

swamp contains very little water. The *Melaleuca quinquenervia* at Carr's Creek, although occupying approximately the same area as at Gillett's Ridge, is growing much more densely and is in several feet of water. At Gillett's Ridge, the Cattle Egrets are accompanied by White, Plumed and Little Egrets, but no other species have been noted at Carr's Creek.

Unfortunately, the Carr's Creek swamp is close to human habitation, although the owners of the property are very sympathetic and interested.

Eric Wheeler, Grafton, New South Wales, 15/4/1972.

Black-tailed Native Hen in Desert Country. During periods of normal rainfall the Black-tailed Native Hen, *Tribonyx ventralis*, frequents "swamps, grasslands near water" (Condon, 1968, see also Cooper, 1955, McGill, 1960, Slater, 1971, Storr, 1967, etc.).

However, due to the exceptionally dry conditions that have prevailed in southern South Australia and New South Wales, and the whole state of Victoria during the spring and early summer months of 1972, a southward irruption of this species has occurred. There are numerous reports in South Australian Ornithological Association's "Newsletter" (December, 1972), where an effort is being made to collate the various records for South Australia, and also in other journals. Most of the observations are of birds near dams, lakes or swamps.

At the time of writing, December 1972, the drought had intensified and we are able to appreciate the circumstances that have caused the Native Hens to move southward. However, during the autumn months we had no idea that the forthcoming dry period was going to be severe, yet the birds were moving even during the month of May.

As an apiarist I do much travelling throughout the State, following the blossoming trees, and have many opportunities of observing the movements of birds.

Early in May, before the explosion of these birds across the country, I received a report from another apiarist, who described a Native Hen that he had seen in the Big Desert, between Yanac and Murrayville. It would appear that this bird, which is normally closely associated with water, was out of its element in such dry country.

A few weeks later I was across the border in the Big Desert, and heard a further report of the same bird. Later I saw a single bird in the Desert Banksia, *Banksia ornata*, country.

This was during the dry frosty period in the early winter, and then three Native Hens took up their abode in banksias close to where I had set up an apiary. I saw these birds, or some of them, every day for several weeks at a time, during three visits that I made to the area. The Hens lived there for approximately two months and, although there were puddles of water near a road half-a-mile distant, they appeared quite content to live on dry land.

By the end of August Native Hens were seen right across the desert from Yanac and Murrayville, also in similar areas around Frances in South Australia.

On small water-holes three birds were often the occupants, while large flocks were in the larger areas. I never saw a Hen actually in water at any time, or did I see them across the Wimmera Plains, excepting where some form of cover was available.

The birds were in greater numbers than I have ever seen them before, not only in this area but anywhere in Australia.

It would appear that the Black-tailed Native Hen is not necessarily a waterbird, but that it is adaptable enough to survive on dry land, as long as there is cover available.

A very recent report is of 30 birds in the dry country at Wathe, near Gama, some 30 miles east of Wyperfeld National Park.

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Edwin Rich, Maryborough, Victoria, 9/12/1972

Reaction to Predators by Black-tailed Native Hen. On April 28, 1972, I was observing Black-tailed Native Hens, *Tribonyx ventralis*, at Bonuna Station, 15 miles north of Ivanhoe, in western New South Wales. A large open sheet of water had been formed a month earlier by heavy thunderstorms and, as at other similarly formed waters in the district, a huge invasion of Native Hens had subsequently taken place.

Some 4,000 Native Hens were feeding around the perimeter of the water in three big groups. As I walked around the water's edge the birds moved ahead of me in a solid mass, a moving carpet of black. A few took to flight and circled over the water to settle on land behind me. Perhaps two or three took to the water where they swam, tail high, head bobbing, like a Dusky Moorhen, *Gallinula tenebrosa*. The remainder continued ahead of me until a small bay was reached when all headed "inland" scurrying up the gentle slope to the open, dry paddock beyond, across which most ran for up to half-a-mile from water; some turning back to eventually return to the water's edge.

This behaviour I have noted on numerous previous occasions. Unlike their relatives, the Dusky Moorhen and the Swampen, *Porphyrio porphyrio melanotus*, which head for the sanctuary of water when disturbed on land, the Native Hens forget their Gallinule ancestry, their watery birthplace, and rely upon their running ability to carry them to safety across dry land.

Later, as I sat quietly in the shade of a tree, an interesting