

## AN EXPEDITION TO EYRE PENINSULA AND OFFSHORE ISLANDS

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On August 22 Douglas Barnes, Inspector of the Department of Fisheries and Game at Port Lincoln, led a nine day wild life expedition along the coast and nearby islands between Coffin Bay and Ceduna. Both authors were present, as were Roy Masson Wallen Hurrell, whose interest was mainly in shells, Jim Cockburn and Don Murphy, herpetologists, and Don Carne from the 'Advertiser.' In all 103 species of birds were recorded during the trip, the highlights being the discovery of a new colony of breeding Pelicans (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) near Port Kenny, a pair of Reef Herons (*Egretta sacra*) on the shore at the same place, banding of the Western Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*) near Ceduna and Coffin Bay, and observations on breeding Cape Barren Geese (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) on Walde-grave island.

Excluding Kangaroo island, Walde-grave is thought to be one of the main breeding stations for the Cape Barren Goose (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) in South Australian waters. A total of 30 adult birds were seen and 15 broods of goslings. The average number of goslings per brood was 5, the lowest being 3, and the highest 10. It is probable that this last figure is made up of two broods. The goslings though unable to fly, had well developed primary feathers and were accompanied by four adult birds. The young were of all sizes from those covered in down to birds almost at the flying stage. It was rather interesting to note that very young birds covered in down possessed a white cap and two distinct white lines running down either side of the rump. These markings showed up very well when the birds were moving away through cover. One wonders if they might not serve as guide markings to adult birds following the goslings, or to aid in keeping the young birds together as a unit. Older birds that had lost these markings, were well feathered, and sufficiently large to be taller than the general ground cover. These older goslings were extremely nimble, and were sometimes seen moving along the sides of the cliff and along ledges with great alacrity. Two old birds were also seen to alight on a ledge on the cliff face.

This was quite an amazing sight since one's inclination is to associate this group of birds with adeptness in the water rather than in such precarious land conditions. On St. Francis island only 4 adult birds were seen and no goslings. The rather poor status of this breed will be commented on later.

A pair of White-breasted Sea Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) were preparing to nest. The nest was an extremely large one the litter of sticks being eight to ten feet in height, had a small amount of greenery in the nest cup. It is interesting that many of the Falconiformes bring greenery to the nest at its near completion, and one wonders at the significance of this in terms of behaviour. In England, the Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) frequently builds two nests but the nest that is subsequently occupied is the only one that is lined with green leaves. One Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) was seen sitting on a nest and two old nests thought to belong to this species were also found.

Two Galahs (*Cacatua roseicapilla*) were noticed flying towards the island, from the direction of Flinders island. It seems that these birds might forage on a number of the offshore islands, even making quite lengthy flights over the sea.

A Hooded Dotterel (*Charadrius rubricollis*) and Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*) were noted on the shore. According to Condon 'A Handlist of the birds of South Australia,' this may be the furthest west in South Australia that this species has been recorded. The Common Sandpiper was particularly tame and allowed a very close approach.

One of the most interesting days was spent visiting an apparently new colony of Pelicans (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) on a small island in Venus Bay just off Port Kenny. This island was one of a group of three, and in general appearance was not unlike the islands in the Coorong on which the pelicans have nested for a number of years. A total of 72 adults were counted. There were thirty nests containing 35 eggs and 24 young in various stages of development, from just hatched to birds with the wing feathers just breaking through. Eleven large young were

seen also, but these formed a group that marched down to the shore and stood with the adults. The various stages of nesting within the colony seems to agree with the habits of the species on the Coorong. (Condon, pers. comm.).

A number of fish were scattered around the nests; these comprised small Mullet (7), Catfish (9), Whiting (1), Rock Cod (2). Most of these fish were of no commercial value, as stated by one of the fishermen that kindly ferried the party to the island. On one of the other islands a colony of 300-400 Silver Gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*) were nesting. The majority of the eggs had the usual beige background with lavender-brown markings. However two clutches of eggs were noticed in which the general background was a pinky-mauve colour with rusty red blotches. Such erythrocytic eggs have been recorded by other observers in Silver Gull colonies. (Wheeler and Watson, 1963).

Rock Parrots (*Neophema petrophila*) were also nesting. These birds were very tame and would fly back to their nests which were in man made heaps of rocks, whilst the observer was sitting only a few yards away. It was estimated that there were approximately 20 pairs of birds nesting in the area in similar sites. Three of the nests examined contained eggs. Four adult birds were banded, this being the first banding of this species in Australia. Both Sooty (*Haematopus fuliginosus*) and Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) frequented the shore and an occasional Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*) was flushed from the tops of the islands.

