

A FURTHER REPORT ON THE INTRODUCED GRENADIER WEAVER

(*Pyromelana orix*).

By Alan H. Lendon.

Since the establishment of this bird at Wood's Point, about eight miles in a direct line south-east of Murray Bridge in 1932, by Morgan (1), (2), there has been little further reported about its continued existence.

Late in 1947, Mr. H. Morton, of Jervois, reported that he had found the bird breeding at Wood's Point, and in consequence the writer together with Messrs. F. Basse, F. George and R. W. McKechnie, decided to make an investigation of the area.

On December 14, 1947, an early start was made from Adelaide, and Morton was met at Tailem Bend and conducted us to the landing stage at Wood's Point. On arrival, the birds in question were identified at once, and the following details were recorded.

Immediately north of the landing stage at Wood's Point, there is the usual growth of willow trees, and between them and the embankment there is a small backwater with a dense growth of bullrushes on the landing side (see fig. 1). The gorgeously coloured males spent most of their time on prominent branches of the willows from which they would frequently set off on a display flight, during which they have been aptly described as "looking like an enormous bumble-bee." These flights sometimes concluded with a mild brawl with an adjacent male, but more often than not the male bird returned to his favorite perch.

Investigations showed that immediately opposite each male's favorite perch, there was a group of nests in the rushes. Each group consisted of from two to seven nests in varying stages of repair and disrepair. Thus, in each group were old deserted nests, possibly belonging, in some cases, to a previous season, and nests containing young and eggs. In addition, recently fledged young birds were observed being fed on two occasions.

The widely accepted theory that the birds are polygamous was borne out by our observations, inasmuch as more than one female was observed at most of the groups of nests

and more than one nest in each group was in use.

There were three groups of nests in a distance of about fifty yards to the west of the landing stage and two of the three groups were within ten yards of each other, and the watching perches of the males were at a corresponding distance apart. But, as recorded above, the territorial rights appeared well-defined, and only occasional squabbles occurred between the males.

A fourth and smaller colony was found about 100 yards or so to the east of the landing stage. There were probably not more than two females in this colony, whereas it was felt that there might have been three or more in each of the others. It was felt that there were not more than four colored males in the area under review; of these, No. 1 was distinctly aggressive and flew at us when his territory was approached, but veered off when within a few yards of us.

On February 7, 1948, McKechnie and George paid another visit to the area, but the flame-throwers used to combat the grasshopper plague had burnt down the rushes, and although a few birds were seen, no evidence of nesting was observed. Since then, L. Ellis, of Tailem Bend, has found a large nesting colony on the opposite bank of the river.

It is difficult to estimate whether the birds have spread to any extent in the last twenty years. If they had, it would seem likely that a brightly-colored bird like the male in breeding plumage would have been observed and reported frequently, and the writer inclines to the view that the original colony has done little more than maintain its numbers over the years.

REFERENCES:

- (1) Morgan, A. M. 1932. "S.A. Orn." XII: 5.
- (2) Morgan, A. M. 1933. "S.A. Orn." XII: 31.