

## NUMBERS OF NATIVE BIRDS HANDLED BY COMMERCE

By RICHARD SCHODDE

The trade in wild birds, which has numerous influential supporters, commenced almost unnoticed long before World War II began, and, as many competent naturalists have pointed out, its growth to alarming proportions was rapid. In the year 1940 Jack Jones (*Emu*, 39, p. 185) said "during the years 1933-38 inclusive, the Perth Zoo exported an official total of 35,852 birds, all native except for an insignificant number. Finches predominate, followed by parrots and cockatoos . . ." He supplied details of numbers of individual species, and concluded, "it is some small comfort, however, to realise that the present state of war will probably stop traffic in native birds to the Continent and Great Britain for some time. It will be our task to see that it never recommences." In 1938 ten dealer's permits were issued in South Australia and large numbers of Scarlet-chested Parrots (*Neophema splendida*) were reported to have been trapped and smuggled out of the State in January, 1940 (*Emu*, 39, p. 192).

Naturally the bird trade slackened during the war years. Only 232 individual birds were exported from Western Australia in 1940-41. In 1942-43 "over 3,600 finches and a few dozen cockatoos" were sent interstate. The following year, six birds, valued at £A42, were exported (for details see Branch Reports for W.A. in *Emu*, vol. 42-43). For South Australia during the war years the only figures published (1946) were for the *destruction under permit* of 48 Cape Barren Geese, 30 Mountain Ducks, 90 Maned Geese, 202 Magpies, 172 Pelicans and 66 Emus (1943); in 1944, 24 Cape Barren Geese, 794 Mountain Ducks, 337 Magpies, 50 Pelicans, 186 Emus, and 500 "Rock pebbler parrots" were destroyed by permission.

There was a revival of the bird trade in 1947, and private enterprise, instead of zoos, became the principal exporter of birds. Without doubt, big business had now become the latest and one of the gravest threats to Australia's unique and sought-after bird life.

In Western Australia great numbers of indigenous birds were trapped and exported,

between the years 1948 and 1950, to overseas and interstate traders. For details see V. N. Serventy in *The Emu* (vol. 47, p. 225; vol. 48, p. 211; vol. 49, p. 252). The birds handled were mainly finches, parrots, cockatoos and pigeons, and the numbers of individuals reached tens of thousands.

In an endeavor to have the bird traffic curtailed, the W.A. Branch of the R.A.O.U. passed resolutions concerning the trapping of finches (see *Emu*, 50, p. 255). A gradually-reducing quota system was advocated so that all trapping should cease at the end of five years. Other recommendations were for strict supervision of trappers, that the C.S.I.R.O. be asked to institute an enquiry into the status of the birds, and that all further exports be held up pending the result of this investigation. However, with the adoption of the new Fauna Protection Bill by Parliament about this time, some of the desired controls were gained, although considerable consignments of native fauna are still exported. Of the 9,354 individual birds handled in 1951, 9,267 were finches (*Emu*, 52, p. 136). In 1953, a total of 12,500 birds was exported, including 5,934 Gouldian, 2,418 Long-tailed, and 1,146 Star Finches; in 1954, for the same species the numbers are 9,343, 1,888, nil. (*Emu*, 54, p. 50; *ibid*, 56, p. 61.) In 1955 the number of Gouldians rose to 29,100. In 1956 9,240 finches and 794 parrots and cockatoos were sent from Western Australia, these numbers including 4,474 Gouldians, 24 *Emblema picta*, 112 Smoker Parrots, 371 Western Rosellas and 227 Twenty-eight Parrots. (*Emu*, 58, p. 51.) Bird exports for 1957 totalled 24,420 individuals, comprising 41 native species. (*Emu*, 59, p. 145.)

In the 1952-53 Annual Report of the Fisheries and Game Department of South Australia are given the first details of bird exports since 1947. Of course, the live bird trade was well established in South Australia by 1953, as the remarks of the Chief Inspector (Mr. Moorhouse) will show: "The overseas market for live Australian animals and birds remained firm. Finches, parrots

and cockatoos were the most wanted." No official numbers of birds exported from South Australia are available to show the growth of the trade in the immediate post-war years.

