

Birds of the Sewerage Works at Armidale, N.S.W.

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The Armidale sewerage works lies almost midway between the Kempsey and Cook's Roads, at a distance of some three miles east of the city of Armidale. On the flat land comprising the flood-plain of the Dumaresq Creek occur five ponds which are separated by low, grass-covered earth-banks. The closest pond to the treatment plant appear to be the most favourable for ducks while the others, being well vegetated at the shallower parts, are generally ideal for wading birds. A series of grassy channels, which supply water to the ponds, are particularly attractive to snipe. On occasions, large expanses of mud are exposed when some of the ponds either dry out, or are drained, thus providing an excellent wader-habitat in the spring and summer months.

The site was visited occasionally between April and July, 1967, while after this latter month weekly attendances generally occurred until the end of December 1967. Of the 52 species of birds that have been recorded within the boundaries of the sewerage works, 38 are contained in the annotated list, and 14 are listed in the final section.

LIST OF SPECIES

Little Grebe, *Podiceps novaehollandiae*. Irregular. Though present throughout the year there were noticeable fluctuations in abundance. The largest flock comprised 50 birds in late December.

Hoary-headed Grebe, *P. poliocephalus*. This species was common in small numbers during the months of September, October, November and December.

Little Black Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*. A rare visitor, three were observed on October 1, and another six days later.

Little Pied Cormorant, *P. melanoleucos*. Seasonal. Only recorded between September and November when individuals, and occasional pairs, were noted.

Plumed Egret, *Egretta intermedia*. An individual was often noted between October and December. On November 4, two birds were seen.

White Egret, *E. alba*. Uncommon. Only observed on three occasions during the months of April, May and September. In each case single birds were present.

White-faced Heron, *Ardea novaehollandiae*. My records show that this species was present in small numbers throughout the year.

White-necked Heron, *A. pacifica*. An occasional visitor. One bird was present during November and December. Other birds were seen in the district during August and February.

Nankeen Night-Heron, *Nycticorax caledonicus*. During October an adult was flushed from willows growing close to the Dumaresq Creek, at the western end of the sewerage works. Later in the month an adult and an immature were sighted in the same area.

Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*. Rare. A solitary bird was observed on a pond margin on October 28. However, on December 27 at least 12 birds were sighted on a lagoon elsewhere in the district.

White Ibis, *Threskiornis molucca*. Regularly sighted in small flocks at the works.

Straw-necked Ibis, *T. spinicollis*. Commonly met with throughout the year, but numbers fluctuated from individuals to flocks containing up to 70 birds.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill, *Platalea flavipes*. Rare. On November 5 an individual was observed feeding near a flock of Straw-necked Ibis, on a pond margin. (A flock of 20 was observed feeding with two Royal Spoonbills at a lagoon elsewhere in the district, on December 27.)

Maned Goose, *Chenonetta jubata*. An irregular visitor in small numbers to the ponds, though quite common in suitable habitats throughout the district. As with most other species of ducks a large flock, containing about 30 birds, was present on a pond during the latter part of December.

Black Swan, *Cygnus atratus*. Eleven birds were present in April, but their number decreased to four by August. One pair remained and successfully hatched out three cygnets, of which two survived.

Black Duck, *Anas superciliosa*. A common bird throughout the year, both on the ponds and on the Dumaresq Creek. In late December their number increased markedly. Adults with ducklings were a common sight during the spring, though no nests were found.

Grey Teal, *A. gibberifrons*. Present in small numbers throughout the year. In December about 150 were observed on the lakes. Adults with ducklings were sometimes seen during the spring.

Blue-winged Shoveler, *A. rhynchotis*. First sighted on August 12 when a flock of 13 appeared on the ponds. Small numbers remained until the end of December.

Pink-eared Duck, *Malacorhynchus membranaceus*. A rare visitor. Twelve birds were seen on December 10, decreasing to six by late December.

White-eyed Duck, *Aythya australis*. Irregular. One bird was observed on April 16; the species was not seen again until September, then small parties were often met with until December, when an increase in number was noticeable.

Swamp Harrier, *Circus approximans*. An occasional visitor. A single bird was observed over the ponds on November 4, and again on the following day.

Dusky Moorhen, *Gallinula tenebrosa*. Sighted regularly on the Dumaresq Creek, chiefly near reeds and willows.

Eastern Swamphen, *Porphyrio porphyrio*. Uncommon. First recorded on October 28 in thick grassy growth surrounding a drain, when an individual was sighted. On December 24 three occurred around the margins of another pond.

