

Report of Bird Observers' Club, Melbourne

At the June meeting Mr. H. N. Beck, who is Hon. Secretary of the Gould League, read a paper on "Birds of St. Arnaud District," illustrated with photographs. His census of 135 species will be a very useful list to those interested in bird geography.

The July outing was to Kallista gullies, a preliminary scouting after the Lyrebird. The day was wintry and the mountain top enveloped in misty clouds, which made the vegetation wet and the pathways slippery. Nevertheless, two birds were heard singing, and "Spotty," an old identity with some white feathers on his side, was seen. A party of Pied Currawongs entertained the party with antics in a tree-top, and their weird calls. The winter quota of bird life in these heavy forests numbers about 20 species.

The meeting on July 22 was very well attended, the subject being "The Dandenong Ranges before Settlement." This is the first of a series of lantern lectures which belonged to the late A. J. Campbell, and which, by his expressed wish, have been presented to the R.A.O.U. for use in popularising nature study. In 1889 Mr. Campbell took up photography as an aid to his oological studies, and with a band of enthusiasts belonged to The Working Men's College first Photo. Club. In those days the Ranges, 25 miles away from Melbourne, were in their pristine beauty, a happy hunting ground for naturalists and photographers alike. Many of the lantern slides, now over 30 years old, made by the wet plate process, are of exceptional brilliancy. The scenes include the first tourists' hut erected in Victoria, a shingle structure on Sassafras Creek, hewn and split from a single tree; several specimens of giant trees, and a remarkable clump of *Cyathea* or whipstick tree ferns, over 50 feet in height. All these are now a memory, because the State Forest of 50 square miles was, during the distress that followed the financial crisis of 1896, thrown open for settlement. For the sum of one pound per acre this fine national heritage of mountain forests of untold value was devastated and destroyed by axe and fire to make way for a few miserable clearings, which to-day might not be in existence if it were not for week-end and holiday visitors, which come to the settlers' assistance.

The Frankston outing on August 4, although the weather promised badly, turned out a good one. Twenty-four species of birds were identified during the day, including Grey-crowned Babbler and Noisy Miner. The Koala or native bear was observed in its wild state.

On the evening of August 26 Dr. L. J. Clendinnen gave "Observations of Bird Life by an Aviculturist." To the Club this is a new aspect of bird lore and proved a delightfully entertaining subject. Moving pictures showed many Australian birds at home in large aviaries, including such rare forms as the Alexandra Parrot, Turquoise Parrot, Northern Rosella, and many Finches. The Club is invited to visit Dr. Clendinnen's aviaries in Malvern in a few weeks' time.

On September 7 a visit was made to Toolern Vale. Mr. V. Davey, over whose property the party was escorted by him, had several nests under observation. A tramp over the sterile stony slopes, contrasting sharply with the grassy alluvial flats, was productive of birds, orchids for those interested in botany, and scenery—vistas of wooded hills on the one hand, and, on the other, of extensive plains stretching across to the You Yang mountains and to Port Phillip Bay. The poor nature of the country was indicated in the type of the flora, amongst which red ironbark, gold-dust acacia and strigosa heath, were prominent. Notwithstanding, a list of about 30 species was obtained, and a thoroughly enjoyable day was spent. An exhibition of handling bees, by Mr. Davey, was an interesting conclusion to the outing.

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