

## Round About the Islands Near the Murray Mouth.

By J. Sutton.

[All the places mentioned herein can be located by reference to the map on page 95 (Part 3) of this volume.]

A party, consisting of Dr. A. S. Randell, Messrs. Fred. T. Bruce and E. S. Rymill, Dr. A. M. Morgan, and myself, had a trip on Dr. Randell's motor-launch from 4th to 7th April, 1930, inclusive, round about the islands near the River Murray Mouth. Leaving Glen Osmond at 8.15 a.m. on 4th April in two motor-cars, we arrived at Goolwa at 10.7 a.m., and left in the motor-launch at 11.40 a.m., proceeded up the Goolwa Channel, past Hindmarsh and Ram Islands to Deep Creek, in Reedy Island (No. 2), then into portion of Loveday Bay, and past the entrance to Jacob's Bight, to about a mile from Pelican Point, reaching there at 5.15 p.m. and anchoring for the night. Immediately after anchoring, Mr. E. S. Rymill, in a dinghy, reconnoitred the water in the direction of Pelican Point, and found that it was too shallow to permit of the motor-launch going into the Coorong; its draught was two feet. During the early part of the night a Greenshank, and then a Spur-winged Plover, called; otherwise there was complete quietness. On 5th April we left the anchorage at 8.5 a.m., proceeded towards Pelican Point for a little distance, then turned back up the eastern channel past Reedy, Long, and Mundoo Islands, and went down the Mundoo Channel as far as the Barrage, near Varcoe's Island, arriving there at 10.25 a.m. A teatree swamp on Hindmarsh Island was visited. Leaving there at 3.5 p.m.,

we went back up the Mundoo Channel, then between Hindmarsh and Ram Islands to the lagoon opposite Rankine's Ferry (known as Dunn's Lagoon), and anchored in the channel between Goose Island and the mainland at 4 p.m. We landed and worked the western shore until darkness set in. During the early part of the night Eastern Curlews and Black Swan were heard whilst flying overhead. Spur-winged Plovers were calling frequently during the nighttime, and on flashing a torch upon the shores at 9 p.m. one of these birds promptly uttered its warning cry. On 6th April we left at 7.45 a.m. and proceeded down the Goolwa Channel past Goolwa and the Murray Mouth, through the Coorong Channel and the Tauwitchere Channel to Panmuring Point (Godfrey's Camp), anchoring there at 1.40 p.m. We went on Younghusband Peninsula in the afternoon. No birds were heard during the night. On 7th April Dr. Morgan and I were landed on Tauwitchere Island, and walked round the eastern end from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. We proceeded then in the motor-launch to the end of Younghusband Peninsula, and anchored at 3.10 p.m. We went on shore, walked to the ocean beach and back, left for Goolwa at 4 p.m., arrived there at 5.37 p.m., thence by motor-car to Adelaide, which we reached at 8.30 p.m.

The Murray Mouth (all the distances and heights are approximate).—We landed on the Younghusband Peninsula near the former site of Barker's Knoll, which is still shown on the maps, although long since washed away by the River. Between the end of the sandhills on that peninsula and the river channel there is a sandy space for a quarter of a mile, sloping slightly, a few feet above water-level, whilst on Sir Richard's Peninsula the sandy space is flatter, and to the end of the sandhills the distance is half a mile. Most probably during a flood these spaces would be covered with water. The actual channel between the two peninsulas is one mile long and a quarter of a mile wide. The sandhills on the Younghusband Peninsula are 100 feet high, and at the Coorong Channel they are without vegetation, and rise almost perpendicularly from the water's edge. The sandhills on the other peninsula are 50 feet high. In the first gully in the sandhills on the Younghusband Peninsula there is a fisherman's camp, and the men have a wireless receiver installed. About the Murray Mouth we noted Fairy Penguin (a body picked up), a Pelican, Caspian and Crested Terns, Silver Gulls, Double-banded and Red-capped Dotterels, and Welcome Swallows.

