

# The Tasmanian Naturalist

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Acting Editor - L. E. Wall

## THE FUTURE OF SOUTH WESTERN TASMANIA?

THE plans and policy of the State Government and the Hydro-Electric Commission have been severely criticised by many sections of the community, including those most active in the cause of conservation of our natural resources.

There seems no need to repeat all the arguments, both for and against the proposed project, but as one of the interested organisations which gave evidence on the subject to the Select Committee of the Legislative Council we should reiterate our views on three aspects which are considered to be most pertinent.

Firstly, we believe that the Government's inter-departmental committee which was instructed to investigate the proposals for a South West National Park, put to the Government by the South West Committee, should have included a qualified conservationist. The Curator of Wildlife, Mr. J. H. Hemsley, with his considerable experience overseas, was available to the Government and should have been appointed to that committee.

Secondly, the public should have been advised of the broad outline of the Commission's proposed development, long before final plans were prepared and submitted to Parliament. This has always been the policy of the Snowy Mountains Authority, which has met objections to its proposals well in advance of its final planning with beneficial results to all parties.

Thirdly, the Government's proposal to give the Hydro-Electric Commission full control of the South West, because it says that this body has the organisation to police it, is unconvincing to say the least. No one would argue against the Commission controlling the area of its operations, but this is a relatively small part: the remainder of the Fauna Reserve and Scenic Reserves should continue under the control of those bodies already charged with these duties - the Animals & Birds Protection Board and the Scenery Preservation Board. The Government should reduce the allocation of funds to the Commission by the amount required for these policing duties and increase the funds available to the respective Boards to enable them to carry out their functions properly. For too long these Boards have been most inadequately financed.

**ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS.** Subscriptions for subscribers to the "Tasmanian Naturalist" who are not full members of the Club fall due on 1st May each year. If your current subscription is outstanding this will be indicated in the box adjacent to this paragraph. No further issues will be forwarded unless your payments are up to date.

## R. A. O. U. NEST RECORD SCHEME

THIS scheme aims to provide accurate data on the breeding of Australian birds, and all observers are asked to participate, whether they are members of the Union or not.

Record cards are supplied and any contributions are welcomed, no matter how few, though of course the more the better. The accumulation of records from all parts of the Commonwealth over a period of years will provide useful information on the extent of breeding seasons, clutch sizes, periods of incubation and fledging, nest sites, etc. No species is too common to be recorded.

Anyone who is able to help this scheme, no matter to what extent, may obtain full details by writing to S. Marchant, 36 Arthur Circle, Forrest, Canberra, A. C. T. 2603.

As a contribution towards the cost of operating the scheme \$2.00 is charged for the initial supply of 100 cards, which are replaced free of cost when returned completed.

### BIRDS OF MT. ELEPHANT

by J. R. Napier

MT. ELEPHANT is situated in the coastal range between the Break O'Day Valley and the sea east of St. Marys. It is a long narrow mountain running north to south, with its summit approximately 2,000 feet. The mountain would receive an annual rainfall slightly in excess of fifty inches, and also is subject to extensive sea fogs in summer. The eastern slopes have a milder climate than the western slopes. Snow may fall occasionally but does not remain.

The vegetation is predominantly temperate rain forest, containing many deep moist gullies. There are many small farms carved out of the bush, and some of these are neglected and in the process of returning to nature. These give added open habitat some of which carries stands of bracken fern.

The Tasman Highway passes over the southern end of the mountain and there are many roads and bush tracks. Fortunately feral cats are not a problem.

The birds discussed are the species recorded by the writer and no claim is made that the list is complete. However, at the conclusion species so far not recorded there, but likely to occur, are discussed.

**BRUSH BRONZEWING.** This species is frequently heard calling from the dense parts of the forest, and would appear to be evenly distributed. Several nests have been found, usually in early December.

**TASMANIAN NATIVE HEN.** Often seen in farm clearings along drains where it nests.

**SPURWINGED PLOVER.** This may seem an unusual record for this type of country, but several pairs may be found in cleared farmlands.

