

Notes on Birds met with during a Visit to  
South-West Queensland.

—By A. CHENERY, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.—

No. I.

Leaving Broken Hill on September 14th, the writer, with Dr. W. Macgillvray, and Dr. H. Dobbyn, both from that town, and the driver of the car, had as their objective Nappa Merrie cattle and sheep station on Cooper's Creek. Copious rains had fallen for the past two months at intervals on the Cooper watershed and as we learned from the Messrs. Conrick, our future hosts at Nappa Merrie, that the flood waters, were well down both in the Cooper and the Wilson Rivers. The country north of Broken Hill through which our road lay was looking wonderfully well after having passed through one of the worst droughts on record. The same could not be said of the roads, which in such hilly country intersected with numerous small watercourses and larger gum creeks, had suffered severely from the heavy downpours. At Iduna Park, a wayside hotel on the Morden Station, 120 miles north of the Hill, we were held up by car troubles and rain for two days. To put in the time while awaiting the arrival of the Milparinka and Tibooburra mail coach which was, held up further down the road over

which we had come, two small gum creeks were carefully worked and many galahs, bare-eyed cockatoos, yellow-throated minahs, tree martins, whistling eagles, white-shouldered caterpillar eaters, warbling grass parrakeets, owlet night jays, all nesting, were met with. One nest of the little eagle containing one egg partly incubated was taken, and a second one ready for eggs was found. This was my first introduction to this fine bird in its native haunts. I have never seen them, on the Darling or on the Murray. They are nowhere plentiful and sit fairly closely when they have eggs. I believe either one or two eggs is a full clutch for this species. I also met with the Allied Kite at Idune for the first time. This bird was not nesting there, but old nests were seen and the birds visited the hotel each day from the creeks. Their swallow tail renders them easy of identification. Along the road we flushed one pair of Australian dottrells and saw one pair of crested wedge-bills, zebra finches, white-winged wrens, yellow-fronted chats, and of course the ubiquitous ground lark, grassfinches, black-backed magpies, ravens, and an occasional wedge-tail eagle were seen. We met with one family of grey jumpers (*Struthidea*) at Iduna Creek, the only ones we saw during the trip, and a solitary pair of *Glycyphila albifrons*. Probably these last two species were migrating because I have generally found *Struthidea* partial to pine country, and *Glycyphila* to flowery scrub. Although our hosts at Iduna, Mr. and Mrs. Barraclough, had made us, most comfortable, we were not sorry to board the coach when it did arrive, and continue our journey on to Milparinka via Cobham Lake. Our car and driver we had to leave behind, as we had broken our only two back axles and could see that it was not strong enough for the load over such roads as we anticipated having to negotiate.

After a rather trying journey Milparinka was reached at midnight. and the journey continued next morning on from there, some 25 miles to Tibooburra 220 miles north of Broken Hill. There is a fine growth of gidgee passed through after leaving Milparinka, and there is also a good gum creek well lined with gum and box timber that would well repay working for the hawk family, as it seems to extend most of the way to Cobham Lake. Mount Poole is seen on the left after leaving Milparinka. This is named after a surveyor of Sturt's party, who died there from scurvy after the party had been held up by drought conditions in a camp on some permanent water for over six months. The country in the neighbourhood of Tibooburra is hilly with outcrops of granite boulders and low ranges sparsely timbered, but now rendered most cheerful by

