.
17. Australian Pratincole (*Stiltia isabella*)—Very common. These birds run very rapidly over the ground. Generally met with in lots of six to 20 birds. No eggs were seen, although several times while motoring along birds would scatter away as if they had broken wings. Once saw two very little chicks.
18. Eastern Stone Curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*)---No birds were seen, but when camping out at night time they could often be heard.
19. Australian Bustard (*Austrotis australis*—Wild Turkey)—Many birds were noted, especially in Queensland. On seeing the motor they would not fly, but would run a few yards and squat very low on the ground, allowing us young ;about two-thirds grown.
15. Native Companion (*Mathewsia rubicunda*)-- These birds were met with all along the track, mostly in pairs. On approaching them in the motor they would spread their wings, stretch the neck with head very high and bound over the ground, resembling the bouncing of a rubber ball.
16. Straw-necked Ibis (*Carphibis spinicollis*)—Common on cane grass swamps.
17. Royal Spoonbill (*Spathero dia regia*) ---Many birds seen. It was a pretty sight one morning on rising, just at daybreak, to see about 30 of these snow-white birds perched on a dead tree in the waterhole, about 60 yards away.
18. White-fronted Heron (*Myola pacifica*)—Seen on the bore drains.
19. Nankeen Night Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicas*)— Often disturbed during day from a thick tree on the waterhole.
20. Black Swan (*Chenopis atrata*)—A few birds seen on a lake.
21. Mountain, Duck (*Casarca tadornoides*)—Often seen on the bore drains in S.A. Always in pairs.
22. Maned Goose (*Chenonetta jubata*) —Only one pair seen on a waterhole at Mt. Leonard Station, Queensland.
23. Plumed Whistling Duck (*Leptotarsis eytoni*)—This was by far the commonest duck met with. The waterholes on

Mt. Leonard Station during the day time would be black with whistlers, but just at dusk they would leave the holes and scatter over the flooded country to feed, returning again in hundreds just at daybreak.

29. Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)—A few or these birds, were scattered amongst the plumed whistling ducks.
30. Black Duck (*Aneas superciliosa*)—Common on swamps. Many broods of ducklings seen on the small waterholes.
31. Grey Teal (*Nettion gibberifrons*)—Common on swamps, several nests found. Favourite position is at base of thick lignum bush. Great numbers, of ducklings could be seen on all the swamps.
32. Pink-eared Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*) —A few odd pairs of birds seen on quiet waterholes. The unanimous opinion of the settlers is that this duck is the best of wild ducks for table purposes.
33. Pied Cormorant (*Hypoleucus varius*)—Only one pair of birds seen.
34. Australian Darter (*Anhinga novaehollandiae*)—A few birds met with.
35. Pelican (*Catoptropelicanus conspicillatus*)—Often seen on the waterholes.
36. Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*)—These birds were scarce. Two or three of their large nests were seen. In one of them were two eaglets almost ready to leave the nest.
37. Little Eagle (*Hieraetus morphnoides*) —Sparsely distributed. Always selected the highest trees in the vicinity for nesting. Nest contained two eggs.
38. Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenitrus*)—A common bird, always about the station, but flies at a higher altitude than the kites.
39. Fork-tailed Kite (*Milvus korsehun*) —A very common bird. It would be very unusual not to be able to see one at any time of the day. They congregate about the station homesteads or drovers' camps. I counted 37 kites flying about Mt. Leonard Station homestead, and I know I missed some, and at Diamantina Gates homestead I counted 30 birds, and estimate that they were about one-third of the flock that were at that time flying about the station yards. They nest in the Coolebah Tree-, on the watercourses. Their nests are much larger than the Whistling Eagles. The usual clutch was two, but in one case I found three eggs.
40. Letter-winged Kite (*Elanus scriptus*)—On our way to Diamantina Gates we passed through Davenport. It was here

PARSONS—*A Motor Trip to Western Queensland.*

that Mr. Jackson secured the eggs of the letter-winged kite for Mr. H.L. White. The storekeeper informed me that a fortnight previously he had seen several birds about 45 miles west of the station house, and that they were always about that particular part, but our time was limited, and precluded us from going after them.