**SWAMP HARRIER.** Another unusual record. A pair was observed on 8/11/64 circling an old farm clearing.

**AUSTRALIAN GOSHAWK.** Not at all common, but noted on several occasions and also heard calling.

**BROWN HAWK.** Keeps to the more open farmland near the Tasman Highway.

**WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE.** Occasionally observed circling high over the mountain.

**GREEN ROSELLA.** Common in the forest country, where it no doubt breeds in some of the old dead trees.

**SWIFT PARROT.** The occurrence of this bird is somewhat irregular, but it is noted in flocks, particularly in years when there is heavy gum blossom.

**LAUGHING KOOKABURRA.** Now well established over most of the State. Mt. Elephant carries a good population of this well-known bird.

**PALLID CUCKOO.** Frequents the margins of the forest where there is an abundance of smaller birds nesting every spring and no doubt foster parents are easy to find.

**FAN-TAILED CUCKOO.** As for the previous species.

**GREY FANTAIL.** This dainty little songster is common in the forest borders and breeds regularly.

**SCARLET ROBIN.** Not as common as the Flame Robin, but odd pairs can be located in most areas.

**FLAME ROBIN.** The most common robin, nesting in roadside banks, and each year in a disused mine tunnel.

**PINK ROBIN.** Well distributed over the heavy scrubs on the mountain, notably in the moist gullies, and may commonly be seen on many roads and tracks in these parts. Nesting seems to begin about mid-November.

**DUSKY ROBIN.** Occurs in the forest edges near some of the farms lower down the mountain.

**GOLDEN WHISTLER.** This lovely songster occurs quite commonly in the forest margins and breeds regularly from September to December.

**OLIVE WHISTLER.** On any day in the summer this bird may be heard calling from many localities on the mountain. In the writer's limited experience Mt. Elephant holds one of the largest populations of this species in the State.

**GREY THRUSH.** Occurs in lighter parts of the forest and in the margins. It breeds regularly, rearing clutches of two or three young.

**GROUND THRUSH.** The moist gullies hold a small population of this beautiful bird, which no doubt appreciates the small numbers of feral cats. It may be seen on most days feeding on the forest floor, its mottled plumage blending perfectly with its surroundings.

**TASMANIAN THORNBILL.** Fairly numerous on the mountain and easily confused with the Brown Thornbill. The nest of this species is quite different from that of the Brown Thornbill, being largely composed of green moss and tightly woven, as opposed to the more loosely constructed nest of the other.

**BROWN THORNBILL.** Common in the margins of the forest and in the farm clearings, and a regular breeder in these localities.

**YELLOW-TAILED THORNBILL.** As for the previous species.

**SCRUB TIT.** This endemic species is not common but occurs in some of the fern gullies, and on occasions may be seen in family parties of up to six birds.

**BROWN SCRUB WREN.** On any day this bird may be seen in good numbers and can be classed as common. It has been found feeding small young in the nest as late as January.

**STRIATED FIELD WREN.** Confined to the patches of bracken fern adjoining the Tasman Highway, but cannot be listed as numerous.

**SUPERB BLUE WREN.** The farm clearings and forest margins hold a good population of this species, which has the capacity to thrive in a wide variety of habitats.

**SPOTTED PARDALOTE.** Widespread and common, breeding in roadside cuttings. The bush is often ringing to their calls in spring and summer as they industriously search the eucalypts for food.

**STRIATED PARDALOTE.** Also common and well-distributed.

**SILVEREYE.** This species occurs mostly around farmhouses and the forest margins, where it has earned the reputation of a cherry thief.

**STRONG-BILLED HONEYEATER.** Very common and a regular breeder.

**BLACK-HEADED HONEYEATER.** As for the previous species.

**YELLOW-THROATED HONEYEATER.** Its familiar "tonk" call may be heard on any day in the summer.

**CRESCENT HONEYEATER.** Very numerous. It nests in the under-scrub in large numbers. A great songster.

**NEW HOLLAND HONEYEATER.** Occurs in small numbers, particularly along the forest margins and in homestead gardens.

**EASTERN SPINEBILL.** Also in small numbers.

**YELLOW WATTLEBIRD.** The population varies, but it may be seen every year though not in large numbers.

**BEAUTIFUL FIRETAIL.** Occurs sparsely along roadsides and scrub margins, and occasionally nests are located. It is nowhere common.

