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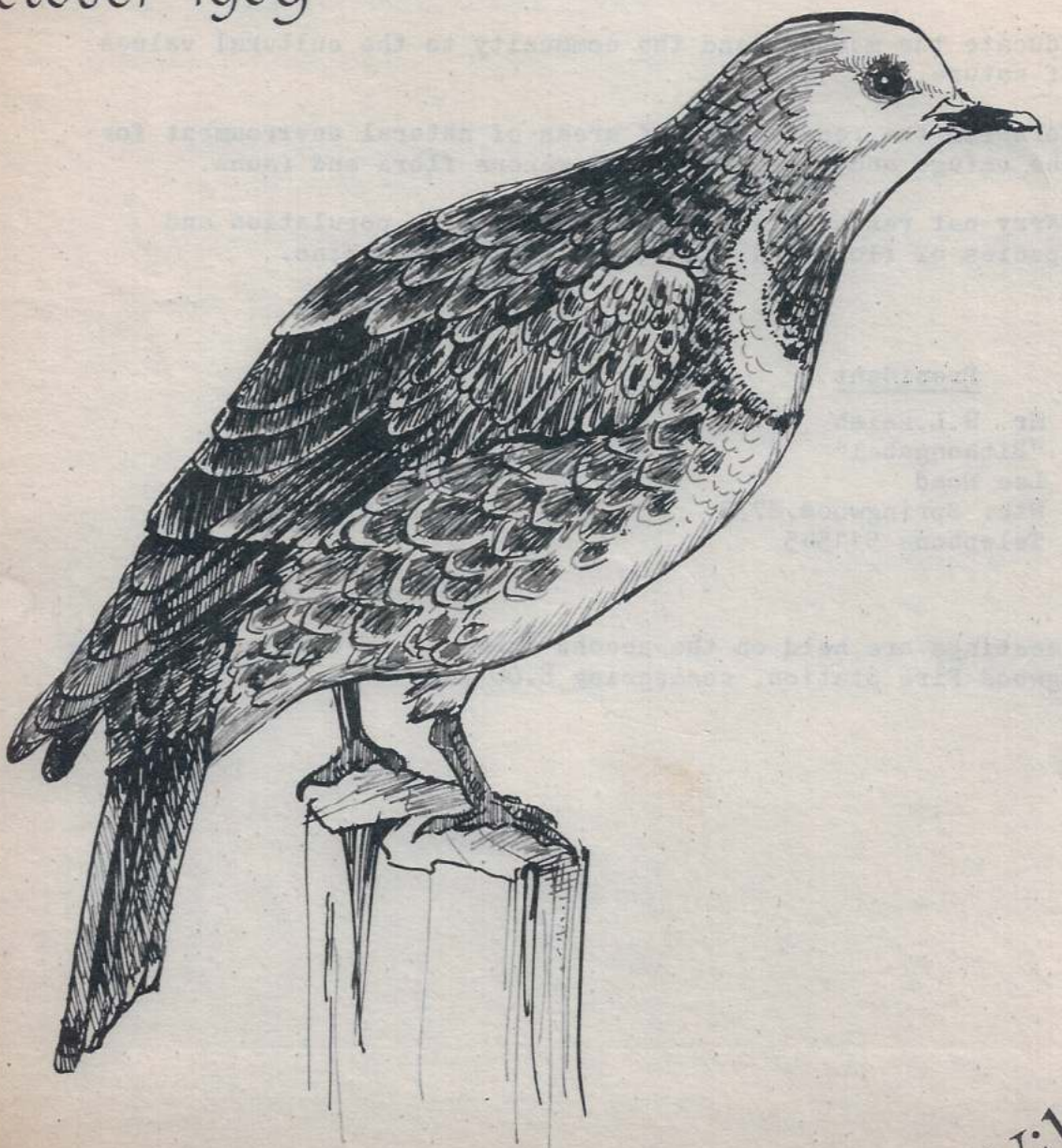
KALORI

October 1969



Lower Blue Mountains Wildlife Conservation Society

CONSERVE, PRESERVE, INVESTIGATE, EDUCATE.

Kalori is published monthly by and for the members of the Lower Blue Mountains Wildlife Conservation Society.

The aims of the Society are, briefly, to:-

1. Educate the members and the community to the cultural values of nature.

2. Work for the reservation of areas of natural environment for the refuge and breeding of indigenous flora and fauna.

3. Carry out research into the distribution, population and species of flora and fauna in the Blue Mountains.

President

Mr. H.L.Paish
"Bithongabel"
Lee Road
Nth. Springwood,2777
Telephone 511545

Secretary

Mr. G. Croghan
9 Gwen Crescent,
Warrimoo, 2775
Telephone 402.

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month in the Springwood Fire Station, commencing 8.00 pm.

