

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

variation in this reaction to a predator or possible predator was seen. The Native Hens had resumed feeding on the edges of the water and some 600 Wood Ducks, *Chenonetta jubata*, had camped on a sandy spit. Suddenly the ducks hurled into the air, and the Native Hens scampered in three masses away from the water across the drying land to the fringe of Black Box trees, at the high water perimeter of the depression.

A Grey Falcon, *Falco hypoleucos*, ignoring the ducks now high in the air, skimmed at rapid speed about ten feet above the rushing carpet of Native Hens. Rising a little over the gaps between the groups, it zoomed down again to skim each frantically escaping mob. By the time it had completed its run along the bank opposite me the Native Hens had massed under the three large box trees. Over 1,000 birds were jammed against each other under each of the protecting trees; not a pin, not a feather could have been pushed between them. The Falcon made another run along the water's edge, lifted over the fringe of trees and left.

I then saw a lone Native Hen which somehow had been left behind. It was running rapidly, zig-zagging and feinting, as it headed for one of the solid masses. A Swamp Harrier, *Circus approximans*, hovered and swooped above it vainly trying to grab it with outstretched talons. Some six unsuccessful attempts were made before the Native Hen gained the shelter of its massed mates under a tree. The Harrier drifted to a tree in the centre of the water, perched precariously for a short time and then flew away. In fifteen minutes the ducks were back gabbling softly on the sandy spit and three black carpets of Native Hens moved slowly around the perimeter of the water; peace had returned.

J. N. Hobbs, Ivanhoe, New South Wales, 29/4/1972.

Little Cuckoo-Shrikes at Werribee. The afternoon of July 23, 1972, was sunny and calm, and the temperature about 15°C. The Spit at Werribee, Victoria, is still a relatively undisturbed locale for bird watchers, and full of interest. On this day raptors were plentiful; Whistling Eagles, Brown Hawks, Kestrels, a Swamp Harrier and a Black-shouldered Kite. A Spotted Crake enjoyed a prolonged bath at its haunt by the edge of the creek.

Returning to the outfall at the south end of Grills Road we saw a cuckoo-shrike, 75m distant, perched on a low bush in the relatively bare paddock behind the beach, where bull-dozers had been at work. The bird flew closer and was joined by a second on the ground. We moved towards them and they flew to the fence, where they perched a few metres apart, and were joined by three more birds.

One of them called fairly loudly three or four times, in a rather high pitched whistle of five or six syllables. The birds were identical in appearance, with a black area extending from the bill around and beyond the eye. The upper breast was faintly and delicately cross-barred, and the closed wings showed a thin black fore-edge. They were identified as Little Cuckoo-Shrikes, *Coracina robusta*.