**LITTLE RAVEN.** This scavenger is common over the whole mountain where no doubt it breeds. The habits and life of this bird are too well known to need elaboration.

**BLACK JAY.** May be heard calling from the higher parts of the mountain, and occasionally may be seen on the farmlands diligently searching for food.

**SWALLOW.** This well-known bird is a summer visitor to farm buildings.

**PIPIT.** Common and increasing on the farmed areas, where it breeds each season.

The following species almost certainly occur in the area but as yet have not been recorded :- the COMMON BRONZEWING and the BANDED PLOVER must occur on the farmlands, and the PEREGRINE FALCON is a notable bird of prey not recorded in spite of extensive cliff areas. There has been no work undertaken at night but it is almost certain that the TAWNY FROGMOUTH, the TASMANIAN MASKED OWL and the SPOTTED OWL would occur. It seems certain that the BLACK COCKATOO is present owing to trees being stripped of their bark. The BRONZE CUCKOOS would

most likely be present in this locality, and the SATIN FLYCATCHER must also be a summer visitor. The SPOTTED QUAIL-THRUSH has been recorded in nearby areas and it almost certainly occurs on the mountain.

The writer recommends this area to other bird watchers as a comparatively undisturbed forest and easily accessible. It is an excellent breeding area, and the species mentioned must all breed there, no doubt enjoying the absence of most of our introduced predators.

#### ALBINISM IN MARSUPIALS

by A. P. Andrews B. Sc.

AN albino, from the Latin "albus" = white, is a pigmentless individual of a pigmented race. Pigmentation or colouring of the skin depends on the presence in the dermal tissues of colour bases or chromogens which are usually themselves colourless but on interaction with various enzymes yield coloured products which are deposited in the tissues. If one or more of these factors are absent in an individual the skin will remain colourless.

Albinism has been recorded in a majority of domestic animals and plants and in many cases among wild animals and birds. In many of the cases examined genetically by breeding experiments, albinism appears to behave as a simple Mendelian recessive with the occurrence of "carriers" in the normal pigmented population.

If the genes responsible for causing albinism arose originally by mutations, then the characteristic is quite likely to appear in any normal breeding wild populations.

Albinism is rare, however, as the albino individuals are usually at a disadvantage in nature, selection pressure favouring the pigmented individuals. The main reasons are lack of protective colouring and the sensitive nature of the skin and eyes to direct sunlight.

While albino mammals may be less successful in the wild state than the normal types, albinism nevertheless crops up occasionally in field populations of Australian marsupials. Albino kangaroos are known to exist and albino possums and other phalangers have been reported on occasions.

In February of this year an albino variety of the Tasmanian Marsupial Mouse (*Antechinus minimus*) was obtained from the south west of the State in the vicinity of the junction of the Gordon and Serpentine Rivers. The animal was kept in captivity at the Tasmanian Museum for several months until it died. This appears to be the first time that albinism has been recorded in the genus *Antechinus*.

These animals in the natural state appear to be partly nocturnal and insectivorous. The captive specimen was observed to devour up to thirty small grasshoppers in as many minutes. They have been trapped along the banks of small streams and rivulets among dense scrub. Usually associated with the species are several other small mammals such as the Velvet Furred Rat and the Broad Toothed Rat.

As very few of the Tasmanian marsupials have been studied in any detail, albinism has consequently not been recorded in many species. It is customary practice to report cases where albinism has been found so that information to this effect can be published in scientific journals. Albinism is furthermore a characteristic of mammals that can be readily recognised in the field by the untrained observer and it is to be hoped that our knowledge of mammals can be furthered by the interest and observations of persons interested in marsupial studies.

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