THE WONGA PIGEON - FROM PIE TO POSTERITY.

The eating qualities of the largest of our mainland pigeons, the Wonga, were no doubt greatly appreciated by our early settlers. The scientific name, Leucosarcia melanoleuca, bestowed by early ornithologists suggests that they too were familiar with the Wonga as a table bird, for the name Leucosarcia means "white flesh". Though now proclaimed Rare Fauna under the Fauna Protection Act, and rigidly protected, I know that these birds are still shot for the table in many areas.

In Cayleys "What Bird is That?" the Wonga is described as inhabiting the "brushes and big scrubs" of Eastern Australia. (Both these terms refer to rain-forest areas). While they certainly inhabit the rain-forest, I personally have found that these pigeons are equally at home in open forest - so long as there is adjacent rain-forest or semi-rain-forest.

In fact, from my own observations, I feel that they prefer open forest of either wet or dry sclerophyll type, interspread with rain-forest bordered gullies and creeks. On the North Coast of N.S.W., in the Mt. Warning area, they are far more plentiful on the open forest slopes than in the actual rain-forest.

This view on their preference for a drier, more open type of habitat is strengthened by the fact that the most Wongas I have ever seen in one area, and the only place where I could describe them as being plentiful was in the scrubs around Yarraman, near the headwaters of the Brisbane River in South-eastQueensland. The forest here, though still a true rain-forest type is in a lower rainfall area than the coastal scrubs, and as a result has a lower, more open canopy and a very much more open ground cover. Here (in1960) the Wongas were everywhere, foraging on the ground, and one only had to sit quietly for a few minutes to have them approach to within a few yards.

It would be interesting to know if they are adapting to the exotic pine plantations that are replacing many of the Yarraman and Blackbutt Range scrubs.

On the Blue Mountains, while not exactly plentiful, Wongas can be found in many areas. Mrs. Vellenga records them from Leura, Wentworth Falls andJamieson Valley. I have seen them in Sassafras Gully, also at Faulconbridge and have heard them calling in one or two other areas of the Lower Mountains.

Recently four Wongas were observed in my garden, and a few days ago I had the great satisfaction of seeing one feeding from the parrots seed tray on a Banksia stump about fifteen feet from my kitchen window.

A ground frequenting bird, their food is native fruits, insects and seeds. Although fallen fruits and berries are readily eaten, I have never observed these birds feeding in a tree or shrub.

Cayleys illustration of the Wonga, in "What Bird is That?" is excellent, and should make identification easy, even for a first-time observation. The overall colour is soft slaty-grey, with attractive white markings on the breast, underneath wings creamy-white, abdomen flecked black and cream, top of head off-white, cheeks whitish, bill and legs reddish pink.

Their call is modified from the "Coo's" and "Ooms" of most pigeons, to a sound more like a loud, resonant rather nasal whistle. It is very aptly described by Mrs. Vellenga as "a loud Wonk....Wonk..." repeated

nany times. While perhaps not the loudest call of our pigeons, it is certainly the most resonant, and can be clearly heard at distances of up to three-quarters of a mile.

A rather large bird, it is much heavier and plumper in the body than the Bronzewing, which is approximately the same length (16-17"). Its size and the soft tonings of its protective colouring make it a handsome sight when observed quitely feeding on a bush track. Disturb it suddenly however and the disturber is equally startled by the typical loud clapping noise of the wings as it rises to fly, usually a short distance, to the branch of a tree. The selected branch is usually a bare one, and the bird invariably alights with its back to the cause of its disturbance. In this attitude, its camouflage harmonizes so perfectly with its surroundings that it is very difficult indeed to re-spot a flushed bird. A search for a Wonga in this position usually results in disturbing it again, when it immediately flies swiftly off, this time losing itself completely in the forest.

The fact that the Wojga can make use of a variety of habitats makes me quite hopeful for its survival. Though it has been proclaimed Rare Fauna, which technically gives it maximum protection, I feel that there are other native pigeons that are in greater danger. However, that is another story.

The Wonga appears safe for a time, and perhaps for all time; but only if we have the foresight to set aside enough natural areas to ensure, not only that the Wonga and other endangered species are saved from extinction, but that the enjoyment of natural, living things may also be available to future generations.

K.King.

REPORT

A recent trip to the north-west of the State - an area about 60 miles west of Walgett - enabled me to observe for a short time the fauna of the district. In particular I studied the numbers of the larger native animals - the kangaroo and the emu.

The area visited on the Barwon and Macquarie Rivers had received quite good falls of rain over the last few years, and this plus a drop in professional shooting had accounted for many animals being abundant. The Grey kangaroo was more numerous than the Plains(red) kangaroo which had dropped in the number of sightings measurably even since my previous visit last August. Kangaroo numberswhich I presumed abundant, I was told, were nowhere near the numbers found just four years ago.

