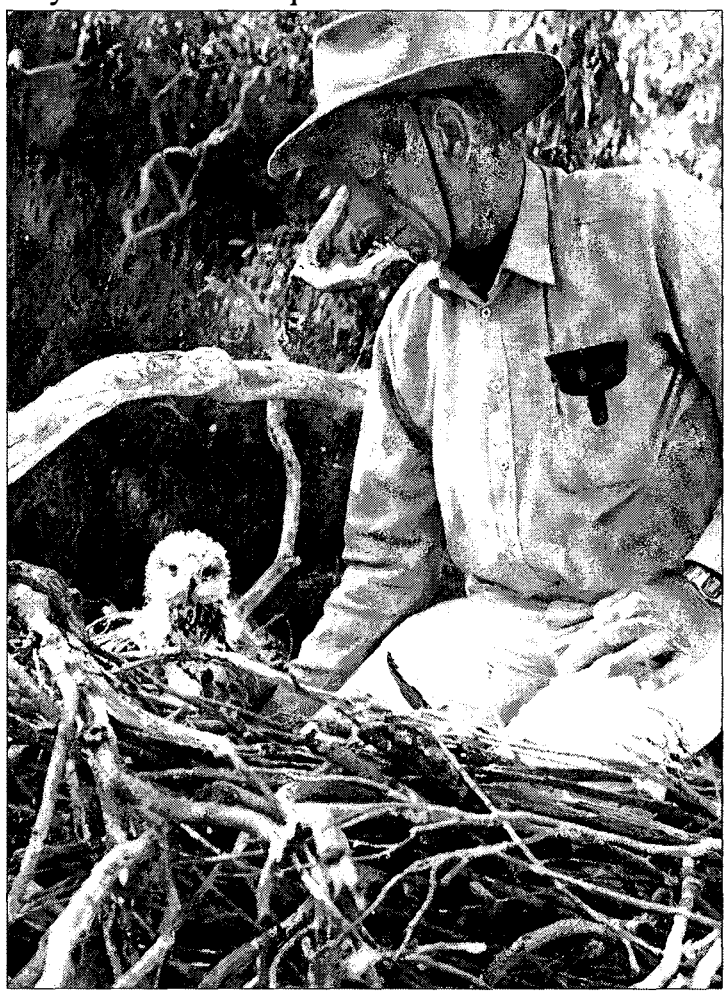
SAOA Historical Series No. 23
Allen F. C. Lashmar (1917-1993)
Part Three

The first two parts of the account of the ornithological activities of Allen Lashmar concentrated on the early period of his interest in birds as a lad and on the bird banding, research and egg-collecting phase up until the late 1960s. This third and last instalment focuses more generally on Allen's life and on the changing nature of Kangaroo Island, its bush and birdlife, mainly taken from the taped interview of 1993.

Like many people from rural and regional communities, Allen was involved in a variety of community activities and organisations. For example he served two terms as a member of the Dudley District Council, in the period before council amalgamations. For one of those terms he was also hospital delegate for the Kingscote District Hospital, which entailed travelling to bimonthly meetings in Kingscote for those two years. In 1982 the Kangaroo Island Consultative Committee was established by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Allen gave the inaugural address at Flinders Chase and continued as a member until ill health forced his retirement in 1988. The Consultative Committee liaised between National Parks and the local community and Allen believed that it was valuable in smoothing out differences between local people, particularly farmers, and the Parks Service. Another task carried out by the Committee was voluntary assistance in repairing the houses rented out by the Parks Service.



Allen Lashmar banding a nestling White-bellied Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* on Kangaroo Island, SA. (courtesy of Lynette [née Lashmar] Bartlett) Photo taken by T Dennis.

On one occasion Allen's family hosted an Adelaide girl on their farm during the school holidays — a Legacy Club activity. Allen was a Legatee of the Legacy Club of Adelaide for a number of years. Legacy was founded in 1928 by World War I veterans to assist the families of ex-servicemen who were in financial or other need. Another community activity was the local Anglican Church with which Allen was associated for 33 years in one capacity or another. Even when ill health forced him to resign his official duties, he continued to assist at services occasionally. Being on the land from birth and spending the majority of his life in one place on Kangaroo Island allowed Allen to observe the many changes that took place on the eastern end of the Island over a lifetime. When asked about this, Allen thought that over the 65 years from the early 1930s about 65% of the

native vegetation had disappeared, to the detriment of the heath and bush birds. The first scrub to go was the eucalypt and acacia lands because it was the better land for farming and was easier to clear. The early clearing method was with scrub rollers, but later logging and chaining was used. Clearing the yacca country was difficult with the rolling method because the short yaccas didn't push over; instead the roller climbed up over them and then banged to the ground, causing a lot of damage to bolts, rivets and framework. But with the arrival of logging and chaining, the yacca country was able to be cleared, severely restricting the area available for the heathland birds.