At the Adelaide Congress of the R.A.O.U. in 1952, a report was read from the Standing Committee for Conservation, in which it was pointed out that Customs statistical item no. 981 'Birds Indigenous to Australia' had been merged with item no. 982, 'Other Fauna Indigenous to Australia' to form a single item, no. 985, 'Fauna Indigenous to Australia,' thereby concealing the number of birds and their value exported each year. At the request of the R.A.O.U. the category for Birds was later restored as a separate item.

The following details of the numbers of birds exported from South Australia between 1952 and 1957 have been taken from the Annual Reports of the Fisheries and Game Department.

1952-53:—Finches "over 1,000", parrots 2,000, cockatoos 100. "Overseas zoos were also sent 2 bower birds, 2 brush turkeys, 4 Cape Barren Geese, 48 doves, 22 ducks, 16 emus, 12 ibises, 2 kookaburras, 20 mallee hens, 24 pied geese, 36 pigeons, 4 plover, 30 swans."

1953-54:—Total number of honorary inspectors 21. "A good market for our live birds exists at various zoos overseas." Finches 33,000, parrots 3,300, cockatoos 590, "were the chief birds exported, but 16 Cape Barren Geese, 30 Ibis, 35 Kookaburras, 20 magpies, 204 pigeons, 12 plover, 128 swans, 212 diamond doves, 119 ducks, 24 emus and 22 eagles were also sent overseas."

1954-55:—"The market for our live birds and animals with overseas zoos remained firm." Finches 5,587, parrots 4,167, cockatoos 1,062, Cape Barren Geese 54, cuckoos 5, choughs 20, doves 77, ducks 30, emus 17, flycatcher 1, frogmouths 2, gulls 3, hawks 6, herons 5, kookaburras 8, king fishers 16, "linnets" 48, larks 2, mopokes 6, magpie lark 1, magpies 41, mallee fowl 1, owls 3, pigeons 197, plover 9, quail 93, rifle bird 1, swans 120.

1955-56:—"The market for our live birds and animals with interstate buyers and with overseas zoos remained firm." "Interstate destinations": Bronzewing pigeons 53, Brush turkeys 4, Budgerigars 3,115, Cape Barren Geese 22, Cockatoos 2,295, crows 2, doves 55, ducks 64, emus 17, finches 5,228, hawks 17,

ibis 18, kingfishers 12, kookaburras 2, mistletoe birds 5, parrots 5,275, pelicans 8, various pigeons 181, plovers 11, quail 588, shags 2, "silver-bills" (!) 5, swans 159, waterhens 6, wattlebird 1, wedge-tailed eagles 15. "Overseas"—Cape Barren Geese 6, cockatoos 209, doves 4, emus 8, finches 6,155, ibis 6, kingfishers 12, mallee fowl 5, parrots 337, various pigeons 37, plovers 6, swans 110.

1956-57:—The interstate market took: budgerigars 9,938, bower birds 6, Cape Barren Geese 2, cockatoos 2,466, "corn-crakes" 2, curlews 1, doves 97, ducks 24, emus 3, finches ("all species") 6,858, honeyeaters 14, ibis 7, kookaburras 11, "linnets" 64, mopokes 2, magpies 10, mallee fowl 3, mistletoe birds 9, parrots ("all species") 6,029, pigeons ("all species") 103, plover 10, quail 345, shags 3, swans 192. "Overseas"—600 budgerigars, 90 cockatoos, 1 curlew, 20 doves, 14 ducks, 13 emus, 9,851 finches ("all species"), 30 honeyeaters, 732 parrots ("all species"), 10 pigeons ("all species"), 8 plover, 20 quail, 20 swans, 6 choughs, 4 "cranes", 4 maned geese—a total of almost 38,000 birds.

However, only when provided with figures for the whole of Australia can we fully comprehend the alarming extent of the trade. The following is an extract from the Third Report of the Standing Committee on Conservation, R.A.O.U. (*Emu*, 55, p. 85).

