

## Notes on the Wedge-tailed Eagle

By N. GEARY, R.A.O.U., Dalby, Queensland.

I consider the character of the Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaëtus audax*) is, in most cases, painted much blacker than it really is. That it has black spots on it there is no gainsaying. Undoubtedly, the bird does kill lambs, but not nearly as many as it is blamed for. I have been all my life among stock, especially sheep, and I consider in a large number of cases the lamb that the eagles are eating has met its death in some other way. Having been seen by the keen eye as the birds glide overhead, they at once drop down on the carcass and proceed to make a meal of it. The owner of the lamb comes along, sees the birds at it, and at once comes to the conclusion they have killed it, when in reality they are helping to keep down the blowfly pest by cleaning up the rotting carcass.

For years I have always taken particular notice of the remains of the food taken to the nests, both on the ground beneath and in the nest itself. The following is a list of the remains of animals, etc., I have found:—Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), hare (*Lepus europæus*), kangaroo (*Macropus*), "goanna" (*Varanus varius*), jew lizard (*Amphibolarus barbatus*), blue-tongued lizard (*Teliqua scinoides*), shingle-back lizard (*Trachysaurus rugosus*), once a small sucking pig (there were a great number of the tame pigs gone wild on the Flinders some years ago), a domestic cat, and a Button Quail (*Turnix velox*). How such a large bird caught the last-named is a mystery. I found the Quail in a nest. It was quite fresh and the young birds (in the downy stage) had not touched it. Perhaps I disturbed the parent bird just as it brought it to the nest. While climbing up to a nest I have never been molested in any way by the birds—they invariably flew away in widening circles rising to a great height and remaining in the air, whilst I was in the tree or near it.

Now for the hunting side of the bird. On two occasions I have seen these birds kill fully-grown kangaroos, once in the Hughenden district and once in the St. George district. The former species was the red variety (*Macropus rufus*) and the latter the grey variety (*Macropus giganteus*). The procedure was the same in both cases. The birds hunted in pairs. The Kangaroo was hopping when the attack started. One bird swooped down and appeared to flap both wings, one on each side of the head of the kangaroo, then it would shoot up into the air, the mate would then do the same, and this was kept up for perhaps twenty minutes or so. The kangaroo each time it was struck jumped sideways and put on an extra spurt, but after a time the pace became slower

and the poor beast became very distressed, and used to stumble, recover its balance and stumble again, but the determined hunters would give it no respite. At last it fell and immediately the birds were on it. Once or twice it struggled up only to be forced down again, and at last it could not rise. When I got up to it the jugular vein was completely severed, as if it had been cut with a knife. The cut was about 3 inches long. It shows what that powerful beak is capable of doing.

Another time I saw an Eagle hunting a "goanna" (*Varanus varius*). It was surprising to see the pace the "goanna" went at. Just as the bird reached its prey the "goanna" dived down a hole, but it was only deep enough to allow its body to be covered, leaving its tail and hind legs exposed. The Eagle immediately dropped to the ground and tried to pull the "goanna" out, but could not do so. It then proceeded to make a meal of it. I waited for a while then I rode over to see what had happened and found both hind legs were broken in several places and nearly torn off, and a large hole eaten into the base of the tail.

---

In response to a request made by F. L. Berney, R.A.O.U., Mrs. Tom Carter has been good enough to forward for publication in *The Emu*, a photograph, taken in 1922, of her late husband. So far as we know, no likeness of our late member has ever appeared in any Australian publication, and it is therefore a matter of great satisfaction that we can rectify this in the pages of our journal and place on record for all time a likeness which, Mrs. Carter thoughtfully adds, is a very good one, of one of our keenest field naturalists. We need say no more, as an appreciation of our old member and his work appeared in *The Emu* of April, 1931.

---

Members desirous of having their volumes of *The Emu* bound must send their copies to the Hon. General Secretary not later than April 30. The prices will be:—Covers, 2/9 each; covers and binding combined, 5/-. Applications will definitely be closed on that date, and members who do not notify the Secretary by that date must make their own arrangements with Messrs. Mason, Firth & McCutcheon, 507 Little Collins Street, Melbourne. The cost per volume if not bound with a quantity will be fully double to that given above.