

## Birds at Macleods Morass, Bairnsdale, Victoria

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### Introduction

Concurrent with a 21 month study (July 1975 to March 1977) on the biology (Beumer, 1979) of the Short-finned Eel, *Anguilla australis* Richardson 1841, and the Long-finned Eel, *A. reinhardtii* Steindachner 1867, at Macleods Morass, we recorded the species of birds we saw. A species list of the birds is presented in Table 1.

### Macleods Morass

The Morass, a freshwater reedy swamp proclaimed a State Game Reserve in 1966, occupied an area of 423 ha during the study. Additional purchases of land since then have increased the total area to more than 600 ha. The Morass is located immediately west of the Mitchell River in Gippsland and runs in a north-south direction. It is surrounded by freehold land, largely cleared for grazing of cattle and sheep but with a few remaining stands of *Eucalyptus* and *Acacia*. Several small creeks flow into the Morass, the largest being Cobbler Creek. The water-level in the Morass varied by 0.5 - 0.6 m during the study period as a consequence of rainfall, evaporation and effluent releases (final stage) from the Bairnsdale Water Authority. When water-levels are highest, previously exposed mud-flats around the perimeter of the Morass are inundated.

Macleods Morass consists of two extensive shallow regions (depths up to 1.4 m), one at each end of a deep-water region (depth up to 5.1 m), the latter known locally as the Long Waterhole. The southern shallow region is connected to the Mitchell River by a drain through which water usually flows only during the period from mid-winter to early summer. The two shallow regions are extensively covered by emergent vegetation (*Juncus*, *Cyperus*, *Typha*) with grasses (*Phragmites* and *Paspalum*) extending from the bank. Of the free-floating plants, *Azolla* and *Lemna* were widespread. A small area of *Melaleuca* and *Eucalyptus* remains along the southern region. *Juncus*, *Typha* and *Eleocharis* were established in patches only around the margin of the Long Waterhole which also had submerged vegetation (*Vallisneria*, *Myriophyllum* and *Elodea*) in the shallow, more wind-exposed margins.

### Method

Birds were identified (Frith, 1967; Slater, 1970; 1974) and allocated to one of six groups: (a) waterfowl; (b) large wading birds; (c) open water/diving birds; (d) birds of prey; (e) shore birds; and (f) bush birds. No attempt was made to determine the number of each species. Names used are those recommended in the RAOU (1977) list.

### Discussion

Many species (e.g. Australian Pelican, Black Swan and Cormorants) appear to be permanent residents in the Morass; other species (e.g. Spoonbills, Black-winged Stilt, Grebes and several species of duck) occurred less regularly. The large number (50) of species recorded from the



Northern end of Macleods Morass with shallow water regions, patches of emergent aquatic vegetation and marginal *Phragmites*.

Plate 63

Photo by John Beumer



Southern end of Macleods Morass with open water region and riparian cover of *Eucalyptus* and *Melaleuca* on far bank.

Plate 64

Photo by John Beumer



Morass reflects a diversity of habitats ranging from open grassland/pasture and riparian cover to emergent aquatic vegetation and open water. Most of the birds recorded during the study were bush birds (Group f) and open water/diving birds (Group c), with each of these two groups accounting for more than 100 occurrence records during the 21-month study.

The diversity of the bird species at the Morass also indicates the value of wetlands of this type, particularly those which are permanent and have fresh water. The area of such wetlands in Victoria is declining (Corrick & Norman, 1980) and reservation of additional wetlands is necessary, both for permanent and migratory species of birds, particularly during droughts.

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## Short Notes —

### A Sight Record of the Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* in the Northern Territory

On February 9, 1980 at 17.30 I found a Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* on the edge of a pond at the Sanderson Sewage Ponds near Darwin, N.T. The bird was at first thought to be a Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius*, a species that is an occasional visitor to this area (McKean, et. al. 1976; McKean & Hertog, in press) and I paid little attention to it until it was flushed when a conspicuous white wing bar was noted. I followed the bird to where it landed on another pond only to find it had joined another "Ringed Plover" which I noted as being slightly smaller and paler. In fact, the smaller bird was later identified as being a Little Ringed Plover. I concentrated on the larger of the two birds, noting that it had the broad white frontal patch and superciliary line and the black bill of an eclipse-plumaged bird, yet its orange legs and the darkness of the well-defined breast band indicated that a change into nuptial plumage was taking place. I flushed both birds and followed the larger of the two with my Leitz 10 x 40 binoculars, again viewing the white wing bar.