"*Export of Native Fauna.*"—The Committee asked each State Fauna Department to supply statistics of the export of native birds, species by species, and offered to compile from this source the particulars for Australia as a whole. The result showed that the trade had grown rapidly in the past six years, until approximately 48,000 birds were exported in the year 1951-52 . . . . An unsatisfactory feature of the records was that nearly half the birds were exported without a record of the species, on permits issued for 'mixed finches,' 'mixed parrots,' etc. The issue of such permits is far too common in South Australia, and encourages the illegal trapping and export of protected species.

"Finches made up most of the birds exported. There were 42,000 native finches of sixteen species . . . . Cockatoos and parrots numbered 2,550 and included thirty-one species. About fifty other species of birds were exported in small numbers, including 8 Mallee-fowls.

"In the year 1952-53, the total number of

birds exported appears to have been nearly the same, but there was a big increase in the number of cockatoos and parrots, about 8,000 being exported. Also there were 20 Mallee-fowls, 18 Emus, 42 Black Swans, and 16 Kookaburras.

"These statistics, in detail, species by species, were placed before the conference of State Fauna Authorities, at which all States, except Queensland and South Australia, were represented. All the Guardians of Fauna present were impressed with the need to control this trade."

Subsequently, the following proposal from the Australian section was advocated by the 9th Annual Conference of the International Committee for Bird Preservation (1954): "That the Governments of all countries be requested to restrict the export and import trade in wild-caught birds, and only permit the export of rare and protected species in small numbers to zoos, and to bona fide aviculturists for scientific study and breeding." According to Wilson (1955), "this motion, if it were given effect to by the Australian Governments, would stop the worst aspects of the trade in live birds. However, there seems little prospect that all Australian Governments will act this way at present."

Meanwhile, the traffic continued without interruption. In 1953-54, 27,728 birds were exported for a value of £52,338. The Netherlands was the biggest customer, with U.S.A. next, and then Britain. The importation of parrots to Holland was prohibited in 1958 (see *Avic. Mag.*; 64, no. 5).

Formerly, most birds were shipped through New South Wales; at the present time Victoria is the principal exporter port (*Emu*, 55, p. 85; *The Bird Observer*, 1959). However, neither of these States has issued permits for the export of protected native fauna for many years. Under Section 92 of the Commonwealth Constitution, Victoria and New South Wales cannot prevent trading in birds from other States.

The Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, which invited the South Australian Ornithological Association to join its ranks without success in 1951-52, has recorded this (1958): "We asked the Minister for Trade and Customs to supply us with an itemised list of all fauna leaving Australia. We were informed that detailed lists of various types of fauna were not recorded, the

grouping being limited to (a) birds indigenous to Australia (b) other fauna indigenous to Australia, (c) other live birds and animals. Total figures under this classification show: Indigenous birds (exported)—for 1954-55, 16,424 individuals; for 1955-56, 16,338; and for 1956-57 (9 months only), 23,950. Further enquiry gave an analysis for 3 months as follows: 4,139 birds exported, of which 2,559 were finches, 230 parrots, 4 kookaburras, 76 black swans, 2 budgerigars, 3 emus, 1,286 not specified."

The Commonwealth Government Quarantine Report for 1957 states that 27,000 birds were exported during that year.

In a letter to the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia re the 1958 Interstate Conservation Conference, Mr. A. Strom, Chief Guardian of Fauna, New South Wales, is quoted as saying: "The general principle adopted by the States is that protected fauna cannot be exported except to authenticated zoos and scientific institutions. All States at the conference, except South Australia, adopted this principle as a rigid rule. South Australia includes 'reputable persons' in their list. . . . You will appreciate that some species rigidly protected in New South Wales are unprotected in other States, e.g. Major Mitchell parrots (S.A.)." (*Australian Wild Life*, 1959.) Mr. Strom's impression that Pink Cockatoos are unprotected by legislation in South Australia is wrong. Nevertheless, it would appear that no restraint has been placed on the trapping of these birds.

