

A FURTHER SIGHTING OF BAILLON'S CRAKE ON KANGAROO ISLAND, WITH COMMENTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF WETLANDS. There have been only three previous sight records of Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* on Kangaroo Island. Allen Lashmar saw one (or more) birds at Lashmar Lagoon in 1935-6 (Lashmar 1936), Graham Carpenter and Cath Kemper saw one at Larrikin Lagoon, Flinders Chase National Park, on 15 November 1990 (Carpenter 1996) and two birds were observed by David and Val Seikmann on a reed covered dam on their farm (sect. 29; Hd of Gosse) on 13 March 1994 (Baxter 1995). This note documents a further sighting of this species on Kangaroo Island.

The Record

On 20 January 1997 I was birdwatching at Grassdale Lagoons (36°01'S, 136°52'E) in Kelly Hill Conservation Park. The larger freshwater lagoon here was still quite full and most of the sedge which covers this lagoon was inundated. However it had dried back far enough to leave a muddy five to ten metre perimeter around the western and northern side. This was mostly free of sedge and other bushes and therefore an ideal place to view foraging water birds. The mudflat was flanked on one side by a dense cover of slender honey-myrtle *Melaleuca gibbosa* and scarlet bottlebrush *Callistemon rugulosus* and on the other by the thick beds of sedge which

covered most of the remainder of the lagoon.

Having stepped out onto this linear mudflat at the extreme western end of the lagoon I immediately saw several Australian Spotted Crakes *Porzana fluminea* foraging in the open. They showed little concern at my presence and continued feeding. Others also ventured from cover and a total of 10 adults of this species was observed along the lagoon's western and northern edges. While I was skirting the western end of the lagoon and walking close to the inundated sedge beds of the lagoon proper, I flushed another small crake out of dense cover. It lifted up out of the sedge a few metres to my right and flew across in front of me with weak fluttering flight and legs dangling and landed out of view in dense bushy cover about ten metres away. Its light tan and black streaked upperparts and pale grey underparts were clearly seen. Believing this bird to be a Baillon's Crake I waited for ten minutes for it to reappear. Finally it skulked very carefully from cover with head and neck extended to full height and its tail flicking often. At this time its barred black and white undertail coverts were clearly seen and its identity confirmed. After about one minute it dashed across the open mud flat to the dense sedge cover from where it had originally come.

The circumstances here reminded me of the bird that Carpenter and Kemper had observed in similar habitat at Larrikin Lagoon (Carpenter 1996). It too flushed out of dense inundated sedge

and flew with weak fluttering flight and legs dangling to thick shrubby cover nearby. Knowing that the Larrikin Lagoon bird had flushed from a nest with eggs, I too searched for a nest but unfortunately no evidence of breeding could be found.

Discussion

I agree with Carpenter (1996) that small numbers of Baillon's Crakes probably visit and breed in Kangaroo Island's freshwater wetlands each year and that they are easily overlooked due to their secretive behaviour and the densely vegetated, often inaccessible habitat they live in. The latter three observations of Baillon's Crakes have all come from the wetter western districts of Kangaroo Island. This is not surprising as this is where the majority of largely pristine freshwater wetlands remain. Many of the central and eastern lagoons have become much more saline and inundated due to increased run-off as a result of widespread native vegetation clearance for agriculture (Good and Schramm 1983; Barritt 1984; pers. obs.).

The importance of Kangaroo Island's freshwater wetlands to waterbird conservation in South Australia cannot be overstated. The significance of the role they play is not fully understood simply because we have a poor understanding of these fragile ecosystems and the species they support. Nevertheless, one only has to reflect on the significant bird observations of the past fifteen years to gain a vivid appreciation of the vital role these wetlands play. Most of the following waterbirds are scheduled as vulnerable or rare under the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Act (1972): Lewin's Rail *Rallus pectoralis*, Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis*, Baillon's Crake, Australian Spotted Crake, Buff-banded Rail *Gallirallus philippensis*, Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*, Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, Freckled Duck *Stictonetta naevosa*, Blue-billed Duck *Oxyura australis* and

Australasian Shoveler *Anas rhynchotis*. They have all been recorded from the wetlands of western Kangaroo Island (Baxter 1995). All but the Buff-banded Rail are known to occur on freshwater lagoons, swamps, rivers and creeks within Flinders Chase National Park and Kelly Hill Conservation Park.

It is imperative that these wetlands are monitored closely and sound land management practices implemented to ensure they continue to flourish in the future. Freshwater wetlands such as the Grassdale Lagoons in Kelly Hill Conservation Park have the majority of their catchment in surrounding farmland areas to the north. A combined conservation effort by all parts of our community is therefore needed to manage these delicate wetlands successfully, and to safeguard them and the precious plants and animals they support from detrimental impacts (e.g. salinity and increased inundation).

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