

Distribution of the Jabiru in Central and Northern Coastal New South Wales

By H. A. SALMON

H. L. Bell, in a recent paper (1963) discussed the distribution of the Jabiru, *Xenorhynchus asiaticus*, in south-eastern Australia and examined in detail its presence in the area extending from the Sydney district to south-eastern Victoria.

In New South Wales the species is more common in favoured localities between Sydney and the Queensland border. I have, therefore, gathered available observations and records for that part of the State and assembled them in the following notes. The birds mentioned by Bell as inhabiting Hawkesbury swamps had apparently been absent for several months, and it was not until May 24, 1964, that one was again seen at Londonderry, and on June 28, a pair was sighted flying near Richmond.

Local populations seem to show considerable variation in numbers; for instance, early in 1964, Athel D'Ombraïn advised that he had not observed one bird between Maitland and Hexham for quite a long time, but he now reports (May 1964) seeing five adults and two immature birds at Eskdale and one adult at Rosebank (Maitland district).

In the first decade of this century the bird was apparently unknown around Sydney, for A. J. North 1913 states, "Cox and Hamilton record it as a rare visitant to the Mudgee District, New South Wales. It is said at all times to be difficult to procure but that some birds fall victims to the fowlers' guns is evidenced by the fact of its being exhibited for sale in the poulterers' shops in Sydney from time to time.

Specimens thus obtained for this Museum [The Australian Museum] I have learned were mostly procured on the northern rivers of the State, principally the Clarence River."

Additional records mentioned by North from northern New South Wales are: a nest found by Angus Sutherland near West Kempsey in September 1897; a tame Jabiru kept by Peter Knaven of Fredericktown, and a specimen in the Australian Museum of a young bird from Port Macquarie.

It would appear from inquiries I have made that the population in the area under review, is as follows; one pair of birds near Sydney, as recorded by Bell; seven birds in the Hunter River district (D'Ombraïn) and varying reports from the Tea Gardens-Myall River area of from five to eight birds. In 1959 I saw two dead immature birds, which had been shot, in the Myall River. Mr Jack Debert noted two birds at Wallis Lake in May, 1964. Since the Jabiru flies very high and can easily cover long distances the birds observed by Debert could have been part of the Tea Gardens population.

The area east of the Pacific Highway between Telegraph Point and Macksville, and especially the coastal swamps near Kempsey, appears to be much favoured by Jabirus. Mrs Grace Jarvis, of Kempsey, went to considerable trouble estimating the Jabiru population in that district, both by personal observation and through the local press. In letters dated January 11, and February 11, 1964, she gives detailed reports of sightings. Three definite nesting records were received and the schoolteacher at Upper Belmore reported seeing six birds from his window, two in one party and four in another. The actual observations received were: two of single birds, eight of pairs, one of three, two of five, and one of six. Mrs Jarvis says, "Most of the sightings are probably duplications of the same birds".

During July, 1962, I saw a young Jabiru at the bridge near Macksville and an adult bird in the same place a couple of weeks later. In July, 1962, and August, 1963, one bird was observed in the swamp north of the Pacific Highway at South Grafton while I was travelling north and was seen again on the return trip. (This bird appears to be almost a permanent resident.)

One pair of birds is known to nest at Coutts Crossing in the Grafton district, and a little to the south birds have been observed in the swamps at Ulmarra, Tucabia and Gilletts Ridge.

Mrs Jarvis observed a pair at Mullumbimby in May, 1963. It is highly probable that the birds still frequent the coastal swamps adjacent to Evans Head, which were used as bombing ranges during World War II, where I saw Brolgas in 1943.

A further coastal record for Jabirus is from Mr W. R. Moore who reports three pairs in the Tweed district.

Since Morse's report of one bird at Moree in 1922, only one other inland record has been received and that from a relative, S. G. Morse. He saw a bird at Mogil Mogil, where it remained for some three weeks, subsequently moving 12 miles to the north; since then no further records of its presence are available.

It was my intention to try to estimate the Jabiru population in New South Wales but, as the birds wander over extensive areas, this proved too difficult a task.

Further, the problem posed by Noel Burnett (Bell 1963) — " . . . in the area in which the Jabirus nest and rear young, there never appears to be any increase in the population" — makes estimating even more difficult. In the Windsor-Richmond District, during recent years, parties of two adults and one or two immature birds have been seen on many occasions, yet the adult population appears to remain static. With swamps bordering the Hawkesbury River, from Penrith to beyond Windsor and Wilberforce, the food supply is surely enough to sustain a larger Jabiru colony. The district has been combed by several experienced observers over a period of twenty years or more but only two nests have been found and these have not both been used in any one season.

In conclusion, I suggest that a reasonable estimate of the Jabiru population in the area under review would be upwards of thirty birds, as follows:

Sydney District	2 birds
Hunter River	7 birds
Tea Gardens-Myall River	6 birds
Kempsey District	10, possibly up to 16 birds
Grafton District	6 birds
Tweed District	6 birds

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are extended to K. A. Hindwood for information given and for the use of his records, also to Mrs Grace Jarvis, who has gone to considerable trouble during the last four years to obtain general information on Jabirus in the Kempsey District. A. H. Chisholm and K. A. Hindwood kindly read the manuscript.

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68 Castle Howard Road, Beecroft, N.S.W.
Manuscript received October 24, 1964.