MOVEMENTS OF BIRDS—PART III
IN OTHER STATES

By BRIAN GLOVER

The 1951-52 influx of birds from the interior and northern parts of Australia, reported in my two earlier papers (1), (2), was not confined to this State alone, but was evident in varying degrees in every State of Australia, including Tasmania, one species, the White-necked Heron, even reaching New Zealand (4).

However, very little has been published on this, possibly the most phenomenal mass movement of birds yet recorded in Australia. This paper is an attempt to summarise the influx of birds into the other States. The response to my letters of enquiry to a number of interstate ornithologists was most gratifying, and a reasonably good picture of the 1951-52 bird movements, has been obtained. It is unfortunate that space does not permit of the reporting of all interstate records in full.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The avian invasion of this State was reported by Serventy (3), and may be summarised as follows. Species marked * were recorded in N.W. Australia only.

Birds occurring in large numbers over a wide area:—
Straw-necked Ibis (Threskiornis spinicollis),
White-necked Heron (Notophoyx pacifica),
Black Kite (Milvus migrans),
Black-shouldered Kite (Elanus notatus).

In smaller numbers or over a more restricted area:—
Native Hen (Tribonyx ventralis),
Brolga* (Grus rubicundus),
White Ibis (Threskiornis molucca),
Pied Goose (Anseranas semipalmata),
Spotted Harrier (Circus assimilis),
Letter-winged Kite (Elanus scriptus).

Odd records of:—
Jabiru* (Xenorhynchus asiaticus).
Possible influx of:—
Pelican (Pelecanus conspicillatus),
White Egret (Egretta alba),
Black Swan (Cygans atratus),
Pink-eared Duck (Malacorhynchus membranaceus).

TASMANIA

(From M. S. R. Sharland, June 25, 1952.)

Only two species visited Tasmania in unusual numbers:—
White Egret:—The arrival began about November, 1951, and counts indicated the presence of between 50 and 60 birds in different parts of Southern Tasmania, and on the East Coast. Normally, one or two White Egrets may be seen in Tasmania at intervals of several years. The last occasion when any number was seen was in 1938.

Grey Teal (Anas gibberifrons):—There was an influx of this species during 1952, numbering probably many thousands of birds. Normally the species is seen in flocks of a dozen or more.

VICTORIA

The invasion of birds into this State was very extensive. Several papers and short notes have appeared in "The Emu," "The Bird Observer," and possibly other journals referring to various aspects of the influx, but
to my knowledge no complete account of the bird movements has been published.

Roy Wheeler (July 3, 1952) supplied me with the following summary of unusual visitors to Victoria (in particular the Melbourne area and the Western District), supplemented by the very comprehensive records upon which his summary was based. This latter was, unfortunately, far too extensive to publish here.

The main invaders were:

Little Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*),
White-necked Heron,
Black Kite,
Black-shouldered Kite,
Black Falcon (*Falco subniger*).

In smaller numbers were:

Darter (*Anhinga novaehollandiae*),
Yellow-billed Spoonbill (*Platalea flavipes*),
White Egret,
Plumed Egret (*Egretta intermedia*),
Spotted Harrier,
Letter-winged Kite.

Odd records of:

Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*),
Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*).

By July, 1952, the water birds had already dwindled, but the Black and Black-shouldered Kites were still in large numbers.

As only one comprehensive report was received from the South-East of S.A. (Naracoorte—A. R. Attiwill and J. B. Hood), a summary of the influx of birds into S.W. Victoria is of special interest as far as South Australia is concerned.

Claude N. Austin of Coleraine reported on the area roughly bounded by the towns of Mount Gambier, Edenhope, Balmoral, Hamilton and Dartmoor (June 6, 1952). The normal status of each species is given in brackets.

The following species were numerous and widespread:

Native Hen (one previous record—two birds in 1937).
Yellow-billed Spoonbill (rare visitor).
White-necked Heron (a regular summer visitor in small numbers).
Blue-billed Duck (*Oxyura australis*) (two previous records within 15 years—on each occasion a pair only).
Black Kite (previously not seen by Austin in Victoria).
Black-shouldered Kite (previously only seen once in area—in 1937-38).

