

Coastal Occurrences of the Grey Currawong in New South Wales

By J. A. KEAST, Rockdale, N.S.W.

In New South Wales the Grey Currawong (*Strepera versicolor*) is chiefly an inhabitant of the hilly and mountainous regions. Occasionally, however, small parties or solitary birds are observed in coastal areas, thus exhibiting the nomadic instinct typical of the species in other parts of its range. The observed coastal movements in New South Wales have all been in the autumn, winter and spring months, that is in the non-breeding season.

Concerning its distribution in New South Wales, A. J. North in 1900 wrote¹ of the species: ". . . these birds are common on the Blue Mountains about Springwood and Lawson, and the surrounding districts, also about Moss Vale and Bundanoon on the southern line. They are extremely sociable birds, breeding in trees near one another and are often seen in company with their congener *S. graculina*. Unlike the latter species, however, they are seldom met with in open forest lands, and I have never observed them about the suburbs of Sydney." A few years earlier North had written:² "Not common. Usually met with in the heavily-timbered ranges of the Hawkesbury River district, and about George's River."

John Gould, who visited New South Wales in 1839, wrote:³ "It is, however, more local in its habitat than any of them [Crow-Shrikes], at least such is the case in New South Wales; for although it is tolerably abundant at Illawarra, at Camden, and at Bong-bong, it was not seen in any other district that I visited."

Available published and unpublished records of coastal occurrences of the species in New South Wales during the past twenty years are tabulated below. Most of the records are from the Sydney district, there being a concentration of observers in that area.

Loftus-Engadine-Waterfall, Sep. 9, 1921, 20 miles south of Sydney. Hilly, forest country. A few (E. A. Nubbing): Aug. 6, 1922, five birds (P. A. Gilbert): Sep. 10, 1922, seven birds (P.A.G.): Aug. 26, 1923, nine birds (P.A.G.): Aug. 3, 1924, seven birds (P.A.G.): Nov. 30, 1924, several (E.A.N.): Jul. 5, 1925, several (P.A.G.): Apl. 2, 1926, several (P.A.G.).

When discussing coastal movements of birds, P. A. Gilbert states:⁴ "Another species of interest is the Grey Currawong (*S. versicolor*), which enlivens the bush between Waterfall and Loftus with its melodious whistle, the bulk of the species moving inland again in due season."

Over the last ten years, however, there have been no records from that locality. This may be due to lack of observations, or possibly indicates that the occurrence of the birds may be of an irregular nature.

Sutherland, 16 miles south of Sydney, outer suburban area, forest country. Specimen in Australian Museum (no. 0-8254) collected in May, 1895.

Bardwell Park, six miles south-west of Sydney, closely-settled suburban area, very few trees. Single bird seen in low hillside scrub on April 3, 1942 (A. R. McGill, *Emu*, vol. XLII, 1943, January, p. 176).

Milperra-Bankstown, eleven miles south-west of Sydney, outer suburban area. Open forest country. July 27, 1924, six birds (P.A.G.): winter, 1940, several (*anon.*).

Woolwich, Lane Cove River, four miles north-west of Sydney. A few large gum trees. Late July—early August, 1938. Three or four birds (J. S. P. Ramsay).

Avalon Beach, nineteen miles north of Sydney, forest country. September, October, 1940. One bird present for several weeks in company with Pied Currawongs, which molested it a lot (Dr. E. A. Pockley).

Normanhurst, thirteen miles north-west of Sydney, forest country. June 19 to July 16, 1939. A few birds (E. A. Nubling).

Gosford, thirty-five miles north of Sydney. July-September, 1930-1935. Rare; odd birds appearing and only remaining a few days. More timid than Pied Currawongs in whose company the birds are usually seen (A. F. D'Ombrain).

Madden's Plains, 30 miles south of Sydney, hilly forest country. Nesting pair photographed in September, 1934 (*Emu*, vol. XXIX, Jan., 1930, p. 200). Observed on subsequent occasions and apparently breeding regularly in this area (K. A. Hindwood).

Bega, approximately 200 miles south of Sydney. H. V. Edwards states (*Emu*, vol. XXIV, 1925, April, p. 282): "The Grey Bell-Magpie is a rare visitor."

Apparently the distribution of the Grey Currawong has not changed much during the past hundred years or so. The species is represented among the 'Watling' paintings in the British Museum, and must have been drawn from a specimen taken near Sydney about 1790. On the painting, no. 60, is written: "The only one yet seen."⁶ Both Gould's and North's notes are true of the species to-day. It is still not uncommon on the Blue Mountains (Katoomba, Blackheath, Lithgow, Taralga) and the southern highlands (Moss Vale, Goulburn). It breeds in those localities and on the fringe of the mountains west of Sydney. Mr. J. S. P. Ramsay

informs me that about twenty years ago several birds bred yearly in the open forest lands at Kingswood near Penrith and probably still do so.

Gould does not state in what part of the Illawarra district he observed the species. Behind Wollongong and Port Kembla the mountains come to within a few miles of the coast. Mr. Ellis McNamara, who resides at Mount Kembla, a few miles inland from Wollongong, has supplied me with the following notes: "A few appear every winter but they are far from common. I doubt if you would ever find more than half a dozen in the district. They disappear in the spring about the time when their Pied relatives begin to break up their flocks and I have never seen a nest. They are usually found feeding in cultivation land and orchards in company with a flock of the Pied species, but they are sometimes to be seen alone."

Although the Grey Currawong occurs in north-eastern New South Wales and southern Queensland the paucity of records would seem to indicate that it is a rare bird in those parts. I am indebted to the persons mentioned in the text for their assistance in the preparation of these notes.

REFERENCES:

1. North, A. J. *Nests and Eggs of Birds found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania*, vol. 1, pt. 1, June 11, 1901, p. 15.
2. North, A. J. *Handbook of Sydney*, Austr. Ass'n. Adv. Sci., 1898, p. 72.
3. Gould, John. *Handbook, Birds of Australia*, vol. 1, 1865, p. 173.
4. Gilbert, P. A. 'The Seasonal Movements and Migrations of Birds in Eastern New South Wales' (part II), *Emu*, vol. XXIV, 1935, part 3, January, p. 207.
5. *The History of the Collections Contained in the Natural History Departments of the British Museum*, vol. II, 1906, p. 119.

Report of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting for 1942 was held in the meeting room of the *Herald* Office, Melbourne, on Tuesday, October 19. In the absence of the President (Major H. M. Whittell, O.B.E.) a Past President, Mr. G. H. Barker of Brisbane, occupied the chair. As the meeting was merely to transact formal business matters there was only a small attendance.

Those present were Mr. G. H. Barker, Queensland, Mrs. B. E. Miller, Misses R. Denny, N. Fletcher, Ina Watson, M. L. Wigan, Messrs. H. N. Beck, A. S. Chalk, A. H. Chisholm, C. F. Cole, D. J. Dickson, L. C. Haines (N.S.W.), E. S. Hanks, W. Heathcote, A. H. E. Mattingley, P. Crosbie Morrison, and W. R. Wheeler. Apologies were received from Major H. M. Whittell, O.B.E., Messrs. C. E. Bryant, A. G. Campbell, F. E. Howe, Jack Jones, R. T. Littlejohns and M. S. R. Sharland.