

FURTHER NOTES ON EARLY ORNITHOLOGY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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In my Presidential Address to the R.A.O.U. (Emu, xxxvi, 1937) I gave an account of the history of ornithology in South Australia. The following further references have come under my notice.

1838-1839: JAMES C. HAWKER.

The following references to birds occur in James C. Hawker's "Early Experiences in South Australia," 1899:—

On his arrival at Adelaide in October, 1838, in the "Pestonjee Bomanjee" with Governor Gawler, some of the party walked to Adelaide from Holdfast Bay and then returned to the latter place to rejoin the ship. A gale, however, had sprung up, and they had to camp as best they could on the shore with very little food. Next morning, whilst waiting some hours for the boats to come, several of the men set off with guns, and returned with a good supply of parrots and quail, which they proceeded to cook (p. 7). In December, 1838, when employed with Mr. Maclaren's party surveying near Brighton and Glenelg, their food was supplemented by parrots and quail which Hawker shot (p. 36). A little later at Happy Valley, Hawker notes that bronze-pigeons, cockatoos, parrots and quail were plentiful. "On one occasion I had strolled rather far after some pigeons, when a laughing jackass gave his unearthly laugh, and immediately several others joined in chorus. Not having the slightest idea that the birds were the cause of the horrible din, I made sure some natives must be making a hostile demonstration, and made tracks for the open ground. No human beings showing up, I cautiously looked up in the trees, thinking a spear might come from there, when a bird flying amongst the branches suddenly began to laugh, and relieved me of the idea that natives were in the vicinity" (p. 36).

Whilst stationed at the Onkaparinga (The Horseshoe) surveying in 1839, emu meat was often eaten when other meat was difficult to obtain. The meat itself was rather coarse, but the liver was palatable (p. 45).

"Emus were just as plentiful as kangaroos about the Maclaren Plains, and they evinced

great curiosity when a human being came near them, especially if he was on horseback. On many occasions when riding without my dogs in pretty open ground, I came across a large flock of emus, and almost invariably they would come so close that my horse was frightened. Their gambols were most ludicrous, and they would keep up with me for miles, even when I was going at a gallop. When I first came to Maclaren Plains I caught a young emu, and he afforded great amusement not only to myself but also to my men. His rapid growth was astonishing, and the pranks that he played were more like those of a monkey than a respectable bird. He was perpetually up to some kind of mischief, though generally in a harmless way. I named him Ugly, and he always answered to his name. My dog fraternised with him in spite of his tricks. His great delight was when he found a dog asleep under the lee of one of the tents, to go close up to him on tip-toe, and, being assured that he was fast asleep, he would give one of his ears a smart peck, and be round the corner of the tent before the dog could realise what had bitten him. My poor old show dog, which had no chance of paying him off, got most of the attention in this respect. Having played the joke one day on my fastest dog, and being unable to get away in time, he was seized by the tail, and lost a good many of his feathers, and he kept clear of that dog in future. He was not even respectful to me, for if he could manage to get into my tent about sunrise he would stretch his long neck up to my hammock, and peck at my head until I woke up and spoke to him. My cook, Bill, was an old man-of-war's man, and had to leave service owing to a fall from aloft which caused a compound fracture of one leg, and resulted in permanent lameness. If he left a pot uncovered by the fire, Ugly would go quietly up; whip out the contents if it was meat, run in and out of the tents, with poor old Bill hobbling after him, throwing pot lids or anything else he could pick up, and if that did not succeed in making him drop the meat he

would set the dogs on to him. Then Ugly would drop it, and the dog nearest him would immediately secure and eat it. Like most birds, emus' crops when opened contain numerous small pebbles, which assist in digesting their food. They feed at times on the berries of shrubs, which are plentiful in many places in the bush. When this was the case the contents of the crops, instead of having an unpleasant smell, had quite the contrary, a most aromatic scent issuing, and my men used to take the pebbles out, and save the rest of the contents for stuffing pin-cushions. I had a small toolchest in my tent, and included in the various contents were a quantity of tacks. Master Ugly, I suppose, requiring something to aid his digestion—there being no gravel or pebbles about, cleared these out, but in doing so got a small bradawl stuck in his bill, and thus betrayed his delinquency, which otherwise would have been undiscovered. Frequently when I was kangaroo-hunting, he would come with my dogs; and, strange to say, civilisation seemed to have altered his tastes, for he would enjoy a piece of meat quite as much as the dogs. On one hunting occasion he did not come home, and I concluded that he had come across some emus and joined them; but on the fourth day he suddenly turned up, much to the joy of poor old Bill, the cook, who treated him almost like a child, in spite of his vagaries. When he was about two-thirds grown I sent him up to the young Gawlers at Government House, and they made a great favorite of him; but, like many pets, he had a sad end. Some kangaroo dogs, in passing the fence round the plot of grass which was enclosed in front of Government House, caught sight of Ugly, and before anyone could interfere, they leapt the fence, ran him down, and killed him; and there was great tribulation amongst the children" (pp. 49-50).

During the course of a punitive expedition up the Murray under Major O'Halloran in May and June, 1841, Hawker notes that the Governor's (Sir George Grey's) servant, Benstead, was with the party to obtain "speci-

mens of birds, etc., for His Excellency" (p. 77).

1852-1859: POLICE INSPECTOR ALEXANDER TOLMER.

In Alexander Tolmer's "Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered Career at Home and at the Antipodes," he quotes portion of his diary when in charge of the first Gold Escort in February, 1852, during the journey over to the Mount Alexander diggings in Victoria. This contains three references to birds. On their first day's journey south of the Murray (at Wellington) a number of bronze-winged pigeons flew up from within a splendid well or cave with abundance of water (Vol. 11, p. 128). Next day they met with the tracks of a great number of emus, and saw further bronze-winged pigeons round the wells or springs they met with (p. 128). On the following day, seeing an emu, one of the men, by whistling in a peculiar manner, brought the bird to within a few yards, to Tolmer's surprise and great amusement; after surveying the party for a few minutes, it again started off at a wonderful speed (p. 129).

In October 29, 1859, Inspector Tolmer went to Arkaba Station. "During my journey along this mountain chain (evidently Flinders Range) I have observed numerous flocks of the hawk species. They cluster about the trees and rocks, and exhibit such a remarkable tameness that a gun would be superfluous, as they might be knocked down with a stick. They feed upon grasshoppers, which at this particular time are infesting the districts in swarms, and eating up the little vegetable matter which remains. I am informed that these birds have only recently made their appearance, and are total strangers. What can this denote? May it not be the absence of water in the districts they frequent, or otherwise?"

Tolmer considered emu oil as an excellent emollient for sprains, though he adds that some say that it rots the bones. He had used it on himself successfully for a contracture of the arms and fingers (1, p. 182).