On the other hand, this led to an increase in the birds of open spaces, birds like magpies, quails, herons and lapwings. One exception that Allen noted was the pipit – he thought that this bird of the open areas was less abundant in the 1990s than it had been previously. Another bird that Allen thought had become less common was the migratory Flame Robin. He was the first to confirm this species from Kangaroo Island on 12 June 1938, when he collected one bird from a flock of nine (see SAOA Historical Series No. 21, p. iv). By the early 1990s he believed that this species was a much less frequent visitor to the Island, mirroring its decline in reporting in the Mt Lofty Ranges/Adelaide region over the past 30 years.

There is also a suite of birds that were absent or very rare on the Island that during this time self-introduced or became more numerous. The Willie Wagtail was once a very rare bird on Kangaroo Island and Allen relates how there were two birds seen together in 1945 and then this did not occur again until 1976. Now of course this species is common on the Island. He believed that the early records were probably of birds that were either blown across from the mainland or were carried all or part of the way on ships. In the interview Allen relates how he collected six eggs from the nest of the 1945 'pair' of Willie Wagtails. He deduced that both birds were females because there were two distinctive sets of eggs, which of course were infertile. Another species that was very rare early in the nineteenth century was the Magpie-lark. Allen's first record was of a pair that built a nest near Penneshaw on the Kingscote road in about 1929. He saw one or two birds at Antechamber Bay some years later and by the 1990s the species was common across most of the Island.

As with these species in the southern parts of South Australia, the Galah and the Little Corella have arrived and/or become more common on Kangaroo Island. The Galah was not recorded until 1913 (Baxter 1989), with Lashmar first recording breeding in 1937 at the eastern end of the Island. A year later (9/9/38) when travelling on a small ferry across Backstairs Passage, Allen saw three Galahs flying about a metre above the water heading towards Kangaroo Island. They are now abundant and Allen recounted how they damage the newly sown crops, by walking along the rows pulling up the plants to eat the seed. The first record for Little Corella was five birds perched in a big tree near one of the Lashmar homesteads on 23 September 1955. Since that time they have gradually increased in numbers and now compete for nesting hollows with the endangered Glossy Black-Cockatoo.

In 1938 by the age of 21, Allen knew most of the birds to be found regularly in the square kilometres around his home that he ranged over on his weekend walks. But his isolation from other ornithologists as well as the relatively poor bird book that was his only guide meant that he was still learning the birds that were irregular visitors. His correspondence with Sutton had greatly helped him with some of the unknown or difficult to identify species, but Sutton's death in 1938 left him with no regular correspondent to bounce ideas off and he confides in the diary as if to another person.

He revisits the diary as he learns more and corrects misidentifications so it is a living document. For example on 17th May 1938 he records an Oriental Pratincole? adjacent to Lashmars' Lagoon and Chapman River. This bird is described as being larger than a Red-capped Plover and that in flight the wings appeared something like a Magpie-lark. He gives the general colours noted in flight and on the next day describes it as having a typical dotterel attitude. At a later stage in the margin he has written Black-

fronted Dotterel *Charadrius melanops*, undoubtedly the correct identification.

For a bird observer in the year 2007 with access to many excellent bird books and journals, bird meetings, other observers, the internet and many other resources, it is hard to imagine what it was like for Allen Lashmar as a teenager interested in birds on the then remote eastern end of Kangaroo Island in the 1930s. He did not get a pair of binoculars for some time and, when he did, they cost 17 pounds and 10 shillings and he kept them for the rest of his life. His only bird book for years was Cayley's 'What Bird is That?', a gift in 1932, which he commented helped him "a little". It is no wonder that he was so assiduous in his correspondence with John Sutton and that he took every opportunity of visiting the SA Museum and SAOA bird meetings when he was in Adelaide. Learning about nests and eggs through his rambles and, later, egg collecting was also clearly of great benefit in an ornithologically challenged environment. And I suspect the exchanging of eggs that went on between egg collectors was not caused just by the desire to gain the eggs of different species but also from the sense of belonging to an unofficial club of like-minded people. I asked Allen about how these exchanges were effected and he told me that the eggs were wrapped separately in cotton wool and sent by post in small wooden boxes.

In the interview with Allen in 1993 he mentioned that he had attended the Easter 1982 SAOA Campout to the Gosse Crown Lands adjacent to Flinders Chase. It was his only SAOA Campout and he enjoyed the experience, particularly bird watching from camel back! He thought that the great height of the camels' backs and their silent movement through the bush were conducive to seeing birds. Allen was also pleased to see three Gang Gang Cockatoos – his only record from the Island of this introduced species. This Campout and other lobbying activities from conservationists led to these lands being added to the Flinders Chase National Park.

