

BIRD NOTES FROM WILMINGTON

By T. Brandon

Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*).—Fairly numerous following the Spring of 1947; could be heard calling all day in the green wheat crop in October, and later in the lucerne. They are still to be seen in the lucerne, but do not call now (Feb., 1948). A nest of seven eggs was found on November 6, 1947, and an addled egg was found in the stubble on January 15, 1948.

Little Quail (*Turnix velox*).—Fairly numerous since the Spring of 1947. Two nests of four eggs found about the middle of October last year, one being in speargrass, the other in the wheat crop. Several nests with egg-shells were noted while reaping in December. A bird with two tiny chicks was flushed in the lucerne on January 15, 1948. While inspecting some hollows in a red gum, a friend found an egg of the Little Quail in a large hollow three feet from the ground.

Maned Goose (*Chenonetta jubata*).—Odd pairs and one brood of young along the creek in October, 1947. A nest with nine eggs in an old red gum; in the same tree a nest of the Grey Teal—both about 15 feet from the ground.

Spotted Harrier (*Circus assimilis*).—Not as many this Spring as is usual in a good season. Nest with four eggs on August 30, 1947. This species appears to build and half line the nest, and then leave it for two or three weeks before completing and commencing laying. One pair known to me returns each year to the same spot and builds a new nest for each brood.

Swamp Harrier (*C. approximans*).—One bird seen over the wheat crop on Jan. 1, 1948, this being only the second time I have seen this species in the district, after a lapse of several years.

Australian Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*).—Seen here occasionally; frequently chased by crows and magpies. Lately one bird has been seen frequenting the trees about the house, to the alarm of the domestic poultry. As far as I know they do not harm the fowls, but may attack the chicks

Wedgetailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*).—A few years ago I was familiar with the nesting sites of six or seven pairs of these birds,

but now only three pairs remain in the Range, perhaps due to poisoning and trapping. On July 27, 1945, I took the eleventh set of eggs from a nest in a large red gum leaning out over a steep gully in the Range. On July 31, 1946, I found that this tree had fallen down the gully, and the Eagles had reverted to a native pine where a new nest was built about 15 feet above the ground on the site of an old feeding platform. The birds were not found breeding here in August, 1947.

The local landholders dislike this species and destroy it at every opportunity, but I consider that it does as much good as harm, although a few of my own lambs are killed by it. I have examined many nests, and only on one occasion has any part of a lamb been seen, whereas as many as 14 rabbits have been noted in one nest. A pair of birds nested half a mile from a neighbor's house this season and had four youngsters; the spot is about four miles east of the Range in a gum creek, and Eagles rarely nest here these days.

Little Eagle (*Hieraetus morphnoides*).—Three nests, each with two eggs, found in 1946; one nest with one egg and two birds nearby noted on July 26, 1947. When on the wing, these birds are frequently harassed by smaller birds, but the Whistling Eagle, which resembles the Little Eagle, is seldom molested.

Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*).—Throughout the district, especially in good seasons. If undisturbed, these birds will use the same nest year after year, but if interfered with, will build a new nest near the old one. They feed almost entirely on rabbits. A bird was seen some time ago to catch a medium-sized Brown Snake, take it into the air and later perch in a tree with it.

Fork-Tailed Kite (*Milvus migrans*).—Rare before April, 1946, but since that time have been about continuously. On August 12, 1946, I visited Murrachowie woolshed while shearing was in progress, when about 50 of these birds were seen near the cookhouse fighting for scraps thrown out, and many

uttered their peculiar weak whistle. On a later visit to the same district, which is about 50 miles north of Port Augusta, many birds were found nesting or attending to old nests of other species, such as crows, in which they would probably lay later. On this occasion (Sept. 23, 1946) one nest was found with three eggs, four with two in each and several with only one egg. The nest is a crude affair of coarse sticks placed in a fork with little or no lining, but more often than not I think they prefer to use the deserted nest of some other species. One nest examined had an egg cavity four inches wide and three inches deep; it contained only one egg and there was very little room for another. On October 15, 1947, one chick, nearly big enough to fly, was seen in an old raven's nest in a red gum, seven miles east of Wilmington, this being only the second record, to my knowledge, of the species breeding in this locality. The first record was in 1931 in the same area.