Coot, *Fulica atra*. A seasonal visitor. In November, three birds were present and numbers gradually built up to 22 birds by late December.

Painted Snipe, *Rostratula benghalensis*. Rare. My sole record is of a female, that was kept under close observation for about twenty minutes on the Dumaresq Creek, on April 9.

Red-kneed Dotterel, *Charadrius cinctus*. Recorded only in late December, when an adult and two immature birds remained for about a week along the pond margins.

Spur-winged Plover, *Vanellus novaehollandiae*. A common resident which breeds in the locality. A non-breeding flock of some 50 birds was present all year round, instead of during the non-breeding season only.

Golden Plover, *Pluvialis dominica*. A summer migrant. On October 7 an individual bird, in partial breeding plumage, was sighted on a grassy bank. Another bird, in eclipse plumage, occurred on November 4.

Black-fronted Dotterel, *Charadrius melanops*. A common resident which was present along the pond margins, and also the shingle beds of the Dumaresq Creek.

Black-tailed Godwit, *Limosa limosa*. A rare vagrant. On December 14 a flock of 14 birds visited the grassy margins of a pond. Good views were obtained and all the field marks, including the white rump and wing stripe, were clearly seen. On December 23, and again on the following day, a single bird remained.

Marsh-Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatalis*. A rare migrant. Recorded only on a few occasions, when individuals were sighted between October and December.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Calidris acuminata*. A common spring and summer migrant. Muddy expanses were favoured, though grassy pool margins were sometimes visited by the birds.

Great Knot, *C. tenuirostris*. An individual bird, with a pure white rump and in eclipse plumage, was first observed on September 23, feeding in shallow water near a drain. When flushed it flew to the near-by Dumaresq Creek, where it remained on the sandy margins. On October 1 a final sighting was made in the presence of J. le Gay Brereton, of the Zoology Department of the New England University.

Japanese Snipe, *Gallinago hardwickii*. A regular migrant. First recorded on August 8 when one bird was sighted, but 25 birds were present by the end of September. During November their numbers gradually decreased, but built up again to about 20 by the end of December.

White-headed Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*. A seasonal visitor. About 12 pairs were present on August 12, and nesting occurred during October and November. By late December only a few birds remained.

White-winged Black Tern, *Chlidonias leucopterus*. A summer migrant. A small party, in eclipse plumage, was present over the ponds between December 23 and 30.

Marsh Tern, *C. hybrida*. Irregular and seasonal. A small flock of 12 occurred on September 30, and numbers built up to 100 by October 14. After early November the birds were not sighted until December 30, when about 20 occurred.

Silver Gull, *Larus novaehollandiae*. A rare visitor. Two birds were present on December 10, and another on December 30.

CONCLUSION

The following birds were also observed at the sewerage works, but are not included in the annotated list.

Whistling Eagle, *Haliastur sphenurus*; Black-shouldered Kite, *Elanus notatus*; Nankeen Kestrel, *Falco cenchroides*; Kookaburra, *Dacelo gigas*; Welcome Swallow, *Hirundo tahitica*; Tree-Martin, *Petrochelidon nigricans*; Fairy Martin, *P. criel*; Willie Wagtail, *Rhipidura leucophrys*; Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus australis*; Blue Wren, *Malurus cyaneus*; Pipit, *Anthus australis*; *Corvus* sp.; Black-backed Magpie, *Gymnorhina tibicen*, and Magpie-Lark, *Grallina cyanoleuca*.

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Field Characters of the Dominican Gull. Since December 1958, when A. J. Gwynne and D. F. Gray first reported the breeding of the Dominican Gull, *Larus dominicanus*, in Australia (*Emu*, 59:141), it has been reported from Victoria (W. R. Wheeler, *A Handlist of the Birds of Victoria*); Tasmania (M. S. R. Sharland, *Tasmanian Birds*); South Australia (R. F. Brown, *pers. comm.*), and Western Australia (D. F. Gray, *The Australian Bird Bander*, 5:18). Apparently, the prediction of colonization made by A. R. McGill (*Emu*, 55:97) has begun.

In a recent letter Gray writes that the Dominican Gull has now been found nesting at Five Islands, New South Wales, by H. Battam; 107 miles south of the original site at Moon Island. If this trend continues, nesting will probably occur in the other states of south-eastern Australia in the near future.

To help field observers in the identification of the Dominican Gull, and to document its expansion, I present these illustrations and notes on the field characters of this species as compared to its relative the Pacific Gull, *L. pacificus*.