

Melopsittacus undulatus (Shaw).

There are no differences whatsoever between birds from the various parts of Australia. Birds of north-western Australia are not different by "pallid coloration, especially noticeable on the head," as claimed by Mathews when he named *pallidiceps* from Point Torment. Like *Geopelia cuneata* this is one of the vagrant birds of the interior of Australia that may turn up anywhere, at any time, and therefore has no opportunity to develop geographical races.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Water Birds and others in Flooded Areas along the Hunter River Valley, N.S.W.

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During the last eighteen months, extending back to the beginning of 1950, two major floods and a number of lesser ones have left the Hunter Valley almost one large swamp area. There is an extensive swamp which extends from Kurri Kurri right through to Maitland, and another area which covers a large area of low-lying ground around Hexham, a few miles out of Newcastle, on the main northern line. This latter extends from Sandgate, about ten miles from Newcastle, through Hexham, and after that there is a break to the next station at Tarro; from there on it extends to Beresfield and beyond towards Thornton. This refers only to the area near the railway line. Many miles of swamp extend all over the Hunter Valley.

As the flood waters receded it left low-lying areas near the railway line in such a saturated state that they have been filled with water ever since the first flooding. These paddocks have become the home of thousands of swamp-loving birds, and it is amazing to see how the birds have become accustomed to the trains passing by every day. During the months of May and June, 1951, in particular, there have been more birds than I have seen there at any time before. Near Hexham the treeless area is one 'mass' of ducks. They seem to prefer this area when the water gets down to a few inches in depth, and as soon as heavy rains raise the level to more than a foot or so the ducks leave for other places.

When the wind is blowing hard from the south all the Swamp-hens, Coots, and other swamp birds sit facing the wind like cattle facing rain. The Swamp-hen is by far the most common bird to be seen from the train, and it would be hard to estimate the number of birds in any one area. Next to them in numbers would come the Coot. Both of

these birds are to be seen in many hundreds lining the post and rail fences near to the railway.

The following list of birds may be seen any time during the train trip from Maitland to Newcastle.

Himantopus leucocephalus. White-headed Stilt.

Flocks of fifty to eighty birds seen regularly near Hexham railway station.

Podiceps cristatus. Crested Grebe.

A few birds seen, but many have been reported from residents nearby. Unfortunately a small boy shot five of them in one swamp. These birds are not a regular inhabitant of these parts.

P. poliocephalus. Hoary-headed Grebe.

Small parties spread out in most areas along the line between Beresfield and Hexham. Nests often seen from the train.

Zonifer tricolor. Banded Plover.

Common along the edges of the swamps. Parties of from six to twenty.

Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ. Spur-winged Plover.

Not as common as in the summer months and in smaller parties than the Banded Plover.

Tribonyx ventralis. Black-tailed Native-Hen.

Common and spread out all along the swamp area.

Gallinula tenebrosa. Dusky Moorhen.

Common.

Porphyrio melanotus. Eastern Swamp-hen.

Present in very large numbers in all parts where swamp conditions prevail. Many nests can be seen from the train, and, though they are raided by local boys, it seems to make no difference to the large numbers of young birds hatched. They have no fear of the trains and, when not feeding, sit on the railings of the post-and-rail fence next to the line.

Fulica atra. Coot.

Also in very large numbers, extending all along the swamp area.

Threskiornis aethiopica. White Ibis.

Common. Seen often at Hexham in company with the Straw-necked Ibis.

T. spinicollis. Straw-necked Ibis.

Common along the edges of the swamps, but usually much more plentiful when conditions are not so wet.

Plegadis falcinellus. Glossy Ibis.

Although seen at times in the lower Hexham area, none has been recorded this year (1951).

Egretta alba. Egret.

Common all along the line, often in large flocks. One flock of over fifty was seen near Beresfield.

Notophoxyx pacifica. White-necked Heron.

Mostly singly or in pairs, and well spread out over the many swamp areas.

N. novæ-hollandiæ. White-faced Heron.

Extremely common. In some areas they are in very large flocks. These birds have become so tame around many areas that I have had a number of reports about them, even from in the main street of

Maitland. One motorist had to swerve in order to avoid running down a bird in a thickly-populated residential area. I know of no other bird that has increased in such great numbers over the last ten years.

Microcarbo melanoleucus. Little Pied Cormorant.

Common throughout the swamps. One day I saw one of these birds sitting on the top cross-arm of a telephone pole, while on the other end was a Kookooburra, and on the pole itself was perched a Brown Hawk, all apparently on friendly terms.

Querquedula gibberifrons. Grey Teal.

Large flocks seen regularly at Hexham.

Chenonetta jubata. Maned Goose.

Considerable damage has been done in the Hunter Valley by these birds, which have been descending in large flocks and eating young crops and lucerne. Seen regularly at Hexham in very large flocks.

Anas superciliosa. Black Duck.

Probably the commonest of all ducks at present and so tame that large flocks of them swim within a few yards of the railway embankment. Some have already brought out young. (May 24, 1951).

Biziura lobata. Musk Duck.

A few odd birds seen from time to time near Beresfield.

Cygnus atratus. Black Swan.

Although often seen flying overhead in larger flocks, only a very small number have been seen on the swamps from the train.

Nycticorax caledonicus. Nankeen Night-Heron.

Often seen late in the afternoon feeding along the swamp near casuarina trees. A large colony is reported to be in a well-timbered part of the swamp near Beresfield.

Botaurus poiciloptilus. Brown Bittern.

Two birds, presumably a pair, have been causing a lot of interest among train travellers who did not know what they were. At first the Bitterns kept well away from the train line, but have since been seen right at the foot of the embankment. They sometimes break out from the reeds, proceed a few steps, and then stiffen with head held erect in characteristic attitude, while the train rumbles past.

Haliastur sphenurus. Whistling Eagle.

There are always one or two of these birds skirmishing about.

Circus approximans. Swamp-Harrier.

Several Swamp-Harriers have been seen working low over the reedy parts of the swamps in different localities.

Falco cenchroides. Nankeen Kestrel.

Common along the edges of the swamps, but keeps more to the drier areas.

Larus novæ-hollandiæ. Silver Gull.

Often seen in small parties, and on one occasion several hundred were feeding very close to Hexham railway station. It is popularly believed that these birds have been blown inland by storms, but I do not believe that it has any bearing on their presence. They fly for many hundreds of miles inland at times, and it would be a simple matter for them to follow the Hunter River up to Hexham.

Xenorhynchus asiaticus. Jabiru.

A pair of these beautiful birds was seen every day for some time in the swamp area at Sandgate. This is only a few miles out of the industrial area of Newcastle.