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## THE BIRDS OF BARROW CREEK, NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

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A.I.F.

Barrow Creek is a tiny settlement situated approximately 200 miles north of Alice Springs. It was originally established as a repeating station on the Overland Telegraph Line in the 70's of last century, and thus is closely connected with the earliest history of the Northern Territory. The old white buildings still stand, nowadays serving the dual purpose of police station and post office. The adjacent hotel and store comprise the remainder of Barrow Creek settlement.

In this area the most prominent features are the mesas or tabletop hills. Although rising only a few hundred feet, they do so so abruptly from the surrounding flat country that they appear much higher. These arresting prominences are quite flat on top, with low hills skirting the brinks. A steep talus, thickly grown with *Triodia*, slopes steeply up to these cliffs, against which a few Native Figs (*Ficus* sp.) cling.

Flat plains surround the tabletops. Mulga (*Acacia aneura*), with associate shrubs, grows densely, and is the predominating tree. There are also a species of Corkwood tree (*Hakea* sp.) and Ghost Gums (*Eucalyptus papuana*) scattered thinly. Along the sandy course of Barrow Creek small Red Gums (*E. rostrata*) are to be found. Unfortunately, the country hereabouts is "eaten out," both by the local goat herd, and by cattle coming in to the bore, which marks a stock route.

Spinifex, or Porcupine Grass (*Triodia*) is the prevailing perennial grass, growing on the hill slopes and other stony areas. Mitchell Grass is said to occur in favoured localities,

but in the vicinity of the telegraph station and bore the red plains are mostly bare, with vestiges of annual grass clinging in more sheltered spots.

Several miles east or south-east of the settlement a rocky waterhole in the headwaters of Taylor Creek is known as Beantree Waterhole, because several Stuart's Beantrees are to be found there. It was the only permanent water I visited.

During the usually dry winter months the prevailing winds are the South-East Trades. They blow strongly for days and nights on end. In summer, monsoonal disturbances come in from the North-West, bringing sudden squalls and thunderstorms in their train. Often the thunderstorms are dry, merely producing vivid lightning and terrific thunderclaps, but these monsoons are the usual source of Barrow Creek's spasmodic rains.

For four months in 1942—February to May—the author was camped at Barrow Creek. It was a dry and windy period, there being no rain until mid-May, when 1½ inches fell overnight. Barrow Creek rose 3 ft., but had ceased flowing within 24 hours, soon presenting its normal dry appearance. A thin coating of annual grasses quickly appeared on the flats, but rapidly died.

As mentioned earlier, nearby country was "eaten out" and bird life was accordingly less evident than in less devastated areas a few miles either north or south. However, duty confined the writer to camp, and he rarely travelled beyond the limits of his camp area. The list of species recorded suffers accordingly, as did the actual number of birds seen.

Emu (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*).—Only seen a few times.

Diamond Dove (*Geopelia cuneata*).—Quite plentiful until May, when they disappeared.

Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*).—One female seen, 18/5/42.

Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*).—A numerous species. Tame in the camp area.

Black-tailed Native Hen (*Tribonyx ventralis*).—Several seen among the lignums on Stirling Swamp, about 20 miles south of Barrow Creek, 9/2/42.

Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*).—A few always to be observed on Beantree Waterhole.

Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*).—Two or three pairs always frequented the margin of Beantree Waterhole.

Southern Stone Curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*).—Three Curlews seen in a patch of Mulga.

Australian Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*).—Only rarely observed in the district during my stay.

Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*).—One bird at Beantree Waterhole.

Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*).—Once noted at Beantree Waterhole.

Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*).—Occasionally a pair was flushed from Beantree Waterhole.

Grey Teal (*Querquedula gibberifrons*).—Little parties occasionally on the above water.

Australian Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*).—Noted once.

Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*).—Sometimes to be seen in the vicinity of Beantree Waterhole, rarely elsewhere.

Black (Fork-tailed) Kite (*Milvus migrans*).—Always foraging around the settlement and camp.

Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*).—Identified once only.

Brown Hawk (*F. berigora*).—Usually to be seen along the cliffs or flying noisily over adjacent scrub.

Nankeen Kestrel (*F. cenchroides*).—Individuals flew over at infrequent intervals. Like the former species, they are of the inland pallid form.

Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*).—Sometimes heard at night.

Galah (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*).—Even this usually plentiful bird was only to be noted occasionally in little flocks.

Cockatiel (*Leptolophus hollandicus*).—Little parties passed by on rare occasions.

Port Lincoln Parrot (*Barnardius zonarius*).—Usually a few fed quietly around the camp, often right in the tent lines. Barrow Creek is the most northerly place where one can always see these handsome birds, although they do extend beyond Tennant Creek.

Budgerygah (*Melopsittacus undulatus*).—In small numbers. Bred at Beantree Waterhole.

Kingfisher (*Halcyon pyrrhopygius*).—A solitary Kingfisher, which was only seen a few times, was most probably the Red-backed Kingfisher.

Cuckoo (*Cacomantis* sp.).—A Cuckoo seen on 17/3/42 was probably a Fantailed Cuckoo (*C. flabelliformis*).

White-backed Swallow (*Cheramaeeca leucosterna*).—A pair hawked over the camp twice in May. Not a common bird north of Alice Springs.

Tree Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*).—A large flock fed along Barrow Creek on 10/5/43. Migrating?

Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*).—Fairly common.

Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*).—Odd birds frequented the Mulga. No birds in the plumage of the adult male were ever seen.

Hooded Robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*).—Rarely noted.

Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*).—Odd birds noted at intervals.

Thrush (*Colluricincla* sp.).—A pair seen in thick scrub about twenty miles north of Barrow Creek, near Taylor Creek. Also seen further south near Central Mount Stuart.

Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*).—Small numbers around bores and waterholes. Bred at Beantree Waterhole.

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina novae-hollandiae*).—A widely distributed bird in the Territory. Usually to be seen where gums grow.

Red-breasted Babbler (*Pomotostomus rufescens*).—Quite often disturbed in the scrub.

Crimson Chat (*Epthianura tricolor*).—Little parties were found feeding in open areas on odd occasions.

Weebill (*Smicrornis* sp.).—Weebills were always in the gums around Beantree Waterhole. They were very yellow.

Banded Whiteface (*Aphelocephala nigricincta*).—Often seen in open timber, even if the trees were mostly dead. Several nests were found up in Corkwood trees, in contrast to their habit of building in low bushes at Alice Springs. Barrow Creek is the farthest north I have recorded this species.

Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*).—A common bird. Barrow Creek is apparently the northern limit of this species. Two other species of Thornbill observed were assumed to be the Red-tailed (*A. hamiltoni*) and the Slender (*A. iredalei*).

Rufous-crowned Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus ruficeps*).—In an area of 'spinifex' with a few clumps of low mallee—the type of vegetation these birds inhabit—a party of six was noted. On one occasion a party was seen near Wauchope Hotel, approximately 60 miles north of Barrow Creek. I have not seen them farther north.

Blue-and-white Wren (*Malurus cyanotus*).—Only noted twice.

Black-faced Wood-Swallow (*Artamus melanops*).—One of the most common birds in the district.

White-winged Sittella (*Neositta leucoptera*).—Seen three times only.

Mistletoe Bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*).—Odd birds noted occasionally.

Red-tipped Pardalote (*Pardalotus ornatus*).—A pair recorded in May.

Golden-backed Honey-eater (*Melithreptus laetior*).—One small party seen at Beantree Waterhole.

Singing Honey-eater (*Meliphaga virescens*).—Sparsely distributed in the scrub.

Grey-headed Honey-eater (*Meliphaga heartlandi*).—Honey-eaters answering to the description of this bird were seen several times. They were the same as those described in "Birds of Alice Springs."

White-plumed Honey-eater (*M. penicillata*).—Confined to the gum creeks.

Yellow-throated Miner (*Myzantha flavigula*).—In small numbers, usually near gums.

Spiny-cheeked Honey-eater (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*).—Individuals rarely noted.

Pipit (*Anthus australis*).—Scattered in small numbers in plain country.

Zebra Finch (*Taeniopygia castanotis*).—Common.

Painted Finch (*Emblema picta*).—Several times when at Beantree Waterhole the writer flushed these inland finches.

Crow (*Corvus* sp.).—Most of the birds were small, probably being Little Crows (*C. bennetti*).

Pied Butcher-bird (*Cracticus nigrogularis*).—Fairly common.

Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*).—As in most parts of the lower Northern Territory, these Magpies are thinly scattered through the area.