

RECORDS OF THE BARKING OWL FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIA

S. A. PARKER

Accepted January, 1977

SUMMARY

This article discusses the occurrence of *Ninox connivens* in South Australia, using both published and unpublished sources of information. The species has been recorded from several localities in the eastern part of the State, notably in River Red Gums. Care should be taken to distinguish the barking call of this owl from certain calls of the introduced Fox.

NORTH-EASTERN

Mees (1964) plotted Innamincka on his map of the distribution of the Barking Owl *Ninox connivens*, basing this on a specimen in the South Australian Museum. In his text, Mees stated "Field observations from Cooper's Creek (White, 1917 [a]) . . . were given in too casual a way to be considered here." Condon (1968-9) gave three records from the North-East: a specimen from Innamincka, a "casual" sight record from Cooper's Creek, and "also Innamincka (Mees)."

The above records are in fact all referable to a single occurrence, reported by White (1917a, b) and Sutton (1923). White (1917b: 450) wrote of *N. connivens* "A pair of these birds was observed in the vicinity of 'Burke's Tree', Innamincka, where one was secured . . . They were very wary, and it was not till after many attempts that they could be approached within gun-shot, keeping to the large gum timber along the creek". Burke's Tree is actually about three km east of Innamincka HS, on the bank of Cooper's Creek. White's specimen is now in the South Australian Museum, registered number B2225, a male collected on 30 September, 1916 (date on label; given as 2 October by White 1917b).

Other records from the North-East are: near Etadunna HS, May 1955, heard calling in Coolibahs *Eucalyptus microtheca* along water-course (T. Brandon pers. comm.); Coongie Lakes, August 1975, heard calling in River Red Gums *E. camaldulensis* (J. B. Cox et al., forthcoming); a pair seen and heard in *E. camaldulensis* at Innamincka, 21 August, 1976 (R. Lovell pers. comm.; on the same trip Mr. Lovell also recorded the species in *E. camaldulensis* on Cooper's Creek at Windorah, central Queensland).

NORTH FLINDERS RANGES --- LAKE FROME DISTRICT

Terrill & Rix (1950) referred to a specimen in the South Australian Museum from Parallana. Condon (1962, 1968-9) stated that this

reference was incorrect. However, there is a specimen in the Museum from this locality — an egg, B10076, collected by R. M. Hawker, inscribed in pencil "A/ connivens/ Parallana/ 2 Eggs in nest/ July 1893." This egg was earlier mentioned by Boehm (1947). It measures 47.55 x 38.8 mm, within the size range of *N. connivens* but too large for the Boobook Owl *N. novaeseelandiae*.

On 22 July, 1923, J. N. McGilp collected a clutch of three eggs of *N. novaeseelandiae* from a hollow limb of a large gum tree on Hamilton Creek. On the data-slip accompanying this clutch (now in the South Australian Museum, B14463), he commented: "There appears to be two brown owls in this locality one very much larger than the other and it has a much harsher 'mopoke' call; identification is not certain but I think the larger bird must be the Winking [Barking] Owl. No skin has yet been secured."

Morgan (1931) made a similar comment on the owls at Mount Serle: "Boobook Owl — heard calling at Mount Serle. The call seems to me, to differ from the southern bird. Mr. Greenwood, owner of Mount Serle Station, says that there are two species of brown Owls in the district, one larger than the other, so this may be *Ninox connivens*, Winking Owl." Recourse to John Sutton's *ms.* transcription of Morgan's original notes (in the Bird Section, South Australian Museum) shows that Morgan heard his owl in the bed of the River Frome at Mount Serle on 17 January, 1931.

McKechnie (1972) reported hearing and seeing a Barking Owl in Parachilna Gorge in July 1960. Ian May (pers. comm.) recorded the species at Arkaroola in October 1973; it was calling nightly and was occasionally spotlighted in *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* along Whywiyana Creek near the Arkaroola Motel.

SOUTH FLINDERS RANGES — PORT AUGUSTA DISTRICT

Brandon (1951, and *in litt.* 19 May, 1976) has heard calls he considered referable to the Barking Owl in the Wilmington district. Several times in the Spring of 1944, and again on 3 April, 1945 he heard the call on the Willochra Creek 11.2 km (7 miles) east of Wilmington. On 20 October, 1950 he heard it again in a large River Red Gum 5.6 km (3½ miles) east-south-east of Wilmington. Gray (1931a) re-

corded a "*Ninox* sp." at Orroroo, subsequently (1931b) reporting *N. connivens* from the area without further comment.