Considering the disadvantages that Allen laboured under, it is a credit to his perseverance and ability that he became such a competent and knowledgeable bird observer. He was responsible for some 24 new records of species for the Island by himself as well as five with other observers and these are documented in Baxter's (1989) book on Kangaroo Island birds. Lashmar's contributions to knowledge about the breeding biology, movements and conservation of Island birds have been highlighted in SAOA Historical Series No. 22. Reference has been made several times to his diligence in recording his observations, both in his diary and, later, in a card index system. For many birdwatchers the easy bit is getting out into the field and making the observations; we all know that the hard bit is conscientiously writing it down and publishing. In his active phase Allen published numerous articles and notes on his observations and even when time was short later in life he kept a card index system of bird records. This was initially organised by species number and later alphabetically. This resource as well as the ornithological diary was made available to the author for entry into the RAOU Atlas of Australian Birds conducted from 1977 to 1981.

As a country boy interested in the natural world, Allen's knowledge extended beyond the bird world. We know that, after the sale of his egg collection, the egg cabinet became a repository for his shell collection, so he clearly had an interest in shells. The interview tells of a motley assemblage of animals sent to Adelaide for the SA Museum collection over the years – short-nosed bandicoot, echidna, tiger snake, short-finned eel and a freshwater eel found in a dam when it was being cleaned out. There are also several stories of interactions between animals that clearly fascinated Allen. He told me of an encounter he 'nearly' witnessed: when walking near his home along the bank of a dry creek he came across a series of goanna tracks and churned up patches of alluvial sand. On following the tracks he came to a dead goanna and then further on a dead snake. The snake was covered in saliva from end to end, which Allen interpreted as the goanna biting the snake all along its body and killing it, but at the same time the snake had bitten the goanna and caused its death. Another story he told was of finding a partly eaten carcase of a Cape Barren Goose (one of a group of six pinioned birds from Flinders Chase that lived on his property) under a

big tree. There was a line of feathers from the tree to the dam where the geese lived and he surmised that a Wedge-tailed Eagle had taken the goose and eaten part of it.

One of the regular entries in the ornithological diary from its inception in 1938 until 1940 when he left for active service was Allen's description of going on his walks after checking the 'wallaby snares'. I asked Terry Dennis about this and he explained that it was a common practice for many decades in the early 1900s on eastern Kangaroo Island, in particular, for farmers to set snare lines to control the damage to crops from the abundant Tamar Wallaby population. Snares were used so as to minimise damage to the skins which were in strong demand as they provided high quality soft leathers for use as shoe 'uppers' and gloves etc. Snare lines were established in a particular way and would be maintained and used over many years sometimes by skilled local 'trappers'. This was done by creating a low fence of cut mallee branches with confined runways every so often through which the wallabies would become accustomed to travel to and from feeding areas. Then the snares would be set on the runway holes and, depending on 'how thick' the wallaby population had become, serviced several times during a night!

Allen was a farmer as well as a bird enthusiast and he managed to resolve the inevitable conflicts between his need to make a living from the land and his love of the natural world. As well as the snare lines his diary also mentions wallaby shooting at night (April 1940) and from 1944 to 1952 there are entries recording the shooting of Wedge-tailed Eagles. The eagles worried the turkeys that were part of the farming enterprise as well as making a nuisance of themselves when the ewes were lambing. The dates that the eagles were shot are recorded along with the weight, length and wing span of each bird. So even when it was necessary to take the lives of native animals Allen made sure that as much information was recorded as possible for scientific purposes.

This same balance was evident in his stewardship of the family farm at Antechamber Bay, where he preserved large tracts of native vegetation. This was recognised when 188 hectares of land that had been in the family since the 1850s was dedicated as the Lashmar Conservation Park in 1993, recognizing the Lashmar family and Allen's contribution to wildlife conservation on Kangaroo Island (T. Dennis pers. comm.). As well as his ornithological and conservation activities, for which Allen was awarded a Telecom Advance Australia Medal in 1986, Allen was also interested in photography, horticulture, antiques and stamp collecting (Mason 2004/05). Despite his excellence in all his endeavours, Allen was a softly spoken and unassuming man, giving his opinion when asked in a quiet but confident manner. South Australians can be proud of this upright man and his contributions to so many fields of knowledge, most notably ornithology and nature conservation. I would like to acknowledge Terry Dennis for bringing the diary to my attention as well as adding considerably to all three parts of this account of Allen Lashmar.

Penny Paton October 2007

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