

EMUS ON THE MOVE

In Western Australia emus periodically migrate from the arid interior towards the wheat belt, causing damage to wheat crops. Since 1964 the Division of Wildlife Research C.S.I.R.O. has been studying emu populations and their movements around Sandstone and Wiluna, and at Mileura station near Meekatharra.

During a large-scale southward winter migration of emus in 1969 the Division banded more than 150 emus in the Sandstone-Wiluna-Mileura region. Banded birds were later recovered some 300 to 350 miles (480 to 560 kilometres) to the south-west at Perenjori and Ajana. Nine months after banding, birds believed to have taken part in this movement were recovered near Carnarvon after a total journey of about 700 miles (1120 kilometres). There were, however, individual banded birds which remained in the same locality on Mileura station for some time and a more intensive study has begun in part of this area using marked birds.

Whether emus migrate in winter appears to depend on the quantity of green herbs and grasses available then and during the previous autumn, but the Division has not yet discovered why. Aerial survey counts made periodically over the whole of Mileura station have provided a good picture of how the birds use the different types of country on the station. Usually they live near rivers, creeks, and watercourses, and feed away from them only when heavy rains ensure that green food is available over a considerable area.