

## Notes on Birds met with during a Visit to South-West Queensland.

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### No. III.

We had a wet trip from Bilpah water-hole in to St. Ann's on our return journey from Barrioulah out-station on Nappa Merrie. On reaching tableland country out from the sand hills and swamp country the wheels of the car sank to the rims and low gear was the order of the day. We were all "proper wet," as they say in Devonshire, before we reached our destination. Of course overcoats had been left at head station and likewise the hood of the car. We were glad to find the three peculiar peaks of Bunga Bunga Billy, marking the situation of St. Ann's homestead, growing nearer as we plugged along on squelching boots with only one of our party riding. Dr. Mac-Gillivray filled some of his numerous bottles with fine specimens of centipedes and other crawling insects which the rain seemed to have brought to the surface in large numbers. A warm welcome and change of clothes on arrival at St. Ann's late in the afternoon soon made us forget our troubles. Nothing particularly interesting in the bird line was noted this day. During the evening Mr. Clive Conrick gave us some interesting reminiscences of his work in Palestine as a pilot in the A.F.C. and also showed us maps of country as photographed from the air, as well as other interesting souvenirs of his part in the "Great Adventure."

On the morrow we realised that further progress towards head station was impossible for two days at least on account of the country to be crossed, so decided to explore the surrounding country under Mr. Clive's direction. With this object we made a pilgrimage on foot to the top of Bunga and were rewarded by finding a pair of Black-cheeked Falcons in possession of a small cave near its summit with a half-fledged young one in residence. The side of this rather precipitous hill showed signs of having been used as a native ochre quarry, much of the stone was stained red and fine seams of this material could

yet be seen in places between the sandstone layers. It was probably worked out and abandoned, but an immense amount of labour must have been necessary, with the primitive implements at their disposal, to make the excavation there to-day. Singing Honey-eaters were plentiful on these sparsely timbered uplands. These birds appear to me to prefer more open country. A solitary pair of Hooded Robins had a nest with two fledged young in a gidgea tree. The following day the whole party, including Mr. Clive and Mrs. Conrick, set out on horseback for a more extended inspection of this interesting country. No Desert Chats were seen, which rather surprised us, as the country appeared ideal for them. A Bennett's Crow's nest with young was examined, and the usual Galahs and Bare-eyed Cockatoos flew from nearly every hollow when we approached a gum creek. The country traversed was rough and hilly and the prevailing timber mulga. A peculiar rock formation was examined on one ridge, hardened sandstone, which had evidently withstood the weathering effects of ages, stood up in various curious formations, most of them hollow, not unlike chimneys. Some were as high as four feet. Of course I do not attempt to explain this formation geologically, but the cause mentioned may have accounted for them. During our ride we had evidence of some evidently contagious disease that was playing havoc with the kangaroos. Four recently dead ones were seen and others, almost too weak to move out of the way. They appeared to be in good condition and there was abundance of feed and water. Mr. Conrick attributes this sickness amongst the kangaroos, which he has only noticed in good seasons when green feed is abundant, to the scourge of sand flies which cause glandular swellings in the throat. Unfortunately, we did not have time to perform a post-mortem examination on any of the victims. A well-grown Joey—left an orphan by its mother's death—was run down and captured but died next morning at the homestead.

Amongst the birds seen during to-day's ride were a pair of young Crow Shrikes (captured), a pair of Ground Cuckoo Shrikes, and Orange-fronted Chats. On the previous evening, during a walk along St. Ann's Creek, we flushed a delicate owl, I believe the only one seen during the trip, and also identified Collared Crow Shrike, Red-capped Robin, Black-throated Grebe, and Rufus-breasted Thickhead. A Red-backed Kingfisher's burrow was examined containing one fresh egg. The aboriginal name for this bird is "Chula" and for the Red-lobed Pardalote "Poopa tella lilla," both names appearing to be descriptive of the bird's note.

