

## FROM THE EDITOR

### THE LITTLE RAVEN

Attention is drawn to the paper "A Fourth Species of Australian Corvid," by Ian Rowley, in *The Emu*, 66, 1967, pp. 191-210. It has been discovered that the birds previously known as Ravens actually consist of two distinct species, the true Raven (*Corvus coronooides*) and the Little Raven (*C. mellori*).

In the hand there is a difference in body size, size and shape of the hackles and the amount of feathering on the under mandible. In the field there is a definite difference in the aggressive and territorial calls and the appearance and actions of birds when calling. It is interesting that many of the distinguishing features are only recognisable in the field or on live or fresh specimens. Although typical territorial and aggressive calls are distinct there is considerable individual and geographical variation and one wonders whether every *Corvus* call is identifiable.

Rowley states that "Work in hand at the moment is aimed at clarifying the breeding and nomadic ranges of the four species of Corvid in Australia." The results of this research are eagerly awaited.

From information that I have been able to gather it would appear that the birds of the southern, better watered parts of South Australia are mostly Little Ravens; the Raven is common in the mid-north, the drier mallee areas, etc., which are the normal southern limits of the Little Crow (*C. bennetti*), which extends throughout the northern parts of the State; the Crow (*C. ceciliae*) apparently occurs only in the far north.

Working out the ranges of our four "crows" would be a very interesting and worthwhile project. All species can probably be identified by call, and being both common and unprotected, some collecting, especially in the zone of overlap is certainly justified.

### THE WESTERN WHIPBIRD

The recent history of this species must surely constitute one of the greatest mysteries in South Australian ornithology. Previously only recorded from a small area of mallee on both sides of the Victorian border in the Peebinga area, with unconfirmed reports from Eyre Peninsula, the species was considered by many to be "probably extinct in South Australia and Victoria."

Now, since its rediscovery in such an unlikely locality as the coastal sandhills at the extreme south-western tip of Yorke Peninsula in 1965, the Western Whipbird has also been found to be well distributed, and apparently numerous on parts of southern Eyre Peninsula and Kangaroo Island. The species could hardly have arrived in these areas in recent times so it has obviously been there since long before civilization.

The mystery is this—how is it that a bird with such a distinctive and far-carrying call and occurring commonly in areas frequently visited by bird observers has remained undiscovered for so long? Admittedly, without the use of a tape recorder to call the birds up they are almost impossible to observe, but why have not other observers remarked upon the unusual bird calls from these areas? Has the average bird observer a poor ear for bird calls?

Has there been a recent build-up in population in these areas so that greater competition for territories is causing a greater volume of song than would be produced by a very sparse population? It seems unlikely that such a build-up would occur simultaneously in three separate areas and in several types of habitat.

A further recent report of the "Western Whipbird" from the upper River Murray area received considerable publicity, but from information received the birds observed were obviously not this species.