On the shore at Port Kenny, two Reef Herons (*Egretta sacra*), of the dark phase, were seen feeding along the shore.

In a patch of scrub about 12 miles north of Ceduna, a pair of Western Yellow Robins (*Eopsaltria australis*) was noted. A nest was subsequently found containing two well feathered young. Three adult birds were banded in the area, and were thought to be one male and two females. Identification of the male was based on the size of the bird, brighter plumage and more raucous call. The two smaller and duller birds were presumed to be females. It is interesting to note that all three birds fed the young at the nest. On one occasion both presumed females perched at the nest whilst the presumed male was observed nearby.

Pallid Cuckoos (*Cuculus pallidus*) seemed quite numerous throughout the Eyre peninsula and were frequently seen and heard calling around the camp site. Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) were observed in small flocks as far as Ceduna and a small party of three was seen near Koonibba. House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) were also common around the mission station at Koonibba. One rather amusing observation was made on a flock of Galahs (*Cacatua roseicapilla*) near Port Kenny. There were about 100 of these birds sitting on telegraph wires, many in display. The displaying birds were hanging upside down, with outstretched wings and raised crest.

It seems that many of the offshore islands provide suitable habitat for a number of interesting groups of birds.

One of the most disturbing findings was the relatively low number of Cape Barren geese (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*). From information gleaned from various local observers it seemed apparent that the numbers of this species had fallen, and there would seem to be a pressing need for all the offshore islands around the coast to be declared sanctuaries and some to be perhaps declared prohibited areas. The Cape Barren goose (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) is particularly vulnerable to human predation at the gosling stage and it would have been easy to round up all the broods seen, in a relatively short space of time. It is to be hoped that proper conservation measures will ensure the preservation of this unique species whose relationships with other members of the Anseres is still in doubt.

#### SPECIES RECORDED—

Suffixes in brackets following the scientific name indicate areas in which the birds were recorded.

- (Ad-PW)—Adelaide to Port Wakefield.
- (C)—Ceduna.
- (E)—Elliston.
- (EP)—Eyre Peninsula.
- (F)—St. Francis Island.
- (FI)—Flinders Island.
- (IV)—Islands Venus Bay.
- (K)—Koonibba.
- (LB)—Laura Bay.
- (L-CB)—Lock to Coffin Bay.
- (PA-PL)—Port Augusta to Port Lincoln.
- (PK)—Port Kenny.
- (PL-SB)—Port Lincoln to Streaky Bay.
- (PP-PA)—Port Pirie to Port Augusta.

- (PW-PP)—Port Wakefield to Port Pirie.  
(W)—Walde-grave Island.  
Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) (W).  
Little Grebe (*Podiceps novaehollandiae*) (L-CB).  
Hoary-Headed Grebe (*Podiceps poliocephalus*) (L-CB) (C).  
Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) (W).  
\*Thin-Billed Prion (*Pachyptila belcheri*) (C).  
Pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) (IV).  
Australian Gannet (*Sula bassana*) (LB).  
Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) (IV).  
Black-Faced Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscescens*) (W) (IV).  
Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*) (Common along the coast).  
Little Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*) (PL-SB).  
White Egret (*Egretta alba*) (PL-SB).  
Reef Heron (*Egretta sacra*) (PK).  
White-Faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*) (PL-SB).  
Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*) (PL-SB) (L-CB).  
Chestnut-Breasted Shelduck (*Tadorna tadornoides*) (L-CB).  
Cape Barren Goose (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) (W) (F).  
Chestnut Teal (*Anas castanea*) (L-CB).  
Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) (L-CB).  
Black-Shouldered Kite (*Elanus notatus*) (PA-PL).  
Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*) (PP-PA).  
Wedge-Tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*) (PA-PL) (PP-PA).  
White Breasted Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) (W).  
Swamp Harrier (*Circus approximans*) (PW-PP).  
Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) (W).  
Brown Falcon (*Falcon berigora*) (Ad-PW).  
Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) (FI).  
Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*) (PW-PP) (PP-PA) (PA-PL) (PL-SB) (W) (C) (L-CB).  
 Dusky Moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*) (PL-SB).  
Coot (*Fulica atra*) (PL-SB).  
Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*).  
Pied Oyster-Catcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) (W) (IV).  
Sooty Oyster-Catcher (*Haematopus fuliginosus*) (IV).  
Spur-Winged Plover (*Lobibyx novaehollandiae*) (PW-PP) (PL-SB) (W) (IV) (L-CB).  
Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*) (L-CB).  
Hooded Dotterel (*Charadrius rubricollis*) (W).  
Red-Capped Dotterel (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) (IV).  
Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*) (W).  
White-Headed Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) (PL-SB).  
Banded Stilt (*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*) (PL-SB) ca. 1000.  
Pacific Gull (*Larus pacificus*) seen frequently along coast and Islands.  
Silver Gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*) Common along coast.  
Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) (IV) (E).  
Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*) (W).  
Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*) (L).  
Brush Bronzewing (*Phaps elegans*) (CB).  
Crested Pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) (Ad-PW) (PW-PP) (PA-PL) (L-CB).  
Galah (*Cacatua roseicapilla*) (Seen throughout EP, see text).  
Port Lincoln Parrot (*Barnardius zonarius*) (small numbers EP to K).  
Red-Rumped Parrot (*Psephotus haematonotus*) (PW-PP).  
Mulga Parrot (*Psephotus varius*) (C).  
Rock Parrot (*Neophema petrophila*) (W) (IV).  
Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) (see text).  
Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chrosococcyx basalis*) (CB).  
Kookaburra (*Dacelo novaeguinae*) (L-CB).  
Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sancta*) (CB).  
Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*) (Common EP).  
Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo tahitica*) (EP).  
Tree Martin (*Petrochelidon nigricans*) (C-K).  
Black-Faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina novaehollandiae*) (single birds EP).  
White-Browed Babbler (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*) (EP).  
White-Fronted Chat (*Epthianura albigrons*) (EP) (W) (IV).

