

ORANGE-BELLIED PARROT *NEOPHEMA CHRYSOGASTER* AT CHINAMAN'S CREEK.

On 3 August 1992 while watching a flock of over 60 Blue-winged Parrots *Neophema chrysostoma* at Chinaman's Creek Research Station 23 km S of Port Augusta, we noticed a brighter coloured bird among them. The birds were feeding on the daisy *Senecio lautus* which was growing profusely behind the snakebush *Nitraria* sp. above the high tide mark. Other vegetation in the feeding area included samphire, saltbush and a few specimens of sea rocket *Cakile maritima*. Closer examination of the flock revealed a bird fitting the description of the Orange-bellied Parrot, *N. chrysogaster* and several Rock Parrots *N. petrophila*. The sighting was reported to the SA NPWS Office at Port Augusta.

Subsequent sightings of the bird confirmed our identification. These sightings were made by Rod Henderson on 6 August, Peter Macrow on 7 August and Ian May on 18 August (SA NPWS officers familiar with the Orange-bellied Parrot), John Paynter and Brian Reichelt (aviculturists experienced in *Neophema*) on 15 August and Chris Baxter (SA NPWS) on 23 and 24 August. Attempts to mist net

the bird were unsuccessful, although some Blue-winged Parrots, including immatures, were caught and banded. It was observed again by Rod Henderson on 1 September. Searches by PL on 6 September and again by PL and WK on 11 September failed to reveal the bird, although some Blue-winged Parrots were still present. The Rock Parrots were also not sighted.

Field notes: Bird noticeably more brilliant green, blue in wing not as extensive nor as dark as in the Blue-winged Parrot. Tail same green as back. This bird could be easily picked out in the flock. Underwing stripe present.

Flight description: The brilliant green of the uppers of the bird was what first drew our attention, being easily seen amongst the duller Blue-winged and Rock parrots. Also different from Elegant Parrot *N. elegans*, with which we are both familiar, but which was not present at the time. The central tail feathers were the same brilliant green as the back and rump. Under wing stripe present. The blue in the wing was also more brilliant than that of the Blue-winged Parrot and was made even more noticeable by the turquoise median wing-coverts.

Call: Tinkling call heard when bird flushed. Harsh alarm call which could be described as a buzzing sound also heard but the observers were not sure which bird in the flock was responsible.

On several occasions we watched the bird for some time from a distance of 5-10 m while it perched on a low dead twig. Visibility conditions were perfect, with the sun mostly behind us. The approximate time of first sighting was 1100 hrs. The bird was flushed several times and was observed at several angles and while flying. When flying the Orange-bellied Parrot tended to fly up and above other *Neophema*.

Description of perched bird: Entire upper parts including crown, nape, rump and central tail feathers bright grass-green. Frontal band deep blue bordered above by a paler blue line. The sides of head bright green merging into paler green on lores, throat and breast (Elegant and Blue-winged have yellow lores, Rock Parrot has pale blue). Abdomen, belly and undertail coverts bright yellow. A few faint orange feathers on belly (variable in Elegant, Blue-winged and Rock parrots as well). Bend of wing and outer secondary coverts brilliant blue. Inner secondary coverts grass-green. Outer medium wing coverts turquoise blue. Primaries brilliant blue. Secondaries grass-green. Central tail feathers green, lateral tail feathers bright yellow.

DISCUSSION

Historically in South Australia the species has ranged coastally through the South East, west to the vicinity of Adelaide with only MacDougall's 1886 sightings from Edithburgh coming from further west (Jarman 1965). Since the 1940s there have been no records from west of the Mt Lofty Ranges. Small numbers still come annually to coastal localities in the South East and range up along the Coorong (where it was recorded in only two one-degree blocks during the Atlas between 1977 and 1981 [Blakers *et al.* 1984]) occasionally reaching the northerly and westerly margins of the Murray Lakes. It has been seen near Adelaide and Monarto, and

once at Edithburgh, Yorke Peninsula (Condon 1975; Eckert 1990). Thus the finding of the species at Chinaman's Creek represents a surprising and significant extension of range. As it was with a flock of Blue-winged Parrots it is presumed it had migrated with them to this area. Is this another case of lack of observers or a case of a stray bird being dragged further than its normal range by getting mixed up with a flock of similar birds?

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