

## SOME BIRDS OBSERVED ON SOUTHERN EYRE PENINSULA

By GLEN M. STORR.

The observations recorded herein were made between September 20 and October 24, 1946, during which period I was mostly in the Wanilla district. Wanilla is a railway siding about 20 miles north-west of Port Lincoln and 20 miles south of Cummins. Other places visited were Edillilie and Warunda, which are between Cummins and Wanilla, and Wildeloo, which is about 5 miles north of Cummins. Little Swamp and Big Swamp, which are also mentioned in the text, are a few miles west of Port Lincoln.

The area under consideration may be divided topographically and ecologically into two types, the railway running north from Port Lincoln to Cummins forming the dividing line approximately. To the east of the railway are low ranges 400 to 300 feet high. This region receives from 21 to 26 inches of rain per year. The climax association is the Sugar Gum-Bottlebrush. This on good soil forms a luxuriant and almost impenetrable stand. Birds that seem confined to it include the Western Yellow Robin and Grey Fantail. On the stony ridges

the vegetation is much more open. This stunted Sugar Gum in association usually with Yacca (but sometimes Broombush) is poorly tenanted by birds. On some lower slopes, Sheoak and Bottlebrush are found in association. Here bird-life is very plentiful; the Yellow-winged Honeyeater, White-browed Babbler and Western Shrike-Thrush being typical. In shallow valleys on alluvial soils a heath-like vegetation grows consisting mainly of dwarf Teatree, Hakea, and *Banksia marginata*.

Birds found in this include the Superb Blue Wren and the Silver-eye. At the foot of the hills, where the creeks debouch on to the plains, occasional flooding occurs, and on these flats is found a mixed vegetation containing Sugar Gum, Red Gum, and Sheoak, spaced at parklike intervals. The undergrowth is mostly Bottle-brush and Teatree. This area is also rich in bird life.

The country to the west of the railway consists of plains, undulating and from 150 to 400 feet above the sea. These are intersected by watercourses rising in the hills and flowing north-westerly. This region has

an annual rainfall of about 20 inches. The soils vary from sands to clays, and generally with much surface ironstone rubble. They are not particularly fertile. The usual vegetation of the higher and drier land is the Mallee-Broombush association. Birds prominent here are the Purple-backed Wren, Purple-gaped and Yellow-winged Honey-eaters, Red Wattle-bird, Brown Thornbill, Black-winged Currawong, Western Shrike-Thrush, and the Golden Whistler. Along the watercourses the vegetation is denser, being supplemented by Teatree, shrubby Wattles and occasionally small Bottle-brush. Here the Spotted Scrub-Wren and the Silver-eye are plentiful. To the west the land becomes more level and the creeks lose their well-defined channels, spreading out into saline flats up to a mile wide. These flats support a low stand of cutting grass and dwarf Teatree. The Emu-Wren, White-fronted Chat and occasionally Emus may be found here. Along the middle of these flats usually stretch a chain of holes containing brackish water on the edges of which grow Paperbarks (*Melaleuca*).

A considerable amount of country has been cleared for agriculture, especially a belt running north and south through which the railway runs. Here the strictly scrubland birds are gone forever, except for a remnant in strips of scrub left on roads. Their place has been taken by a greatly increased population of birds that are rarely found or absent in the virgin scrub. These include the Magpie, Willie-Wagtail, Magpie-Lark, Welcome Swallow, White-fronted Chat, Ground-lark, Kestrel, Little Falcon, Banded Plover, Crows, Shell-Parrot and the Port Lincoln Parrot. The Crested Pigeon, which was seen here only once, will, I think, be much more plentiful 30 years hence, colonising this cleared country from the north. Naturalised birds seen here are the ubiquitous Sparrow and Starling; the Goldfinch was only seen in the vicinity of Port Lincoln.

Some birds were seen only once, and then so briefly that identification was uncertain. These may have been the Little Friar-Bird, Shy Heath-Wren, Gilbert Whistler, Brown Weebill, Sparrow-Hawk, and the Swift Parrot.

The following is a detailed list of birds seen during the trip. Unless the locality is

otherwise stated, the Wanilla district is to be assumed.

Emu (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*). Occasional small parties (up to six birds) in cutting grass flats and open swampy areas of either plains or ranges.

Brown Quail? (*Synoicus australis*). One only flushed in dwarf Teatree (*Leptospermum coriaceum*) on slope of hill in ranges.

Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*). Very plentiful. Usually seen feeding in paddocks or natural "clearings" close to timber or scrub, to which they fly rapidly when disturbed. Their low, powerful and slightly vibrant call is quite a feature of the Mallee.

Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*). One seen in company of Bronzewing in paddock near timber at Warunda. Both birds flew into nearby Red Gum. Also seen at Wildeloo flying across paddock into small clump of Mallees. A rare species in this region when compared with its abundance in the Lower and Upper North.

Black-tailed Native Hen (*Tribonyx ventralis*). One only seen on road beside small Bottle-brush (*Callistemon laevifolius*) swamp in Wildeloo district.

Bald Coot (*Porphyrio melanotus*). One flushed from shallow water in Paperbark (*Melaleuca halmaturorum*) swamp.

Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*). Pair seen in hole in cutting-grass swamp, diving for food. Noisy and not shy.

Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*). Pair seen fishing close into shore at Port Lincoln.

Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*). One seen at Port Lincoln.

Silver Gull (*Larus novae-hollandiae*). Port Lincoln, inland dams and water. Flocks seen following the plough, inland.

Pacific Gull (*Gabianus pacificus*). Singly or pairs, sometimes in company of preceding, at Port Lincoln.

Spurwinged Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*). Fairly plentiful in grassy low-lying flats near water.

Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*). Occasional pairs and small flocks in grasslands.

White-fronted Heron (*Notophox novae-hollandiae*). Plentiful in and near swamps, watercourses and lagoons. Nests 12 to 14 inches in diameter, crudely made of

sticks, are usually placed 20 to 40 feet up in Red Gum on horizontal fork towards end of bough, over or near water. One such nest contained 5 young birds almost ready to fly. Description of young—bill, lores, crown, back and wings, pale slate-grey; breast, purple-brown (plum), becoming paler in abdomen; legs, yellow. White patch near tip of "shoulder" with narrow black margin.

Cape Barren Goose (*Cereopsis novae-hollandiae*). Four seen beside dam in grassy paddock.

Black Swan (*Chenopsis atrata*). Several seen on Little Swamp only.

Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*). Occasional pairs on dams (not seen in October or after).

Chestnut Teal (*Querquedula castanea*). Flock of 12 seen in Red Gum swamp.

Grey Teal (*Q. gibberifrons*). Occasional pair seen on dams (also Wildeloo district), and in Red Gum swamp.

Pink-eared Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*). One was flushed from nest in a Paperbark swamp. Bowl-shaped (about 8 inches in diameter) nest, composed of dark grey down, one side reinforced with grass stems, was built on platform of grasses in base of Teatree and 6 inches above water. It contained 9 pinkish-brown lustreless eggs.

Swamp Harrier (*Circus approximans*). One seen flying low and slowly over Big Swamp.

Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*). Singly or pairs flying high above either Sugar Gum ranges or Mallee.

Little Eagle (*Hieraaetus morphnoides*). Partial to Red Gum flats and swamps. Often seen flying high in big sweeping circles. One bird seen flying low with small snake in talons, making an excited chattering call (somewhat like that of Nankeen Kestrel) continually.

Fork-tailed Kite (*Milvus migrans*). Occasionally, singly or pairs, over Mallee, Broom-bush, Teatree flats or crops.

Square-tailed Kite (*Lophoictinia isura*). One seen flying low, swiftly and straight over Mallee. Short rounded tail, orange colouration below and extremely pointed wings swept back behind tail were conspicuous.

Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*). Seen at Wildeloo and Edillilie in agricultural

country with occasional belts of timber along roads. Not shy. Often perched on telegraph poles and fence posts. One perched on post was seen being "dive-bombed" so vigorously by pair of Welcome Swallows that it took refuge in flying high up into nearby Gum-tree.

Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*). Seems to be a paler bird than that of Adelaide district. Fairly plentiful in cultivated lands and naturally open areas. Two nests were found in Red Gums 20 to 30 feet up, one of which had young, whose squawks when being fed were similar to those of young Magpies. Another nest was found in fairly high Mallee (one of thin strip along fence in cultivated land—Wildeloo) about 15 feet up in horizontal fork. Call—shrill and honeyeater-like.

Blue Mountain Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus moluccanus*). Fairly plentiful in pairs or flocks in Sugar Gum and Red Gum forests. Has a soft parrot-like warble as well as a harsh alarm screech. Also a call similar to Noisy Miner.

Purple-crowned Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*). Fairly plentiful in pairs or small flocks in Sugar Gums and open Mallee (when flowering). Very fast fliers, fairly wary, and screeching constantly when on wing and often when feeding.

