

Bird Notes from the Illawarra District, New South Wales

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The dry conditions that existed over New South Wales, and most of Australia for that matter, during 1957, were in direct contrast to the previous few years when well-above-average rainfall created ideal breeding conditions for ducks and other water-frequenting birds. It was not surprising, therefore, that unprecedented numbers of those birds forsook the parched outback areas and sought the more suitable conditions existing along the coast.

By mid-winter the smaller freshwater lagoons and creeks in the Illawarra district on the South Coast of New South Wales were drying up, but the large swamps, storage dams and tidal lakes and estuaries afforded sanctuary to a great number of water-birds.

Several species which usually have a more inland distribution, such as the Pink-eared Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*), Blue-winged Shoveler (*Anas rhynchos*) and White-eyed Duck (*Aythya australis*), mingled with the teeming Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) and Grey Teal (*Anas gibberifrons*) which are always present. The Chestnut Teal (*Anas castanea*), Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*) and the Maned Goose or Wood-Duck (*Chenonetta jubata*) were also seen on occasions in company with the above species on Coomaditchy Lagoon at Port Kembla and on a large swamp near the township of Albion Park. The Hoary-headed Grebe (*Podiceps poliocephalus*) and Darter (*Anhinga novaehollandiae*), rare birds in this district, were also recorded in these localities.

Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*) shared the parched brown paddocks with lean dairy cattle. The White Ibis (*Threskiornis molucca*) was not uncommon, and the rare Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) was seen three times.

The White Egret (*Egretta alba*), White-faced Heron (*Notophojx novaehollandiae*), White-necked Heron (*N. pacifica*), Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) and the Yellow-billed Spoonbill (*P. flavipes*) were present in considerably greater numbers than usual and congregated mainly around the foreshores of Lake Illawarra and along the margins of the Minnamurra River near Kiama. These five species were also represented throughout the year on the Albion Park Swamp and on Tom Thumb Lagoon just south of Wollongong. The Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) was recorded twice near the Lake Illawarra entrance.

The Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*) and Brown Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) were numerous wherever reed-beds provided suitable cover, and three examples of the lat-

ter were found beside the Wollongong to Port Kembla Road, the victims of night traffic.

Crakes and rails were particularly plentiful, and the Spotless Crake (*Porzana plumbea*) and the Little or Marsh Crake (*Porzana pusilla*) were often the victims of marauding domestic cats.

A Brolga (*Grus rubicundus*) was seen on paddocks behind an ocean beach a few miles north of Wollongong on May 8, and again on July 11. Another observation just south of Wollongong on June 3, was presumably of the same bird. To see this stately species so far south and on the coast was indeed unexpected and exciting.

The Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*) became so abundant on tidal Lake Illawarra during November and December, that fishermen advocated, in both Sydney and local press, an open season so that their numbers could be considerably reduced. It was argued that the birds were eating certain weeds in the shallows that are required for many species of spawning fish. As the area is wholly contained within a sanctuary, an open season did not eventuate, but despite the efforts of rangers and members of local conservation bodies, numbers of these majestic birds were shot. During this period small groups of Swans were often seen on the water off the ocean beaches. The Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*) was also seen upon the open sea on two occasions.

An influx of birds of prey was evident towards the end of the year. The Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus notatus*) and Whistling Eagle (*Haliastur sphenurus*), two species seldom seen in this district, were relatively common.

Drought-breaking rain during January and early February, 1958, was possibly the major contributing factor to a gradual dispersal which took place during this period, and the bird population of the Illawarra District was practically normal again by late summer.

Thanks are accorded to Mr. J. Devitt of Wollongong for information and field observations incorporated herein.

The Whistle of the Musk Duck.—A bird-call always difficult to reconcile with its producer is the powerful shrill whistle of the Musk Duck (*Biziura lobata*). There has been conjecture as to its significance in the scheme of things concerning Musk Ducks. I have recorded the whistle in every month of the year and during most hours of the day and night. The opinion has often been expressed that the call is associated with courtship behaviour. Surely this bird is not so amorous as my records above would suggest.

An acquaintance told me of how, once, he noticed a Musk Duck several times emitting the whistle whilst cocking a wary eye skywards at a hawk soaring above, and that during the episode there was no splashing of water by the duck.—V. T. LOWE, Mystic Park, Vic., 31/7/58.