

## Notes on Birds seen during a Recent Visit to the Western Darling, N.S.W.

### Part II.

By A. Chenery.

Leaving our travelling companions and the blackboys at the camp, Dr. Macgillivray, Ian, and myself set off on foot for the island in the lake visible in the distance. A few White-winged Wrens, Orange-fronted Chats, and a solitary Brown Hawk were the only birds inhabiting this desolate waste of powdery sand, covering wind-swept hummocks more or less encrusted with salt. The surface of the lake proper was damp and covered with a glistening crust of saline, into which one's feet sank for a few inches. After covering about 1,000 yards of this heavy going, we reached the island, which was duly explored for fossil remains, without success. A solitary fox was started from the far side, and went away across the lake surface for the far shore, and was still going until lost sight of. Before leaving camp next morning a White-breasted Swallow's nest, containing four eggs, was dug out of a bank and a return was made to Callabonna Hut, picking up Dr. Macgillivray's swag on the way. This had been shaken out of the protecting Ford buckboard on the outward journey on the previous evening. After further discussion we left to

wards the nor'-west to another portion of the lake where, with Boulka Frèd as guide-in-chief, we had fresh hope of discovering the elusive fossil deposits. There is a windmill and well some eight miles along the Murnpeowie road, which, of course, is only a pack track. This was to be our camp for that evening. We left this track after some three miles and cut across towards the lake-shore again. When crossing some flats covered with old-man saltbush and cane grass we flushed some flocks of very timid Parakeets, which were feeding on the cane-grass seeds. After some difficulty a specimen was obtained, which turned out to be *Neophema elegans*. The last time I had met with this pretty Grass Parrot was on a creek in the Flinders Range, where they were nesting and quite tame. The ones we met with here were in flocks and had evidently finished breeding as the ones shot were in immature plumage. On approaching the lake again, after leaving these well-covered flats, the country became again almost impassable for anything but a bullock dray or camels. The blackboys, now that their joy-ride on the cars was assured, did not appear to have any idea as to where to take the party to find the fossil reserve. Dr. Macgillivray, however, left the Dodge, which was on ahead, and, leaving Boulka Fred with Mr. and Mrs. Heywood in the car, joined Sit-down Jimmy in the horse-drawn buckboard, which had caught up to us, and went on down to the lake-shore in a final effort to see if any trace could be seen of Mr. Zeitz's old camp. The Ford, with myself and Ian, was some distance behind at the time. When we joined the Dodge car party they told us that they had seen a pair of parrots which had alighted on an acacia quite near the car. From their description they were quite probably the Splendid Grass Parrakeet, but unfortunately neither Dr. Macgillivray nor myself was there to identify them. Being pretty keen to get a sight of these birds, if possible, I left the cars, which went on for another mile or so, and spent the lunch hour circling around for a few miles. I saw a Calamanthus, but could not obtain a specimen, although I had one snapshot at a bird running through the saltbush. The evening or early morning is the best time to capture these shy little gentlemen, when they sing on the top of a low bush. In the middle of the day they are mostly silent and one would never guess their existence. Another bird I was keen to see was the Banded White-face, but although this was similar country to that in which McGilp found them earlier in the year and not far from it geographically, we never sighted one the whole trip. Nor was any further sign of the strange parrot seen. I was disappointed and pretty weary by the time I returned to our

car tracks of the morning and was joined by the other members of the party. They reported failure to find any sign of the fossil reserve, and Dr. Macgillivray's remarks on the reliability of ancient aborigines as guides were, to put it mildly, not flattering, and would probably have been unprintable had not a lady been present. We made camp that evening at the windmill on a small creek, now to all appearance dry. Some water was drawn from the well in buckets for the horses and we carried some for our own use. As we noticed a pair of Grallinas and many Top-knot Pigeons about, we concluded that there must be a soak down the creek somewhere, as these birds cannot do without water for long. A Spotted Harrier's nest containing one egg was found during a walk up the creek before tea. After tea, as it was fairly moonlight, Ian went up into the sandhill country on the far side of the creek to see if he could glimpse any small marsupials, but returned without any luck. That country is stillness personified at night. There was not a sound to be heard if one remained silent. On this evening, I remember, we remarked on it. There was not a cricket or other small insect to break the silence, and in the absence of any breeze even the leaves were motionless. Wildflowers everywhere here as elsewhere, *Senecio fregorii* being specially abundant as well as numerous daisies, everlastings, and others which I cannot name.

