

CAPE BARREN GOOSE ON THE MURRAY LAKES

The following letter, dated December 5, 1965, has been received from Mr. John Eckert, of Langhorne Creek.

"In the *South Australian Ornithologist*, Vol. 24 (1965), p. 75, H. T. Condon quotes Dr. O. Fuller and Mr. J. Hood re breeding of the Cape Barren Goose (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) in Lakes Albert and Alexandrina. I would be interested to know if either person has first-hand knowledge of this matter. Although I have several times been told that Cape Barren Geese breed on The Granites in Lake Albert, I have been

unable to find one person who has actually *seen* the birds nesting there.

"As stated, The Granites are rocky outcrops which I believe are devoid, or almost so, of vegetation. I am doubtful if breeding would be attempted in such a situation. From my experience with the species in captivity it would seem that the young are not fed by the parents at any stage, but are merely led to suitable patches of grass which they graze for themselves. It is difficult to see how the young could exist on a barren outcrop unless the parents swam them the

few miles to shore soon after hatching. Once ashore they would immediately face the threat of foxes. The fox menace would also be a deterrent to the species nesting on islands near Point Sturt. In the days before foxes the Aborigines would have provided a threat just as serious. Jenkin and Waterman (*S.A. Ornith.*, 24, 1965, p. 46) mention the ease with which all young on an island could be rounded up.

“The fact that Cape Barren Geese do roost on The Granites and that some geese remain on the Lakes all year round may have given rise to the belief that the birds must nest on the outcrops. However, not all the convincing stories told around the duck-shooters’ campfire are based on fact, and H. J. Frith, in his book on the Mallee Fowl, has given instances of this sort with regard to that species. Therefore, until some definite proof of breeding of the Cape Barren Goose in the Lakes area can be shown, I prefer to regard the records as interesting but extremely doubtful.”

Dr. O. Fuller has supplied the following information:—

An old identity, regarded as being reliable, told him that back in the days when ducks were shot for the market, Cape Barren Geese used to breed on swampland adjacent to The Granites. Other local inhabitants have informed him that “fair numbers” of young geese used to swim out to The Granites, presumably for protection. He has also received reports of recent breeding at the upper part of Waltowa Swamp, several miles from the main road and very difficult of access.

From his own records from at least as far back as the early 1940s, plus information from local inhabitants, a flock of 200–300 birds seems to be resident in the Waltowa Swamp area. The numbers do not appear to have changed appreciably in over 20 years.

Dr. Fuller has odd records of Cape Barren Geese from all around the Lakes, but only one personal breeding record, of one pair nesting on Mud Is., near Point Sturt.

Any further information on this matter would be appreciated.—*B.G.*