In smaller numbers were:

White Egret (previously not recorded within the area)—was common on plains east of the Grampians, where Austin had not seen the birds for 20 years.
Spotted Harrier (previously not seen by Austin in Victoria).
Little Harrier (*Hieraaetus morphnoides*) (one previous record).
Black Falcon (previously not seen by Austin in Victoria).

At the time of writing (June, 1952), most of the species were still present, but water birds were almost entirely absent by August 25, 1952, although a single Plumed Egret was seen near Casterton. By March, 1953, nearly all species had either disappeared or were back to their normal level. Black-shouldered kites were still in fair numbers, but not as common as the previous summer, and odd Little Eagles and Black Falcons were still to be seen. The number of Black Kites gradually decreased throughout 1952, the last bird being seen in November, 1952, near the S. Aust. border north of Casterton.

Noel F. Learmonth, of Portland, reported on his area (June 24, 1952).

In large numbers were:

White-necked Heron (usually odd birds from July to September; began to appear in large numbers in August, 1951; diminished after New Year, but many still present, June, 1952).
Grey Teal (increased to perhaps double, numbering many thousands).
Black Kite (one previous record, Gorae West, 1944-45).
Black-shouldered Kite (previously rare visitor).
White Egret (previously odd visitor).
Yellow-billed Spoonbill (previously a few birds each year).

In smaller numbers:

Native Hen—about 30 in May, 1951 (occasional visitor).
Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) (rare visitor).

Odd records of:

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*).
Freckled Duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*).
Pink-eared Duck.

Mrs. J. M. Temple Watts (August 19, 1952) reported odd Darters, Pink-eared Ducks and Black-shouldered Kites from Nelson.

Further east, A. Graham Brown reported
the following unusual visitors to Colac (May 20, 1953).

In very large numbers:—Blue-billed and Pink-eared Ducks.

Numerous:—Gull-billed Tern, White-necked Heron, Black-shouldered Kite, White Egret, Yellow-billed Spoonbill.

In smaller numbers:—Red-kneed Dotterel (Erythrornis cinetis), Freckled Duck, Black Falcon, White-browed Wood Swallow (Artamus superciliosus).

This correspondent did not mention the Black Kite, but B. V. Fennessy saw five at Skipton on August 12, 1952, and 20 at Wallinduc the following day: these localities are approximately 45 and 30 miles respectively north of Colac.

The large influx of Hoary-headed Grebes (Podiceps poliocephalus) into the Melbourne and surrounding areas in 1951 is not considered by Roy Wheeler (July 25, 1952) to be a movement from the north; "... it occurs at intervals, and fairly regular ones, too; their breeding is most spasmodic, and they are found in great numbers on Port Phillip Bay."

NEW SOUTH WALES

A. R. McGill (June 21, 1952) reported that, apart from a single Black Kite seen at Camden, and an unusual number of Darters, there was no definite influx of birds into the Sydney area, suggesting that the Great Dividing Range proved a barrier to an eastwards movement, in that portion of N.S.W. at least.

A definite influx occurred further west, J. H. Calaby, formerly of Canberra, in letters June 16, 1952, and June 21, 1954, reporting the following:—The most obvious species were the Black Kite and White-browed Wood Swallow. Other species definitely involved were: White-necked Heron, White-faced Heron (Notophoyx novae-hollandiae), Straw-necked Ibis and Black-shouldered Kite, and possibly Black Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo), White Egret, Spotted Harrier, Little Eagle, Barn Owl (Tyto alba), and White-winged Triller (Lalage tricolor).

Regarding the Black Kite, records, mostly of small numbers of birds by J. H. Calaby, B. V. Fennessy, and D. L. Serventy and party (J. H. Calaby and D. L. McIntosh), are from a wide area in Central N.S.W., bounded roughly by Moree, Nynga and Balranald on the west, and Moree, Cassilis, Bathurst, Jugiong and Wangaratta (Vict.) in the east. This species did not, however, reach the Yass-Canberra area (J. H. Calaby).

In the Moree area, Black Kites were common from the second half of 1951 and all of 1952; about 100 were seen “spiralling” over a small grassfire on December 14, 1952. (A. L. Dyce, per J. H. Calaby.)