Galah (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*). Very plentiful in Red Gums in swamp, pairs or small flocks, feeding in nearby paddocks. Also plentiful in clearings in Sugar Gum ranges. Harsh screeching when alarmed, especially by appearance of man or hawks. Often when walking through nearby scrub a pair of these birds (as though on reconnaissance flights) would fly low overhead, and invariably, notwithstanding how much one attempted to "freeze" into surroundings, these birds would observe one and indicate same by raising of crests and shrilly screeching.

Port Lincoln Parrot (*Barnardius zonarius*). Plentiful in partly cleared Sugar Gum, in timber adjoining cultivated lands and in open Mallee where undergrowth has been replaced with pasture, and in Red Gum flats. Alarm note is a sharp "vatch." Another call is a musical warble "weer-witto." Its more typically parrot-like notes are not unmusical.

Elegant Parrot? (*Neophema elegans*). One

- only seen in Red Gum, one of several in flat. Persistent short but musical whistle sometimes quickly repeated, other times with longer interval.
- Shell-Parrot (*Melopsittacus undulatus*). Fairly plentiful in flocks of 10 to 20, over Mallee, Broombush and Sugar Gums in vicinity of clearings. Melodious warble when on wing.
- Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*). One flushed from Paperbark in swamp.
- Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*). Plentiful in Red Gum flats and open Sugar Gum forest.
- Black-eared Cuckoo (*Owenavis osculans*). One young bird, just able to fly, was found in Teatree flat, in Mallee, Broombush country. Its foster parents, who showed much concern for it, were a pair of Brown Thornbills. The young Cuckoo was between 5 and 6 inches long; brownish-green head and back, brown tail tipped white, pale under and eye-brow, grey legs and beak.
- Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*). Fairly plentiful in open country.
- Tree-Martin (*Hylochelidon nigricans*). Very plentiful over margins of swamps between Port Lincoln and Coomunga. Also, one day only, small flock hawking over margin of small clump of Mallee. Apparently nomadic.
- Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*). Occasional pairs in cultivated lands and clearings.
- Grey Fantail (*R. flabellifera*). In pairs, dense Sugar Gum forest. Extremely active bird, continually chirping "chip." Song—a squeaky warble, also a more musical and clearer "syr-up."
- Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*). Pair seen hawking from dead top limbs of Red Gums in grassy Gum park. Very active and noisy, uttering harsh "zee-erp" all the time. Also seen in small patch of Mallee scrub, left in otherwise cleared land near Wildeloo.
- Scarlet Robin (*Petroica multicolor*). Seen once in dense Sugar Gum-Bottlebrush association and once in Sheoaks lining creek through clearing—both localities in the hills.
- Western Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria griseogularis*). One small colony found in the Sugar Gum ranges. Beautiful nest found in fork 7 feet up in small Sugar Gum, made of grass with outside neatly decorated or camouflaged, with pendant strips of bark  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide and 4 to 6 inches long. Nest (similar shape and size to Silver-eye's) containing 2 eggs (large relative to size of nest and bird), pale pearly grey, with faint reddish dots especially concentrated around middle, leaving clear-cut zone at larger end, unmarked.
- Golden Whistler (*Pachycephala pectoralis*). Very plentiful in either the Mallee-Broombush of the plains or the denser Sugar Gum of the ranges, especially near the water-courses. Beautiful whistle "choo-choo-choo-chip," the last syllable being higher pitched and shorter than preceding ones and being finished with whip-like abruptness. It has various other even more beautiful songs (covering wider range of notes), but these are only occasionally uttered, especially when a Shrike-Thrush sings nearby and it apparently takes up the challenge. The female was only occasionally heard (invariably the first-described song), but the notes seemed to me neither so rich nor strong as the male's. Often when walking through the scrub I would come across one of these beautiful and friendly birds and usually it was easy to induce him to sing by attempting to mimic his song. He would reply with such gusto, barely pausing between successive lays, that it seemed he appreciated an audience.
- Western Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla rufiventris*). Odd pairs seen throughout Mallee-Broombush and in the Sugar Gum ranges. Habits similar to those of Grey Shrike-Thrush. One song is something like usual call of Golden Whistler, but with a rattle-like warble in middle. A shorter song often uttered sounds like "wok-wok; tor-tu-weet" (the last syllable consisting of drawn-out ascending notes).
- Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*). Occasional pairs in settled country, especially around homesteads, dams and other waters.
- Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina novae-hollandiae*). Fairly plentiful in Red Gum and Sugar Gum woodlands.
- Southern Scrub-Robin (*Drymodes brunneopygia*). Plentiful in Mallee-Broombush (especially thickets marginal to water-courses) and in dense Teatree-Bottlebrush flats. Also in strips of Mallee-scrub left