More disturbing is the account in the Melbourne "Herald," October 17, 1956, of the exploits of one dealer, Mr. A. Philips—"the leading fauna exporter in Australia," who carries on his business at West Heidelberg, Victoria. The report says: "At present there are about 6,500 birds and animals on the property, including 4,000 finches and 1,000 parrots. . . . Most of these are already ordered by zoos and dealers overseas." Mr. Philips has trappers in Western Australia and Queensland "looking for 1,200 dozen (14,400) finches to send overseas. He exports to Britain, Japan, Hong Kong, America, Holland, Belgium and South Africa" . . . "the demand overseas for our fauna is terrific. In most of our ship loads, there are from 1,000 to 1,500 birds." Philips was prepared to pack up and move to South Australia where, he says, "You can export birds

and nobody seems to mind." This followed an action by the Fisheries and Game Department, Victoria, which succeeded in several prosecutions against him for the illegal possession of protected birds." (*Australian Wild Life*, 1959:)

To reveal the unnecessary cruelty of much of this traffic, as well as its uselessness, the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia (1959) has quoted this from the "Sydney Morning Herald," August 16, 1952: in "a consignment of 180 South Australian birds which Sydney Customs officials banned from being flown to Holland: two had died that day, many others were weak. Customs would not pass any of the cages. A dead cockatoo and a dead parrot were lying in cages with other birds. In another cage, 20 Rosellas crawled round on top of one another. Some were too weak to walk. There was no water in the Kookaburras' cage. One was so weak it fell from its perch."

The most recent available figures of bird exports (for the year 1957-58) leaves us in no doubt that the numbers exported by the trade has reached a record level: "Fauna exported from W.A. from July 1, 1957, to June 30, 1958, for commercial purposes, comprised a total of 23,742 finches, 523 parrots and 20 (Senegal) Doves, including Gouldian Finches 11,136, Long-tailed Finches 3,968, Pictorella Finches 3,952, Masked Finches 1,188, Painted Finches 48, Western Rosellas 260, King (Red-capped) Parrot 123, Smoker (Regent) Parrot 34, Major Mitchell Cockatoos 3, Budgerigars 22, Crimson Rosellas 4." (Western Australian Fisheries and Game Department Annual Report.)

For the same year in South Australia I quote from the Annual Report of the Fisheries and Game Department: "The demand for our live birds and animals from interstate buyers and overseas zoos remained firm. The following were exported overseas:—Budgerigars 4, Cape Barren Geese 8, Cockatoos 189, Doves 12, Ducks 76, Emus 14, Finches 5,470, Galahs 62, Kangaroos 267, Kookaburras 8, Parrots 706, Pigeons (native) 64, Swans 74, Wallabies 60. The interstate market took: Apostle-birds 8, Bronze-winged Pigeons 7, Budgerigars 44,454, Cockatoos 1,502, Doves 143, Ducks 247, Eagles 4, Echidnas 6, Emus 2, Finches 10,785, Galahs 1,139, Honeyeaters 30, Kangaroos 23, Kookaburras 14, Magpies 6, Mallee Fowl 2, Parrots 7,293, Mistletoe

Birds 50, Pigeons (native) 379, Plover 17, Quail 436, Swans 43, Wallabies 1,"—a total of 16,255 finches, 55,349 parrots and parrot-like birds, 505 pigeons and doves, 331 ducks and geese, 708 other birds. The use of general terms, e.g. "cockatoos," "finches" and "parrots," conceals the species (and the numbers) involved.

The grand total from both this State and Western Australia for 1957-58 is almost 100,000 birds!

What lies ahead? In May, 1959, the Bird Observers Club of Victoria, in deploring the outrageous trafficking in birds, presented this question to the South Australian Government: "Why is the trapping, trading and exporting (both overseas and interstate) of our native birds permitted in South Australia?" The full reply was: "To supply educational requirements, to satisfy widespread human interest in pets, and to control concentration of fauna."

The growth and activities of the bird trade may be encountered in all directions. The full extent to which our native birds are exploited and threatened can only be guessed.

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