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BIRD NOTES

A MASKED OWL IN THE NORTH-EAST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA. Parker (1977) reviewed the occurrence of the Masked Owl *Tyto novaehollandiae* in South Australia, and showed that all acceptable records were from south of 30° S. No further records have been added (SAOA 1977; Blakers *et al.* 1984), except for one bird photographed by N. Yates in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens on 6 March 1977 (copy of photo held by J. McNamara; S. A. Parker pers. comm.). This note details a sighting of the Masked Owl at Lake Toontoowaranie (27°05' S, 140°09' E), c. 10 km N of Coongie Lake in the North-East of the State.

On 29 September 1985, at approximately noon, I was with a group of people returning to Lake Toontoowaranie from some nearby samphire when we flushed a large owl from the canopy of some eucalypts that were approximately 12 metres high, and about 200 metres from the western shore of the lake. The owl, which flew across a clearing and landed in another eucalypt about 100 metres away, was identified as a Masked Owl. Prominent were its fully feathered legs and the rufous markings around its eyes. Some of the observers present were familiar with the species and as far as I know no field notes were taken. However, Mrs Judy Brown was able to take slides from a distance of about 25 metres using a Tokina 500 mm mirror lens. The owl stayed in position for at least 30 minutes, so that all members of our party of about 35 were able to see it through binoculars and three 25× magnification Bushnell telescopes.

A print from the best slide was submitted to S. A.

Parker for confirmation and he replied that, despite the over-exposure of the film, "the fully feathered tarsi seem to render the identification as Masked Owl unavoidable". At the time of the sighting, the samphire and canegrass were in good condition and the latter heavily in seed. Later in 1985 Cooper's Creek was in flood and the Coongie Lakes were all filled and connected.

This is the first authenticated recent record of the Masked Owl in the North-East of South Australia, although a Pleistocene fossil from Cooper's Creek was attributed to this species (Rich *et al.* 1978) and *Tyto* pellets from the northern Flinders Ranges, probably dating from the 19th Century, were attributed to the Masked Owl (Smith 1977). The Coongie record is supported by the records of Beruldsen (1969, 1972) and A. R. McGill (in Rogers 1975) in the Broken Hill district of far western New South Wales. McGill's sighting was of a pair at a nest in August 1974. Together, these records suggest that the Masked Owl may occur in riverine eucalypts in inland Australia where conditions suit mammalian prey. These inland records also support those of Ford (1968) for inland Western Australia, dismissed by Schodde & Mason (1980) although Ford presented a good case. Perhaps the Masked Owl is widely distributed in the caves and hollow river gums of the arid inland.

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