

third week of February, and the stable population of about 80 at Ralph's Bay is probably reached by the end of March. The outward movement takes place during August, and is complete by the end of that month.

During the autumn and winter months they may be found on many beaches on the south-east coast, throughout the Derwent Estuary and as far up that river as Bridgewater, and as far south as Cloudy Bay Lagoon and Great Taylor's Bay on South Bruni Island.

I have not found any of the species during the summer months.

Referring to Robert Hall's paper, *Emu*, vol. 23, p. 286, there is mention of two others of the migrant waders which we have not observed at Ralph's Bay during the last three years—the Grey Plover (*Squatarola squatarola*) and the Little Whimbrel (*Mesoscolopax minutus*). It is reasonable to assume that these birds are rare visitors only. It is regrettable that Mr. Hall did not give any indication of the approximate numbers of each species, as a comparison would have proved most interesting.

In conclusion I would express my thanks to Mr. Hugh Wilson for his part in this survey. It could not have been undertaken without his very able guidance and advice, and he carried out most of the observations made prior to his departure for Melbourne in December 1949.

## **Bird Movements in the Portland District, Victoria, in 1951**

By NOEL F. LEARMONTH, Portland, Vic.

These notes do not deal with general movements but only with those that are out of the ordinary in appearances or non-appearances.

Lorikeets came in great numbers during the third week in January, and were widespread through forests and orchards. Three species were about equally represented—Musk (*Glossopsitta concinna*), Purple-crowned (*G. porphyrocephala*) and Rainbow (*Trichoglossus moluccanus*). The last is a very infrequent visitor here; the others more common, sometimes almost residential. In all three species the numbers far exceeded anything we have had since we first began taking records—about thirteen years. By the end of May most of these lorikeets had left.

Spine-tailed Swifts (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) and Fork-tailed Swifts (*Apus pacificus*) were in extraordinarily large numbers during January, February and March (see *The Emu*, vol. 51, p. 1951). Cuckoos, on the other hand, were rarely seen. Only at odd times and places were we

able to list a bird of any of the usual four species—Pallid (*Cuculus pallidus*), Fantail (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*) and the two bronze-cuckoos—*Chalcites basalis* and *Lamprococcyx plagosus*.

In March came that great influx of Hoary-headed Grebes (*Podiceps poliocephalus*) that has already been discussed in the *Victorian Naturalist* for April and June 1951. In the last three months of the year very few of these birds remained in the district, and the numbers became normal.

The number of Flame Robins (*Petroica phoenicea*) visiting us from May to August was very small. Usually open paddocks near scrub are bright with them. Of Red-capped Robins (*P. goodenovii*) we saw nothing. This species is always rare here, however.

In August there began that influx of northern water birds that has been such a feature of the latter part of 1951. Yellow-billed Spoonbills (*Platalea flavipes*) appeared first: they were on all kinds of swamps and creeks. I am sure some of this species stay here and nest as I have seen young on the Darlots Creek Sanctuary. Royal Spoonbills (*P. regia*), which are uncommon in this district, were reported from Heathmere in August, after which I saw birds on Nelson Lagoon, Portland town lagoon and Darlots Creek Sanctuary. White Egrets (*Egretta alba*) appeared about the same time and were scattered over suitable terrain in large numbers. On December 16, on Darlots Creek, I counted 20 birds sitting on the bank in one place whilst many others flew up from a swamp behind them. We have never previously seen numbers here to approach this. Then early in October came the White-necked Herons (*Notophojx pacifica*)—the largest invasion of all. Normally an odd bird or so on scattered swamps is all we see, but during the period under review every small swamp, creek and waterhole had its quota; there would be ten birds on a swamp, and then a dozen more on a nearby creek. The camouflage scheme must have its exception in this bird, as there is nothing more prominent than the long white neck in a reedy swamp.

In 1914 I saw two Black-shouldered Kites (*Elanus notatus*) on the Heywood heath, and not another bird till August 1948, though once or twice people reported them. In 1948 I saw several more, then none till October 1951. During this month, and on to the end of December, there were more of these beautiful birds in our district than any of us had ever seen to that time. I have reports of one pair nesting which is probably correct as they were here during the nesting season.

One important point is to be recorded about the Spoonbills, Egrets and Herons. The few that come to us in normal visits always leave before the end of October, but

in 1951 the majority of the birds were still with us at the close of the year. Had they abandoned nesting for the season or completed these duties abnormally early before coming south?

Wood-Swallows are very irregular in their appearances here. The Dusky (*Artamus cyanopterus*) is a resident, but White-browed (*A. superciliosus*) and Masked (*A. personatus*) come and go presumably as conditions suit them. They were all here in numbers early in October, but in two weeks had completely disappeared. Mr. Claude Austin, 50 miles north of Portland, recorded, at that time, flocks of both species flying from south to north. On December 5 an advance guard of all three species appeared near Cape Grant and from then on the birds were here in thousands. They were spread over the whole district. We have never seen such flocks, White-browed largely predominating. At the close of the year many were busy nesting.

Currawongs are common birds in our forests, where we have Black-winged (*Strepera melanoptera*), Grey (*S. versicolor*) and Pied (*S. graculina*), but during the spring and early summer of 1951 it was a rare thing to see a bird of any species in a day's outing. The birds are supposed to be stationary, but they certainly disappeared, as stated. If any readers in adjacent districts have noticed a large influx of currawongs to their localities it would give us an idea of their movements.

As the long run of good seasons in what we vaguely term 'the north' inevitably switches over to drought, we may expect a tremendous influx of water birds to southern Victoria. Perhaps the numbers reported above are the advance army of such a movement.

## Stray Feathers

**Polygamy Among Ground-frequenting Birds.** — When writing in the *Victorian Naturalist* (Sep. 1942 and Apl. 1943) on the birds of Wattle Park, Melbourne, I gave notes on the nesting of the Rufous Song-Lark (*Cinclorhamphus matthewsi*), and raised the question whether the species is ever polygamous. That point still remains to be determined, for although the latest writer on the species (J. V. Ryan, in *The Emu* for August 1952) submitted some informative notes on nesting habits, he gave no indication of supposing that the male bird ever possessed more than one mate.

The basis for the question is, chiefly, the apparent fact that grass-frequenting birds seem to be more apt to break from monogamy than do arboreal species. For example, the male Corn-Bunting is recorded in Britain as having as many as eight 'wives' at a time, and in Australia at least

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