- along roads in Wildeloo district. Inquisitive and friendly. Spends nearly all of time on ground, only occasionally perching in shrub close to ground. Often stands still, slowly raising and lowering tail. When running quickly uses tail as rudder by flicking it from side to side as it dodges in and out of undergrowth. Usual call is a long, thin, mournful whistle, fairly high pitched and repeated at long intervals. Alarm note is a harsh, babbler-like chatter. A similar call and the usual one when being observed is a derisive sounding chatter "Cher-chicha-chica-chich" (the first syllable longer than following and descending). Occasionally it utters a melodious whistle "whip-whip-paree."
- White-browed Babbler (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*). Fairly plentiful in restricted colonies in Mallee-Broombush and in Sugar Gum country, with dense undergrowth, especially big Bottlebrush. Usual call is a succession of quickly repeated chirps with an occasional guttural and rolled "drrrrrt." Nest found near top of Mallee sapling was composed of small twigs and lined with grass and feathers. Was approximately size and shape of football, with opening at one end almost concealed by overlap of top. It contained 2 eggs, pale grey covered with pale purplish-grey blotches and thin irregular lines, especially marked and so darker at larger end.
- White-fronted Chat (*Ephianura albifrons*). Fairly plentiful in low Teatree and Cutting grass flats, and cleared land with low Mallee shoots. In the latter, one cup-shaped nest made of grasses and rootlets was found 6 inches above ground among dead twigs and leaves of rolled Mallee shoot. It contained 3 young. Also plentiful in Wildeloo district in ley pasture with low growth of Stinkwort and in dwarf scrub on roadsides adjoining open paddocks.
- Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*). Plentiful in small colonies in Mallee-Broombush and in Sugar Gums, especially where there is dense growth of Gum saplings and Bottlebrush. Very active and noisy, continually chirping and chattering. Also utters a pretty but very soft song. [See notes on Black-eared Cuckoo.]
- Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*A. chrysorrhoa*). Occasional pair or small party in Sugar Gum ranges, in Red Gum saplings beside swamp, and in Mallee-Broombush adjoining clearings or cultivated paddocks. Call note:—"tit-titta-tit." Has 2 songs: one a strong (for its size) melodious warble, not unlike Willie Wagtail's, and a soft, sweet twittering.
- Spotted Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis maculatus*). Fairly plentiful in small parties in denser parts (especially along watercourses) of Mallee-Broombush; also Bottlebrush and Teatree tangles along creeks in Sugar Gum country. Call is a harsh "tiz-tiz-tiz," varied with a loud grinding chatter. Occasionally utters a soft warble. Spends most of time on ground and the lower branchlets of shrubs.
- Southern Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*). In pairs in Cutting grass-dwarf Teatree flats. Call is a sibilant "tsuh-tsu." Also quick, soft, twittering song. The male is shy and elusive, although the female is just the reverse.
- Superb Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*). Very plentiful in small parties in Sugar Gum ranges, especially near watercourses where there is a dense growth of Bottle-brush and Teatree. Also in slopes covered with dense Yacca-Needlebrush association. One young bird, just out of nest, was observed, for which its mother showed fearless concern. She would fly into a nearby shrub and with back feathers all ruffled up, would run quickly up and down a small branch, side-on, uttering all the time a fairly loud chatter, in frantic endeavour to attract my attention away from her offspring. All this time the male was not seen.
- Purple-backed Wren (*M. assimilis*). Fairly plentiful in pairs or small parties in drier and more open Mallee-Broombush. The male of this species did not seem as shy as that of preceding. Song similar to *M. cyaneus* but not as soft or sibilant, but more twittering. Description of an immature male seen: pale blue tail and streaks and splashes through head and chest; otherwise fawn above and whitish below.
- Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*). Fairly plentiful in open Sugar Gum forest and open Mallee (including Wildeloo district). Call is a soft, low, croaking and grinding "vut-vut," sometimes followed by a higher pitched "peep-peep."
- Red-tipped Pardalote (*Pardalotus ornatus*).

Very plentiful in pairs high up in foliage of Sugar and Red Gums, and in higher Mallee (*E. diversifolia*). Very active and fearless. The call of the male is a loud ringing "hweet-hweet" or "glook-glook," rarely answered by the female (?) with a low husky "wittoo-wittoo." In *Eucalyptus diversifolia* scrub one day a pardalote was heard to utter 3 or 4 times a powerful and ventriloquial single bell-like whistle, but I was unable to determine whether it was this species or not.

