A Handbook Of The Birds Of Tasmania And Its Dependencies

Mervyn Littler Frank
A

HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF TASMANIA

AND ITS DEPENDENCIES
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AND ITS DEPENDENCIES

BY

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A HANDBOOK

BIRDS OF TASMANIA

AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN FOR THE FUTURE

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PREFACE.

No apology is offered for the appearance of the present modest little volume dealing with the avifauna of our island home. The time appeared ripe for such a book as would deal, in a manner consistent with scientific accuracy, and plain to understand, with our feathered friends. While every endeavour has been made to eliminate errors and to attain as high a degree of accuracy as possible, the author does not claim infallibility. The present volume makes no pretence to be either a "history" or a "monograph" of the various species passed under review.

The sins of omission are both manifold and manifest, and for these kind indulgence is craved. The one most regretted is in connection with the brevity of the field notes under the heading of "Observations." This was imperative in order to compress the subject matter within reasonable limits. Some day it may be the author's privilege, or that of someone more worthy, to write a history of the birds of this garden isle. Until such is done, the hope is expressed that the present effort may to some extent help to bridge the gap. Every endeavour has been made to make the book purely Tasmanian—i.e., to describe from material collected within the confines of Tasmania, and to use only field notes collected in the island. A large amount of success has been achieved in this direction, thanks chiefly to the good offices of various kind friends.

The writings of the author's predecessors and contemporaries have been constantly consulted, and much help obtained therefrom. All measurements taken by the author are expressed in terms of millimeters, as being in his estimation the easiest for comparison, and, now that the decimal system is coming so much into everyday use, the simplest also for the layman.

At the end of the subject matter will be found an extract from
the latest Tasmanian Game Protection Act, with a complete schedule of the species afforded total protection under the Act.

An asterisk placed against the name of a bird at the beginning of an article denotes that it is protected under the Act.

The Author desires to express his grateful thanks for valuable assistance in material and notes to Mr. H. H. Scott, Curator of the Victoria Museum (Launceston), who kindly placed the entire resources of the Museum at the writer's disposal; to Messrs. H. C. Thompson, H. Stuart Dove, A. L. Butler, R. H. Green, F. D. Barclay, Geo. Russell, Col. Legge, and others who assisted in many ways.

THE AUTHOR.

Launceston, Tasmania.
INTRODUCTION.

TASMANIA and its dependencies consist of the main island of Tasmania, and a number of islands of greater or lesser extent, and groups of islands, chief among which are the Furneaux Group, of which the largest are Flinders, Cape Barren, and Clarke Islands; the Hunter Group includes Robbins Island, Barren Island, Three Hummock Island, and several smaller ones; then King Island, Maria Island, Bruni Island, Schouten Island; the Macquarie Group, consisting of a number of moderate-sized islands; the Kent Group; Hogan's Group; also a number of small islands scattered about Bass Strait in the vicinity of Tasmania.

It is with Tasmania that we are chiefly concerned, and so may to a great extent ignore the islands which are politically joined to her.

Lying as she does at the extreme south of the Australian "region," Tasmania is visited by but few migrants from Arctic and sub-Arctic regions who "winter" in the Southern Hemisphere during the Australian summer. Not only are the species fewer, but the individuals of those species which reach here are considerably less than further north.

Taken as a whole, Tasmania cannot be considered rich in bird-life either as to species or individuals. What birds there are are very irregularly distributed, owing to the very diversified nature of the country, climate, and vegetation.

The only portion of the island where birds may be said to be absolutely scarce is on the West Coast, where the mountains and gullies are densely clothed with forests of myrtle and an almost impenetrable tangle of scrub and undergrowth. About the mountain tops of this portion Hawks, Goshawks, and Falcons may be seen wheeling on facile wing.

The Midlands form the stronghold of such Plovers as are found here. The large amount of clearing that has been going on
during the last few years is responsible for a marked decrease in
the number of birds in many districts. For not only have the
birds been driven to seek other haunts, but those that remained
have fallen victims to "pot-hunters" and settlers’ cats.

Compared with the resident birds of the Australian mainland,
those of Tasmania may be said to show marked melanistic
tendencies. Of the species "peculiar" to the island, all save
the Lesser White-backed Magpie (Gymnorhina hyperleuca) are
larger than their nearest allies on the mainland.

A number of species lay four or even five eggs to the clutch,
while the same species or related ones on the continent of Aus-
tralia lay but three. There are also a number of structural
differences in the nests of several species as compared with those
across the Strait, but this point is not emphasized as much as
the preceding ones, nor is it as important.

Some 214 species are glanced at in the succeeding pages.
Omitting the orders Gaviie and Tubinares, owing to the distribution
and economy of certain species included in them not having been
fully worked out, the birds may be roughly subdivided as under:

| Position on list challenged | ... | 5 species |
| Occurring on dependencies only | ... | 4 |
| "Peculiar" or insular forms | ... | 21 |
| Accidental and casual visitors | ... | 16 |
| Permanent residents (circa) | ... | 110 |

The total number of absolutely authenticated species, including
accidentals, casuals, and migrants, of all Orders, for Tasmania
and her dependencies may be placed at slightly over 200.
SYSTEMATIC INDEX.

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   Spotted Harrier (*Circus assimilis*) ... ... 2
   White Goshawk (*Astur nova-hollandiae*) ... ... 2
   Goshawk (*Astur approximans*) ... ... 3
   Sparrow-Hawk (*Accipiter cirrhocephalus*) ... ... 4
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SUB-ORDER—PASSERES.

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Satin Flycatcher (Myiagra nitida)  ...  ...  ...  21
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Flame-breasted Robin (Petroeca phœnica)  ...  23
Pink-breasted Robin (Petroeca rhadinogaster)  ...  25
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