41. Black-cheeked Falcon (*Rhynchodon peregrines*) —A few birds seen.
42. Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*)—A few birds noted, but it is more common than 41.
- 1:G. Brown Hawk (*Ieeracidea berigora*)—A common bird; several nests with three eggs noted.
44. Nankeen Kestrel (*Cerchneis cenchroides*) —Many pairs of Kestrel were seen, and two nests found, each containing five eggs. Both of these nests appeared to have been built by the Kestrels. Previous to this I have always found that the bird uses a deserted crow's nest or takes a hollow or ledge of rock.
45. Banksian Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*)— Flocks of 40 or 50 birds were at three large waterholes on Mt. Leonard Station. At Currawilla I found a nest about 20 yards front the blacksmith's shop, containing one well-fledged young bird.
46. Pink Cockatoo (*Lophochroa leadbeateri*)—A few odd birds noted.
47. Rose-breasted Cockatoo (*Eolophus roseicapillus*)— These birds were about the watercourses in great numbers, and many nesting hollows were inspected, but in no case was more than three eggs found.
48. Bare-eyed Cockatoo (*Ducorpsius gymnopsis*) —This bird was as common as the previous one. The majority of nesting hollows could be reached from the ground, several contained four eggs, but mostly three.
49. Cockatoo Parrot (*Leptolophus auricomis*)—A few birds seen at Diamantina Gates (Queensland), and about 30 birds at Apermanner, S.A.
44. Blue Bonnet (*Northiella haematogaster*)—The only birds of this species met with were among the trees growing in the bed of Cooper's Creek.
45. Shell Parrot (*Melopsittacus undulatus*)—The commonest bird met with on the trip; flocks of them were always living about, and scores of nesting places were seen. A favourite place is in hollow fence posts.
46. Red -winged Parrot (*Aprosmictus erythropterus*)—Met with among the gums lining the large waterhole at Currawilla.

59. Owllet Nightjar (*Aegotheles cristata*)—A few birds were flushed from hollow spouts. They are a very light grey colour.
54. Red-backed Kingfisher (*Cyanalcyon pyrrhopygius*)— Several solitary birds were seen, generally perched on the top of a dry tree.
55. Australian Bee-eater (*Cosmaerops ornatus*)—Often met with. These birds prefer perching on a dry tree to a bush or green tree.
56. Pallid Cuckoo (*Heteroscenes pallidus*)—Only one or two birds noted.
57. Narrow-billed Cuckoo (*Neochalcites basalis*) —Several birds seen and heard.
58. Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) —Birds met with occasionally along the route, and a few nests noted on rafters of the station buildings.
59. White-backed Swallow (*Cheramoeca leucosternum*)— Not many birds noticed.
60. Tree Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*)—A common bird.
54. Fairy Martin (*Lagenoplastes ariel*)—In thousands. Nests were built in clusters under lowest limbs of the trees. As many as 40 nests clustered together under one limb.
55. Brown Flycatcher (*Microeca fascinans*) —Birds observed wherever there was timber.
56. Red-capped Robin (*Whiteornis goodenovii*) —Very few noted.
61. Short-billed Tree Tit (*Smicrornus brevirostris*) —Fairly common in the timber. One nest found just ready for eggs.
65. Black-and-white Fantail (*Leucocirca tricolor*)—Several of their pretty nests found.
69. Ground Cuckoo Shrike (*Pteropodocys maxima*)—Two or three pairs seen, and one nest found, containing large young birds.
67. Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike (*Coracina novachollandiae*) —Not common ; very few birds seen.
68. White-shouldered Caterpillar-eater (*Lalage tricolor*) A. very common bird, met with wherever there was any timber, but no nests were found.
60. Cinnamon Ground Bird (*Samuela cinnamomea*)— Often met with among the bushes. It prefers spinifex, sandy country.
70. Chestnut-backed Ground Bird (*Cinclosoma castanotum*) —A ground bird, evidently this species was often observed.

