

FURTHER NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF KANGAROO ISLAND

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Accepted December, 1976

INTRODUCTION

A recent note in this journal (Parker and Lashmar, 1976) was a reminder of the shortage of published material on the birds of Kangaroo Island. Abbott (1974), noted that '... no modern critical list for Kangaroo Island and the adjacent mainland is available', and in spite of his extensive search of the literature, his discussion of the landbirds (a term he never defines), contains several errors and omissions. Some of these have recently been corrected in an undated mimeographed pamphlet *The Birds of Kangaroo Island*, put out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, S.A., which is otherwise not in print. The following short notes are intended partly to rectify this situation, and to supplement these recently published papers as far as they relate to distribution. They are based on two visits to Kangaroo Island by the author, December 24, 1969 to December 30, 1969, and February 17, 1975 to March 7, 1975, a total of some four weeks. In 1969, the author travelled around much of the island, while the lengthy stay in 1975 was almost all in the Eleanor River area on the mid-south coast. Records have also been collected from a week-long Victorian Field Naturalists trip to the island in 1973 (Turner *et al* 1974), which seems to have been overlooked by some writers.

YELLOW-BILLED SPOONBILL

Platalea flavipes

Condon (1968) mentions one record for the island. To this may be added a single bird seen by the author at American River, December 24, 1969.

MANED WOOD-DUCK *Chenonetta jubata*

Condon (1968) states that this species has not been found on Kangaroo Island. This despite the fact that Wheeler (1960) had recorded 'Two birds near Kingscote and eight at Flinders Chase' in late September, 1959. More recently there are at least three separate records as follows: Rischbieth, five birds at Rocky River, January 2, 1969 (Glover, 1971). The author saw five birds at Breakneck River, December 28, 1969. These two records are from locations about 10 km apart. The Victorian Naturalists recorded the species from the northern and Flinders Chase sections in September, 1974 (Turner *et al* 1974).

It would seem therefore that the species is at least a fairly regular visitor to the island; and

one might surmise that the opening up of land and the presence of grass-flanked dams may have provided increasingly suitable habitat (for a similar argument with respect to the Galah, see Ford and Paton 1974).

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*

Condon (1968) includes the island as within the distribution of this species, but Abbott (1974) includes it as a species that could have become extinct, presumably as a breeding species.

Parker and Lashmar (1976) discuss its status on the island, and mention that they can find only two records previous to theirs. The following records can be added, though a couple of them lack precise dates and therefore are of limited value, other than to suggest that the species is regular on the island.

The Victorian Naturalists party recorded the Peregrine in the northern part of the island in September, 1974. The author saw a single bird at Eleanor River on March 4, 1975, and Glover (1972) reports the species at Rocky River during 1970-71, though neither a date nor an observer are named.

AUSTRALIAN SPOTTED CRAKE

Porzana fluminea

Parker and Lashmar (1976) discuss the status of this species on the island and note only four published reports. While staying for three weeks at the mouth of the Eleanor River during February and March, 1975, the author used a small rowing boat over 3 km of this secluded river. During this time, the Spotted Crake was seen almost daily, and the regular location of pairs was noted. There appeared to be at least four pairs along this stretch of the river. A single bird was also seen on the Harriet River a few km W on March 5, 1975. Given the secretive habits of these birds, these sightings suggest that it is quite numerous on these river systems.

OWLET NIGHTJAR *Aegotheles cristatus*

Condon (1968) suggests by omission that this species is not on Kangaroo Island; and Abbott (1974) in Appendix I, includes it in a table of birds, 'never recorded Kangaroo Island.' Abbott describes it as a species which has probably become extinct on the island, though he adduces little evidence for this view. The only reference in literature appears to be an aural record by Robinson in 1969 (National Parks and Wildlife Service, S.A., undated).

The author has seen this species twice on the island. On December 27, 1969, three birds were seen in the Breakneck River area of Flinders Chase. Two of them were seen at dusk and were observed at close range while sitting together and calling.

On February 28, 1975, a single bird was seen in broad daylight in thick coastal Tea-tree *Leptospermum* sp. and Acacia scrub at the mouth of the Eleanor River. Both of these sightings were close to large areas of mallee scrub, habitat closely resembling areas on the mainland in which the species occurs commonly. Its crepuscular habits, and the lack of observers in the less developed parts of the island, may well explain the lack of records.

WILLIE WAGTAIL *Rhipidura leucophrys*

The status of the Willie Wagtail on Kangaroo Island has always been something of a mystery which Abbott's notes (1974, p. 132) reflect. However, it has been reported regularly in small numbers since the early years of the century. The Victorian Naturalists party (Turner *et al.* 1974) recorded the species in the Kingscote section and in the Eastern section, and the present author saw one bird at Murray's Lagoon on the southern side of the island on March 5, 1975. At present this record seems to be the most westerly on the island, and there appear to be no records from Flinders Chase.

MAGPIE LARK *Grallina cyanoleuca*

Condon (1968) describes this species as somewhat rarer on the island than on the mainland, and Abbott (1974) is unsure of its status, including it in a group of birds which may breed rarely. Certainly until recent years it was rarely reported, and until 1960 all records for which there were dates were for April and May (Abbott 1974).

During the author's first visit in December, 1969, only two birds were seen and these were in the American River area. However, during February and March, 1975, the species seemed to be widespread and not uncommon. Pairs were seen along the main south-coast road in several places, and a group of six birds was seen in the Western River area on the north coast. In fact the species seemed to be as numerous as in comparable mallee areas on the mainland. The Victorian Naturalists party (Turner *et al.* 1974) reported the species from the Kingscote section and in the northern section of the island in September, 1974. Denton (pers. comm.) noted them in large numbers near Kingscote. These records, together with

those of Grant (Glover 1971) span the months September to February, and this would include part of the normal breeding period, although there seem to be no breeding records in the literature.

In the eastern States the species is a partial altitude migrant (Rowley 1969; Baldwin 1973), leaving inland high altitude territories in autumn and generally moving to lower altitudes, which commonly means to coastal districts. While the altitude factor in South Australia would seem to be relatively unimportant, the same instinctive movements may occur. Certainly, the fact that all records up to 1960 were for April and May supports the possibility that the birds may have been migrants from the mainland. In the eastern States these autumnal migrant groups are mainly composed of females and juveniles; and it is a pity that early records of the species failed to record the sex of the birds. Recent observations on the island by the author confirm the presence of males and of apparent pairs. This, together with their presence in the breeding season, suggests that the Magpie Lark probably is resident and breeding, though the status in earlier years may have been different. It is possible that, like the Galah, the Magpie Lark is colonising Kangaroo Island, probably aided by the increased availability of water and relatively open farming country (Ford and Paton 1974). Alternatively, it may still be largely a vagrant, supplemented by migratory flocks from the mainland, or even by local nomadism, which again mainly involves females (Lane 1972). Given the sexual dimorphism of the species, it is worth asking that visitors to the island note the sex ratio of Magpie Larks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mr. Frank Denton, who elaborated on the Victorian Field Naturalists' visit to the island in 1974.

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