The Coorong Channel referred to herein is shown on the maps as the first portion of the eastern channel from the Murray Mouth to the west end of Ewe Island. The Coorong itself

begins at Pelican Point, and extends south-easterly for 90 miles. The course followed by the motor-launch in the Lakes and Channels was very tortuous on account of the sandspits both above and below the surface of the water. On our way down the Goolwa Channel on 6th April we found the end of it (Port Pullen) to be very shallow, with a right-angled turn where the Mundoo Channel is met with; thence the motor-launch was slowed down and steered direct for the Murray Mouth with very shoal water over a sandbank on our port side. When near to the channel, between the peninsulas, we had to turn again at a right-angle to get into the Coorong Channel, and in the last-named channel several set-nets of the fishermen had to be avoided. On page 211 of this volume it is mentioned that at "Devon Downs," near Nildottie, many dead fish were seen on the banks of the River Murray. Excepting the one in Deep Creek, no dead fish were seen stranded on any of the shores we visited, but there were about the water's edge many dead bodies, apparently uninjured, of the mottled shore-crab (*Paragrapsus gaimardii*), the carapaces ranging in size from about three-quarters of an inch to nearly two inches.

Ostriches.—Three were seen, two on the land at Jacob's Bight, on 4th April, and one, a splendid bird, at 8 a.m. the next morning close to the shore-line at our anchorage, near Pelican Point. These birds are on Mr. Bowman's estate. Mr. H. H. Newell advises me that Ostriches occasionally come across from Pelican Point to the islands, and that last year a pair had a nest on Mundoo Island, but he did not know if they hatched out any chicks.

The trip was a delightful one. There were no mosquitoes, and flies were very scarce, being troublesome only on one forenoon. The species of birds noted during the islands trip numbered 57, with a total of 14,622 individuals, as shown in the list herewith, the numbers in parentheses after the names signifying the individuals noted. All the members of the party contributed to the particulars, as well as to the census.

*Eudiptula undina*, Fairy Penguin (1). Picked up dead on the ocean shore at the Murray Mouth.

*Coturnix pectoralis*, Stubble-Quail (3). Obtained on Mundoo Island near the Barrage. 2 ♂, 1 ♀. One stomach contained many small pieces of succulent leaves; the other two contained seeds of oats. In all the stomachs there was much coarse quartz-sand.

*Phaps elegans*, Brush Bronzewing (1). This bird was flushed from a waterhole in the sandhills at Panmuring Point.

*Porphyrio melanotus*, Bald Coot (8). All flew from a small patch of reeds in Dunn's Lagoon.

*Podiceps* sp., Grebe (100). In Dunn's Lagoon too far out from the shore for the species to be identified, even with the aid of field-glasses. They were probably *P. poliocephalus*, Hoary-headed Grebe.

*Phalacrocorax carbo*, Black Cormorant (2). Both were seen in the Mundoo Channel.

*Phalacrocorax ater*, Little Black Cormorant (5). One was seen near Loveday Bay, and four in the Mundoo Channel.

*Phalacrocorax varius*, Pied Cormorant (262). This species was seen everywhere we went. A specimen was obtained—♂, immature; iris greenish; bare skin of lores orange; dull yellow ring of bare skin round eye; maxilla, culmen light horn, tomia dull yellow; mandible dull yellow; gular pouch dull yellow; legs, feet, and soles black; inside mouth light horn colour. There were some black feathers on the breast and abdomen. Total length 79 cm., spread of wings 111 cm.; weight 4 lb. 14 oz. Stomach contents: one salmon trout (*Arripis trutta*) about six inches long, three lake mullet (*Agnostomus forsteri*), the heads digested, but the bodies each about three inches long, as well as other fish remains which were indistinguishable, and one small mottled shore-crab. All the contents were very wet.

*Microcarbo melanoleucus*, Little Pied Cormorant (133). Met with everywhere.

Cormorants sp. (626). The species could not be identified.

*Pelecanus conspicillatus*, Pelican (738). A number of these appeared to be immature birds of the season. A small flock was seen on Pelican Point.

*Hydroprogne caspia*, Caspian Tern (30). Met with on each day. Four were seen at the Murray Mouth. The call sounded like "scrrhow."

*Sterna bergii*, Crested Tern (151). Met with everywhere. Sixty-five of these formed a flock on Younghusband Peninsula on the Coorong Channel side of the Murray Mouth; some of them were bathing in the water at the shore-line. Judging by the call ("sis-sis-sis"), a number were young birds. The adult's call was a guttural "koww."

*Sterna nereis*, Fairy Tern (275). At 6.25 a.m. on 5th April, near Pelican Point, there were about 250 of this species flying about and around the launch and some little distance off. They were diving into the water for food and calling frequently.

They all came from the direction of the Coorong, and disappeared in about twenty minutes. These birds will dive into very shallow water, but are immersed for a very brief period.

Terns sp. (37). The species could not be identified.