Black Shouldered Kite (*Elanus notatus*).—For the first time in years I saw one of these birds on September 28, 1947, near our neighbor's house.

Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*).—Usually seen at intervals except in drought seasons. In good years they nest in isolated pairs and are quiet. They do not go more than 50 yards from the nesting tree, but will put on a good show of "dive-bombing" if the nest is approached. On September 20, 1945, I found a nest with three eggs in the top of a red gum. The nest resembled that of a Raven, but the sticks used were finer and the egg cavity was saucer-shaped (instead of cup-like) and lined with small sticks instead of leaves and wool. On October 10, 1947, three eggs were found in an old Raven's nest near the end of a long thin limb in a red gum, and close to the nest described above. On November 8, 1947, the same pair of birds had laid three eggs in the old nest. Locally, these birds are known as "Ring Hawks," and every land owner who raises chickens destroys them at every opportunity, as they are very daring and will carry off a chicken only a few feet away from a human being.

Black Falcon (*Falco subniger*).—The occurrence of this species is irregular, and it is only seen in pairs when breeding. Some nests are built close to the ground, others at great heights. On August 13,

1946, I found a nest in the Warrakimba Creek, about 100 feet up in a red gum. Another nest was found on August 7, 1947, in a mistletoe; it contained young. I consider the Black Falcon is very wary when brooding, and often leaves on the first sight of an intruder. They seem to nest in the same locality year after year.

Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*).—Nesting seems to commence about the middle of October. One pair of these birds has nested in the same hollow of a dead red gum for the last fifteen years at least without missing a season.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*).—Nearly always present in the district; in some good years they are fairly numerous. A nest was found on October 10, 1947, with four eggs. Both birds were flushed from the large hollow, which measured about 18 inches in diameter, and the floor was covered with pellets. I have found, on occasions, roosting hollows with a deposit of pellets almost two feet thick.

Galah (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*).—These birds are a pest in this district as in many others, and I have had to resort to strychnine to poison them. Over two hundred were destroyed last season.

Mulga Parrot (*Psephotus varius*).—Has been found breeding in mallee on the east side of Spencer Gulf between Pt. Augusta and Pt. Germein.

Blue Bonnet (*P. haematogaster*).—Occurs about 12 miles east of Wilmington, where first noted about three years ago.

Sacred Kingfisher (*Halycon sanctus*).—Noted for the first time in this district at Spring Creek this season.

Brown Songlark (*Cinclorhynchus cruralis*).—Numerous.

Australian Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*).—First recorded in this area on October 17, 1947.

Purple-Backed Wren (*Malurus assimilis*).—Mainly confined to the ranges, but one pair seen seven miles east of Wilmington on July 26, 1947.

Horsfield Bushlark (*Mirafra javanica*).—Noted between October 20, 1947 and January 10, 1948.

White-Backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*).—Numerous.

A Grey-Backed Butcherbird was heard here re

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cently, this being the third time I have heard them about here.

A Spiney Cheeked Honey-eater was heard here in April, this being a new record for this district.

A male Red-capped Robin was seen at the house several times in April, also a female was noted. These being the first Robins seen for several months.

The Fork-Tailed Kite mentioned in my recent notes as being seen often about the house, remained until March 8, but has not been seen since.

During last Spring, only two pairs of Orange Chats were noted, and only one nest of this species. This was unusual, seeing that we had a wet Spring. During February

of this year, these birds appeared in hundreds along the road at one certain spot for about a mile, and on a hot day several would be flushed from the shade of each post every time a car went along the road. After about a month they gradually left, until there are none to be seen now.

The best grasshopper catchers I know are the White-Faced Herons. When there are any 'hoppers about these birds can be seen out among them making short runs and queer hops and jumps as they catch their meal. One bird was seen for several days running, feeding on this pest at one certain spot when there were only patches of them about. (Wilmington is 24 miles S.E. of Pt. Augusta)