

KUSS—Birds of Lowbank District.

Further Notes on Birds of the Lowbank District.

By Max S. Kuss. 11/2/1934.

Just before leaving Lowbank for Murray Bridge, I noted three species, which I had not previously recorded:—

Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*).—On 3rd October, 1933, a single bird of this species was seen amongst a flock of the Black Cormorant (*P. carbo*) and the Little Black Cormorant (*P. ater*), which were following a school of fish in a large lagoon connected with the River Murray. The birds were so eager and intent upon diving and swallowing their prey that they approached within a few yards of me as I sat motionless on a log jutting out into the water. As soon as I was detected the Black and Little Black rose in haste, but the Pied bird seemed curious and hesitated, craning its neck and twisting its head from side to side as it examined me, and finally joined the others in flight. About five chains further along the bank I came upon another Pied Cormorant perched on the horizontal limb of a dry gum standing in water, and about 15 feet above the water's surface. This bird acted similarly to the first one, and did not flush until I threw a stick at it. The behaviour of these two Pied was in strong contrast to that of the other two species, which are very shy through being often shot at by fishermen.

Striped Honeyeater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*).—A pair of this species was found in mallee scrub, three-quarters of a mile from the River on 3rd October, 1933. The nest was also discovered suspended in a very leafy and hanging branch of a mallee, about six feet from the ground. On 12th October I again visited the nest, hoping to find eggs, but was still too early. The nest was white in colour, apparently built of sheep's wool, interwoven with plant down and fine rootlets. I did not disturb the nest.

Red-capped Dotterel (*Charadrius ruficapillus*).—A pair was noticed in about 1½ inches of water a foot from the edge of a shallow lagoon. When stationary they were difficult to see against the background of muddy, brownish water and washed-up weeds. When followed they did not fly, but persistently ran, ahead of me, keeping just within the water.

Magpies (*Gymnorhina*).—Mating of a Black-backed (*tibicen*) with a White-backed (*hypoleuca*).—On 28th August, 1933, I began climbing to what I thought to be a Black-backed Magpie's nest (White-backed Magpies were rare this year). The bird

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flushed when my attention was concentrated upon climbing, but I caught a glimpse of what seemed to be a white back. Although I waited for half an hour the bird did not reappear, so I decided to return later. On 31st August I again found the bird sitting, and this time there was no doubt about the white back. As I was taking some measurements both birds were noticed approaching, but they did not come within several chains of the tree containing the nest. They alighted on the ground, and whilst watching me pretended to seek food. My attention was attracted to what appeared to be a black-backed male, but as I had never before seen the two species mating I wished to be certain, so attempted to get nearer, but was unsuccessful. I returned again, on 1st September, having borrowed a pair of binoculars, which, however, proved unnecessary. The birds were evidently becoming concerned about my visits, and showed signs of aggression, particularly the male. There was no doubt about the white-backed female (back slightly greyish) and the black-backed male. The nest was situated 17 feet from the ground in a leafy offshoot from the main trunk of a mallee growing at the edge of scrub and plain, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the River. It was an open cup-shaped structure, consisting of an outer casing of coarse dry sticks and twigs, with an inner cup of finer sticks, bark, string, cloth, horsedung, and mustard stalks, and lined with horsehair, wool, and small pieces of bagging; diameter over all, 12; internal diameter, 6; height, 6; depth, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Three eggs in set, two being .6 incubation and one infertile, with typical Magpie markings—ground colour, light bluish-green with brownish and greyish-brown markings.

Whistling Eagles (*Haliastur sphenurus*) at Lowbank in 1933. —This species is commonly seen and heard, but actually it is not numerous. Often soaring almost out of sight it still adheres to the River, circling round and round, never far from the stream. It seems strange that it apparently does not increase in numbers, although it breeds locally. The same nests are used year after year, and I have never seen a new one built. A few relics of old abandoned nests remain, and it is evident that these are very old, possibly twenty years or even more, for they appear no older now than they did eight years ago. I have tested the stability of a few structures by sitting in, and even jumping on, them without inflicting damage. Except for size there is very little variation in the nests. They are usually wedged into the angle of a three- or four-pronged fork, and securely lashed to each prong. With one exception every nest found was in a tall gum-

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tree, either in water at the very edge of the River or a back-water; the exception was about three chains from the River. The birds utilize the nests throughout the year, and when not breeding evidently carry their prey aloft to devour. I have found such remains as rabbits' bones and fur, lobster claws, fish scales and bones, also small pebbles. Out of the breeding season the tops of the nests have a worn appearance, and are flat, due no doubt to constant usage by the birds. When preparing for the eggs the top is slightly hollowed out and a layer of green gum-leaves placed in the depression. These seem to be the only annual renovations made. Robbing the nests of eggs does not appear to deter the birds, for they soon lay again. How often this would occur I did not have an opportunity to test. In two instances the second clutch consisted of only one egg, whereas the first clutch contained two eggs. The first egg found in 1933 was laid on 8th August. The following are the measurements and contents of nests climbed to:—

(1) Nest 65 feet from ground; diameter over all, 28; diameter of leaves lining, 10; height, 14; internal depth, 3 inches. Contents, 10/8/1933, one egg; 12/8/1933, 2 eggs; incubation, .0; 22/9/1933, 1 egg, second clutch, incubation, .4.

(2) 64 feet from ground; diameter over all, 22; leaves lining, 8; height, 22; depth, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Contents, 16/8/1933, 2 eggs; incubation, .1.

(3) 57 feet from ground; diameter over all, 34; leaves lining, 16; height, 19; depth, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Contents, 2/9/1933, 2 eggs; incubation, .0; 10/10/1933, 2 eggs, second clutch, just hatching.

(4) 84 feet from the ground; diameter, oval, 30 x 25; leaves lining, 11; height 17; depth, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Contents, 2/9/1933, 2 eggs; incubation, .4.

(5) 72 feet from ground; in same tree as (4), and same birds, but the nest on a different limb; diameter, oval, 23 x 20; leaves lining, $7\frac{1}{2}$; height, 17; depth, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Contents, 2/10/1933, 1 egg; incubation, .1.

(6) 61 feet from the water; diameter over all, 21; leaves lining, 9; height, 16; depth, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Contents, 19/9/1933, two unfledged young.

(7) 53 feet from water; diameter over all, 27; leaves lining, $10\frac{1}{2}$; height, 19; depth, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Contents, 10/10/1933, two young about a week old.

Three nests climbed to were found to be not in use. They were 31, 81, and 73 feet from the ground respectively, the second and third being built in the same tree.