

Notes on the Plain Wanderer

By T. G. SOUTER, Maitland, South Australia

My first experience with the Plain Wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) here was on July 24, 1927 (see *South Australian Ornithologist*, vol. IX, part 4, p. 150, in notes by J. Sutton). My surprise on finding this nest was great as no birds had been seen here up to that time. The first bird seen was a male, which was flushed in a stubble paddock on August 1, 1928. It flew in front of me and settled on a clear patch of ground and was in good view for about two minutes, then it flew off again into the stubble. The next occasion was on January 19, 1934, when a female was seen in a grass paddock.

No further signs of the birds were seen until January 3 this year (1938) when, about 7 a.m., whilst I was after stock, my attention was drawn to the movements of a spaniel that was out in the paddock with me. On riding over to where he was sniffing around, I found my second nest of the Plain Wanderer. It contained three eggs.

The nest was situated in barley stubble under a clump of dogweed (*Diplotaxis muralis*), a frond of the plant entirely covering the nest. I again visited the nest at 6 p.m. the same day and found that a further egg had been laid, making the full clutch of four.

The nest was visited for ten days, mostly twice a day. As it was our busy period I was unable to give the time that I would have liked to watch the nest. On January 14, at 7.30 a.m., the eggs were taken from the nest to send to the South Australian Museum, as that institution did not have a full clutch in any of its collections. The set is now in the McGilp collection there.

The nest was formed by the bird scratching a depression three inches in diameter and one and a half inches deep; the composition used for building was the flag off the barley straw and fine grass stems.

When found, all eggs were placed with the sharp ends to the centre of the nest. That was always the case when the nest was visited in the early morning, but in the evening and on three occasions around midday one or two eggs were turned side on to the centre of the nest.

On January 5, at 6.30 p.m., a bird was flushed off the nest; it arose with the whirring flight of a Quail but only flew about twenty yards away and disappeared in the stubble and was not seen again on any of my visits to the nest, although I took good care to approach quietly with a good view of the nest position. As the bird was only in flight for a few seconds I was unable to note its sex.

On January 6, at 10 a.m., Mr. Hayward, of Port Victoria,

brought Mr. Mules (who is conducting research work with rabbits on Wardang Island) to see and photograph the nest.

On January 9 the nest was visited at 7 p.m. The day had been hot and was still rather warm and it was seen that the birds had built up a protection of grass blades and straw interwoven through the dogweed on the western side of the nest to protect the eggs from the rays of the hot sun. The same "structure" was noted two days later, which also was a hot day.

It is interesting to note that although the nest was under observation from January 3 to 14 no incubating seemed to be done by the bird at least during the day, except for egg turning. On the one occasion when the bird was seen it was probably moving the eggs. Was the bird relying on the sun to hatch them?

This nest was only a quarter of a mile away from where I found the former Plain Wanderers' nest. Another interesting item in connection with the first nest found was that it was in an oat crop with no protection or cover and the eggs were visible from some distance; the oats were only three inches high and not very thick.

Reviews

[*Australian Parrots. Their Habits in the Field and Aviary.* By Neville W. Cayley. Angus & Robertson Ltd., Sydney and London. Pp. i-xxviii + 1-332. Price, 12s. 6d.]

Mr. Cayley, in the freedom covered by the title of his book, states in his introduction that "this work is the first attempt to combine all that is known about Australian parrot-like birds from the viewpoint of ornithologist and aviarist. Owing to the considerable difference of opinion that exists regarding the status of many sub-species, there is much work to accomplish both in field and aviary." The whole-hearted co-operation of workers in ornithology and aviculture would greatly expedite that work. Everyone acquainted even casually with the works of Mathews and Peters, and with the R.A.O.U. *Official Checklist*, 1926, will admit the correctness of this latter statement, but when so many Parrots are interior forms one remains sceptical of the statement that "unless a serious attempt is made to save the few species now on the verge of extinction, only museum specimens will be left witness to a fate that might have been prevented." In general, the statement is, of course, an obvious one, but the careful reader is inclined to say: "But what species are now on the verge of extinction?" Mr. Chisholm, in his foreword, mentions two species that a few years ago were suggested as extinct and are now known to be not uncommon in their inland haunts. Let us then hope that those others, such as the Night Parrot and