

Possible Occurrence of the Night Parrot in the Kimberley Division of Western Australia

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During a recent discussion with me concerning the birds of the Kimberleys, W.A., Mr. A. J. Jeapes (now of Perth) mentioned the 'ground parrot'. I immediately thought of the Northern Rosella, but that was not the bird Mr. Jeapes had in mind, and he described a parrot, and the circumstances in which he saw it, which left me with little doubt that he was referring to the Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*).

From about April to June in the years 1933-6 Mr. Jeapes used to cart wool from Ellendale and Calwinyarda Stations to Derby *via* the Lennard River. To avoid the heat he usually drove at night. The route passed through a broad belt of 'spinifex' (*Triodia*) on sandy and gravelly soils east of the Sisters Plateau (60 miles ESE of Derby). He sometimes saw, in the headlights of the truck, flocks of from two to five parrots on the road. When flushed they flew for only a short distance before dropping to the ground. Their flight was slow and fluttering, and only about three or four feet above the ground. Occasionally Mr. Jeapes hit one and was able to examine it. As far as he could remember, the parrots were 'plain green' except for a 'pale [yellowish] head' and they were about the same size as a 'weero' (*Leptolophus*). Other grasses grew in this area besides spinifex, but water was scarce.

Size, coloration, behaviour and habitat, all pointed to the parrots being *Geopsittacus*. The only difficulty was the locality—600 miles north-east of Nichol Springs, beyond which there was no record of the species in Western Australia. However, the intervening country seems to have been traversed by only two naturalists, *viz.* G. A. Kearnland in 1896 and Otto Lipfert in 1930-1. The hinterland of Derby itself has not received a great deal of attention, and as areas suitable for *Geopsittacus* are much more circumscribed than in the drier country to the south, passing naturalists could easily have overlooked the species.

If the parrots seen by Jeapes in the 'thirties were in fact *Geopsittacus*, the species should still occur in West Kimberley, for the country away from the rivers, and especially the spinifex, has been little affected by pastoral activities. The fox seems to have reached the northern limit of its expansion in Western Australia, which, except for a narrow strip along the Ninety Mile Beach, is some hundreds of miles south of the Fitzroy River. It is therefore heartening to reflect that West Kimberley (and other parts of arid northern Australia) may be harbouring this 'extinct' species.