

Birds of Gemmills Swamp

By RONALD G. ROBERTS, Mooroopna, Victoria

Gemmills Swamp, near Mooroopna, in central Victoria, is probably best known for its ibis rookery, and the efforts that were made to save the rookery and the swamp from being used for water sports. As a result of a survey of the birds conducted at the swamp, and much discussion between interested persons and groups, it was eventually declared a sanctuary.

Gemmills Swamp which is filled by the overflow from the Goulburn River, and is adjacent to the township of Mooroopna, is bound on the west and south margins by farms and housing subdivisions, with some house fences extending to the water's edge. On the north and east margins the swamp is bordered by river red gums, with yellow box and wattles on the higher ridges.

There are over 500 acres (200 ha) of timbered country, controlled by the Forests Commission of Victoria, and the swamp is in excess of 85 acres (30 ha), which includes a large ibis rookery.

The following list of species was compiled from observations that were made between January 1968, and December 1973.

SCIENTIFIC LIST OF BIRDS

Pelecanus conspicillatus, Australian Pelican.

Seen on the swamps throughout the year in parties up to 20 birds at the one time.

Phalacrocorax carbo, Black Cormorant.

A few birds are around the swamp throughout the year.

P. sulcirostris, Little Black Cormorant.

Small numbers seen at all times during the year.

P. melanoleucos, Little Pied Cormorant.

A common species that is in these parts for all months of the year.

Podiceps novaehollandiae, Little Grebe.

A resident and breeding species. Present all months of the year.

P. poliocephalus, Hoary-headed Grebe.

Only single birds are present when the water is at normal levels, but 50 birds were observed in June 1973, following heavy flooding.

P. cristatus, Crested Grebe.

Odd birds seen on the open water of the swamp, usually after floods.

Ardea pacifica, White-necked Heron

A resident species that nests in the tall trees around the swamp.

A. novaehollandiae, White-faced Heron.

Common throughout the year, nesting in the larger trees.

Egretta alba, White Egret.

A few birds seen all months of the year; possibly nesting in the flooded timber areas.

E. intermedia, Plumed Egret.

Very common some years, others not so.

Nycticorax caledonicus, Nankeen Night Heron.

A migrant, common during spring and summer. Evidently nesting in the area.

Ixobrychus minutus, Little Bittern.

Observed on two occasions only, October and November, 1972.

Threskiornis molucca, White Ibis.

Very common; roosts and also nests in the flooded reed-beds of the swamp.

T. spinicollis, Straw-necked Ibis.

Common; roosts and nests at swamp, similar to the preceding species.

Platalea regia, Royal Spoonbill.

A few birds seen throughout the year, but not common.

P. flavipes, Yellow-billed Spoonbill.

A few birds seen throughout the year, but not common.

Cygnus atratus, Black Swan.

Very common all year. Nests on the swampy areas.

Tadorna tadornoides, Mountain Duck.

Odd birds recorded during the year, in parties up to 20 birds at a time.

Anas superciliosa, Black Duck.

Very common all swampy parts, where it breeds freely.

A. gibberifrons, Grey Teal.

Very common on the waterways.

A. castanea, Chestnut Teal.

Appears to be increasing in number in the last two years, but not common.

A. rhynchotis, Blue-winged Shoveler.

The only positive record was of four birds that were observed during August 1972.

Malacorhynchus membranaceus, Pink-eared Duck.

The only records of this duck are of two birds in August 1973, and six birds during November 1973.

Aythya australis, White-eyed Duck.

Fairly common, increasing in numbers. Must breed in the area.

Chenonetta jubata, Maned Goose.

The largest number was eight birds that were seen on October 1973; otherwise it is a rare species.

Biziura lobata, Musk Duck.

This duck is common when the swamp is flooded, otherwise rare.

Oxyura australis, Blue-billed Duck.

Odd birds recorded after floods. It was observed breeding in December 1971.

Elanus notatus, Black-shouldered Kite.

Somewhat rare, only odd visitors to the forest recorded.

Haliastur spheurnus, Whistling Eagle.

There is a resident pair of these birds at the swamp, where they are breeding in one of the large trees.