- but no skin was collected. It appeared to be a very small subspecies.
71. White-browed Babbler (*Morganornis superciliosus*)— Very few of these birds were noticed.
 72. Chestnut-crowned Babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficeps*)— Seen at Cooper's Creek.
 73. Desert Wren (*Valantanthus campestris isabellinus*)— Only saw a few birds in the bed of the Frome at Maree.
 74. Brown Song Lark (*Cinclorhaniphus eruralis*)—A few birds, noted on the plain.
 75. Rufous Song Lark (*Ptenoedus mathewsi*)—A common bird among the grass in flooded country.
 76. Tricolored Chat (*Parephthianura tricolor*)—Only four or five pairs seen.
 77. Orange-fronted Chat (*Aurephthianura aurifrons*)—A very common bird. All the way from Maree, S.A., to Mayne, Queensland, many nests were found, some of them with four eggs.
 78. Desert Chat (*Ashbyia lovensis*)--Met with on all the open Gibber plains. It is a very quiet bird. One of its calls is a low monotone, repeated about ten times in quick succession. It is a hard bird to detect, its colour harmonising so well with its surroundings. Three nests were seen, each containing young birds.
 71. Reed Warbler (*Conopoderas australis*) —Always to be heard whenever the bore drains were lined with reeds.
 79. Thin-billed Tit (*Acanthiza iredalei morgani*)—Often met with in the saltbush.
 80. Yellow-rumped Tit (*Geobasileus chrysorrhous*) —Very few of these birds were noted. They were a very pale variety.
 81. White-winged Wren (*Hallornis cyanotus*)—This little gem was always present in the larger saltbushes, several nests were found.
 82. Purple-backed Wren (*Leggeornis lamberti*)—I could detect practically no difference in birds, from Hergott Springs and those from Mayne, in Queensland.
 83. White-rumped Wood Swallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*) —A few isolated pairs were observed at waterholes. One nest was found, containing four eggs. The nest was constructed of fine grass, similar to the other varieties of wood swallows, but was built on top of a deserted nest, resembling a thrush's.
 84. Masked Wood Swallow (*Campbellornis personatus*)— Were never seen in any numbers. Several nests were found on top of fence posts.

86. Sordid Wood Swallow (*Pseudartamus cyanoleuca*)— Odd birds seen.
87. Magpie Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*)—A common bird near water. Several of their mud nests were seen, in two cases containing five eggs each.
88. Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) —This was the only variety of magpie seen. Many nests were found, and as a rule contained either four eggs or four young.
89. Bell Bird (*Orcoica cristata*) ---Often noticed running under the larger bushes.
90. Black-banded White-face (*Aphelocephala nigricincta*) —A common bird in the larger bushes. Many nests were seen.
91. Brown Tree-creeper (*Neolima pieumna*) —This was the only species of tree-creeper observed.
92. Silver Eye (*Zosterops lateralis*) —No specimen was collected, but the birds often met with.
86. Red-browed Pardalote (*Pardalotus rubricatus*) —These birds were often noted from Hergott to Mayne. No eggs were found, but several nests were being built.
87. Red-tipped Pardalote (*Pardalotus striates*)—Only seen close to Hergott their place was filled as we proceeded north by No. 93.
88. Black Honey-eater (*Cissomela nigra*)—About half a dozen birds were noted.
89. White-plumed Honey-eater (*Ptilotula penicillata leilavalensis*)—I was surprised at the paucity of Honey-eaters. This particular -species was common, but apart from this we saw very few Honey-eaters.
90. Yellow-throated Mina (*Myzantha flavigula*) —Not a great number were seen. Several nests found.
91. Spiny-cheeked Honey-eater (*Acanthogenys rufogularis*) A few birds seen or heard whistling.
92. Australian Pipit (*Anthus australis*)_ Always present on the grassy plains.
93. Bush Lark (*Mirafra javaifica*)_ A very common bird on the grassy downs.
94. Chestnut-eared Finch (*Taeniopygia casttaotis*) —About the commonest bird met with; they were all busy with their nesting.
95. Short-billed Crow (*Corvus bennetti*)—A very common bird. Their nests were everywhere seen, and as often contained six eggs as five. This bird mingled with No. 103 about the homesteads, where you could approach them very closely, provided you walked about as if you were not heeding them.

103. Queensland Crow (*Corvus ceciliae*)—Very common about the homesteads, where they are always on the lookout for scraps.