

The Distribution of Several Species in North-west Queensland

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In 1910, W. M'Lennan collected for W. MacGillivray in the Cloncurry district for almost six months. M'Lennan's observations, with comment by MacGillivray, were published by MacGillivray (1914). In several cases it appears that notes concerning one species have been wrongly ascribed to a similar species, which may also occur in the area. Comments given below concerning the distribution and present-day status of several species are based largely upon personal observation between July 1954 and December 1958, during which time I lived at Mount Isa.

Podiceps ruficollis. Little Grebe.

Podiceps poliocephalus. Hoary-headed Grebe.

Portion of MacGillivray's paper reads:

"*Podiceps poliocephalus*. Hoary-headed Grebe.—Noted occasionally at Cape York, and numerous in the Gulf waters."

At one time the Hoary-headed Grebe was considered to range over Australia generally (*Official Checklist*, Second Edition, 1926; Cayley 1933). More recent publications restrict its range to "Southern Australia" (e.g. Whittell and Serventy 1948), or more precisely "From Point Cloates (W.A.) through southern Australia and Tasmania, north to south-eastern Queensland" (Cayley 1958). This last seems too restrictive, as the Hoary-headed Grebe occurs sparingly in north-west Queensland and the adjacent portion of the Northern Territory to within about 200 miles of the Gulf of Carpentaria. This is considerably north of the indicated range. H. G. Barnard (1914) published notes on the birds of Brunette Downs and included

"*Podiceps poliocephalus (cloatesi)*. (Western) Hoary-headed Grebe.—Only odd birds seen."

A footnote at the beginning of Barnard's paper states "Skins of any bird mentioned in this list, about which any doubt existed, were identified by Mr. G. M. Mathews, and are shown in his sub-specific names in parentheses." From the inclusion of the subspecies *cloatesi*, it is evident that Barnard secured a skin which was examined by Mathews. At Mount Isa, Hoary-headed Grebes were seen by me only three times, each time on the newly-completed Leichhardt River dam, as follows:

March 9, 1958—five.

March 29, 1958—two.

May 4, 1958—two.

The Little Grebe ranges over the mainland of Australia. In north-west Queensland it occurs not uncommonly in small flocks of two to about 12 birds on most of the larger stretches of water in the area, such as the dams at Mount Isa and the lakes at Carnoowal. It seems that MacGillivray's note should refer to the Little Grebe rather than to the Hoary-headed Grebe, although there is no reason why M'Lennan should not have come across the Hoary-headed Grebe in the Gulf country.

A further paper by MacGillivray (1917), based on M'Lennan's and MacGillivray's observations on Cape York Peninsula, states that M'Lennan noted the Hoary-headed Grebe on the Pascoe River in 1913. This note again evidently refers to the Little Grebe. It is interesting to note that in 1915 M'Lennan collected along the waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria for H. L. White, and White's paper based on M'Lennan's observations includes the Little Grebe (a skin was collected), but not the Hoary-headed Grebe.

There is another apparent mix-up between these two species recorded in *The Emu*. Notes for the Barclay Expedition were published by G. F. Hill (1913) and include mention of three skins of *P. novae hollandiae* (= *ruficollis*) collected on a waterhole on Lander Creek, about 150 miles north-west of Alice Springs. Some of the skins of the expedition are detailed by A. J. Campbell and J. A. Kershaw (1913) and include a skin of *P. poliocephalus* taken at Lander Creek. Apparently Hill in the field mis-identified the two species.

Milvus migrans. Black Kite.

Lophoictinia isura. Square-tailed Kite.

MacGillivray's paper noted the Square-tailed Kite as "Quite the most plentiful of the hawk tribe throughout the Gulf country, where dozens may be seen in the air at a time", and referring to the Black Kite, "Only a few Allied Kites were noted by Mr. M'Lennan in the Gulf country".

Mention has been made (Liddy 1959) of the differences in reported status of the two species for the same general area. As Condon and Amadon (1954) remark, the Square-tailed Kite is a "rare species", and I know of no other record of the species being abundant in north-west Queensland. There are several papers published in *The Emu* concerning the birds of north-west Queensland and adjacent portions of the Northern Territory between about 1905 and 1920, that is, roughly the same time as M'Lennan's visit. Thus F. L. Berney (1905), at Richmond, noted the Black Kite as "Next to the Crow, this is the most common bird in the district." Berney did not list the Square-tailed Kite; nor did Barnard (1914) at Brunette Downs in 1913, where the Black Kite was "Very common". Hill (1913) noted the Black Kite, but not the Square-tailed Kite, on the MacArthur River in 1913. H. J. Kersey was at Cloncurry in 1918 or 1919 and published notes (1919) on species identified. However, his notes do not help, as he almost certainly mis-identified Black Kites as Brown Hawks (*Falco berigora*) (See Liddy 1960).

During the time I lived at Mount Isa, the Black Kite was plentiful and, although not quite "the most common bird of the district" it was probably the most conspicuous, while the Square-tailed Kite was very rare.

In MacGillivray's paper there are several other cases where confusion between similar species apparently occurs. In my opinion the "most plentiful of the hawk tribe" noted by M'Lennan was the Black Kite.

Halcyon macleayi. Forest Kingfisher.

Halcyon sanctus. Sacred Kingfisher.

The Sacred Kingfisher is a conspicuous bird of the larger watercourses of the interior of north-west Queensland during the late spring and summer months. At Mount Isa it generally arrives in numbers about mid-October and breeds along the larger watercourses. From November until January it would be usual to see perhaps 12 to 30 per mile of the Leichhardt River, with smaller numbers on the lesser watercourses. By mid-April numbers are greatly reduced, but a few winter each year, particularly near permanent waterholes on the watercourses. At Richmond the status of the Sacred Kingfisher is apparently similar to that at Mount Isa (Berney 1905). Berney did not record the Forest Kingfisher for the Richmond district; I did not see it in north-west Queensland.

MacGillivray's paper reads in part:

"*Halcyon macleayi*. Forest Kingfisher.—Noted all the way down the Cloncurry River."

"*Halcyon sanctus*. Sacred Kingfisher.—Mr. M'Lennan did not come across this species in the Gulf country, though I had previously obtained skins from Cloncurry."

It seems very likely that the kingfishers seen on the Cloncurry River by M'Lennan were Sacred Kingfishers. It is not easy to explain the assumed error. It is most unlikely that M'Lennan would

confuse the two species in the field. Perhaps an error was made in entering or transcribing notes. As far as I can determine, the Forest Kingfisher occurs only rather sparsely along the Gulf of Carpentaria and does not extend inland to any marked extent. There is also curious difference in several recent publications regarding the distribution of the Forest Kingfisher in north-western Australia. For example, the *Official Checklist* (Second Edition, 1926) and Cayley (1958) include north-western Australia in its range. It is not included by Whittell and Serventy in their *Systematic List of the Birds of Western Australia* (1948), nor do they include it in the list of Kimberley birds in their *Handbook of the Birds of Western Australia* (1951). However, it is included in some lists for north-western Australia, for example, at Upper Liveringa Station, on the Fitzroy River (Shilling 1948).

Megalurus gramineus. Little Grassbird.

Megalurus galactotes. Tawny Grassbird.

The Tawny Grassbird is sparsely distributed in the Mount Isa area, generally being found in grassed areas along watercourses and occasionally in spinifex (*Triodia*). MacGillivray's notes state that the Little Grassbird was "Observed at Sedan" by M'Lennan; K. A. Hindwood (1950) has pointed out the very doubtful nature of this record.

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