The Emu is still plentiful, little opposition coming from graziers in this particular area. The animals of the area have spread out with the good season and most have benefited from the good conditions. Nesting was in progress for a number of birds, most certainly for the parrots and emus. Population rises in pests, eg., pigs and foxes, has also occurred, giving hints of future destruction of enviroment.

However a list of animals sighted will perhaps give a better documentation of this trip.

Letter-winged kite	Elanus notatus
Emu (38)	Dromaius novae-hollandiae
Black backed magpie	Gymnorhina tibicen
Blue billed duck	Oxyura australis
Willy wagtail	Phipidura leucophrys
Budgerigar (10-20)	Melopsittacus undulatus
Crested Pidgeon (35)	Ocyphaps lophotes
Banded plover	Zonifer tricolor
White ibis (35)	Threskiornis molucca
Large egret	Egretta alba
Inland dotteral	Peltohyas australis
Wedge tailed eagle (4)	Aquila audax
Pied currawong	Strepera graculina
Black-faced cuckoo-shrike	Coracina novae-hollandiae
Kookaburra	Dacelo gigus
White necked heron	Ardea pacifica
House sparrow	Passer Domesticus
Welcome swallow	Hirundo neoxena
Sacred kingfisher	Halcyon macleayi
Raven	Corvus coronoides
Grey butcher bird	Cracticus torquatus
Masked wood swallow	Artamus personatus
Diamond Dove	Geopelia cuneata
Black duck	Anus gibberifrons
Red backed parrot	Psephotus haematonotus
Cockatiel (25)	Leptolophus hollandicus
Galah	Kakatoe roseicapilla
Red tailed black cockatoo	Calyptorhynchus banksi

Grey thrush	Colluricincla harmonica
Pallid cuckoo	Cuculus pallidus
Rainbow bird	Merops ornatus
White browed wood swallow	Artamus superciliosus
Apostle bird	Struthidea cinerea
Noisy miner	Myzantha melanocephala
Peewee	Grallina cyanoleuca
Black breasted buzzard	Hamirostra melanosterna
Pied butcherbird	Cracticus nigragularis
Spur winged plover	Lobibyx novae-hollandiae
Grey kangaroo (148)	Macropus major
Plains (red) kangaroo	Macropus rufus
Bearded lizard	Amphibolurus barbatus
Brown snake	Pseudonaja textilus textilus
Myall snake (2)	Denisonia suta
Common goanna (3)	Varanus varius
Barking gecko	Gymnodactus milii

Michael Smithson

THE MAGPIES

The Australian magpies consist of three main species - the black-backed magpie, the white-backed magpie and the western magpie. These are no relation th the British magpie and can be best described as crow-shrikes. The distribution of the magpies show the black-backed magpie as the most widely distributed - throughout Australia - except in areas covered by the other two species and in the most northern parts of Australia. The white-backed magpie is only found in south-eastern N.S.W., Victoria and southern South Australia and Tasmania; while the western magpie frequents the southern parts of Western Australia.

The western magpie (Gymnorhina dorsalis) is the same size as the other magpies and shows a greater white coloured area than the white-backed magpie with grey tinges on the back. On the whole it's habits are similar to the white-backed magpie. The nest of this bird is a large, bowl-shaped stick and twig nest lined with soft barks or hair usually about forty feet or more from the ground. Usually four eggs are laid, however any number from 3 to 5can be laid. The breeding season is July to December, and the eggs are a pale bluish white with smudges of umber, brownish-red and pale purplish-slate.

The white-backed magpie (Gymnorhina hypoleuca) has increased its distribution with the spread of settlement. Its breeding season habit of attacking trespassers often makes it unpopular. It, like the black-backed magpie, is a great destroyer of insects and small snakes. The nest is usually 20 - 60 feet high and similar to the western magpies nest in design. However nests are not confined to trees but are often found on telegraph poles and even on the ground. Three to five eggs are laid while the breeding season is from July to February.

Similar in habits, nest and eggs is the black-backed magpie (Gymnorhina tibicen), however this bird has given much information to scientists concerning the social structure of magpies. It is this bird that is the form of magpie found commonly in the Penrith and Blue Mountains area.

Dr. R.Carrick of the C.S.I.R.O. made an extensive study of the blacked- backed magpie around the Canberra area. By banding some thousand birds he discovered that magpies are divided into two groups. Some birds live in trees and are called "tribes". Each tribe consists of 2-10 birds and contains at least 1 pair of adults. In the tribe there is a dominant male which is the recognised leader in the social life of the tribe. The tribe stays within a territory which it defends against trespassing magpies.Defence takes two forms; agressive song and attack. The territory has at least one tree used as a nesting site. The magpies usually feed on the ground and are insectivorous. The territory is usually about 5 to 20 acres; the average area is 10 acres. Young magpies usually are forced to leave after 1-2 years when more young ones mature.

