

AN INLAND LAGOON

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Luke's Dam, on Oakbank Station, in the Lower North-East of S.A. (Latitude 33° 00', Longitude 140° 33'), is situated in a natural hollow, surrounded by Black Box Trees (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*), the other principal vegetation being Australian Boxthorn (*Lycium australe*) and Nardoo (*Marselia* species). The surrounding country comprises plains supporting mainly Black Oak (*Casuarina cristata*), Sugarwood (*Myoporum platycarpum*), Bluebush and Blackbush (*Kochia* species), Saltbush (*Atriplex* species), plus various wattles (*Acacia colletioides*, *oswaldii*, *aneura* and *burkittii* mainly) and Emu Bushes (*Eremophila maculata*, *longifolia*, *sturtii* and *glabra*).

In a good season, this surrounding countryside bursts into prolific annual ground cover, comprising principally Spear Grass (*Stipa* species), Everlastings (*Helipterum* and *Helichrysum* species), odd areas of Koonamore Daisy (*Erodiophyllum elderi*) plus various smaller plants including Bindyi (*Bassia* species).

The years 1968 and 1969 were good seasons following three years of drought, which could only muster a grand total of 17½ inches. The year 1969 recorded 11.72 inches of rain, the largest falls, 160 points on February 22 and 169 points on March 24, causing drains to flow into the dam, that overflowed into the surrounding flat, which contained up to ten acres of water to a depth averaging 12" for the balance of the year, until the onset of hot weather.

During a weekend in September, 1969, while conducting members of the Society for Growing Australian Plants, we were fortunate enough to learn that there were water birds on Luke's Swamp, to which a small party paid a visit on Sunday the 21st September. The bird life was absorbing enough to coax us to revisit Luke's Swamp in October, to record the bird life and perhaps band some of the nomadic water and bush birds there.

Our next visit was on the 11th and 12th October, when the following water birds, in similar numbers as on the September visit, were noted:—

LITTLE GREBE (*Podiceps novaehollandiae*). One only, on the dam, the surround-

ing swamp being too shallow.

WHITE-FACED HERON (*Ardea novaehollandiae*). A pair only.

WHITE-NECKED HERON (*Ardea pacifica*). One only.

BLACK SWAN (*Cygnus atratus*). A pair of adults, with four cygnets, on the dam. On our approach, one adult would fly, while the four cygnets would clamber on to the back of the other parent. If we stayed in the vicinity, the second parent would also take to wing and the cygnets would hide in low vegetation adjacent to the dam. The remains of the nest were near the edge of the swamp.

BLACK DUCK (*Anas superciliosa*). Two only, that flew strongly away to the north-east, perhaps to Canteen Dam (Oakvale Station), that likewise contained some water.

GREY TEAL (*Anas gibberifrons*). Six, that reacted as No. 84.

BLACK-TAILED NATIVE HEN (*Tribonyx ventralis*). Up to 50 or 60 were present on our arrival, but they gradually drifted inland from the swamp.

RED-CAPPED DOTTEREL (*Charadrius alexandrinus*). A pair, on the swamp edge.

BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL (*Charadrius melanops*). Numbers varied from two on 2-9-69, to about eight in October, most of the activity being in shallow water supporting Australian Boxthorns and Nardoo. From our observations, they were nesting in highest clumps of Nardoo, where conditions would have still been very muddy and sloppy.

RED-KNEED DOTTEREL (*Charadrius cinctus*). Two were observed 2-9-69, but twelve were noticed in October. Nests with eggs were visible, in Nardoo growing in the swamp.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER (*Calidris acuminata*). A group of about twenty towards the swamp edge.

WHITE-HEADED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*). Three on 21-9-69, with about twenty in October. There was much flapping and barking on our approach, as they were nesting in Australian Boxthorn bushes in the swamp.

MARSH TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*). Between 30 to 50 were flying over the swamp

or resting on a fence bisecting the swamp. The numbers varied and the birds must have had another site some miles away.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*). Five of this species were present, representing the first North-East recording by the authors. Were generally in company with 194.

LITTLE GRASSBIRD (*Megalurus gramineus*). One only, among low vegetation on the edge of the dam.

REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus sten-toreus*). One, recorded 21-9-69, by call only.

Most of the above species were present because of the swamp; if the water had been confined to the dam, nos. 1-3 and 5-8 on the above list would have been the maximum number of species encountered; the number of species generally observed on dams is from one to three.

In addition, the countryside to a depth of about 200 yards contained an excellent variety of bird life, the following being recorded, with most species coming to drink at the lagoon or dam:— Emu, Whistling Kite, Brown Goshawk or Collared Sparrowhawk, Crested Pigeon, Pink Cockatoo, Galah, Cockatiel, Ringneck Parrot, Mulga Parrot, Blue Bonnet Parrot, Budgerygah, Horsefield Bronze Cuckoo, Owlet-Nightjar, Rainbow Bird, Welcome Swallow, White-backed Swallow, Pipit, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike, White-fronted Chat, Whiteface, Weebill, Yellow-tailed Thornbill, Chestnut-tailed Thornbill, Willie Wagtail, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Brown Treecreeper, Striated Pardalote, White-plumed and Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters, Yellow-throated Miner, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Zebra Finch, Magpie-Lark, Apostle Bird (nest with young), White-winged Chough, White-breasted Wood-Swallow, Grey Butcher-bird, Australian Magpie (Black-backed), Australian Raven and Little Crow.

Other birds encountered during the two visits over a radius of a few miles were Wedge-tailed Eagle, Nankeen Kestrel, Banded Plover, Diamond Dove, Common Bronzewing, Pallid Cuckoo, Tree-Martin, Brown Songlark, Crimson Chat, Redthroat, Blue and White Wren, Purple-backed Wren, Red-capped Robin, Hooded Robin, Rufous Whistler, Crested Bell-bird, Singing, White-eared, Brown-headed, White-fronted and

Striped Honeyeaters and Black-winged Currawong (a pair only, being on the northern fringe of known habitat).

Thus, there were sixteen species on the lagoon or the water's edge, forty-six at the perimeter of the swamp and a further twenty-two within a few miles, a total of eighty-four. In addition, several other species could have been located inland had there been the time, with at least ninety species being possible.

Our banding efforts on water birds met with only moderate success, but as a pleasant ornithological area, of a size suitable for identification and study, we found Luke's Swamp and Dam ideal. In fact, such a site should make an ideal venue for an S.A.O.A. expedition.

We feel that the occurrences of water birds in the North-East have been insufficiently recorded, and we hope to add to our knowledge when future rains provide another ideal setting.

Assistance from amateur ornithologists Bob Goodfellow and Perce Munchenberg, of Berri, is readily acknowledged, as is the hospitality of Oakbank Station.