

Correspondence

H. C. RAWNSLEY AND "RAWNSLEY'S BOWERBIRD"

To the Editor

Sir, — In *The Emu* for 1944 (Vol. 43, pp. 281-88) there appears a speculative article of mine entitled "An Interesting Old Note-book". It deals with a manuscript volume of jottings on birds, mainly Queensland-based, and some of these, as extracted for me by Mr D. Dickson, were given in the article. The then owner of the book, Dr A. E. Malaher of Mt Perry, Queensland, had supposed it to have been originally the property of Gould's competent assistant, John Gilbert, but brief examination had revealed that supposition to be erroneous.

In the absence of definite evidence as to authorship, I put forward the name of Eli Waller, who in the period covered by various dates in the book (1857-60) was active among birds near Brisbane, and was closely associated with Charles Coxen (Gould's brother-in-law), from whose widow Dr Malaher had obtained the relic. However, some of the observations recorded in the book, in addition to appearing to pre-date 1857, were based on Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania, colonies which Waller was not known to have visited. My guess regarding the anonymous author was therefore weakened, and it dissolved entirely when, a few years later, Waller's handwriting was found to differ sharply from that in the note-book.

Now, at last, the recorder of those interesting observations has been determined. He was Henry C. Rawnsley, the surveyor who, in 1867, had the luck to shoot near Brisbane a curious bowerbird — black-bodied but having gold bars on the wings — which Silvester Diggles named *Ptilonorhynchus rawnsleyi*.

The only specimen of its kind ever taken (though sightings of some few other examples have been claimed), Rawnsley's Bowerbird has been the subject of controversy ever since it was named, most writers holding it to have been a hybrid between the Satin and Regent Bowerbirds and others accepting it as a very rare example of a sound species. Especially did argument on the subject develop in the *Sydney Mail* in 1874 (Jan.-Feb.-April), notably between Gerard Krefft, then curator of the Australian Museum, and Charles Coxen.

As for Rawnsley, I know now that he was an Englishman who came to Sydney in 1841 to serve as a surveyor, and later worked in Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania. In each place he fell into disputes with officialdom — for the South Australian angle see Hans Mincham's *Story of the Flinders Ranges* (1964) — and in each place he studied birds with considerable assiduity.

Finally, about 1860, he transferred to Queensland, and there he remained, in the survey service, until his death at Indooroopilly (Brisbane) on January 16, 1873.

A detailed examination of Rawnsley's career would disclose, no doubt, material of considerable interest — as much so, perhaps, as the story of his remarkable discovery that has become known as "Rawnsley's Bowerbird" and the "Blue Regent". Here, however, I am concerned only with revealing the origin of that old note-book and recommending readers of *The Emu*, with the identity of its author in mind, to look up the jottings published in 1944.

Yours, etc.,

A. H. CHISHOLM

Sydney, June, 1965.

Conservation of the Bustard

This letter from the Victorian Fisheries and Wildlife Department was discussed by Council on 23/6/65, and the project given full approval.

The expedition is well planned and equipped. It is very encouraging to see the Victorian government prepared to expend money and the time of its officers on practical conservation work with such exciting possibilities. It is another encouraging example of co-operation between wildlife departments in the different parts of Australia.

Members of this Union can actively assist by giving full details of the occurrence of this bird in their area to Mr M. C. Downes, Superintendent of Game Management, Fisheries and Wildlife Department, 605 Flinders Street, Melbourne.

Roy Wheeler,

President, R.A.O.U.

Dear Sir,

This Department has undertaken a long term project at the Serendip Wildlife Research Station at Lara 39 miles from Melbourne to re-establish breeding populations of several species of birds, once common in Victoria, but now considerably reduced or rarely reported in this State.

One of the most important of these is the Plains Turkey or Bustard, *Eupodotis australis*. This species was common through most of the open country of Victoria but it was reduced very quickly, through the effects of settlement, to remote areas of Australia seldom visited by man. However, even these areas today are being actively developed and a special Australia-wide conservation effort will be needed to produce the management plan which will save this species from eventual extinction.

This plan should have a three-fold purpose. Firstly, the establishment of a satisfactory biological background of knowledge on which conservation measures can be based. Secondly, the awakening of a public awareness of the need to conserve the bustard. This is necessary because the public attitude toward the shooting of this species is the biggest single factor determining its future. Thirdly, restoration of this species is necessary to at least a few of the areas where once it was common.

As a first practical step affecting each of these phases of the plan, this Department has proposed that a breeding stock be established at Serendip and the rearing of the birds for the re-establishment of the species in formerly occupied districts. The only feasible method is the taking of eggs and/or chicks in some of the remote areas where it is still common and transporting these to the Wildlife Research Station for incubation and rearing.

It is intended that an expedition be sent by this Department to the Northern Territory during the current season (1965) to obtain eggs and/or chicks for transfer to Victoria and to gather the biological data necessary to initiate a new move for the conservation of this species throughout Australia. Approval has been granted and every assistance provided by the Northern Territory Administration. They are actively participating in the field work.

The considerable support already given to the proposal by naturalist organizations, field shooters, etc., indicates that this is a project which could awaken a new interest in protecting the Plains Turkey and it might eventually be the means of generating a new attitude and new projects for the conservation of this species.

The following resolution was passed by the 1965 Australian Fauna Authorities Conference held in South Australia in April of this year.

"Conference supports the proposals to secure breeding populations of Bustard, Brolgas, Magpie Geese, and Cape Barren Geese for the re-establishment of these species in Victoria because —

- (a) they are species which were once common in that State;
- (b) they are all vulnerable species which, for conservational reasons alone, need to be maintained throughout their natural range;
- (c) the proposal is one that is likely to capture public imagination and inspire similar worthwhile measures in respect of other vulnerable and threatened species."

If the rearing project is successful the re-establishment of the bustard in part of its former range in Victoria would be a wildlife conservation achievement of direct application to other parts of Australia.

It is not proposed that collecting of this species be done to the detriment of local populations. This would defeat the whole purpose of the conservation project. Birds will not be killed and only a portion of eggs or young will be taken depending on the success of the breeding. Under these conditions the removal of eggs or chicks will approximate the regular losses which occur each season and with which the populations in these areas can cope quite easily.

This project is recommended to the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union as worthy of support. Your Council could be of considerable assistance in this long term project by the provision of information on this species from members in the various parts of Australia. This would be added to the final report on the species when all the data is to hand.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) M. C. DOWNES,

Superintendent of Game Management.