The other division of magpie society is flocks. These usually consist of up to several hundred birds. They do not live in territories but in treeless country and are tolerent to other magpies. Young magpies are continually joining the flock which is nomadic and the members are always jostling for admission to a tribe. Success is limited unless a calamity befalls the tribe or a member. If a tribes dominant male dies the whole tribe is driven out by the flock and a new tribe of magpies is formed. Birds in the flock do not breed and even those evicted from the tribe cease to breed when they enter a flock. The birth rate in the flock is zero but the death rate is high while the birth rate in the tribe is high but the death rate is low. To be a member of a flock is apparently to live in a state of psychological stress. The physiological effect of this stress is the failure to reproduce.

The result of this behaviour is that the population of the breeding birds remains constant from year to year. It is usually about one-quarter of the adult population. The evolution of this form of behaviour has probably been important in increasing the chance of these animals to survive and multiply.

Michael Smithson

WILDLIFE SURVEY == AUGUST-SEPTEMBER

Latest news on the Survey -- the Trapping Licence has been approved. However, due to the vast amount of work to be got through by NP&WS the delay between approval and actual issue is a matter for speculation. Still, it is time to start thinking about money for traps, late night bush scrambles, bitten fingers etc.

Reports of sightings for the two months were sparse, but interesting.

August:-

Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. Lin Paish. Valley Heights.

Both this species and the one following are very difficult to identify from "What Bird is That?". The Yellow-tufted is much more brilliant in the field than in Cayleys painting, while the markings on the head of the Yellow-faced are somewhat different to those shown in the book.

Yellow-faced Honeyeater. Mrs. Croghan. Warrimoo. Plentiful.

Grey Corrawong. Don Perrin. Blackheath. One only.

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike. Reports from Springwood, Valley Heights, Faulconbridge.

September.

Bronze-wing Pigeon. Mel Williams. Nest building.

Wonga Pigeon. K.King. Faulconbridge. Feeding at bird table.

Grey Currawong. Perrin & King. Kings Tableland. One only.

Signs of Wombats. Perrin & King. Ingar,and Breakfast Creek.

Spotted Quail-thrush. Perrin & King. The Ironbarks. One only.

Lyre-bird nestling droppings. Mrs. Croghan. Campfire Creek.

K. King.

WHY ANIMALS BECOME EXTINCT

The reasons for the trend to extinction fall broadly into two main categories;- those which tend to deprive the animal of its habitat and/or food supply, and those which tend to kill off large numbers of individual animals. With the great majority of both extinct and vanishing animals, these two groups of causes work together in deadly unison. It is sometimes suggested that certain species, such as rhino, are in some way biologically inefficient and are bound to die out sooner or later anyway. Indeed it has been seriously proposed that conservationists should not interfere with nature by obstructing her evident will to exterminate certain species. It is true that over geological time more species of the larger vertebrates have become extinct than are alive today, but this is due to very long term changes indeed.

There is now no doubt that, even if man had not evolved to his present dominance, some species would have become extinct during the last 2000 yearsfrom purely natural causes; island species from volcanic eruptions, hurricanes or other local catastrophes, localised wetland species from the long-term drying-up of their habitat, polar species from the long-term dwindling of the polar ice caps. But these factors have nothing to do with the causes which have removed the great majority of the mammals that have died out during the last 2000 years.

Destruction of habitat is undoubtably the major cause of changes in animal populations in the world over the last two or three hundred years: the draining of marshes, felling of forests, cultivation of plains, and overgrazing of grasslands by domestic stock have between them changed the aspect of the land beyond recognition in most parts of the world. In comparison, the retreat of the ice caps and glaciers, the encroachment of the sea and the dessication of grasslands into deserts on account of lower rainfall, though vitally important as very long term trends, have made little difference over this biologically rather short period.

While direct destruction of habitat in order to exploit the land for agriculture or forestry is undoubtably the major indirect factor in the extermination of species, man has also intervened by introducing other animals, either domestic stock or various other animals allowed to go feral. Grazing, and often overgrazing of grasslands by domestic stock is one of the main threats to the continuance of animals already scarce.

These are all only contributory causes however; for there can be little doubt that direct killing or capture by man over the ages has brought more animals to the verge of extinction than any other single factor.

exerpts from Vanishing Animals of the World -
by Richard Fitter - World Wildlife
Fund, 1968.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

To the Treasurer,
Mrs. D. Dark,
"Nimaloola",
Russell Ave.,
Valley Heights. 2777.

Enclosed please find the sum of $ to cover one years membership*

Name in full.....

Address in full.....

Occupation..... .....

* Individuals $2.00 annually or $20.00 Life.
Associates $1.00 annually - subscription to Kalori.
Junior 30 cents annually.
Family $3.00 annually.