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numbers or flowering shrubs of the Cassia, and other botanical species with the names of which I am not familiar. A species of Eucalypt, known locally as the Bloodwood, was conspicuous in the hills with its large clusters of creamy blossoms. There was a wait of two more days for us here while we wired for another car, and awaited the arrival of Messrs. Clive and Joseph Conrick, who were returning to Nappa Merrie and were to act as our guides over the less frequented roads on to the Cooper. We therefore worked the hills and creeks in the vicinity thoroughly and were rewarded by identifying a few rarer species. Amongst these were the cinnamon-backed ground thrush, red lored pardalote, ground cuckoo shrike, a nest of which containing four heavily incubated eggs was taken from the horizontal bough of a gum in the creek. The nest was very similar to the ordinary black-faced variety, but of more elaborate structure with a deeper egg cavity. The markings and colouring of the egg, were also close in their resemblance. A pair of spotted harriers was commencing a nest. Kestrels were found with eggs, also a brown hawk. The red-browed babbler, brown song lark, tricoloured chat, black-faced wood swallow, and many red-backed kingfishers were met with. The scarcity of the falcons was marked, as in former years. Dr. Macillivray had taken many species on similar creeks, north of the Hill. Here again bare-eyed cockatoos, and warbling grass parrakeets, were nesting in numbers, and the owlet night jays were not uncommon. Many burrows of the red-backed kingfisher were examined but we were just a little early for them. Honeyeaters, with the exception of minahs, and white-plumed and an odd pair of black honeyeaters, were conspicuous by their absence. Crested bronze-wing pigeon, were seen in fair numbers, and their nests found. The nest of the ground thrush was searched for most carefully without success. The protective colouring of these birds on the Gibber tablelands, covered as they are with reddish coloured stones, is most effective. We expected to meet with the bustard in our wanderings as the conditions were ideal for them, but we did not meet with one during the trip. Pollard rabbit baits plus foxes have, I believe, had a great deal to do with practically exterminating this fine bird. Bennett's crow was found nesting, but the young were always present in any nests examined. Once one gets to know their habits and their cry it is not difficult to pick them out. They prefer mulga ridges in hilly country for breeding and nests may be taken in quite low trees in such situations.

On the arrival of our convoy (the Messrs. Conrick) and our new car with driver—this time a six cylinder Buick — we bid farewell to our kind hosts of Tibooburra where again we had fared most excellently. About thirty-six to forty miles on, the Queensland netting and alleged vermin proof fence was passed through. Shortly after leaving, Tibooburra, two interesting species were noted, namely the desert chat. (*Ashbyia*), and the Pratincole. These, like the dottrells, prefer open stoney tablelands and are only met with in such localities. This should be the first record for the chat being found in New South Wales. Personally, it struck me that their habits more nearly approach those of the pipit than those of the chats. They never seem to light on a bush as the chats do — being purely a ground bird. When disturbed they fly quite, long distances, unless, near their nest. Dr. Macgillivray obtained a skin or two of this species. The pratincole is a most graceful little chap, and sits, quite near the track. Both this species and the Australian dottrel appear to have a partiality, for the bare surface, generally dust, or sandy, of a road. On our return journey we actually met with the dead body of a dottrel, probably a young, inexperienced bird that had been run over by the mail. The local name for the pratincole—the swallow plover—is most appropriate. We did not have the good fortune to find a nest, but we found a nest or two of the desert chat later on at Nappa. Merrie after passing through the Yalpunga gate in the fence, we ran along the Warri Warri Creek and heard the sweet note, of the wedgebill frequently. At a dam on the creek near Naryilco cattle station homestead, a few water birds were flushed including white-eyed duck, grey teal, straw-necked ibis, darter, and black duck. This, our first night out, was spent on the ground under the stars and one did not sleep quite so soundly as on a spring mattress.

We were now in the cattle country and had to do as the cattlemen do—a finer, cheerier lot of men one would never wish to meet. Some strenuous times over washed-out creek beds, obliterated crossings, occupied us most of this day and gave, little time for bird observation. We did identify a black falcon, more Australian dottrells, and Pratincoles at Inaperra. We left the Warri and soon struck the Wilson floodwaters. Here the black-tailed native hen, Australian coot, white-fronted heron, Pacific heron, and many ducks were seen. Straw-necked ibis were also seen flying over the lignum swamps which here stretch, not for acres, but for miles.