

Bird Notes from McGrath's Flat.

By Joseph Gordon Hastings.

The white-fronted or blue cranes have put in an appearance earlier than usual this year. All through the year odd ones are to be seen, but only in the winter do they appear in large numbers, when there is plenty of food to be had in the form of snails and insect life which is provided by the rains forming pools or ponds in the low lying country near the Coorong. The only reason I can give for their early arrival is, perhaps, the very low state of the Coorong where crabs are more easily procured. If that is so, I feel very sure upon this, they are doing a splendid work which should be highly appreciated by all lovers of bird life, fishermen in particular. The latter, I am afraid, are men who do not fully realize what a great help birds are to the fishing industry. About 300 cranes came to roost every night in the trees near our house, among them being a pair of white ones (a very rare bird in

this district). In a large well close to the house a family of frogs took up their abode some years ago, and in the course of time their numbers increased, till they were to be seen in hundreds, and in all stages from the great-grandfathers down to the tiniest infants. One of the cranes came along last week and paid daily visits to the well. Yesterday we went over to clean the well out, the crane had left and the frogs along with it. The water hens have just about all disappeared. I was down at the Murray mouth last week, and where they were in thousands three months ago, only odd ones were seen. The water crakes have all disappeared from here, but undoubtedly will return with the winter. A few weeks ago when returning from Woods Wells I came across a Bittern travelling in a southerly direction. This bird and a Nankeen or Night Heron which I saw last June are the only two birds of their kind I have ever seen here, although nearly 30 years ago I saw several of the latter bird in the swamps at the back of Salt Creek. Our three boys are beginning to show a keen interest in bird life, and we are careful to cultivate it. The two magpies brought out their chicks this season which in due course were introduced to the scrap heap in the back yard, and are now on intimate terms with the children who feed them. These birds have become very quiet, and will hardly fly out of the way.

It has often occurred to me as strange that although the Australian Hoverlies were here in thousands years ago, they have been very scarce for a number of years, and I have not seen any for quite a time till lately, when on a trip along the Hummocks I saw one and the only bird seemingly on this end of the Coorong.