After August, 1952, B. V. Fennessy saw no Black Kites in those parts of the above areas in which he had previously seen them, although extensive trips were made, including throughout the Murray Valley. However, in 1954, he saw one bird 10 miles north of Swan Hill on March 9, and 12 birds two miles east of Swan Hill on April 8. In a further trip in June, 1954, he saw no Black Kites.

QUEENSLAND

Reports came from a variety of sources.

A. L. Dyce (via J. H. Calaby), at Texas Station, Texas, on May 7 and 8, 1952, saw 1,2,000 Black Kites concentrated in an area of about one mile diameter, evidently attracted by heaps of skinned, poisoned rabbits. Many Black Kites were seen between Texas and Moree (N.S.W.) on following days:

Roy Wheeler (July 25, 1952): “A note from Toowoomba to-day reveals that Black and Square-tailed Kites are still in that district and show no signs of moving out.”

J. S. Robertson (Brisbane, August 3, 1954) —

Black Kite: Oxley, near Brisbane; 18 birds July 3, 1952; increased by late July, 1952, to 150 to 200 birds.

Pelican: Hundreds appeared on the Brisbane River for the first time in memory.

Apostle Bird (Struthidea cinerea): Oxley; odd records; normally does not occur.

E. A. R. Lord, of Murphy’s Creek (June 6, 1954), reported odd records of Square-tailed Kite (Lophoictinia isura), Black Kite, Red-winged Parrot (Aprosmictus erythropeterus), Galah (Kakatoe roseicapilla), and Black-faced Wood-Swallow (Artamus melanocephalus)—first record for the area of the last species.

Nancy Hopkins, Townsville, July 26, 1954, reported the following species as being in unusual numbers in 1951-52.

In large numbers were:—Brown Quail (Synoicus australis), Coot (Fulica atra), Glossy Ibis, White-necked Heron, Pied Goose, Maned Goose (Chenonetta jubata), Black Kite (a few November 1951, plentiful January 1952, thousands during winter of 1952 but
dwindling by September. Gone after heavy rains early in 1953. Usually small numbers some winters), Black-shouldered Kite, Cockatiel (Leptolophus hollandicus), Red-winged Parrot, Fantail Warbler (Cisticola exilis)—probably coincidental, and Pied Currawong (Strepera graculina).

In smaller numbers were:—Native Hen, Darter, Pygmy Geese (Nettapus pulchellus and N. coromandelianus), White-eyed Duck (Aythya australis), Black Falcon, Galah, Budgerygah (Melopsittacus undulatus), Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (Pteropodocys maxima), and Grey Butcher Bird (Cracticus torquatus).

Some other species, e.g. Royal Spoonbill, were probably also in greater numbers than usual.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

My only records from a N.T. resident were from the late T. V. Givens, of Darwin (April 22, 1952). "Regarding the influx of drought conditions here, it has made some difference to a few birds. We always have a few Black Kites with us, for instance, but lately their numbers have increased greatly, probably because of the arrival of birds from the interior. Other inland birds which I have noted here for the first time in the last few weeks are the Masked and White-browed Wood Swallow, Budgerygah and Zebra Finch. As the dry season, now commencing, progresses, I expect to see many additions to this list."

Givens left the Territory shortly afterwards, and no further information was obtained from him.

I visited the Darwin area in October, 1952; I was informed by a brother of the late L. J. Ellis that Black Kites and Crows (Corvus cecilae) were in numbers considerably greater than normal.

The most obvious invader was the Pied Goose, which was literally in thousands in the Darwin area. A flock estimated at 2,000 was in the Darwin Botanic Gardens, and small flocks were 'in patches' of vegetation throughout the town—even in the main streets. Large flocks were in swampy areas about the town, and in open forest country, and at Knuckey's Lagoon, Leanyer Swamp and Milner's Swamp large numbers were present. Most of the birds were in very poor condition, due to lack of food. Many were so weak that they could be caught by hand, others were stuck in the mud of Knuckey's Lagoon. Pied Geese had apparently done considerable damage to market gardens. This invasion appears to be unprecedented. The species was numerous, at Manton River, but was not seen further south.

Not knowing the normal status of Darwin birds, it is difficult to say what other members of the prolific bird life observed in the area were not normal residents or were in abnormal numbers.

REFERENCES: