

NOTES ON A FEW BIRDS SEEN ON EYRE PENINSULA AND ITS ISLANDS

By H. H. FINLAYSON.

The following occasional notes were made during field work on the mammals of the area during February and March of 1946. No birds were collected, and the specific identifications being based upon sight only are in some cases provisional. The observations are recorded chiefly as deriving some value from the inaccessibility of some of the sites mentioned, which have seldom, if ever, been visited by ornithologists.

The ubiquitous suite of littoral species of *Larus*, *Gabianus*, *Sterna*, *Haematopus*, *Charadrius*, etc., is not further noticed.

DANGEROUS REEF, February 11.

A large rookery of Cormorants, apparently consisting chiefly of *Phalacrocorax fuscescens* was in occupation of the eastern portion of the main islet. The crude seaweed nests were spaced at intervals of two feet or less in the densest parts of the colony, and nearly all contained eggs which were noted at the time as pale green, not whitish as most of the Museum eggs are. A large part of the rookery is in close proximity to the basking rocks of the local sea lions (*Arctocephalus cinereus*). There was evidence of damage to nests and eggs by seals coming and going, but not of intentional molestation on any scale.

THISTLE ISLAND, Feb. 12—14.

At Snug Cove, on the north coast of the island, heard the Spurwinged Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*) on landing. In scrub south-west from the cove noted *Zosterops halmaturina*, a Currawong (*Strepera* sp.), the Bronzewing Pigeon (*Phaps chalcoptera*), and on flats between the sandhills the Pipit (*Anthus australis*). Fresh tracks of the Fairy Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) were in multitudes on some of the beaches, though no birds were seen or heard about the rocks. The present owners say that the Curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*) is rather plentiful about Whaler's Bay on the east coast.

TAYLOR'S ISLAND, Feb. 15.

But a small area of the original scrub persists on this small island, and it is at present rather heavily stocked with sheep. Noted Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) in large numbers over the cleared areas, which were clothed in flowering Lincoln Weed (*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*); also a few Rock Parrots (*Neophema petrophila*) and a Quail.

ST. PETERS ISLAND, NUYTS ARCHIPELAGO, Feb. 21—23.

In the shallows off the sandspit near Mt. Younghusband, on the north coast, a small group of Black Swans (*Chenopsis atrata*) was frequently seen. Ashore, Spurwinged Plover, an *Artamus* species, Welcome Swallows, the Rock Parrot, and a minah-like bird seen imperfectly in gums near the old homestead, but not calling. There is a considerable Petrel colony on the north-west corner of the island; no birds and no recognisable remains were seen about the burrows, but local boatmen affirm that they are Mutton Birds (*Puffinus tenuirostris*).

EYRE ISLAND, Feb. 24.

In the extensive shallows off the east coast and close inshore, saw 14 Black Swans (*Chenopsis atrata*) on landing at 10 a.m. of a very hot morning; and a few hours later two pairs of Pelicans (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*). Ashore no birds were seen except a few Cormorants flying about the mangroves at a distance.

WEST FRANKLIN ISLAND, Feb. 25.

Near the shore, towards the west end, noted six Cape Barren Geese (*Cereopsis novae-hollandiae*), one Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), a small Hawk (cf. *Falco cenchroides*), and several Spurwing Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*). At the south-west end on a boulder shingle several recently dead Fairy Penguins (*Eudyptula minor*) and one living bird under a boulder. In the broad scrubby valleys of the up-

lands, flocks of 40—60 Rock Parrots (*Neophema petrophila*) making short flights when disturbed but soon squatting again with characteristic inelegance on the rounded tops of *Rhagodia* bushes. At the summit of the island, on a rocky outcrop, 18 Crows (*Corvus* sp.) in a party.

A colony of the Mutton Bird (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) occupies a large area of this island, as recorded by Wood-Jones. On this occasion no adult birds were seen, but young in a strongly incassated phase were frequently noted just inside the mouths of burrows, and a good many dead and desiccated young were scattered about in the open. As there were no signs of human intrusion and there are no predatory mammals on the island, the destruction is apparently caused by the local Owls or Crows.

On the floor of a hut near the landing on the north coast, quantities of Owl pellets were found in various stages of disintegration, together with very numerous bones of small mammals, all pretty obviously the scattered remains of Owl feasts. The material recovered from this debris represented over 50 individuals of the local rat *Leporillus jonesi* Thomas, and a much smaller number of the Bandicoot *Isodon nauticus* Thomas. The Owl itself was not seen by me, but my companion flushed six about midday from a rock ledge at the north-west point of the island; he had been gathering *Leporillus* relics for me from under the ledge when he disturbed them. His description suggested *Tyto alba*. The presence of Owls at the Franklins seems not to have been noticed before. Wood-Jones, in his extended account of the two mammals named, does not mention them as would assuredly have been the case had he met with this very potent avian factor in their bionomics during his several visits to the islands.

After leaving the Nuyts Islands, the Peninsula was traversed from west to east, from Ceduna to Iron Knob through the Gawler ranges, and then diagonally again on a S.W. course through Kimba to Kyancutta and thence south to Coffin Bay. The Gawler Range section of the route corresponded roughly (in reverse) to that ornithologically described by J. Sutton in 1924 (this journal, Vol. VII, Pt. 5, P. 118 et seq.) and by J. B. Cleland in 1929 (Ibid. Vol. X, Pt. 4, P. 124).

The range country, particularly at the western end from Hiltaba to Yardea, was in magnificent heart, the vegetation after rains varying from 6—9 inches in 3 months, showing a virgin luxuriance and vigor seldom seen in a sub-arid zone in this State. In spite of this, however, and of the added presence of large areas of claypan water trapped within the hills, birds were noticeably scarce. At the Yardea "dam" for instance, which the rains of Feb. 17—19 had swollen to a considerable lake, during an enforced stay of 2½ days, not a single wading or aquatic bird of any species was seen, though the shallows were swarming with tadpoles and invertebrate life such as *Daphnia* and *Apus*, and the country was almost deserted both by man and beast.

In the mallee country, on the south-west traverse, birds were more plentiful, but both here and in the ranges all species seen have already been listed by the above authors, except the Emu (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*), of which three were seen a few miles east of Yardea, and four near Thurlga, both in the middle hours of the day, on open salt-bush flats.

BROTHERS ISLAND, MT. DUTTON BAY, March 6.

On the west coast of the main islet, the limestone has been strongly eroded and cylindrical potholes up to 3 feet in depth and with diameter of from 9 to 15 inches abound. Most of those examined contained a good deal of water and some dead sea birds and some of them were half filled with a putrifying mass of the same, in which a Tern, probably *Sterna bergii*, was the chief constituent. The total mortality represented must be very considerable—certainly many score of birds even in the holes casually examined, and these were but a fraction of the total.

Mr. Tracy Morgan, of Lake Wangary, nearby, who frequently visits the island, states that Terns nest there every year, though in varying number. He is of opinion that the victims are chiefly young birds, straggling from the nests.

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