Accipiter fasciatus, Australian Goshawk.

A rare species with only odd sightings throughout the year.

A. cirrocephalus, Collared Sparrowhawk.

Occasional sightings. One bird came into the town and was seen on an aviary.

Circus approximans, Swamp-Harrier.

There appears to be a resident pair at the swamp, where they are seen throughout the year.

Falco longipennis, Little Falcon.

Single sight records of this falcon recorded in most months of the year.

F. berigora, Brown Hawk.

Occasionally seen in the forest and in lightly timbered areas.

F. cenchroides, Nankeen Kestrel.

One bird seen occasionally in the forest, and over cleared areas.

Synoicus australis, Brown Quail.

Appears to be a resident species; eight birds were observed in one flock.

Rallus philippensis, Banded Landrail.

Observed on four occasions; October 1972, January 1973, February 1973, and March 1973.

Tribonyx ventralis, Black-tailed Native Hen.

This species was seen at the swamp from October 1971 to July 1972, but has not been observed since.

Gallinula tenebrosa, Dusky Moorhen.

A very common bird seen on the edges of the swamp and swimming in the water.

Porphyrio porphyrio, Swamphen.

Very common, all reedy areas of the lake.

Fulica atra, Coot.

A resident species that is present for most of the year.

Vanellus novae-hollandiae, Spur-winged Plover.

Common throughout the year, chiefly in the cleared or open areas.

V. tricolor, Banded Plover.

A rare visitor seen in the open areas.

Charadrius cinctus, Red-kneed Dotterel.

Three birds recorded in September 1972, and five in October 1972, around the muddied edges of the swamps.

C. melanops, Black-fronted Dotterel.

Common throughout the year, frequenting the edges of waterways of all kinds.

Gallinago hardwickii, Japanese Snipe.

A common migrant which is present from September to March each year.

Calidris acuminata, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

A summer visitor in small parties. The highest number at one time was 26.

C. ruficollis, Red-necked Stint.

The only record is of a single bird seen around the edges of the swamp in November 1972.

Himantopus himantopus, White-headed Stilt.

A few birds observed in the warmer months; possibly nests around the edges of the swamp.

Burhinus magnirostris, Southern Stone-Curlew.

A pair resident throughout the year in the forest, where it would nest.

Larus novaehollandiae, Silver Gull.

A few birds are present during all months of the year.

Chlidonias hybrida, Whiskered Tern.

Odd visitors throughout the year, but no signs of nesting.

Geopelia striata, Peaceful Dove.

Resident all year, and breeds in the forest.

G. cuneata, Diamond Dove.

Three sightings; one pair, April 1972, and again in July 1972, and four birds seen in October 1972.

Phaps chalcoptera, Common Bronzewing.

A rare resident in the forest areas.

Ocyphaps lophotes, Crested Pigeon.

A few birds seen throughout the year in the open timbered areas.

Trichoglossus haematodus, Rainbow Lorikeet.

Very rare, one observation of three birds in January 1969.

Glossopsitta concinna, Musk Lorikeet.

Very common during the warmer months, when the trees are flowering.

G. pusilla, Little Lorikeet.

Odd birds most months of the year, but no build up during blossoming of trees.

Lathamus discolor, Swift Parrot.

A winter visitor in small flocks; highest number between 40 and 50 birds in 1973.

Cacatua galerita, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.

Only odd birds recorded throughout the year.

C. roseicapilla, Galah.

Not a common species in this area, odd birds recorded throughout the year.

Nymphicus hollandicus, Cockatiel.

A few summer visitors.

Platycercus elegans, Crimson Rosella.

Birds in immature plumage only observed during winter months.

P. flaveolus, Yellow Rosella.

There is a resident pair in the forest.

P. eximius, Eastern Rosella.

A very common resident in all timbered and grassland areas. Breeds freely.

Psephotus haematonotus, Red-rumped Parrot.

A very common resident throughout the red gums and timbered areas, and on the fringes.

Melopsittacus undulatus, Budgerygah.

Occurred in very small flocks of ten birds in December 1968 and November 1971.

Cuculus pallidus, Pallid Cuckoo.

A common visitor during the spring and summer months.