*Larus novae-hollandiae*, Silver Gull (6,379). The majority of these birds were distributed singly in search of food about the shores of the islands, peninsulas, and mainland, each apparently patrolling a particular portion. In addition, a number of flocks were seen resting on sandspits. Fourteen only were seen at the Murray Mouth. Following the motor-launch up the Goolwa Channel on our return journey on 7th was a small flock of Silver Gulls. One bird, appearing to have no legs, attracted our attention. Dr. Morgan said the legs were tucked up in the feathers, and suggested the throwing of some food on the water when it next flew round. That was done, and the bird at once let its legs drop through the feathers in order to reach the water.

*Haematopus ostralegus*, Pied Oystercatcher (58). These were seen on the reef and sandspits adjoining in the Tauwitchere Channel. This reef is about a mile long, and runs diagonally across the channel.

*Haematopus unicolor*, Sooty Oyster-catcher (10). Two of these were seen on the south-eastern shore of Ram Island, and eight on the reef in the Tauwitchere Channel. A specimen was obtained. ♂—immature; iris light brown; bare skin round eye orange red; bill vermilion, point brown and fairly sharp; legs and feet dull flesh colour; inside mouth vermilion; total length 47.50 cm.; spread of wings 92 cm.; weight  $1\frac{3}{4}$  lb.; temperature-106.2°. Stomach contents: remains of crabs.

*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*, Spur-winged Plover (299). One hundred and eighteen were counted on the banks of the Mundoo Channel, in many cases close to the water's edge. Some of them were immature birds. One hundred and one were seen at a place on the shore of Tauwitchere Island.

*Zonifer tricolor*, Banded Plover (9). These were seen on Mundoo Island, near the bank of the channel.

*Charadrius bicinctus*, Double-banded Dotterel (4). Two adults in non-breeding plumage with two immature birds were seen in company with 10 Red-capped Dotterels on Young-husband Peninsula at the Murray Mouth. They were about 75 yards from the water of the Coorong Channel. This is the first occasion on which I have seen this species.

*Charadrius ruficapillus*, Red-capped Dotterels (212). Met with on most of the shores and sandspits. One flock of 12 were

noticed on the ocean beach near the Murray Mouth feeding in the receding water, and running shorewards quickly whenever a fresh wave approached.

*Charadrius melanops*, Black-fronted Dotterel (3). Two were on the shore of Goose Island, near our anchorage, and one on the shore of Hindmarsh Island, in the Goolwa Channel.

*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*, Banded Stilt (19). All were seen on the reef in Tauwichee Channel; 17 of them near our anchorage at Panmuring Point.

*Numenius cyanopus*, Eastern Curlew (50): Three were calling about 8 p.m. whilst flying over Dunn's Lagoon, the calls being "kore-lee"; five were seen on Hindmarsh Island, in the Goolwa Channel; 42 in one flock on the reef in the Tauwichee Channel, and they were the first species to leave the reef on the approach of the motor-launch.

*Tringa nebularia*, Greenshank (179). Met with on almost every shore. The largest flock numbered 20. They called at times in the early morn, during the daytime, and once at night. The usual calls were given and on one occasion we heard one of the breeding calls. (See "S.A. Ornithologist," Volume X, page 98.)

*Erolia testacea*, Curlew Sandpiper (93). These were identified in the Goolwa Channel, Hindmarsh Island, Reedy Island No. 2, Mundoo Channel, Panmuring Point, Tauwichee Island with the reef and sandspits near there. The largest flock numbered 10. When feeding they were generally in the company of the next two species and Red-capped Dotterels. Most of them were in non-breeding plumage, but several showed signs of the breeding plumage; one bird in particular, on Tauwichee Island, was almost in the complete nuptial dress of rich chestnut. A specimen, ♂, in non-breeding plumage was obtained—iris very dark brown; bill and inside mouth black; legs and feet dark greenish black; total length 20.50 cm.; spread of wings 38 cm.; weight 60 grammes; temperature 106°. Stomach contents: mollusca and sand.

