SOME HABITS OF THE CRESTED PIGEON

By E. F. BOEHM

While not originally having so wide a distribution in this State as the Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*), the Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) is now very widely spread throughout most of South Australia, and its numbers altogether probably exceed those of its relative. In the early days, the species was either absent or very scarce in most of the present southernmost haunts.

It then occurred sparingly along the Murray River down to the old aboriginal station at Moorundi, where it was recorded in the 1840's by Angas (1). Later, it was noted further down on the river, at Wellington, by an unknown observer, thought (perhaps wrongly) by Chisholm (3) to have been Eli Waller.

During 1918-19 a very severe drought occurred in the interior of New South Wales, South-West Queensland, and the Far North of South Australia, and about this time a marked increase began in the numbers of Crested Pigeons in several southern districts. The birds are common along the Murray River now, and also in many places in the Mallee areas of the State. They feed on many kinds of seeds and wild fruits, and also eat spilled grain where cereal crops have been harvested. In country districts, they are generally called "top-knot," or "wire-wing"; the latter name referring to the metallic whirr made by the wings in flight.

Roberts (5) has described the courtship display of the male as bowing or curtsying to his mate; each time uttering a "woof, woof," and at the same time spreading out his tail into a fan; the wings on either side forming smaller fans with the two rows of iridescent feathers flashing in the sunlight.

The male pursues the female, often making a hop forward to gain ground. Often, too, just before copulation, he jumps right over her in the manner described for a Mexican dove by Heilfurth (4).

Nests with eggs or young may be found in all seasons of the year, but it appears that spring is the main breeding season. The nest is a frail platform of thin sticks usually situated among the branchlets of a tall shrub or small tree, and at heights from 4 ft. to 15 ft. from the ground. Two white eggs form the clutch. Dimensions of the eggs in two clutches on the Mount Mary Plains, S.A., were length, 30-31 mm.; width, 23-24 mm.

Bourke (2) gives the incubation period as 19 days, and the nestling period as 15 days. Nests are sometimes deserted by the birds after being inspected by an observer, and the eggs may be pushed off the nest by the resentful Pigeon.

Favourite roosting places may be occupied for long periods, and the spot will then be indicated by a small heap of dung. As in the case of the Common Bronzewing, some illicit shooting of Crested Pigeons occasionally occurs in remote spots. Also, some of the birds are accidentally destroyed at times by poisoned wheat laid by farmers for the destruction of Galahs (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*) on germinating cereal crops.

When not unduly disturbed, Crested Pigeons become fairly tame, and pairs or small flocks will feed with Domestic Pigeons (*Columba Livia*) when fowls are fed at farm and station homesteads.