Cacomantis pyrrhophanus, Fan-tailed Cuckoo.

Partly migratory, with a few birds remaining throughout the year.

Chrysococcyx basalis, Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo.

A regular migrant with a few birds recorded between October and February each year.

C. plagosus, Golden Bronze-Cuckoo.

Although this species should be common there is only one record, that of a single bird during September and October, 1972.

Tyto alba, Barn Owl.

A resident species in the timbered areas throughout the year.

Ninox novaeseelandiae, Boobook Owl.

Resident throughout the year, in red gums and the timbered areas.

Podargus strigoides, Tawny Frogmouth.

Appears to be common throughout the timbered areas.

Hirundapus caudacutus, Spine-tailed Swift.

Observed during the summer months in moving flocks of varying numbers.

Alcyone azurea, Azure Kingfisher.

A few pairs resident throughout the year.

Dacelo gigas, Laughing Kookaburra.

A very common resident seen in all areas.

Halcyon sancta, Sacred Kingfisher.

Very common during the summer, with a few birds wintering at the swamp.

Merops ornatus, Rainbowbird.

A very common summer visitor nesting in the sand hills.

Eurystomus orientalis, Dollarbird.

A common summer migrant which nests in a hollow in the taller trees.

Cheramoeca leucosternum, White-backed Swallow.

A resident species that nests in the sandhills during the spring and summer months.

Hirundo neoxena, Welcome Swallow.

A very common resident and nesting species, with some movement during the winter months.

Petrochelidon nigricans, Tree-Martin.

Odd birds are seen throughout the year, but there is no record of migrating flocks.

P. ariel, Fairy Martin.

Odd birds throughout the year, but there is no record of migration.

Coracina novaehollandiae, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike.

A common resident in the forest and among the red gums.

C. robusta, Little Cuckoo-Shrike.

Single birds seen throughout the year in the timbered areas.

Lalage sueurii, White-winged Triller.

A common summer migrant that breeds in the timber in the forest.

A very common resident, chiefly among the timbered areas along the edges of the swamp.

Pomatostomus temporalis, Grey-crowned Babbler.

A family of these birds was resident from 1968 to 1971, but not recorded during recent years.

P. superciliosus, White-browed Babbler.

One small flock is resident in the timbered areas.

Megalurus gramineus, Little Grassbird.

Very common in the swamp area, where it nests among the reeds and rank grasses.

Acrocephalus stentoreus, Reed-Warbler.

A common spring and summer migrant, with a few birds wintering among the reeds at the swamp.

Cinclorhamphus mathewsi, Rufous Songlark.

A common summer visitor during most years; nesting in the grasslands.

Malurus cyaneus, Superb Blue Wren.

A rare resident in the understory of the forest.

Gerygone olivacea, White-throated Warbler.

One sighting of a pair during September 1972. This area is near the limit of the range of this species.

G. fusca, Western Warbler.

A few birds are resident throughout the year, in the open timbered areas. Overlaps with the preceding species.

Smicrornis brevirostris, Weebill.

A common resident in the forest.

Acanthiza lineata, Striated Thornbill.

A few birds are resident throughout the year, mainly in the timbered areas, where they frequent the outer foliage of the trees.

A. nana, Little Thornbill.

A few birds occur throughout the year, favouring the acacia areas.

A. chrysorrhoa, Yellow-rumped Thornbill.

A very common resident during the year, breeding freely in the bushy tips of trees and shrubs.

Microeca leucophaea, Jacky Winter.

A few birds are seen during the year, but they are more common in the winter months.

Petroica multicolor, Scarlet Robin.

A few birds, mainly in pairs, between March and September, wintering in these parts.

P. goodenovii, Red-capped Robin.

Only one record of a pair seen during September 1972.

P. phoenicea, Flame Robin.

This species is very common between March and September, this area being one of the wintering places for this mountain nesting robin.

Rhipidura fuliginosa, Grey Fantail.

Very common during March to October in the timbered areas, to which it migrates each year.

R. leucophrys, Willie Wagtail.

A very common resident, chiefly among the timbered areas, and along the edges of the swamps.

