

# BUSTARDS - 1914

In the previous issue of S.W.A.N.S. as part of the series "Our Diminishing Heritage", we highlighted the need to preserve the Australian Bustard (Wild Turkey). Reports from Honorary Wardens support the fact that the range and numbers of this bird continue to decrease, and that there is a real danger of extinction of the species in its natural habitat.

As a result of the article we were delighted to receive an interesting letter from Mr. J. E. Watson of Busselton describing a personal experience which occurred in 1914. Mr. Watson's letter is reproduced below; it does show that the precarious situation of the Bustard was not always so.

"Referring to wild turkeys in the issue of S.W.A.N.S. of Autumn, 1971, Vol. 2, No. 2, and knowing what I do know of this fine bird, I grieve to think that possibly zoos or some wilderness area, if we ever have one set aside, may be the only places where they will survive. You would be interested to know that in early 1914 on river flats about 10 miles from Billunin Pool on the Murchison River, I saw what could possibly have been the greatest concentration of turkeys anyone has ever seen. Whilst diamond drilling with a crew of 10 at a place called Holden's Find in this area, and being supplied each fortnight with stores freighted by camel team, it was part of my job (aged 19 and being the recognised hunter) to augment the tinned meat supply with kangaroo, wild turkey and duck.

"Whilst stalking two turkeys one day I noticed five others fully occupied in moving slowly along picking up something as they moved; and while I watched I became aware of many others doing likewise. I appeared to be on the flank of these birds and level with the foremost, so moving away from them I hastened to get well ahead of them, where I partly concealed myself, knowing the birds were moving towards me. It was then that I noticed that the ground was a mass of black caterpillars, all moving in one direction. In quite a short time I was surrounded by **hundreds** of turkeys all feeding on the caterpillars; as far as I could see the birds were on the move. It was an unbelievable sight even in those far off days when 10 to 20 in a group were often seen."