

BIRD NOTE

FERAL PEAFOWL BREEDING AT MONTEITH From time to time I stay at a cottage at Monteith which is on the east bank of the River Murray just south of the Swanport Bridge (35°11'S, 139°20'E). In August 1984 I saw a Peacock and a Peahen *Pavo cristatus* in a cut lucerne paddock north of the house, by a levee. On my approach they quickly disappeared over the levee into the willows. A farmer told me that they had had chicks and that these had presumably been taken by predators.

In November 1984 they appeared again south of the house on a rocky hillside amongst Box-thorn, gums and reeds. The male was less fearful and accepted chicken pellets thrown to him from a balcony. The hen appeared once or twice a day for water and food, all the time being harrassed by the cock with beautiful displays and clicking of feathers. She ignored him and disappeared back to the rocks when she had finished. The cock spent a lot of time displaying to himself in a reflective glass door.

After several days I became suspicious and when she next appeared I went by a different route to the rocky hillside where she usually disappeared. There, in a scrape on a protruding flat rock about 0.8 m by 1.6 m across, I saw three eggs.

On 12 December 1984 the parents and three well-feathered chicks were seen in the vicinity of the nest. They were wary and kept to the reeds and bushes.

In March 1985 the cock, hen and two chicks were seen briefly. They were very nervous. In May they were sighted again, still very nervous.

In September 1985 the adults walked casually past the house onto the lawn and accepted food. One chick eventually walked past but was very timid. The other chick went round the hillside behind the house and met the others in the driveway. Both the chicks were as big as the hen, and it was difficult to tell the difference when the three were together. Next day they were all foraging in the original paddock north of the house. The young male was busily displaying (minus the eye-feathers) to three Purple Swamphens *Porphyrio porphyrio* who completely ignored him. They visited each day for food (one was still very timid). When we were packing to leave they gathered close by and watched us drive away.

In December 1985 the young male was developing tail feathers, but he and the two females seemed to stay together. The older male kept calling to them from rocks and a willow tree but they kept to themselves.

In January 1986 only the two females appeared. The farmer told me the males had been missing for some weeks and had presumably been captured.

Some years before this a farmer who lived a few kilometres south of the house had kept peafowl and it is assumed that these birds came from there. The farmer left the district about ten years ago. Peafowl have been seen south of my area for years, but I don't know of any now.

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