

NOTES ON PELICANS AND MUSK DUCKS

By J. Neil McGilp.

Near Mannum, on the River Murray, on 12/6/41, I saw a remarkable flight of Pelicans. About twelve Pelicans flew up from the south to a spot near some high cliffs, and immediately started circling around at short intervals. Other parties of Pelicans, from eight to twelve in number, joined the main party, which had soared round and round, gradually rising in the air. When some 100 Pelicans had mustered, the spiral upward flight became slightly more rapid; and then suddenly one bird from those at the highest elevation swooped down slightly, and made off away from the spiral formation. Two birds, one from each side of the flight circle, flew out towards the leader, and so on, until about half the mustered birds had formed a remarkable symmetrical V. Then another bird, again from the highest point, broke away, to be followed in V shape formation by the rest of the birds. I had often been told of this aerial manoeuvre, but had not previously observed it. The most remarkable thing about the whole action was that the spiral upward flight continued until only eight or ten birds remained, and that a bird from each side of the spiral formation flew out to form the V just when required.

A resident of the river said that the Pelicans nearly always arrive at this identical

spot at about 12 o'clock every day, unless it is wet weather. He thought that there may be an upward current of air at the spot, due, perhaps, to the cliff formation of the river bank. The Pelicans, ungainly on land, are particularly beautiful in flight, as they soar round and round.

At Caloote Swamp, River Murray, I noted what was, to me, a new performance by a male Musk Duck. It was swimming rather low, in still water, and every now and again it would elevate its spine-like tail, and bring it down with a resounding smack on the water, and immediately afterward two small fountains of water, one on each side of the bird, would be thrown up in a backward direction from the bird's body. The action necessary to produce the fountains created a distinct "plonk" sound. I concluded the bird had used its feet to strike up the water. I have not read of this habit with the Musk Duck, so watched and listened for quite a quarter of an hour. We had previously disturbed hundreds of Coots, which flew and scuttled along the water to a tall clump of reeds, and it was near this clump that the Musk Duck was seen and heard performing what I consider was a "scaring" action, in order to drive away the Coots.