

The Turquoise Parrot

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In former years the Turquoise Parrot (*Neophema pulchella*) was fairly common in South-Eastern Australia, but it has now become extremely rare, and reports of its occurrence are few and far between. What has caused this great decrease in numbers? The lovely Parrot has always been a special favourite with bird-trappers, but it is possible that other causes, such as disease, may have helped to bring about the present state of things. With a common species, the decline in numbers due to trapping will be more or less gradual, but with a species already decimated by disease, the trapper continues his deadly work with increased ardour, and soon brings the bird to the point of extinction, which point the Turquoise Parrot is now unfortunately nearing. In assessing the various factors which may have contributed to this deplorable state of affairs, we must also keep in mind the destruction wrought among birds by domestic cats that have gone wild and seek their food by the old law of "claw and fang."

It may be of interest to give some brief details concerning the reported occurrences of this little parrot during the last twelve or fifteen years. Mr. A. S. Le Soeuf saw a small flock near Camden, N.S.W., on September 8, 1920, but reported later that trappers had located the birds and had already made serious havoc among them. Mr. J. H. Wright, of the Australian Museum, reported the securing of two males near Ooldea, at the eastern edge of the Nullarbor plain, in 1921, but the skins were not preserved. A female, presumed to be of this species, was shot, but was later shown to be the female Scarlet-chested Parrot (*N. splendida*), which still exists in small numbers in that part of South Australia. Mr. G. Wilkins (now Sir George Wilkins), of the British Museum Expedition, shot a specimen in Western New South Wales in 1923. Early in 1923 Dr. Spencer Roberts reported the occurrence of a single male bird from Stanthorpe, Queensland. The late Dr. J. A. Leach informed one of us in 1928 that the Turquoise Parrot was not yet extinct in Victoria. For obvious reasons it will be best not to mention the precise locality where this little bird may still be seen in the Southern State. We are also informed by Mr. A. H. Chisholm that it is still to be found in one or two localities in Eastern New South Wales. That is the sum total of the positive information that we have been able to collect concerning the occurrence of *Neophema pulchella* in recent years.

It therefore affords us great pleasure to be able to add another record to the few already quoted. Early in November, 1929, at a spot within 150 miles of Moree, N.S.W., we discovered a small flock of Turquoise Parrots. Identification of the species was easy. With the aid of field glasses we easily picked out the bright blue on the cheek and wing-edge and the reddish patch on the wing. We observed six birds in a small patch of about ten acres. At least two were fully-plumaged males. The female is a duller bird, has less blue about the head, the wing-edge is less bright and the red wing-patch is either not present or, if present, is difficult to discern in the field. Some of the duller birds may have been immature males. They were much less wary than the brightly-plumaged cock-birds, and on one occasion allowed an approach to within ten feet. One or two sat on a dead tree and uttered a fairly loud "Tiz," like the "Tiz-tiz" of the Little Thornbill (*Acanthiza nana*), but with a long interval of four or five seconds between each note. The males on the other hand had the typical flute-like note of the genus *Neophema*, though a trifle thinner in tone and sweeter than the notes of either the Blue-Winged Parrot (*N. chrysostoma*) or the Elegant Parrot (*N. elegans*), with which species one of us has some slight acquaintance. The flight of the Turquoise Parrot is also typical of the genus, being swift, clean and generally long, and the thin sweet call is usually uttered during flight.

The birds appeared to haunt the vicinity of a few dead trees, some thirty feet in height. Near the top of one of these was a well-defined spout hole with a whitish edge, as if the outer, weathered layer of the wood had been partly bitten away. The tree looked very frail and the spout was a long way from the ground, so that no further investigations were made. One of us noticed the birds pursuing each other, the female appearing in some cases to be the pursuer. We both received the distinct impression that the birds were breeding.

The spot was visited again early in December, and the Turquoise Parrots were found to be still in possession. May they long remain there free and untrammelled, and may it be their fortunate destiny to escape that curse of their race—the bird trapper—whose depredations have already sadly thinned the ranks of too many of our most beautiful parrots.

Since the above notes were written, we have again met the Turquoise Parrot. About five o'clock one morning in January, 1930, we were waiting beside a water trough to see what birds would come to drink, when a *Neophema* flew silently into a tree nearby. It was too dark at first to identify it, but in a few minutes it flew down to the

trough and we recognised it as a male Turquoise. Shortly after four others flew quietly in, and after perching for some time on a sapling dropped down to drink.

Two others which may or may not have belonged to the flock seen earlier were noted nearby about an hour later. The watering place was about ten miles from the spot where we observed the Turquoise Parrot in November and December, 1929. Between the two localities permanent water occurs more than once, so if the species is strictly local in its habitat, then it is probable the birds seen in January belonged to a different flock.

The Variegated Wren.—Since recording the incident of two male Variegated Wrens (*Malurus lamberti*) feeding the same nestlings (*The Emu*, Vol. XXIX., p. 193), I have been fortunate in securing a photograph of two other male birds which fed a tethered fledgling, captured soon after it had left the nest. When first secured the young bird was fed by the female, also by the two excited males. The female soon disappeared, however, and was not again seen that day; in all probability she was feeding the other young birds from the same nest. For more than an hour the two males fed the tethered bird—often bringing food to it at the same time. In the accompanying photograph it will be noticed that the crown and nape of the lower male in the picture is touched with brownish feathers, which remained the same during irregular observations covering a period of about three weeks. The other male was faultlessly arrayed in his gorgeous plumage of scintillating blues and velvet-black, with chestnut-red shoulders.—K. A. HINDWOOD, R.A.O.U., Willoughby, N.S.W.

Birds Nesting Together.—It is remarkable how different birds often nest in "colonies" here. During January and February, 1927, an apple tree contained occupied nests of the following birds:—Dusky Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*), Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*), Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*), two White-winged Trillers (*Lalage tricolor*) and two Diamond-Firetails (*Zonæginthus guttatus*). The following September the same tree contained nests of the Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*), Wagtail, Dusky Wood-Swallow and Restless Flycatcher (*Seisura inquieta*), while a pair of Whistling Eagles (*Haliastur sphenurus*) had a nest in a tree twenty yards away. Last September another apple tree near the house contained nests of the Magpie-Lark, Wagtail, Orange-winged Sittella (*Neositta chrysoptera*), Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascians*) and Restless Flycatcher.—E. L. HYEM, R.A.O.U., Mernot, Barrington, N.S.W.