Seisura inquieta, Restless Flycatcher.

A few birds resident in the forest, where it nests.

Pachycephala pectoralis, Golden Whistler.

A few winter visitors, with rare occasions of birds staying during the summer months.

P. rufiventris, Rufous Whistler.

Fairly common all year, with a build up of number during the winter.

Colluricincla harmonica, Grey Shrike-Thrush.

Fairly common throughout the year, mainly in timbered areas.

Falcunculus frontatus, Eastern Shrike-tit.

A common resident in the forest areas.

Neositta chrysoptera, Orange-winged Sittella.

Odd birds throughout the year, usually in the timbered areas.

Climacteris picumnus, Brown Treecreeper.

A fairly common and nesting resident in the forested parts.

C. leucophaea, White-throated Treecreeper.

A pair was observed in September 1972. Although this species should be common in this area there has been only this one sighting.

Dicaeum hirundinaceum, Mistletoebird.

Common. Regularly seen in the forest, especially when the mistletoe is flowering.

Pardalotus punctatus, Spotted Pardalote.

A fairly common visitor during the winter months.

P. substriatus, Striated Pardalote.

A fairly common resident species. The Eastern Striated Pardalote, *P. ornatus*, was not identified.

P. striatus, Yellow-tipped Pardalote.

No live birds of this species were observed, but one dead bird, which had been hit by a car, was picked up and positively identified.

Zosterops lateralis, Grey-breasted Silvereye.

A common resident throughout the year, which breeds in the area.

Meliphaga fusca, Fuscous Honeyeater.

This honeyeater was a common winter visitor in 1972 and 1973. Not observed in other years.

M. chrysops, Yellow-faced Honeyeater.

A common winter visitor to the forest, where it was seen in flocks.

M. penicillata, White-plumed Honeyeater.

A very common resident in both the forest and the red gums.

M. melanops, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater.

One pair was observed during August 1973. No other record.

Melithreptus brevirostris, Brown-headed Honeyeater.

Recorded as odd visitor throughout the year.

M. lunatus, White-naped Honeyeater.

Appears in this area only during the colder months of the year, when it is a common visitor.

M. gularis, Black-chinned Honeyeater.

A few birds are resident throughout the year, chiefly in the taller trees.

Philemon citreogularis, Little Friarbird.

An extremely common visitor, especially to the box areas.

Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris, Eastern Spinebill.

The only record of this species was of a single bird that was observed in July 1968.

Manorina melanocephala, Noisy Miner.

A very common resident throughout the year, in all timbered areas.

Anthochaera carunculata, Red Wattlebird.

This nomadic species had been a fairly common winter visitor in 1972 and 1973.

Emblema guttata, Diamond Firetail.

A rare visitor, four birds observed in November 1971, and one in October 1972.

Aegintha temporalis, Red-browed Finch.

A rare winter visitor to the forest, although it appears to be a resident at Reedy's Swamp, at Shepparton, Victoria.

Poephila guttata, Zebra Finch.

The common resident and breeding finch in all areas.

Oriolus sagittatus, Olive-backed Oriole.

A migrant, with a few birds observed every summer.

Grallina cyanoleuca, Magpie-Lark.

A very common resident species, nesting in all types of timbered areas.

Corcorax melanorhamphus, White-winged Chough.

One flock of these gregarious birds is resident throughout the year.

Artamus leucorhynchus, White-breasted Woodswallow.

A summer visitor to the swamps and the adjacent red gums. Odd birds remain during the winter.

A. personatus, Masked Woodswallow.

Twenty birds observed, mixed with White-browed Woodswallows, in October 1972.

A. superciliosus, White-browed Woodswallow.

A rare summer visitor, but it was very common during the dry years of 1968 to 1972.

A. cyanopterus, Dusky Woodswallow.

A summer migrant with a few birds remaining throughout the year.

Strepera graculina, Pied Currawong.

A very common winter visitor, apparently from the higher ranges, where it nests in the spring and summer months.

Gymnorhina tibicen, Black-backed Magpie.

A very common resident species. No records of the White-backed Magpie, *G. hypoleuca*.

Corvus coronoides, Australian Raven.

A very common resident.