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## Southern Movements of Northern Birds.

By J. Neil McGilp. 25/7/1937.

For years I have been interested to note that several of our well-known northern birds were gradually working in a southerly direction. It has often given me quite a thrill to suddenly come across a bird, which previously I had considered a permanent resident of our northern regions, where I had spent much of my life and knew the birds well. In recent years several of the hitherto northern species have become fairly common within a few miles of Adelaide, and we might well seek for a reason for this definite southern spread. It is, of course, well known that many birds migrate from the north to the south, but return in due course of the migration—I refer particularly to the Bee-eaters (*Merops ornatus*) Wood Swallows (*Artamus*), Fairy Martins (*Hylochelidon ariel*), Trillers (*Lalage tricolor*), and such like birds. Then again we have the irregular visits of the Shell Parrots (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), Cockatoo Parrots (*Leptolophus hollandicus*) Water-Hens (*Tribonyx ventralis*), and other birds; these are probably driven from the north when the seasons are so bad that the birds move south in search of food, but they return to the interior when climatic conditions and the food-supply improve.

Our interest should be aroused when we see birds such as the Galah (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*), the Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*), and some of the Northern Hawks becoming numerous about Adelaide, for until recent years these seemed to be confined to the north. There surely must be some reason for this change of habitat. As a resident of the interior for many years, and being interested in natural history, I am definitely of opinion that the southern trek of birds is coincident with the drying up of the interior. The ever-recurring droughts and the regular stocking of the country with sheep and cattle have so changed the face of the land that the birds have had to move south so

frequently in order to secure food that some at least of them have thought it better to stay south. With more reliable breeding seasons their numbers have increased rapidly and they have spread to localities quite foreign to the species.

I have known the Galah since about the year 1890, when it was my good fortune to see the first pair of birds noted west of Port Augusta. Even in those days I was interested in birds and had a very taking habit so far as eggs were concerned, and I was very delighted when I saw two grey and pink Cockatoos in, at that time, an abandoned cultivation paddock on Carrierloo Station some thirty-six miles west of Port Augusta. I well recollect that we called the birds the Silver Cockatoo, and that in August of that year I obtained the service of a black boy to climb to their nest in a hollow branch of a red-gumtree near the old Cattle Well in Knucklekidney Creek, and the pleasure I had in adding four eggs to my collection, for from the information I could obtain the birds were the only ones anywhere in that locality. I also remember being soundly rated by the station married couple for taking the eggs, as they were watching the nest in the hope of getting the young birds, and how pleased the old lady was when I later told her the birds were nesting again, and when late in October she secured three young birds, two of which were successfully reared.

In 1891, on my way to college in Adelaide, I was delighted to again meet with the "Silver Cockatoo"—a small flock of five or six birds was seen in a gum creek near Eureka. For many years I noted that flock until it grew to a hundred or more strong, but failed to note the species at any place nearer the city.

It was not until about sixteen or seventeen years ago that I noticed a definite moving south of the species. In the meantime I had spent many years in the far north and realized that the once Silver Cockatoo became the harmful Galah. I had suffered much from its bad habit of polluting water in the sheep troughs. About eight years or so ago I remember the derisive laughter of members of the Stockowners Association in Adelaide when I proposed that the Government be asked to declare the bird an unprotected bird, but when I spoke of my experiences in the north, and was supported by other pastoralists from the interior, I received permission to approach the Minister of Industry and succeeded in having the Galah proclaimed a noxious bird. I remember telling Mr. Cowan, the Minister at the time, that in a few years the Galah would cause destruction about Adelaide, and I have it on good authority that to-day much

damage is being done by the birds in the farming and gardening communities.

With the southern movement of the birds, there appears to be little, if any, diminution of numbers in the interior, for just recently during a trip in the far north the Soil Erosion Committee noticed vast flocks, and in one locality noted thousands of the birds feeding upon the seeds of the Mitchell grass. In most cases the Galahs were accompanied by Bare-eyed Cockatoos (*Kakatoe sanguinea*), which were, if anything, in the greater proportion.

The great increase of these northern Cockatoos is probably due to the presence of hundreds of permanent waters put down by the pastoralists to water sheep and cattle. In earlier years on the drying up of surface waters lying about after rains the birds were driven on to the permanent waterholes and springs. Here the aborigines, who lived greatly upon the eggs and young of these birds, and other natural enemies took such toll upon the Cockatoos that they could not breed as freely as they now do when on account of the numerous stock waters they can spread all over the country.

The Cockatoos of the interior are very hardy, and very few deaths occur in their ranks when terrific loss is noticeable in many other species of birds during a severe heat wave.

It is regrettable that these birds cause damage, for I know of no finer spectacle than a company flight of Galahs and Cockatoos. The glorious sight must be seen to be appreciated. As they fly in vast numbers in the bright sunlight one moment the cloud of birds appears to be bespangled with silver and white and the next second as they turn or twist the colour changes to pink and white, for every bird changes position in unison. As they wheel and dive about the ever-changing flashes of colour create a charming picture more beautiful than my pen can paint.

Another bird that calls for comment is the Crested Pigeon. For many years it was rarely seen within fifty miles or more from Adelaide, whereas to-day it has become quite numerous in the vicinity of the city being as equally at home on the hillsides as the seashore. The southern movement is not confined to the metropolitan region, for three years ago, when collecting in the mallee in Victoria, several Victorian naturalists told me that although some of them had visited that locality for ten to fifteen years they had hitherto not seen the bird there. Last year the birds were still more numerous and were breeding freely all through the mallee.

It is pleasing to see the increase of this pigeon, for I do not think that it can do much harm.

I have been pleased to note an increase of the little Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*) close to Adelaide. It is fairly common in the teatree belts along our coastline, where it breeds. For many years I visited the locality without seeing a single bird until about eight years ago.

The subject of the southern "trek" is of great interest to me, and I hope others will make records of all northern species they note "down on a visit to town." I do not blame them for the interior is not the same place the species formerly looked upon as home.

Having found the advantage of the more southerly climate and conditions, the birds, like humans, will prefer to remain in the south.

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