In the South Australian Museum (McGillp Collection) there is a clutch of three eggs taken as *N. connivens* by Walter Cain. This clutch, B25016, was collected on 18 October 1933 from a hollow eight m up in a *E. camaldulensis* on Dry South Creek 24 km north-north-east of Port Augusta. The eggs measure 40.1 x 35.3, 41.0 x 35.5 and 40.2 x 35.5 mm. A second c/3 taken by Cain as *N. connivens* was listed and queried by Boehm (1947); this was collected near Kallioota on 7 September 1939. Mr. Boehm (*in litt.*, 23 March 1976) has kindly supplied the following details about this clutch: "The following information was among my papers: Describing a nest and eggs believed to belong to the Winking, or Barking, Owl near Kallioota, S.A., Walter Cain wrote to J. Neil McGillp on Sept. 22, 1946, as follows:— "The bird flushed from a Red Gum hollow, 35 ft. from the ground and settled in the topmost twigs of a very high tree. I was confident that it was not the Boobook Owl (*N. boobook*), for this bird was larger and of a tawny or darker colour than most Boobook Owls I have seen there. The eggs were laid on decayed wood. They are pure white, fairly smooth, and very slightly lustrous. Size fairly uniform, the three eggs measuring 1 5/8 in. x 1 1/8 in. We saw another Owl fly up along the Creek near the nest before we sounded the tree from which the sitting bird was flushed."

"My comment is that the size of the eggs, 41 mm x 35 mm would fit *Ninox novaeseelandiae*. I never saw the clutch. Cain wrote to me saying it was taken on 7/9/1939." Almost certainly both clutches taken by Cain are referable to *N. novaeseelandiae*.

MOUNT LOFTY RANGES AND ADJACENT AREAS

Taylor (1972) reported the species from 6.4 km (four miles) south-west of Nantawarra. He first heard calls about the end of April 1972, and last on 3 August 1972. The tape-recorded call was identified by Mr. H. Crouch. Unfortunately, this tape cannot now be found (Mr. P. Taylor *in litt.* 10 Jan. 1977). Tapes made by Mr. H. Crouch in the Basket Range and originally identified as of the Barking Owl have turned out to be of the Fox (see below).

Pearse (1935) reported the species from the Florieton district, but his observations apply almost certainly to the Boobook Owl.

From the Adelaide area there are three early records. In the South Australian Museum there

is an adult female, B8815, collected near Adelaide on 1 July 1895 by J. H. Higgs (mentioned by Sutton 1923:98). Mellor (1948) reported in the Minutes of the S.A.O.A. meeting for 3 August 1906 that he had seen the species lately at the Reedbeds. The third record is

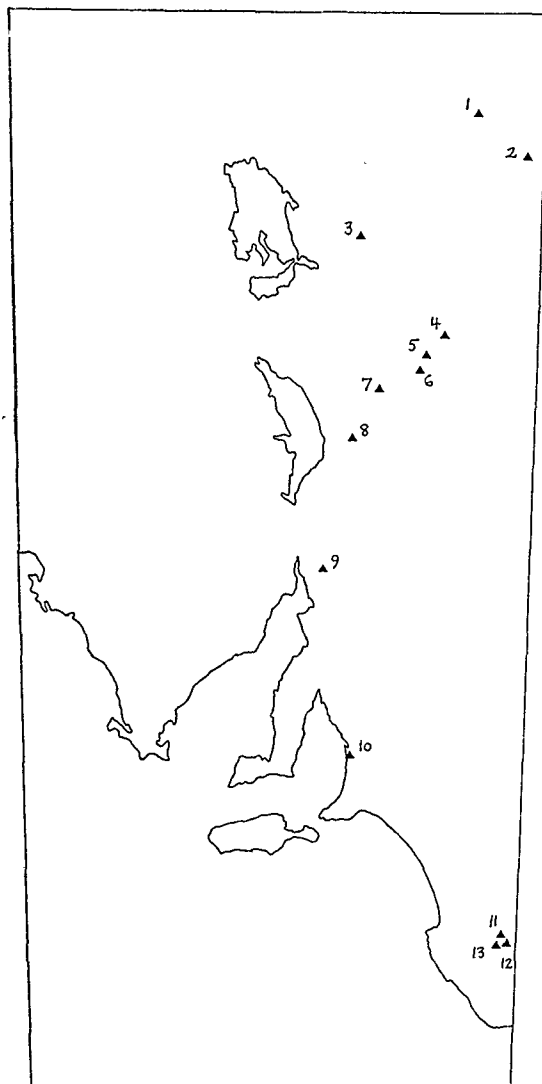


Figure 1. Part of South Australia, showing localities and districts from which records of the Barking Owl have been accepted in this article.

1. Coongie Lakes. 2. 2 miles east of Innamincka HS. 3. Etadunna. 4. Moolawatana — Hamilton Creek. 5. Paralana. 6. Arkaroola. 7. Mount Serle. 8. Parachilna Gorge. 9. Wilmington district. 10. Adelaide district. 11. Naracoorte district. 12. Mosquito Creek. 13. Bool Lagoon.

based upon a specimen in the S. A. White Collection collected at the Reedbeds in July 1892; this was reported as a Powerful Owl *N. strenua* by Condon & Cleland (1942) but is actually a Barking Owl (Schodde 1977). In those early days many large River Red Gums grew at the Reedbeds, and it is likely that the Barking Owl frequented these trees.

