

## A BREEDING RECORD AND NOTES ON OTHER SIGHT RECORDS OF THE PLUMED WHISTLING-DUCK IN THE FAR NORTH-EAST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

LINDSAY CUPPER

In South Australia, the Plumed Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna eytoni* is an uncommon and irregular visitor, with most records being from the lower South-East and the North-East (Parker 1980). There is one definite and one equivocal breeding record from the State: a clutch of eggs collected on Cooper's Creek (probably Lake Hope) in 1863, and 'young' reported on the Diamantina in 1930 (Parker, *op. cit.*). Below, I present notes on further records from the North-East of the State including a probable breeding record.

Following the exceptionally heavy rains of 1973-1974, I made frequent, though brief, visits to the North-East of South Australia, particularly to the Birdsville Track, in search of diurnal raptors. On several occasions between August 1974 and July 1979, I encountered Plumed Whistling-Ducks, identifying them by the prominence of their pale upswep flank-plumes together with their pale rufous-fawn underparts.

In August 1974, I noted groups of the birds on Clifton Hills Station, 150 km S of Birdsville. I made no estimate of numbers and, indeed, I heard more than I saw because they appeared to prefer the shallow water with heavy herbage between the sandhills and on the plains, rather than the open waterholes. The normally dry creek-beds were actually series of long waterholes, often a metre or more deep, while the flats between the sandhills had a cover of herbage and contained many large shallow pools of water. Even on the gibber plains there were many wet and grassy areas.

In mid-1976, I noted only small pockets of water along the Birdsville Track, but heavy rain a little to the east had inundated the Strzelecki Creek area. In

some places the creek-bed resembled a lignum swamp and from one such area emerged a cacophany of twittering and whistling from presumably large numbers of Plumed Whistling-Ducks.

In January 1979, heavy rain fell on much of the Birdsville Track area, filling all depressions with water and promoting vigorous growth of vegetation. In July, water was mainly confined to the creek-beds in sizeable waterholes. On 18 July at a waterhole on Damparanie Creek (30-40m long, 6m wide, less than 1m deep), I noted from a distance of 15m an adult Plumed Whistling-Duck leading eight downy ducklings. The birds swam in a leisurely manner. When I moved closer to the water's edge, the adult bird led the ducklings to the far end of the waterhole, where they sheltered among aquatic herbage. I made no attempt to locate a second adult bird and have no further observations. Frith (1977) records that after hatching, young Plumed Whistling-Ducks are led by both parent birds to water where they remain together as the young mature. It is therefore highly likely that the young birds I noted had indeed been bred in the vicinity of Damparanie Creek.

Considering the conditions, I consider it possible, even likely that Plumed Whistling-Ducks bred on Clifton Hills Station in 1974 and 1975 and on the Strzelecki Creek in 1976.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Shane Parker for drawing my attention to the significance of my observations and for his help and encouragement in preparing this article.

### REFERENCES

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*P.O. Box 348, Merbein, Victoria, 3505*  
 Accepted 23 March 1983