A BREEDING SITE OF THE NANKEEN NIGHT HERON. I have visited the Onkaparinga River Parks and compiled a bird list of 180 species over an eight year period. These parks, which are 35 km south of Adelaide, include the Onkaparinga River National Park and Recreation Park, and Hardy’s Scrub. During this time I have noticed the late autumn/early winter influx of young Nankeen Night Herons Nycticorax caledonicus along the banks, in the trees and in the wetlands of the Onkaparinga River Parks. The highest number of young birds was noted in 1992, when up to 20 were counted.

On 5 December 1995 I was told of a dead bird near the Market Square Oval at the township of Old Noarlunga and late in the evening discovered a freshly deceased, almost fully fledged Night Heron under an Aleppo pine Pinus halepensis. The tree was about 25 m in height and, due to the stillness of the night, the calls of other young Night Herons could be heard coming from this tree on the southern corner of the Square.

I inspected the site in daylight on 10 December and found an almost naked dead chick on the ground under the same tree, as well as numerous fragments of pale blue eggshell and large quantities of yabby claws and carapaces scattered around the base of the tree. Five or six nests could be seen high in the dense pine foliage of this tree. Searches around the base of other pines in the vicinity failed to locate any traces of breeding Night Herons, although these trees do support roosting herons throughout the year. I concluded that the pine tree at the southern corner of the Market Square is the only tree used for breeding by these Night Herons.

Up to 20 Night Herons roost at times in these pine trees, but numbers vary with the season and the year (Figure 1). There are two or three fatalities of Night Herons and Great Cormorants Phalacrocorax carbo annually caused by nylon fishing line discarded by anglers.

Parker et al. (1979) summarized the breeding information for Night Herons in South Australia, concluding that details were sketchy and incomplete. They reported breeding records of Night Herons from several locations in the south of the State, including records into the 1960s from the Adelaide Zoological Gardens. There was also a breeding record of Nankeen Night Herons from the small island north of Torrens Island, 15 km NW of Adelaide, in November 1984 (Vincent and Paton 1986). This was a mixed colony with at least six nests of Little Egrets Egretta garzetta and two of Night Herons in mangrove trees.

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REFERENCES


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Figure 1. An adult Nankeen Night Heron roosting in an Aleppo pine at Old Noarlunga.