On the morning of 21st August we returned to Callabonna Hut, searching for Calamanthus on the way. We flushed a pair of Cinnamon-backed ground-birds, but failed to find a Calamanthus. An Owl was shot out in the Old Man Saltbush, far from any trees or creek, which proved to be an ordinary Boobook. A nest or two of the delightful little Crested Wedge-bill were also found, one containing an egg. After wishing the-genial-Bill Hayes-a-fond-farewell-and-giving-our-blessing to Boulka Fred, we commenced to retrace our tracks up Tilcha Creek towards the bore. We had not gone more than eight miles when we came upon a pair of very light-plumaged hawks, which were easily identified as soon as they took to flight as the Letter-winged Kite. The black markings under the wings are very distinctive. The flight is tern-like and they are a most graceful bird altogether. A nest made of sticks was noted in a tree near the spot where we first saw them and was examined for signs of habitation. It did contain some ejected furry pellets, but was otherwise empty. Strange to say, we never noted these birds on our outward journey. We were one and all pleased to have seen them, as I should say this was south of their usual latitude. As a sequel I may here state that Dr.

Macgillivray ascertained, in conversation with Mr. Austin Clune on our return to Milparinka, that he intended going through to Innamincka at an early date by this Tilcha route. He was asked to keep an eye for these birds, which he did. They were flushed from the tree, the nest was climbed to, and, I think, three eggs found. They were all smashed in the descent!

After lunch on this day, the two medicos sent the cars on ahead and walked the creek for three hours. A pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles' eggs were taken and a pair of Grey Falcons were flushed from a tree containing a likely nest. On climbing to it nothing was found. Some Grey Teal were met with along the creek and an Owl Night-jar was flushed from a hollow containing eggs. Bennett's Crows very plentiful, nests everywhere out in the mulga trees. On reaching the cars we learned that Mr. Winton had motored out 70 miles from Yandama and met them with a supply of petrol, of which we had run short owing to the constant low-gear work on the shores of Callabonna. This kind action, which is in keeping with the hospitality for which people outback are so justly credited, made it possible for us to carry out our intention of visiting Fort Grey in the north-west corner of the State, where we had heard there was still about a foot of water in Pinnaroo Lake.

The following morning, after seeing the cars start on their journey, we continued to work the creek on foot. Shortly after leaving camp we saw a pair of Black Falcons, one of whom swooped at a Raven that came chortling along down the creek. When the powerful Falcon came at him suddenly it was quite ludicrous to hear his self-satisfied note change to a shriek of terror as he dashed into a dense gum-tree to escape his pursuer. I was fortunate enough to locate the Falcon's nest a little further on, but on climbing to it found two young covered with down of a very light-grey colour with grey beak and legs. The nest was an old Kite's or Whistler's. These Falcons are shy and fly straight away from the nest out of sight, and do not soar around in the air like the Grey Falcon and most other species do. Soon after this we found another pair of Grey Falcons near a nest, and after a difficult climb were rewarded with a nice set of four fresh eggs. Further on a nest of the Little Eagle was found with two eggs, and another pair of Black Falcons was seen, but no nest located. Some Grey Teal with young and a solitary Pink-eyed Duck were noted on the creek. During the early afternoon, after having joined the cars and had lunch, we passed Tilcha bore and reached the out-station for tea. On our way we noted another Grey Falcon's nest, this time quite inaccessible, also another Little Eagle's nest. Kites, Whistling Eagles, Zebra Finches, Red-

lored and Striated Pardalotes were also plentiful. Mr. Jackson again kindly replenished our tucker-box with bread and beef, and we went on to camp some few miles on the Yandama side. This evening we saw quite a number of Cinnamon-backed ground birds, feeding in fairly open saltbush country, along the road. While at this camp we found a nest of the Yellow-tail, containing two eggs—the only time we met with these birds. After passing through the fence into New South Wales again we came to St. George's Tank, and from there turned due north towards Fort Grey. We had again taken Sit-down Jimmy on board at Tilcha Out-station, to which he had returned ahead of us. The rest of this day was spent in going over sandhills, which now ran across our track instead of parallel to it, and those too steep to go over we had to run down until a crossing-place was found. Our heavily-laden cars were put to considerable strain, but stood it well, and as evening fell we reached Fort Grey Hut on Pinnaroo Lake.

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