- Weebill (*Smicrornis brevirostris*) (L) (C).  
 Whiteface (*Aphelocephala leucopsis*) (PA-PL).  
 Little Thornbill (*Acanthiza nana*) (L) (C).  
 Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*) (CB) (PK).  
 Chestnut-Tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza uropygialis*) (SB-C).  
 Yellow-Tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) (Small nos. seen EP & C).  
 Brown Songlark (*Cinclorhamphus cruralis*) (Common Ad-PL) (PL-C).  
 Superb Blue Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) (EP).  
 Little Grassbird (*Megalurus gramineus*) (W).  
 Red-Capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*) (CB) (C).  
 Hooded Robin (*Petroica cucullata*) (PA-PL).  
 Western Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*) (C) (CB).  
 Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) Common seen in Scrub (PL-C).  
 Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) (Common from Ad-K).  
 Golden Whistler (*Pachycephala pectoralis*) (EP-C).  
 Western Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) (EP-C).  
 Striated Pardalote (*Pardalotus substriatus*) (PK).  
 Yellow-Tailed Pardalote (*Pardalotus xanthopygus*) (SB-C).  
 Silveryeye (*Zosterops lateralis*) (EP).  
 Singing Honeyeater (*Meliphaga virescens*) (C) (SB-C) (PA-PL).  
 Yellow-Fronted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga plumula*) (PA-PL).  
 Purple-Gaped Honeyeater (*Meliphaga cratitia*) (CB).  
 White-Plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga penicillata*) (CB).  
 White-Eared Honeyeater (*Meliphaga leucotis*) (L).  
 Brown-Headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*) (L).  
 Yellow-Winged Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*) (CB).  
 Yellow-Throated Miner (*Myzantha flavigula*) (Ad-PW) (SB-C).  
 Red Wattlebird (*Anthochaera carunculata*) (EP).  
 Brush Wattlebird (*Anthochaera chrysoptera*) (EP).
- House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) (see text).  
 Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) (see text).  
 Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*) seen near water (EP).  
 White-Winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*) (PA-PL) (PL-SB) (SB-C) (K).  
 Masked Wood-Swallow (*Artamus personatus*) (PL-SB).  
 Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*) (L-CB).  
 White Browed Wood-Swallow (*Artamus superciliosus*) (K).  
 Brown Currawong (*Strepera versicolor*) (CB) (PK).  
 Grey Butcher-Bird (*Craticus torquatus*) (EP).  
 Black-Backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) (EP).  
 White-Backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*).  
 Raven (*Corvus coronoides*) Common (Ad-K).

\*The prion was picked up as a beach derelict at Ceduna and identified as a possible member of this species by Mr. H. Condon of the South Australian Museum.

#### REFERENCE:

- Wheeler, W. R., and Watson, I. The Silver Gull—*Larus novaehollandiae* Stephens. *Emu*, 63, 1963, pp. 99-173.