

The Love-Display of the Australian Bustard

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The Australian Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*) or Wild Turkey, the name by which the bird is best known, is the king of Australian game birds. The weight of a cock bird averages about 14 lbs. In its wild state it is difficult to approach unless stratagem is used. A common method adopted to obtain a close acquaintance of the bird is to ride on horseback in an ever-narrowing series of circles, gradually decreasing the diameter of each succeeding one until the observer is near enough to the bird. Another method is to drive a vehicle in a similar manner.

The best method, however, is to attract the attention of the birds and keep it fixed on a definite object, such as a kite which is flown over them. Whilst their attention is thus absorbed, a close approach can be made by an observer. The Australian aboriginals, to keep the attention of the Wild Turkey, adopted the stratagem of carrying aloft a fascinating and curious device, made partly from birds' feathers. This object keeps the birds so interested watching it that the wily aborigine is able either to spear the bird or to throw a noose over its head.

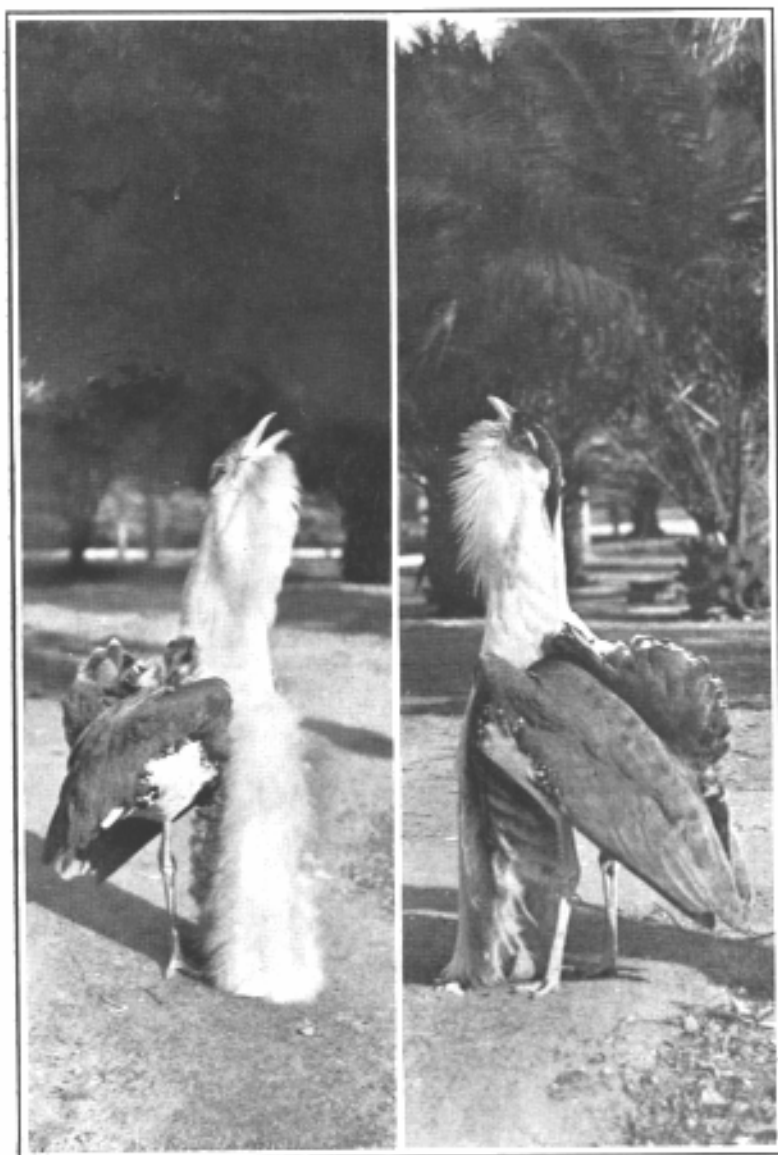
Few bird-observers have been privileged to see the love-display of the Wild Turkey. From the accompanying photos taken by Mr. J. Strickland, the deportment of the bird will be seen and the manner in which the bird, as it stands erect, frills the feathers of the throat and neck, depends from its lower throat and breast an elongated apron of feather-covered skin, until this apparatus reaches the ground, and also at the same time ruffles the feathers of its back.

This posture of the Wild Turkey is one of the most notable of the love-displays of famous Australian birds, and is on a parallel with that of the male Lyrebird.

When the bird is thus displaying, it utters a loud and deeply intoned booming note, which, when heard from a distance at first simulates a distant roar of a lion.

It is suggested that the apron of feathers which is depended by the bird is also used by it when fighting an adversary as a shield for the vulnerable soft part of its abdomen.

Unfortunately, the Bustard is slowly disappearing.



The Australian Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*) in display.
Photos. by J. Stiekland.