*Erolia ruficollis*, Red-necked Stint (420). These were met with everywhere we went. A number of them showed various stages of breeding plumage, in the red on the neck and rufous edging to the feathers on the back. In one instance I saw a bird in non-breeding plumage fly towards another, and when about two feet off the latter it alighted and squatted down, at the same time uttering a low sweet song. The other bird went on feeding until a third bird approached and was driven away. Four specimens were obtained, all ♀—iris very dark brown;

bill, legs, and feet black, tinged green; inside mouth dull black, tinged green. (1) Total length 15.50 cm.; spread of wings 31 cm.; weight 27.50 grammes; temperature 100°. Stomach contents: mollusca and sand. This bird had a few feathers edged rufous on the back. (2) Total length 16.50 cm.; spread of wings 33 cm.; weight 36 grammes; temperature 104°. Stomach contents: sand and shellgrit. This bird had a few reddish feathers on the neck and three feathers edged with rufous on the back. (3) Total length 16.50 cm.; spread of wings 32.50 cm.; weight 32 grammes. Stomach contents: a small bivalve and vegetable matter. This bird had more reddish feathers on the neck than (2) and numerous feathers edged rufous on the back. (4) Total length 15.5 cm.; spread of wings 32 cm.; weight 29 grammes. Stomach contents: sand and small black seeds. This bird had more red on neck than (3), with red on sides of face and crown of head.

*Erolia acuminata*, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (334). This species was met with everywhere, mostly in non-breeding plumage, though a number showed various stages of the nuptial dress. Dr. Morgan saw one bird at Panmuring Point in full breeding plumage. This species could be more nearly approached than any of the other migratory waders, and on flushing would generally fly a little distance away. Four specimens were obtained, three of them in non-breeding plumage. (1) ♂—iris very dark brown; bill greenish black, base lighter; legs and feet light olive green; inside mouth dull black; total length 22 cm.; spread of wings 43 cm.; weight 92.50 grammes; temperature 108° (as the bird was wounded and flew some distance before falling, that may account for the high temperature). Stomach contents: sand, small mollusca and vegetable matter. (2) ♀—legs and feet dull light greenish; other soft parts similar to (1); total length 21 cm.; spread of wings 41 cm.; weight 63.50 grammes; temperature 102°. Stomach contents: sand and vegetable matter. This bird showed more feathers than usual edged rufous on the back, and had also chestnut and black inner secondaries and axillaries. (3) ♀—inside mouth greenish black; other soft parts similar to (1); total length 20.50 cm.; spread of wings 40.50 cm.; weight 54 grammes. Stomach contents: sand, vegetable matter, and many small seeds. (4) Soft parts similar to (1); total length 20 cm.; spread of wings 41 cm.; weight 61 grammes.

Waders sp. 2,422. The species were not identified, but the greatest number would be Red-necked Stints and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. Some Curlew-Sandpipers and Red-capped Dotterels were no doubt in company with the others. I saw only one large flock flying high.

*Egretta alba*, White Egret (13). Four were seen on Hindmarsh Island, three of them in teatrees near the Mundoo Barrage, and a flock of nine in trees on Goose Island.

*Notophox novae-hollandiae*, White-faced Heron (105). Met with on each day. Fifty-three were seen in the Tauwitchere Channel.

*Nycticorax caledonicus*, Nankeen Night-Heron (14). These were flushed from the teatrees in a swamp on Hindmarsh Island near the Mundoo Barrage.

*Cereopsis novae-hollandiae*, Cape Barren Goose (2). On the shore of Mundoo Island, opposite Lucerne Island, at the mouth of the Mundoo Channel.

*Chenopsis atrata*, Black Swan (861). There were birds of this season amongst the number. One flock of over a hundred was seen at Panmuring Point.

*Casarca tadornoides*, Mountain Duck (163).

*Anas superciliosa*, Black Duck (17).

*Querquedula* sp., Teal (52).

*Biziura lobata*, Musk Duck (3).

Duck sp. (19).

Ducks were very scarce and very wary. None flew near the motor-launch. On inquiry from some of the fishermen about the scarcity of Ducks we were told that "they had heard there were thousands down the Coorong." This reply seems to me to be on a par with "You ought to have been here last week."

*Circus approximans*, Swamp Harrier (1). This bird was seen near Deep Creek on Reedy Island No. 2.

*Haliastur sphenurus*, Whistling Eagle (11). One was soaring about 200 feet up over the Goolwa Channel near Dunn's Lagoon, and was being attacked by a Silver Gull. The Eagle easily evaded the attacks, and suddenly "nose-dived" some 50 feet, when the gull at once flew to earth. At Deep Creek a Whistling Eagle flew down to a stranded dead fish, and was feeding off it for some time.

*Falco cenchroides*, Nankeen Kestrel (6). Seen at Goolwa, Hindmarsh Island and Younghusband Peninsula.

*Kakatoe raseicapilla*, Galah (22). This flock was seen near Dunn's Lagoon.