Grey-backed Silver-eye (*Zosterops halmaturina*). Very plentiful in flats in Mallee-Broombush, in Cutting-grass Teatree swamps, and in *Hakea* flats in Sugar Gum ranges. Throughout the whole period nests were found in abundance, some in course of construction, others containing 1 to 3 eggs, and others containing young, either helpless or ready to leave. Nests were invariably placed in a Needlebush (*Hakea*).

Brown-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*). Occasionally seen in foliage of dense vegetation along creeks in Sugar Gum ranges. Also a small, outlying colony in Red Gums in swamp on plains. Call or song is a loud musical "choo-choo-choop."

Tawny-crowned Honeyeater (*Gliciphila melanops*). Fairly plentiful in restricted colonies in Teatree Cutting-grass flats and in Mallee-Broombush, especially in flats where vegetation is denser and dwarfed and heath-like in character. Also in Needlebush-dwarf Teatree association in ranges. Call note is a squeaky chirp. Songs—soft thin whistles, sometimes finishing with a drawn-out whistle—"twee-toota-too." Also "twee-twee" only. Likes to perch on a dead stick above general level of low vegetation, whence its pleasing song is mostly uttered. A nest found in Mallee country in a dwarf Oak (*Casuarina mueleriana*), about 18 inches above ground, was cup-shaped and made of grasses and small pieces of Mallee-bark and lined with down and feathers. It contained 2 eggs, pale pinkish-white, freckled at larger end with pale rust.

Purple-gaped Honeyeater (*Meliphaga cratitia*). Found in small flocks in restricted localities in Mallee-Broombush (especially where Mallee was flowering) and in Bottlebrush thickets along watercourses in

ranges. Very active and noisy. Several calls; one like that of Noisy Miner, another a harsh single chirp; a loud whip-like whistle and a soft, parrot-like warble. When on the wing they occasionally utter a sharp "twit-twit." One feathered young (olive-green, with yellow line on face) was found fluttering along ground. Parents were fearless in their concern for its safety. One bird would flutter along ground with strange antics, uttering a loud babbler-like chatter, pretending injury to divert attention from young bird.

Yellow-winged Honeyeater (*Meliornis novae-hollandiae*). Most plentiful Honeyeater and probably any bird in this region. Usually found in colonies of 10 to 20 adult birds. Most plentiful in Bottlebrush flats and bushy tangles along watercourses. Also in Mallee-Broombush scrub, including thin strips left along roads at Wildeloo. Extremely active bird, flying incessantly from bough to bough and tree to tree. Very aggressive, especially chasing Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters. Call—single chirps, repeated so quickly when excited to become a harsh chatter. Also thin, but melodious song "dick-dick, doodle-doo, twee-twee" (the last 2 syllables being higher pitched). This song, which was occasionally heard in the scrub without the singer being seen definitely, may possibly more rightly belong to the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater.

Red Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*). Very plentiful in open Red Gum and Sugar Gum forest, more open and higher Mallee, and in big Paperbarks (*Melaleuca halmaturorum*). Also plentiful in timber planted around homesteads and Mallee scrub left on roads at Wildeloo. In addition to its usual cackling call "kucka-kuck," has a softer, lower, throaty and grinding call.

Groundlark (*Anthus australis*). Fairly plentiful in crops and pastures.

Diamond Sparrow (*Zonaeeginthus guttatus*). Once only in shrubby clearing on edge of Mallee-Broombush scrub at Warunda Sid-ing. Fairly long musical whistle "peeceep" (ascending).

Crows (*Corvus* sp.). Pairs and small flocks in all classes of country, especially in or near timber adjacent to cultivated lands. One small flock in Red Gum flats were

(Continued on foot of next page)

diagnosed as Little Crows (*Corvus bennetti*), but usually larger birds were seen, probably the Raven (*Corvus coronoides*). Black-winged Currawong (*Stepera melanoptera*). Fairly plentiful in more open Mallee and Sugar Gums, especially near clearings. Call is a powerful, high-pitched, fluty double whistle, and when alarmed a parrot-

like "keer-keer-kink." Young were seen just able to fly. Grey Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*). Once only among Paperbarks (*Melaleuca*). White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*). Fairly plentiful in more settled parts, clearings, open Mallee and Gum-Savanna.