In the last three or four years there have been persistent reports of calls of this owl from the Basket Range and Stirling districts in the Mount Lofty Ranges. Some of these calls were taped by Mr. H. Crouch. In July 1976, a party of listeners including Mr. Crouch, Mr. A. Lees, Mr. J. Drummond and myself spent an evening at Uraidla taping calls that had been reported as possibly of the Barking Owl. These calls, identical to those previously recorded at the Basket Range by Mr. Crouch, were identified by us as belonging to the introduced Fox. The Fox has a variety of calls, some of which are not at all similar to the bark of the owl. The fox-call that we considered could be mistaken for the owl's bark was a similar double-note but was more raucous and shrill than that of the owl, and usually had the second note beginning much higher up the scale than the first (the two notes being more or less the same in the Barking Owl). Care should be taken to distinguish the barking call of the Barking Owl from that of the Fox.

THE SOUTH-EAST

Attiwill (1949) wrote that in the Naracoorte district the Barking Owl had been found "in several different localities and may be more plentiful than published records indicate. One of its favourite hunting grounds is among the big red gums along the Mosquito Creek and surrounding country, and its strong call can usually be heard soon after sundown in the winter and early spring months." The first nest and eggs were found in the district on 17 September 1941, in a River Red Gum. Mr. A. Ey (*in litt.*) found another nest with three eggs

in a River Red Gum at Pearson's Swamp near Naracoorte on 17 August 1952. Subsequently, in a paper dealing with birds found breeding in the Naracoorte-Bool Lagoon district during 1941-1971, Attiwill (1972) wrote of the status of the Barking Owl "Very rare."

The only other record of this species from the South-East is the one quoted without details by Condon (1962, 1968-9): "Bool Lagoon (R. Miller, 1946)."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their helpful comments during the preparation of this note I thank Mr. E. Boehm, Mr. T. Brandon, Mr. J. B. Cox, Mr. H. W. Crouch, Mr. J. Drummond, Mr. A. Ey, Mr. I. A. May, Mr. M. R. Lovell, Mr. G. B. Ragless and Dr. R. Schodde.

REFERENCES

- Attiwill, A. R., 1949. Notes on the Winking Owl. *S. Aust. Orn.* 19:34.
 ——— 1972. Birds breeding in Naracoorte district, 1941-1971. *S. Aust. Orn.* 26:59-64.
 Boehm, E. F., 1947. Oological desiderata in South Australia. *S. Aust. Orn.* 13:68-70.
 Brandon, T., 1951. Notes from Wilmington, 1950. *S. Aust. Orn.* 20:20.
 Condon, H. T., 1962. A Handlist of the Birds of South Australia with annotations. *S. Aust. Orn.* 23:85-151.
 ——— 1968-1969. A Handlist of the Birds of South Australia, 2nd and 3rd eds. Adelaide: S. Aust. Orn. Assoc.
 Condon, H. T. and J. B. Cleland, 1942. Additions and corrections to the list of the birds of South Australia. *S. Aust. Orn.* 16:36.
 Gray, J. T., 1931a. Birds of the Orreroo district. *S. Aust. Orn.* 11:103-104.
 ——— 1931b. Birds of Orreroo district. *S. Aust. Orn.* 11:135-137.
 McKechnie, R. W., 1972. Bird Talk 1 (1). (Published by Adelaide Ornithologists' Club.)
 Mees, G. F., 1964. A revision of the Australian owls (*Strigidae* and *Tytonidae*). *Zool. Verhand.* 65:1-62.
 Mellor, J. T., 1948. *S. Aust. Orn.* 19:20 [Extracts from old minutes of monthly meetings of the South Australian Ornithologist Association (1901-1918).]
 Morgan, A. M., 1931. A trip to Moolawatana, S.A. *S. Aust. Orn.* 11:53-61.
 Pearse, N. H., 1935. Notes from Florieton, S.A. *S. Aust. Orn.* 13:23-25.
 Schodde, R., 1977. The Identity of the Powerful Owl from Fulham, S. Aust. *Orn.* 27:184.
 Sutton, J., 1923. Birds of South Australia. *S. Aust. Orn.* 7:92-107.
 Taylor, P., 1972. *S. Aust. Orn. Newsl.*, Sept. 1972 [Bird notes].
 White, S. A., 1917a. *S. Aust. Orn.* 3:7-8 [Report of November, 1916 meeting of the S.A.O.A.]
 ——— 1917b. Aves, in Results of the South Australian Museum Expedition to Strzelecki and Cooper Creeks. September and October, 1916. *Trans. Roy. Soc. S. Aust.* 41:441-465.

South Australian Museum, North Terrace, Adelaide. 5000.