
CONDON—*Pied Cormorant, Dusky Moorhen, and Starling.*

Notes on the Pied Cormorant, Dusky Moorhen, and Starling.

By H. T. Condon.

Phalacrocorax varius (Pied Cormorant), Nesting on No. 0 Back Lead Beacon, Outer Harbor, S.A. (Plate I.).

Cormorants were first noted by Mr. T. Justice nesting on the No. 0 Back Lead Beacon, A.G.A. Light, at the Outer Harbor in 1931, when two nests were seen, and again in 1933 (twelve nests). No nests were there in 1932. The beacon was visited on 26th May, 1934. The structure is 400 feet from the eastern revetment, and 400 feet from the seashore at low tide. Nests and birds could be seen from the shore. One nest was precariously balanced on the end of a jutting piece of two-inch piping, three feet long, which formerly served as a handrail, but had long since been discarded, and pushed over the side. The beacon, which is totally unprotected from wind or storm, is about seventy feet in height, and a large white diamond-shaped latticed "sight" board is attached to the upper half of it. On approaching the light the birds were identified as the Pied Cormorant, the orange spot in front of the eye being very noticeable. In all, seventeen nests were counted. Some of the birds left the beacon as we neared it, and came flying overhead, but several remained on the nests, and showed little fear on being molested. The young could be heard making a screeching noise like young Parrots.



Plate I.—Pied Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax varius*) nesting on Beacon.

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When the top of the structure was reached all the adult birds left it, except one which remained in the nest on the end of the old railing mentioned above, and no amount of disturbing would induce it to leave. A thick white coating of excreta from the birds covered the whole of the upper portion of the structure. Occasionally an old bird would return and perch for a minute on the far side of the platform and utter a duck-like drumming sound. This was repeated until we left, when the birds settled down again.

Nine nests were placed at irregular intervals on a narrow circular platform nineteen inches wide, and eight feet in diameter. Nine inches above this was a smaller inner platform four feet in diameter, and on this were placed two nests. All these nests were similarly constructed of mangrove sticks and twigs, seaweed, and a few feathers, all coated with white excrement. The average outer diameter was fifteen inches, and inner depth two inches. One nest appeared old and possibly discarded. Two other nests were placed in the steel framework, which supported the light above. One was actually built against the northern side of the light, 6 feet 6 inches above the platform, and the other nest (new) was four feet below it. Three other nests, which appeared to be fairly new, were built on the framework below the outer platform. These nests were all fairly bulky, and from six to nine inches in depth over all, the seaweed being still green in colour, and fairly fresh.

The nest near the light contained one egg. Two newly-born young were in one of the nests on the upper platform. These were completely naked, of brownish black colour on the body and feet, the eyes were unopened, and the head and bill brownish pink in colour. The other nest contained one egg, which was taken. Young in various stages were in some of the nests on the lower platform. One nest contained two large feathered young, probably able to fly, but a little uncertain of their capabilities. Another contained two half-grown chicks, covered with down, and unable to fly, but with head and face bare, these parts, as well as the beak, being yellow in colour. Still other stages were seen, one nest containing two large naked chicks with yellow heads, and another nest with one large chick and one egg. Three nests contained one egg, one nest contained two, and one had no eggs. The eggs were covered with a white coating of lime, which was chipped in places, exposing the pale bluish ground colour, and were very dirty. The nest

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on the old railing with the bird still sitting contained two eggs, while those below the platform contained two, none, and two eggs respectively. Various fish remains and the remains of a dead chick littered the top platforms, and possibly contributed to the pungent odour.

Gallinula tenebrosa, Dusky Moorhen.

A bird was picked up dead by me on North Terrace, Adelaide, near Morphett Street and the Railway Station, beneath the overhead wires of the tram service at about 8.50 a.m. on 23rd August, 1934. The body was still warm, and there was slight blood at the nostrils. ♂; the whole of the plumage was dark slaty-grey, with the exception of the back and scapulars, which were dusky olive brown, and the primaries and tail, which were dark brown; the under tail-coverts—central ones black, lateral ones white; bill, posterior halves of the mandibles, including the front edge of the nostrils, pomegranate-red; anterior halves bright yellow; frontal plate orange, but lighter in colour in the middle; iris, hazel; legs and feet, greenish yellow, darker at the joints and on the toes; soles of feet dark slate; total length, 43.2 cm.; span of outstretched wings, 65.5 cm. The garter above the knee, when noticed, had faded in colour, but is given by Gould as yellow and scarlet.

Sturnus vulgaris, Starling, and the Grasshoppers.

Evidence of the widespread grasshopper plague was seen on Friday, 28th December, 1934, near Murray Bridge. Great numbers of the insects were noticed adhering to the radiators and windcreens of all cars which entered the town from the east.

On leaving Murray Bridge in the afternoon at 2 p.m. great clouds of grasshoppers were met with on the road when only three miles out of the town. At first their presence was quite unsuspected, but they would rise in a dense swarm on the approach of a vehicle, and after flying a few feet, would alight on the road again, as soon as it had passed. They were also in countless numbers in the paddocks on the roadside, and apparently extended a considerable distance along the road towards Taillem Bend, judging from the appearance of cars seen coming from that direction. Specimens taken showed them to be the Common Plague Grasshopper (*Chortoicetes terminii*-

fera), which is about one-and-a-half inches long, and a smaller variety than the European Plague Grasshopper, which is also found in South Australia. Suddenly, while watching the grasshoppers on the road, an enormous flock of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was noticed in an adjacent paddock about a chain from the road. As one watched, the Starlings, which were to be seen in hundreds, and probably thousands, would rise into the air spasmodically as one bird. At the same time the glint of the wings of grasshoppers could be seen as a huge cloud of them rose to escape the Starlings. After flying a few feet they would alight again in the paddock. The Starlings also descended, each individual having apparently captured an insect for itself. However, in a moment or two more Starlings would rise up, and another cloud of grasshoppers would move before them, to alight a few feet away.

This performance continued intermittently for more than a quarter of an hour, and it seemed apparent that the Starlings had not long discovered the grasshoppers, but were determined to make the most of their opportunities.

The significance of the countless numbers of birds in the flock was not fully realized until one got nearer to them; but this was really a most unpleasant task, as it was impossible to advance a foot without disturbing the grasshoppers, which lay thick on the ground, and which were capable of inflicting painful blows, as they flew blindly and aimlessly in all directions. For this reason also, it was impossible to travel very far along the road, and consequently no other flocks of Starlings were seen.