On the morning of Tuesday, October 5th, we found the roads still unfit for travel as the creeks were still running, and had to trespass for another day on Mrs. Conrick's hospitality. During a walk down St. Ann's Creek a nest of Red-lore'd Pardalote, some 15 inches in the bank, consisting of quite a thick outside layer of dried grass lined with a few feathers was found containing three incubated eggs—a complete set for this species, also two nests of Black-browed Wood Swallow with young, Zebra Finch with five eggs, and a Kite's nest with two eggs. I noted the first Yellow-tail Tit seen on the trip during this walk. A nest of the Little Falcon with the bird in possession was seen later. As usual this was situated on the top of the tallest tree on the creek, and quite inaccessible to any of our party. On the following morning we said our farewells to Clive and Mrs. Conrick, the kindest and cheeriest of hosts, and started on the eighteen mile run into head station. Out on the tablelands a specimen of the Desert Chat was obtained and numerous Pratincoles were seen but they did not appear to be nesting. Hearing a song like that of the English Skylark, we pulled up and after some time Dr. MacGillivray secured a specimen of the bird which proved to be a species of song lark, *Mirafra secunda*. I was very charmed with this bird's note, while soaring high above the ground it pours out a flood of song, partly its own and partly imitations of other species, and I noted perfect reproductions of the Ground Lark, White-winged Wren, White-face, Black-browed Wood Swallow, and others. One could have spent more time listening to this delightful little songster who, in my opinion, quite equals the English Skylark, but we had to push on. A deserted nest of the Desert Chat containing one egg was found before we left the tablelands, and when we reached the box timber near the Cooper, the Tree Creepers were again in evidence. We found all well at the head station after our fortnight's absence and returned the Ford car to its owner, Mr. Jack Conrick, I hope none the worse for the rather strenuous work we had given the engine.

Next morning was spent along the Cooper by myself and Dr. MacGillivray in securing some skins of the Tree Creeper. We also found a pair of Brown Fly-catchers commencing to build, and some pairs of Black Honey-eaters. On the creek, Pelicans, White Ibis, Royal and the ordinary Spoon-bill, Cormorants, Teal, White-eyed and Pink-eared Ducks were identified. A nest of Leadbeater's Cockatoo containing three young was also found. In the evening, after a swim in the Cooper, we had instructions from Mr. Conrick as to our return journey and drank success to the venture.

On October 8th we ferried our goods over the river, packed the car, and started on the long run to Tibbooburra. For the first fifteen miles we had considerable difficulty in picking up our land marks, but at last reached the crossing at Milthermerna Creek and lunched there. I was fortunate in securing a fine set of Red-backed Kingfisher's eggs here, the first time in many attempts. These birds burrow quite a distance into the bank before the egg chamber is hollowed out. After leaving this creek we took a wrong turn which brought us down to the Narnoo crossing on the Cooper. While waiting here we were fortunate in securing a nest and pair of eggs of the Brown Flycatcher, in the usual situation on the horizontal branch with the usual inadequate nest of cobwebs, fine rootlets, and hair.

Things continued to go wrong this afternoon but I will spare my readers a detailed account of them, merely recording that we camped at a creek near Tookabarna Yards, and as it was a still night, insects of all sorts, including mosquitoes, were much in evidence. The grunting note of the Podargus and the calling of the Curlew were heard. Dr. MacGillivray found that by turning on the electric headlights of the car, he could catch many moths and beetles attracted by the light and I rather fancy that I fell asleep on this occasion before he had finished his collecting. Next day we had an early start and struck the Wilson floodwaters on our left. Lignum swamps with scattered willow trees for miles and a line of box timber marked the actual course of the main creek. We were fortunate from now on in picking up our motor tracks of the outward journey not yet wiped out by the rains that had fallen since. The usual detours over sandhills and out into rough gibber country had to be made to avoid water. We reached Tenappera on the Wilson before midday and saw some White-headed Stilts on the way.

During the halt for dinner this side of Tenappera we stripped off and investigated a dam which had flooded back and in which many trees were growing. We secured a set of four Pacific Heron's eggs on quite a low box tree. A good run was made past Bransby, Bransby Downs, Mr. Chas. Dorrell's home, and Dingera, where we had tea, on past Naryilco till we ran down the Warri Creek towards the boundary fence. Here misfortune overtook the car in the shape of cylinder trouble and we camped for the night. Mosquitoes were particularly attentive. Our driver was busy until 11 a.m. the next day in repairing the defect, and during the wait we were fortunate in securing a Wedgebill's nest with two beautifully marked eggs. These birds were plentiful at Barrioulah and along most of the

swamp country, but were not then nesting. The song is a very pleasant one, and the male bird sings almost constantly. A bunch of dry mistletoe in an acacia or in a mulga seems their favourite nesting site; four or five old nests were found in this situation. We also found nests of the Owlet Nightjar and the Cockatoo Parrakeet both with full fledged young. The young Owlets appeared to have down, or white fluff at any rate, adhering to the ends of the feathers, otherwise the plumage is similar to that of the adult. The young Parrots appear to get their adult plumage, crest and all, with their first dress.

We saw Desert Chats and Pratincoles again between the Yalpunga gate in the fence and Tibbooburra. We saw two more Desert Chats next day between Tibbooburra and Milparinka, also some Australian Dottrells; we also picked up the fresh dead body of a fully-fledged, probably young, Dottrell, that had apparently been run over by the mail car. (An eventful run over bad roads landed us safely back in Broken Hill on October 12th. We must have covered well over 1,000 miles on this trip and I, personally, enjoyed every day of it. Hardships are nothing, if the work is congenial.

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