

Holiday Notes on North-Western Swamps.

By Walter Cain, Port Augusta.

Lake Salmon and Seepage Swamp were again visited on Foundation Holiday in January last (31st). Lake Salmon was almost dry at the time of this visit, and although a fine array of wildfowl was at the Seepage Swamp nothing of note was recorded but a pair of White-breasted Sea-Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*), which have made a temporary home at the swamp. They seemed to be very quiet, were first seen on 11th December, 1937, and were still there on 26th March, 1938. One of the pair secured one of our "winged" ducks on 31st January.

We had an interesting trip at Easter, 1938, from 14th to 17th April inclusive, but the weather was unkind. We left Port Augusta on Thursday night, 14th April, and camped on the road through Yudnapinna Station. On Friday morning, 15th April, we motored on to South Gap, passing through Bookaloo Station (fifty miles) at 8 a.m. and arrived at Whittata Station (sixty-three miles) at 9.15 a.m. Fortunately, we found Mr. Harold Opie at home. He reported that a colony of Banded Stilts (*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*) and Red-necked Avocets (*Recurvirostra novae-hollandiae*) nested on islands in the Seepage Swamp, Whittata Station, in February, 1937; most probably the latter species was the flock from Lake Salmon which we were looking for at Lake Torrens and Salt Holes in March, 1937 (see page 97 of this Volume). Mr. Opie said that there was a good hatch of Banded Stilts and Red-necked Avocets, the birds leaving the nesting-site when the young were reared. I saw the nesting-site, a splendid spot. The dam was submerged at the time of our visit; only the two banks were visible, and they formed ideal islands, the approach being through a narrow strip of water, I should say about 100 yards, and four feet deep. Mr. Opie pointed out the birds to me by the illustrations in his copy of Cayley's work, and I have no doubt about his identification of the nesting species being correct. A young Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*) was seen on Whittata.

Leaving Whittata at 10.15 a.m. we pushed on to Burgoyne Swamp (seventy-two miles), a fine home for wildfowl. We did not stay, but motored on to Canegrass Swamp (ninety miles); the boundary fences of South Gap and Pernatty Stations run through this swamp. Toby's Hut is at the western end. It is not a very inviting residence, still, owing to the rough weather, it was very welcome. After dinner we went to Toby's Swamp about half a mile west of the Hut. There is a large dam in this water, but it was submerged at this time and a fine lot of Ducks were on the swamp, which is unique, too, as it is enclosed by a belt of stunted Red Gumtrees (*Eucalyptus rostrata*), a setting which has no duplicate in the swamps of the North-West that I have seen. Freckled Ducks (*Stictonetta naevosa*), the duck essentially of the open waters, predominated at Toby's, and we secured sufficient for our larder. I might add that Friday was a very sultry day with a storm brewing in the west. The change arrived at midnight, when a westerly buster came up and blew hard till we left the Hut on Sunday (17th April), at 10.15 a.m.

Canegrass Swamp is an ideal place for nesting, but nothing was found there. I saw a male Turquoise Wren (*Malurus callainus*), but failed to find any nest or female bird. I had the field-glasses on this male bird—the black on the back seemed to come well down to the base of the tail. In the bushes on the sandhills I noted a dozen or more *Maluri*, but there was no male in mature dress to furnish identity—one of these birds, noticed as it fluttered from bush to bush, had a well-defined blaze of light blue in the centre of its tail.

We arrived back at Burgoyne Swamp at noon, had lunch, and secured a few Freckled Ducks; all but two were in moult.

I had an interesting experience at a dam near the Burgoyne Swamp. Some humourist had hung a bullock's skull on a dead myall, or I should say "botanically dead"; on looking into the skull, out of curiosity, out flushed an Eastern Whiteface (*Aphelocephala leucopsis*), and in the brain cavity was a snug nest containing one egg. In the lower part of the skull was another nest with four chicks in it—these were, I think, Zebra Finches (*Taeniopygia castanotis*), although no parent bird was present. Why should these birds select such extraordinary nesting-sites when suitable "natural" places were available?

At the Burgoyne Swamp I found a pair of Turquoise Wrens in the lignums (*Muehlenbeckia*), and after a hunt found the nest with three chicks about a week old. The nest was three feet two inches from the ground, the highest site of a *Malurus* nest

that I have seen. I brought the parent birds back to the bush by causing the chicks to squeak. The male was a fine specimen, but the black on the back was only a broad band between the wings; still, with the field-glasses observations could not be judged accurately, as the birds moved so quickly.

The conditions in the scrub were anything but pleasant, with strong winds and occasional showers, and as everything seemed to point to a wet night we made for Port Augusta, arriving there at 9 p.m. via the "Beda"; not even a Grebe (*Podiceps*) was to be seen at either Bulcarrow or Black Swamps, both fine sheets of water. All the water-fowl seemed to be at The Gap and Pernatty country. At all swamps, etc., under review the water was perfectly fresh, with the exception of some shallow spots in Canegrass Swamp, which were turning brackish, and Lake Salmon remnant was polluted by bullocks' ordure.
