

BROLGAS EXTEND SOUTHERLY RANGE

Fauna Warden John Neal of Carnarvon has received several reports of Brolgas sighted in the area of the Lyndon River Crossing on the Minilya-Exmouth road.

Cayley in "What Bird is That?" suggests that Brolgas are not found south of Onslow, and Servery in "Birds of Western Australia" offers the following comments:

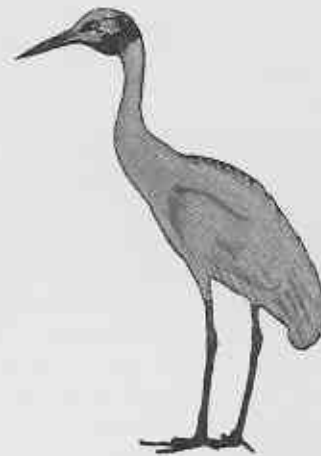
"The Brolga is a bird of the Kimberley Division but it has now penetrated into the North-West and occurs regularly as far south as Onslow. It would appear that this is a more or less recent extension of range as the species was never recorded in earlier days in the North-West . . . Apparently the birds first appeared in small numbers in the 1920's. There was a very large invasion in 1952 when some birds were seen on the Carnarvon Road near Hamelin Pool, and one bird even as far south as Beacon".

Robin Hill, in his "Australian Birds", gives a first-rate description not only of the bird itself but also its habits:

"Brolgas have, like most cranes, loud, trumpeting calls that can be heard over a mile away in open country. A trumpeting bird looks most dramatic—almost heraldic—as it arches its folded wings and droops its wingtips to the ground. The long neck is curved back and the bill points to the sky whilst the bird quivers all over with the exertion of the raucous cry. Their trachea, or windpipe, is greatly developed, being long and convoluted, and acts as a very effective trumpet. They have a variety of mellow, fluting calls, which are more intimate and used as the feeding birds communicate with each other.

In some localities Brolgas appear to be permanent residents, nesting and wintering within a few square miles. Others are nomadic, although not a great deal is known of their movements. They fly high when on the move, and cranes in other countries have been reported as flying as high as two miles.

The dancing habits of the Brolgas are well known, although not many people have seen them indulging in these "quadrilles and minuets". Any number, from a pair up to a dozen or so birds, will line up, roughly opposite each other, and start the dance. They prance forward on their stilt-like legs with wings half-open and shaking. Bowing and bobbing their heads, they advance and retire, gurgling and fluting softly. Now and then a bird will stop and, throwing back its head, trumpet wildly. The birds may also leap into the air a few feet and parachute back to earth on broad black and grey wings. Pieces of twig or grass are flung about and the Brolgas make attempts to catch the pieces or stab at them with their bills as they fall.



Brolga (*Grus rubicunda*).

Various aborigine tribes have incorporated these Brolga-dances into their corroborees, and they imitate the angular, though graceful birds with great skill.

The dancing of these cranes may be used in courtship display, but they certainly indulge in it outside the breeding season. It seems then, that the birds are often expressing a sense of 'playful exuberance' and a release of energy, rather than anything more functional such as a sexual display.

Brolgas become tame quite readily, and country properties often have a bird that comes to the homestead and can be fed from the hand.

Their diet in the wild is insects and small animals such as frogs, reptiles and rodents. They also eat a certain amount of vegetable matter, and occasionally will damage grain crops.

Brolgas nest in a variety of situations. Sometimes the eggs may be laid on the bare ground, or alternatively a few pieces of grass or reeds may be placed around the eggs. They also nest in wet, swampy spots, in which case the nest will be a more bulky structure of reeds and other plants, and it may even be floating.

Two eggs are the common clutch; sometimes one is laid, and more rarely three. They are a dull whitish colour, minutely pitted, and lightly freckled reddish. The breeding season is from September to March as a rule."

The Department would be most interested to hear from any reader who makes a positive identification of Brolgas outside their normal range.