

## BIRDS OF THE WAITE ARBORETUM: 1972-1981

J. SAUNDERS

## INTRODUCTION

The Waite Arboretum forms a portion of the Waite Agricultural Research Institute property at Urrbrae in suburban Adelaide. Most observations reported below were made in the vicinity of a dam situated on the southern side of the Arboretum abutting the suburb of Netherby, 6.8 km south-east of the Adelaide G.P.O. Because of the fluctuating water levels in the dam, some species have been recorded seasonally.

For the first few years of my observations I made only irregular visits to the Arboretum except when the Apostlebirds *Struthidea cinerea* and the Australasian Grebes *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* were nesting. Since 1975 I have made monthly visits lasting for periods from ten minutes to one and a half hours, more frequently in the Spring and Summer and often twice weekly to note the progress of any nesting birds.

Planted in the Arboretum are many varieties of trees, mainly Australian species but also with some exotics. The Eucalypts are the dominant species, the most common varieties being *E. flocktoniae*, *E. astrigens*, *E. cladocalyx*, *E. citriodora* and *E. calophylla*, with several species of *Angophora* attracting many nectarivorous birds when in blossom. Thus there has been a good variety of food for them as well as for insectivorous species. The natural grasses are especially attractive to ground feeders as shown in January 1981 by the sight of 250+ Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla*, 90+ Little Ravens *Corvus mellori*, 50+ Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, 12 Red-rumped Parrots *Psephotus haematonotus*, 9 Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen*, two Magpie Larks *Grallina cyanoleuca*, two Willie Wagtails *Rhipidura leucophrys* and five Crested Pigeons *Ocyphaps lophotes* all feeding on the adjacent Oval.

North of the dam are a number of palms and cypress trees which afford protection and nesting sites for small birds, although it is here that the House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* and Starlings have unfortunately taken over.

In the Bird List below, the following symbols are used to summarize the status of birds recorded at the Arboretum:

R: Resident, seen throughout the ten-year period.

P: Periodic, seen from four to ten months of any one year.

T: Transient, seen on a few occasions.

D: Seen at dam only.

## ANNOTATED BIRD LIST

- Australasian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*. P: One pair each year since 1973, arriving in July-August and staying until February or April; breeding according to food availability and water levels. D.
- Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. T: Once only, one, Feb. 1977. D.
- Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius*. T: Twice only, one, July 1976, Aug. 1981. D.
- Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*. T: 32 stayed three days in Aug. 1976. D.
- Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*. P: One, sometimes two, seen nearly every month in the last three years. D.
- Pacific Heron *Ardea pacifica*. T: Once only, one, Sept. 1976; harassed by Magpies. D.
- White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae*. P: One to nine birds seen from Jan.-Dec. each year but not always the same months every year; has nested in eucalypts 0.5 km from the dam.
- Great Egret *Ardea alba*. T: Once only, one drinking at dam, June 1977. D.
- Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis*. T: One pair in March 1981. D.
- Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa* and Mallard *A. platyrhynchos*. In recent years numbers of these ducks and apparent hybrids between them have been seen. The Pacific Black Ducks (possibly including hybrids with Mallards) have bred each year since 1976, having been absent only in July-August. D.
- Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons*. T: A pair seen for a few days. Nov. 1980. D.
- Maned Duck *Chenonetta jubata*. T: One pair each summer since 1978. D.
- Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus notatus*. T: Once only, one, Oct. 1975.
- Black Falcon *Falco subniger*. T: One bird circling and flying through, April 1977.
- Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis*. T: Seen twice: July 1976 and May 1978; on one occasion diving towards an Australasian Grebe which dived for protection.
- Australian Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*. T: Once only, one on a post near dam, May 1976.
- Black-tailed Native-hen *Gallinula ventralis*. T: Once only, one in Aug. 1975. D.
- Common Coot *Fulica atra*. T: One on dam Feb. 1976 and Jan. 1979. D.
- Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles* R: One to 18, runners seen Sept.-Dec.

- Red-kneed Plover *Erythrogonyx cinctus*. T: Once only, one for three days, Dec. 1980. D.
- Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*. T: Small flocks flying overhead and/or feeding on nearby oval.
- Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*. R: Small numbers always seen varying from two to 14.
- Feral Pigeons *Columba livia*. R: Large flocks flying over or feeding on ground.
- Spotted Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*. R: Always seen in small numbers.
- Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea*. T: In groups of four to 16.
- Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla*. R: Small numbers and large flocks.
- Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*. R: Always conspicuous, in small flocks and up to 60 in number.
- Musk Lorikeet *Glossopsitta concinna*. R: A few always present, with flocks of up to 50 seen.
- Crimson (Adelaide) Rosella *Platycercus elegans x flaveolus*. R.
- Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius*. P: Up to three pairs.
- Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus*. R: Mostly one or two pairs seen at each visit.
- Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae*. P: One or two pairs, mainly from Aug. to March.
- Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*. T: One or two seen in late Spring in the earlier years. D.
- Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*. R: Immatures, Nov.-Dec.
- Tree Martin *Cecropis nigricans*. T: A small flock in Jan. 1976.
- Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*. T: Seen in July 1976 and 1981.
- Blackbird *Turdus merula*. P: One or two pairs, usually from Jan.-Sept.
- Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorhoa*. R: In small parties up to 9 or 10.
- Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*. T: One or two in the winter.
- Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*. R: Nest and/or young, Oct.-Dec.
- Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*. T: Once only, one female, Sept. 1977.
- Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*. P: Aug.-Dec. mainly, with a decline in the last three years.
- Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*. P: Seen from June to Dec., three or four birds.
- White-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus penicillatus*. P: Five or six noted on most visits except in 1981 when only one seen in Feb. and two in August.
- Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*. P: Dec.-Feb. and June-Oct.; two or three pairs noted on each visit except since 1978 when only one or two individuals have been noted.
- New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*. T: One seen in Dec. 1978 and July 1981.
- Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*. P: Up to four seen Feb. to June.
- Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala*. R: Very common and aggressive.
- Greenfinch *Carduelis carduelis*. P: One or two, Oct. to Jan.
- House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. R: Very common.
- Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. R: Very common, breeding Sept.-Nov.
- Magpie Lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*. R: Two or three pairs, breeding Sept.-Dec.
- Apostlebird *Struthidea cinerea*. P: Present each year from 1972-75 arriving in September or October; family parties; reared young in Dec. 1972 and Dec. 1973 but deserted nest in 1974.
- White-backed Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen leuconota*. R: Always seen.
- Little Raven *Corvus mellori*. R: Seen singly or in small flocks.

## DISCUSSION

Seventeen species were Resident, 14 were Periodic and 24 were Transient. The paucity of Honeyeaters was most noticeable. Sixteen species were seen only at or on the dam, though many species were observed near the dam. Parrots dominated the Resident species.

It is to be presumed that some of the birds which have not been seen often in the Arboretum (e.g. honeyeaters) can be seen in the private gardens nearby, where native plants have been increasingly planted in recent years. I have noticed an apparent decline in the numbers of most honeyeaters while Noisy Miners, House Sparrows and European Starlings have markedly increased to the detriment of the smaller species particularly the Yellow-rumped Thornbill. The Sacred Kingfisher has not been seen since the willow trees on the north side of the dam were removed.