

Records of Eastern Grass Owls in Australia appear to have been made almost exclusively of birds found in grass and never in trees. Our observation suggests that these birds, at least occasionally, make use of trees. The bird we saw was, as stated, in creekside vegetation, but the surrounding country was open forest with a good ground coverage of a species of corkscrew grass (sometimes called 'bundle-bundle') averaging c. 500 mm in height. Dr Serventy, when commenting on this record, remarked that his only record of a Grass Owl *Tyto capensis* in Transvaal, South Africa was of a bird perched in a tree, but added that it had apparently flown there after a grass fire. Fleay (1968) recorded that birds have been seen on fence posts. He also pointed out that some food items, as indicated by pellets, are not consistent with foraging in open habitat. Frauca (1980) has recorded Eastern Grass Owls in dry sclerophyll forest in coastal Queensland.

### References

- Fleay, David (1968), *Nightwatchmen of Bush and Plain*, Jacaranda, Brisbane.  
Frauca, Harry (1980), *The Australian Bird Spotter's Book*, Reed, Sydney.

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### Long-billed Corellas in North-Central Victoria

During the last two years I have been making regular trips, almost every fortnight, from Bendigo to Seymour via Heathcote and Puckapunyal. The occurrence of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* and their distribution en route have been of special interest. The flocks begin to form after the breeding season and reach their peak during the months of May and June. The cycle is reversed in August when the flocks begin to diminish in size and the incidence of isolated pairs and smaller concentrations is commonplace. It is a replica of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos' behaviour in the open fields along the Calder Highway from Bendigo to Melbourne.

The breeding season is in full swing during September and October when the fields adjacent to the highway are virtually deserted by roving flocks. Occasionally roadside kills are noted and the victims examined for proof of any other causes of death. The incidence of roadside kills is, however, very rare when compared with other species of the same genus which more easily fall victim to highway traffic. Even when food near the road is plentiful and attractive to these cockatoos, their naturally cautious behaviour usually enables them to take flight long before the potential danger ends in tragedy for some individuals.

My experience with the Long-billed Corella *C. tenuirostris* in the field is not as extensive as that with the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, but it does cover a period of over 35 years and includes observations of both populations in western Victoria and the middle reaches of the Murray River respectively. The Long-bills are less cautious than the Sulphur-crested and frequently feed along roadsides where food is plentiful, taking less notice of passing traffic in much the same manner as the Galah *C. roseicapilla* or the less common Pink

Cockatoo *C. leadbeateri* each of which, unfortunately, fall relatively easy victims to fast-moving vehicles.

When mixed flocks are encountered between Moulamein and Deniliquin, they are dispersed first by the departure of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos then by that of the Pink Cockatoos, followed closely by the Long-bills and finally the Galahs, many of the latter being so tardy in leaving that they frequently pay the price of having loitered so long thus adding to the avian road toll. With care, however, one can approach Long-billed Corellas busily feeding by the roadside and observe their beauty and behaviour.

It was with some surprise therefore that on 2 February 1984, when returning to Bendigo from Seymour about 1630 h eastern summer time, I approached a flock of cockatoos on the roadside just south of the Knowsley Primary School. A few took off with the familiar harsh calls of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. Others remained, so I immediately slowed down and had the unexpected pleasure of watching 50 or so birds which were all Long-billed Corellas. Many were in fine adult plumage, but some were scraggy birds in full moult, almost bare of feathers around the neck and head. Eventually they flew to the neighbouring gums, except for one miserable specimen which appeared incapable of becoming airborne. Leaving the car I gave chase, but the bird eventually fluttered to a big Red Gum and commenced climbing out on a thick horizontal limb from which it surveyed the cause of the alarm.

After disturbing this flock I proceeded along the highway towards Bendigo for about 100 metres when I located a freshly killed road victim on the opposite side of the highway. It was definitely not there when I passed the spot early that morning. It was badly mauled as several cars had passed over the body after death. It was in such a heavy state of moult that it must have had great difficulty in flying and thus fell victim to fast cars on the highway. Its injuries were such that the specimen was useless for museum purposes. The crop was missing and the head severely mutilated. I retrieved the bill and the remnants of the skull as formal evidence of what I considered, at the time, to be an extension of the range of the population inhabiting the western district of Victoria. The nearest locality in which I had hitherto seen individual birds along the highway was near St Arnaud to the west of Bendigo. On reflection, however, it is more likely that the flock seen at Knowsley on the McIvor Highway, some 37 km slightly south-east of Bendigo could have originated from the well-known northern population along the middle reaches of the Murray River.

Although I have located and am familiar with two reasonably large flocks between Deniliquin and Moulamein, I have also seen smaller groups between Echuca and Lake Moira and again further north along the Edward River. After harvest small to medium parties frequent the Bullatale Creek where they often visit my son's station property known as 'Uambi'.

Since locating the Knowsley flock, I have heard that others have been sighted near Elmore between Bendigo and Echuca. The newcomers are, therefore, more likely to have followed the Campaspe River and the Picaninny Creek systems than to have moved from western Victoria over the drier districts to the west of Bendigo.