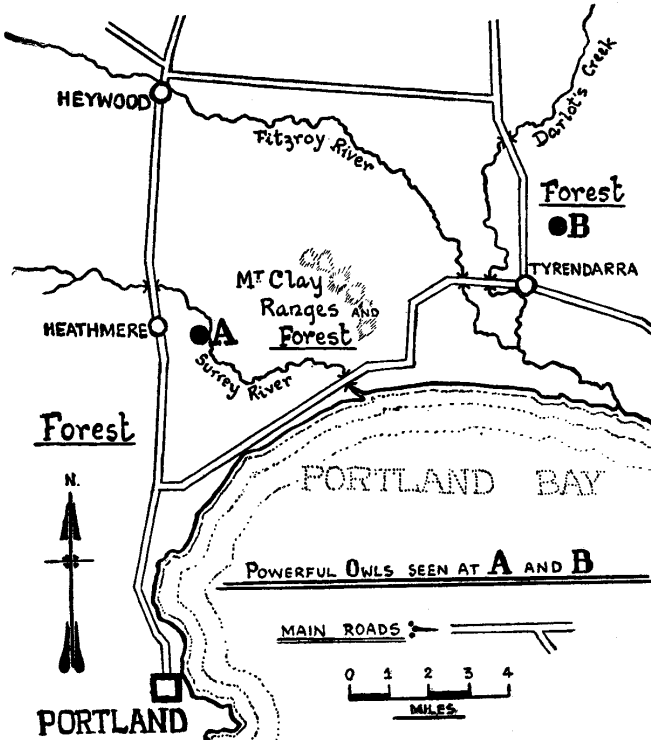


Extension of Range of the Powerful Owl

By NOEL F. LEARMONTH, Tyrendarra, Vic.

While I was collecting material for a list of Portland District birds two enthusiasts gave me for inclusion the Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*). On looking through the list Mr. George Mack queried this species as being far west of any previous report. However Mr. Percy Finck of Heath-



Map of the country north and north-east of Portland showing places referred to in the text.

mere was very definite; he had found a bird just dead and was thus able to identify it. Then, in the spring of 1945, he saw three of these Owls—one an immature bird—in a thick blackwood tree (*Acacia melanoxylon*) on the bank of the Surrey River at the site marked A on the accompanying map. This spot is at the foot of the low Mt. Clay range,

all forest covered, and backed to the west by miles of undulating forest.

The second report—from Mr. R. Holmes of Gorae—I judge to be of a Barking Owl (*Ninox connivens*) as the bird was both seen and heard screaming as described by Mr. David Fleay in *The Emu*, July 1942, and October 1944.

I am now able to substantiate Mr. Finck's find by personal experience which definitely places the Powerful Owl in the Portland District. The following are my records.

26/11/44. With my wife I disturbed a large owl, about 5 p.m., from a thick wild cherry (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*). The bird flew into a tall messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) and I was uncertain of identity. This site [marked B] is in thick forest two miles north-east of Tyrendarra P.O.

9/9/45. With Mr. G. Mack I visited the locality but did not see any trace of the owl, but some old pellets under another 'cherry' twenty chains away might be connected with the bird.

At various times in the next two years I returned to the tree but always with no result.

9/10/47. With Mr. F. G. Elford I visited the original tree and found a number of pellets, some quite fresh, and under a similar tree about 20 yards away were more pellets.

These were submitted to Mr. Fleay who wrote to me saying they were the pellets of the Powerful Owl.

After several unsuccessful visits I returned to the locality with Mr. Les. Chandler on January 20, 1948, and found pellets many weeks old, but no bird. All surface water had dried up and we judged that the owls had departed.

16/2/48. Back to the 'cherry' tree and found two very fresh pellets and three chains south a 'white-wash' patch and several small old pellets.

13/3/48. About 10 A.M. I went to the original tree and at last saw a large owl—without doubt the Powerful—sitting on a branch only fifteen feet above me. The bird had in its claws the half eaten remains of a ringtail possum (*Pseudocheirus*), the tail of which was jammed in a fork of the tree. I walked around and around under the bird but beyond a constant stare it took no notice whatever, no doubt loath to leave the meal, until poked at with a stick. It then flew into a large messmate and in following up the bird's direction in hopes of seeing a second owl I fell over in some thick bracken and lost trace of the quarry.

It is worthy of note that—

(1) The forests around Portland are cut off from the Powerful Owl's nearest known abode—the Otway Ranges—by miles of open and closely-settled country over which this forest-loving bird would be most unlikely to pass. But in the days of the pioneers the south-west forests were connected with those of the Otways by heavily-timbered

land. I conclude therefore, that Powerful Owls have always inhabited the Portland areas but are most uncommon and have escaped notice because there has been no thorough ornithological search in the district. However since finding the species I questioned a Tyrendarra forest worker asking had he ever seen large-sized owls? "Yes," he said, "big ones in wild cherry trees, and I've seen them eating rabbits caught in my traps; they eat the head and shoulders."

(2) The Tyrendarra bird dwells not in the usual well-watered dense mountain gullies but in country as flat as the proverbial table, 150 square miles of creekless and uninhabited forest where in some summers even the swamps dry up. To obtain water and the daily bath as described by Mr. Fleay the birds would have to fly long distances to Darlot's Creek or the Eumeralla River.

Notes on Bird-life at Kowguran, Queensland

By ERIC H. SEDGWICK, Caron, W.A.

For two months—from September 17 until November 20, 1945—I was one of a small party camped at Kowguran, 20 miles north of Miles, south Queensland. No recent accounts of the bird-life of this area appear to be available, so, notwithstanding that my own records, made in so short a time, are necessarily rather superficial, I present an outline of my observations.

The Miles district comes within the 20 inches to 30 inches rainfall belt. Most of the rain falls during the summer months. At the time of my sojourn, drought conditions were being experienced, but, nevertheless, pools could be found in some of the creek beds and further surface water was provided by excavated tanks, or 'dams,' on the grazing properties.

The dominant tree in this area is a species of *Callitris*. The timber is milled locally, so has a commercial value, and that may be one reason why much *Callitris* has been allowed to remain on grazing properties. Though much less frequent than the cypress pine, two eucalypts known locally as iron-bark and as spotted gum respectively, are conspicuous and grow to a height of from fifty to sixty feet.

NOTES ON BIRD-LIFE

Emus (*Dromaius novæ-hollandiæ*) were reported as being infrequent of recent years. I saw none.

Several times I flushed a Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*), but always from the same dry water-course, so that it seems likely that only one bird was encountered.