

Birds of the Florieton District.

By N. Hiles Pearse.

Letters of 9/1/1938 and 25/3/1938.

Black-tailed Native Hen (*Tribonyx ventralis*).—These were with us in large flocks earlier in the season when there was a lush growth of herbage. They only appear also in large numbers in a very good season, and congregate around the watering places. They taught me something this season which I was not aware of before, and that is they are great killers of grasshoppers (locusts). We had a mild plague of grasshoppers and these Native Hens did excellent service—also, of course, Crows (*Corvus*), Magpies (*Gymnorhina*), Starlings (*Sturnus*), and Sparrows (*Passer*).

Southern Stone-Curlew (*Burhinus magirostris*).—A neighbour found a pair of young ones, and their weird notes have been heard nightly for the first time for years, showing that foxes must be scarce.

Fork-tailed Kite (*Milvus migrans*).—There has been flying around for weeks past a dark hawk, much darker than a Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*) and quite recently it has been joined by a mate which was probably sitting. The bird has become very tame, and when I throw scraps from the meat-house it instantly swoops down on them. It has incidentally swooped on my chickens, too, without success. When perched it shows a light shoulder on the wing. 25/3/1938.—They were breeding, as I surmised, and eventually there were four in place of the two, but only the original two birds are with us now. They are definitely fork-tailed in repose, but when flying the tail appears fan-shaped. They are soundless, unlike the Whistling Eagles, which are very noisy. (Mr. J. Neil McGilp identified the species.—Editors.)

Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*)?—Just recently, too, a smaller very dark Hawk, very dark on top and underneath, but shaded lighter on wing edges underneath flew over.

Cockatiel (*Leptolophus hollandicus*).—These appeared in flocks from just a few birds up to twenty or thirty. They only appear in these numbers in a really good season, at other times they are rarely seen, and yet they are not shy breeders, as I heard of several nests in hollows with four to five chicks in them.

Adelaide Rosella (*Platycercus adelaidae*).—They are increasing in numbers and attacked the green pears.

Budgerygah (*Melopsittacus undulatus*).—Only present in small flocks this spring, but those that came here nested.

Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*).—I saw two specimens in the mallee scrub recently, apparently young birds, as their plumage was a slaty blue grey without any defined lacing. They sat calmly on two low limbs and let me ride under them. They are queer-looking birds and could easily be mistaken for broken parts of a tree; presumably this is part of nature's protective scheme.

Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*).—We cleaned a haystack some time ago, and the supporting posts were left standing. It was rather amusing for weeks afterwards to see a Kookaburra perched on each pole awaiting the appearance of an unwary mouse, truly an example of patience on a monument in the bird kingdom. Woe betide the mouse that did pop out, as these clumsy-looking birds can drop on their prey like a flash.

Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*).—This species was here in the spring.

Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*).—Some time ago I was driving sheep with a motor-car; whilst the car was stationary for a few moments, a Willie Wagtail flew on to the bonnet and peered at me through the screen.

Shy Ground-Wren (*Hylacola cauta*).—I saw a single specimen of a very dark wren-like bird with cocked tail and a definite red patch on back at the base of the tail. It was in thick recently-lopped and dry mallee tops. I could not see it again, but it is the first of its kind I have seen here.

Brown Songlark (*Cinchorhamphus cruralis*) and Rufous Songlark (*C. mathewsi*).—In the spring there were scores of Brown Songlarks and the smaller one, the Rufous, which perched on trees a lot. Whilst they were with us the air was full of song. Both birds had the same action in rising.

Blue-and-White Wren (*Malurus cyanotus*).—A specimen flew up right close to me on my side of the motor-car, almost within reach when driving the car through big saltbush recently. It was a beautiful study of blue and white, but there was

definitely no white on the back; the two wings were almost wholly white.

Grey Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*).—My friend still takes his scraps at the meat-house. I was glad to read in W. Hatfield's book, "I Find Australia," that he had heard all the English song-birds, including the Nightingale, but that he gave the palm for melodious notes to the Australian Butcher-Bird. I have not heard the birds he enumerated, but I must admit the Butcher-Bird takes a lot of beating, except when angry, when the note becomes quite different and is a very harsh one.

Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*).—I also have a team of Black-backed Magpies which come daily to the meat-house—an adult pair and two young ones. The male lost half a leg in a rabbit-trap, but looks none the worse for it. They are rarely in sight when I enter the meat-house, but as soon as the chopper or saw is operated they arrive in force. They call for scraps and hop on them as soon as thrown out. They are very tame.
