

Report of the Bird Observers Club

The outing in June was to the mouth of the Werribee River. There it was that John Batman, in 1836, anchored his schooner, and, walking inland as far as a flat-topped hill (Mt. Cottrell), feasted his imagination on the rolling plains before he made his famous treaty with the blacks. The land for miles around is now intensely cultivated under irrigation. English skylarks were observed in the air, singing, and a Black-shouldered Kite hovered over a field much as a Kestrel does. About the estuary were many interesting water-birds. Ibis, Spoonbills, Brown Bittern, hundreds of Spur-winged Plover, and a large party (forty-two) Chestnut-breasted Shelduck. An incident of importance was the finding of portion of a bird's skeleton with a few feathers attached. Comparisons afterwards proved it to be the Grass-Owl, a rare bird in the south. The Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo was heard and seen. A pair of Curlew Stints flew off, showing prominent white rumps. They are the remnant of the migratory host found about the bay in summer. At the meeting on June 19 Mr. A. H. Mattingley gave an entertaining account of the fauna and flora of King Island, the largest of the Bass Straits islands, which, although nearer the Victorian coast, is essentially Tasmanian in character.

The meeting on July 17 was devoted to "Wildflowers," by Mr. E. E. Pescott. By vivid descriptions and perfectly-coloured lantern slides the variety and beauty of the native flowers, both in the bush and in the studio, were portrayed. A large party visited Sherbrooke Forest on the annual Lyrebird pilgrimage. The day was unusually mild; the birds sang freely, and often displayed within a few yards of observers. A White-browed Scrub Wren kept in close proximity to one Lyrebird, and at every "scrape" by the larger bird, darted in and picked up some tit-bit. The same day was chosen for a successful national broadcast.

Hearing that some Pelicans and a few Eastern Curlew had been seen at Altona Bay in winter time, some members visited there on the afternoon of July 22. But the tide was very high, flooding all the sapphire and marshy feeding banks, and there was a scarcity of birds. However, a Double-banded Dotterel was seen.

The Museum meetings, by consideration of the Director, began on the evening of July 24. Mr. J. A. Ross dealt with eggs generally, illuminating his subject with many entertaining personal field notes. Mr. F. E. Howe came next with the Robin family, and stimulated members to ask many questions about the life history of the forms dealt with, and others.

In August a large gathering visited Werribee Gorge, the rocky defile near Baccus Marsh, which is world-famous for its geological peculiarities. But it is not a good place for birds. A resident's list inspected contained 120 species observed over a great number of years. In the floor of the valley the tangle of undergrowth shelters a few Honeyeaters, Wrens and Thornbills. A very fine Eagle's eyrie was seen (from a distance) in a tree, perched high in a cliff face. It is said locally to have been 50 years in use. Falcons, Kestrels and Owls nest in the crannies of the inaccessible cliffs. At the meeting on August 21 Mr. A. H. Chisholm showed a fine series of his bird pictures, taken in three States, and, with colourful descriptions, kept members well interested.

Two other outings were enjoyed in early spring, one to Glen Waverley, where Sittellas were seen building, and where a Ground Thrush sat by its nest full of young; the other to Christmas Hills, where, in the sanctuary of Mr. G. Harvie, Choughs and Magpies were brooding and Swallows had a nest perched upon a picture frame in the hall. The scent of wattle blossom filled the air, and panoramas of mountain range and river valley made vivid impression.