*Neophema elegans*, Elegant Parrot (97). These birds were seen in the wild tobacco bushes (*Nicotiana*) on the western shore

of Dunn's Lagoon. They were feeding on the seeds of a plant which Professor J. B. Cleland has identified as *Heliotropium europaeum*, sometimes called potato weed, which was growing profusely in the locality. Many of the birds roosted at night in the teatrees on Goose Island, whence they were seen leaving at 6.16 a.m. on 6th April.

*Dacelo gigas*, Laughing Kookaburra (1). This bird was heard calling from some big gumtrees on Hindmarsh Island, near Rankine's Ferry.

*Hirundo neoxena*, Welcome-Swallow (40). Four were seen at the Mundoo Barrage, two on Hindmarsh Island, three at Dunn's Lagoon, six at Goolwa, fifteen on the aerial of a wireless at the fishermen's camp near the Murray Mouth, and ten at our anchorage at Panmuring Point—two coming on board the motor-launch as soon as we arrived, and these two were feeding a young bird sitting on another boat.

*Rhipidura leucophrys*, Willie Wagtail (3). Noted at Dunn's Lagoon.

*Colluricincla harmonica*, Grey Strike-Thrush (1). Heard at Dunn's Lagoon.

*Grallina cyanoleuca*, Magpie-Lark (14). Four in the Goolwa Channel, one on Hindmarsh Island and nine about Dunn's Lagoon.

*Epthianura albifrons*, White-fronted Chat (38). One was seen near the Mundoo Barrage, 27 near Dunn's Lagoon, two on Hindmarsh Island, and eight on Tauwitchere Island.

*Dasyornis broadbenti*, Rufous Bristle Bird (3). These birds called a few times at Panmuring Point (Godfrey's Camp), in the late afternoon of 6th April. This indicates that the species is about five miles, in a direct line, from the Murray Mouth, and four miles nearer to it than the previous records at Bedford's Camp (see "S.A. Ornithologist, Vol. VIII, pp. 75-95). The only accounts of its occurrence along the Coorong are from Younghusband Peninsula. It has not yet been found on the mainland side of the Coorong (which is, of course, a different type of country from that on the Peninsula), nor does it appear to have crossed the River Murray to Sir Richard's Peninsula. Dr. Morgan has seen the species in south-east South Australia in the sandhill coast country as far as the Glenelg River.

*Malurus cyaneus*, Superb Blue-Wren (7). These were seen on Hindmarsh Island near the Mundoo Barrage.

*Zosterops halmaturina*, Grey-backed Silver-eye (26). All these birds were noted at Panmuring Point in the shrubs close to the shore-line.

*Meliphaga virescens*, Singing Honeyeater (39). One was noted on Mundoo Island, near the Barrage, eight near Dunn's Lagoon, and 30 at Panmuring Point. At the last place the birds were very tame, two flew on to the motor-launch and another bird was catching insects on the dinghy made fast to the stern.

*Anthochaera carunculata*, Red Wattle Bird (4). Two were heard on Hindmarsh Island and two near Dunn's Lagoon.

*Acanthagenys rufogularis*, Spiny-checked Honeyeater (6). They were seen at Panmuring Point, and were very tame.

*Anthus australis*, Pipit (4). Three were seen on Hindmarsh Island and one near Dunn's Lagoon.

*Corvus coronoides*, Raven (146). A flock of 138 were seen on Mundoo Island near the Barrage, seven near Dunn's Lagoon and one on Hindmarsh Island.

*Cracticus torquatus*, Grey Butcher-Bird (3). All noted at Panmuring Point.

*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*, White-backed Magpie (39). Six were seen on Hindmarsh Island, one near Jacob's Bight, nine about the Mundoo Channel, 22 near Dunn's Lagoon, and one at Panmuring Point.

On the way from Glen Osmond to Goolwa 17 species totalling 81 individuals were seen—Purple-crowned Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*) (5), Galah (1), Adelaide Rosella (*Platycercus adelaidae*) (4), \*Laughing Kookaburra (2), \*Welcome Swallow (1), \*Willie Wagtail (2), Scarlet Robin (*Petroica multicolor*) (1), Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina novae-hollandiae*) (1), Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) (1), \*Superb Blue Wren (9), White-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga pericillata*) (1), Yellow-winged Honeyeater (*Meliornis novae-hollandiae*) (10), Noisy Miner (*Myzantha melanocephala*) (7), \*Red Wattle-Bird (6), Chestnut-eared Finch (*Taeniopygia castanotis*) (3), Red-browed Finch (*Aegintha temporalis*) (3), \*White-backed Magpie (24).

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\* These species were also noted on the motor-launch trip.