

Notes on Birds seen during a Recent Visit to the
Western Darling, N.S.W.

PART III.

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I do not know the exact distance, but I believe the Queensland fence to the north and the S.A. fence to the west were less than ten miles away. Trying to cross an apparently dry arm of the Lake in the dusk, the Dodge car went down to the differential, and it was two hours' hard work, with the help of the

Ford and a rope on the back axle, before we had it out again. It was a weary party of explorers who made camp in the dark and turned in that night. No birds of any interest were met with during this day's journey except another pair or two of Cinnamon-backed Ground Birds.

Owing to threatening rain, of which a few drops fell, we were up at daylight next morning to get our bedding rolled up, and after breakfast moved back to a hut a mile away which we had passed on the previous evening, thinking that there was no water nearer than the well. However, a rain-water tank was in evidence, as this hut is occupied at times by a man who rides the Queensland fence. Here we left Mr. and Mrs. Heywood to rest, give the Dodge car a look over, and to remove some of the black mud which had accumulated on the wheels. The other three started to walk round the lake called Pinnaroo on the maps. Bird life was not plentiful, although the combination of water with timber and ti-tree and much grass bearing seed appeared to provide all necessary for a large bird population. Amongst the birds seen during our walk were a Little Eagle, Podargus with two eggs in a box-tree, many Zebra Finches, Pacific Herons, White-fronted Herons, a pair of Brolgas, Leadbeater's Cockatoo with two eggs, Caterpillar-eaters, a solitary Pelican, and the usual Minahs, Cockatoos, Galahs, and Honey-eaters. On the far side of the Lake we had the good fortune to flush a Black Falcon from a tree, the bird, as usual, flying straight away, and not ascending to soar over the nest. This contained four fresh eggs—now in Dr. McGillivray's collection. When nearing the camp we flushed a Masked Owl from a large hollow in a green box-tree. This contained seven eggs, partly incubated—the first nest of this species the writer has met with, and only the second bird we had seen during our travels. Captain Sturt established a base depot at this spot in 1845 on July 28th. From here he made journeys to Lake Torrens—about 115 miles from the original depot near Milparinka—and back to Fort Grey; then north-west for 400 odd miles over the Strzelecki Creek and the Stony Desert to Eyre's Creek, and to within 150 miles of the centre of the Continent, according to his reckoning, and within one degree of latitude of the Tropic. Drought conditions forced him to return to the depot at Fort Grey; reached on October 20. His third attempt to reach his objective was made more due north and to the east of north until he struck a fine creek, which he followed for some distance, and which he named Cooper's Creek, after Judge Cooper, of South Australia. He struggled back from

here towards the end of November in exceedingly hot weather, losing two of his horses, and found that his party left in charge had fallen back on the original depot near Milparinka. At Cooper's Creek he found a "new and beautiful little Pigeon with a long crest, which never perched on trees, but on the highest and most exposed rocks, appearing to like the intense heat of such situations. Its flight was short, like that of a Quail" (*Geophaps plumifera*—Gould).

In our walks around the Lake we found a marked box-tree with initials cut in it, but almost obliterated by growth of bark. A Government Surveyor had re-marked the tree recently. There is no trace left of the stockade made of slabs four and a half feet above the ground which gave the name of "Fort" Grey to this depot, named after the then Governor of South Australia. There was a Bluebonnet's nest in the tree. So much for this historical digression. After returning to the hut and lunching, we packed up and returned ten miles on our outward route and then camped. Nothing of interest was noticed except a few Cinnamon-backed Ground birds. The next day we reached Yandama at 3 p.m., after negotiating those steep and numerous sandhills, which were so trying to the cars both going out and coming back. We left Jimmy Sit-down at the blacks' camp, and I fancy he was glad to get back. After tea and a talk to Mr. and Mrs. Winton, who had shown us such hospitality, we ran on another 20 miles in to Mount Sturt Station.

The remainder of the journey calls for little comment from an ornithological standpoint. When we left the Heywood's at Milparinka, after "doing" Depot Glen and Poole's Grave, we went on to Tibbooburra, and then east to the Bulloo floodwaters, but they had dried up and gone back through the fence into Queensland. Our observations of bird life were barren of interest except that I struck an *Amytis*—very shy—in a canegrass swamp, but had no gun at the time, and could not get a specimen.
