

OBSERVATION OF THE FRECKLED DUCK AT LAKE TOOLIBIN

On December 16, 1974 Ray Garstone of Woodanilling accompanied Mr. Tom Spence, Director of the South Perth Zoo and Warden Kevin Morrison on a 2-day field survey of Lake Toolibin, 19 km south-east of Wickpin.

The purpose was to check the bird-life and search for the rare Freckled Duck.

It was pleasing to the party to see the Lake full of water and in good condition after 5 years of drought. Many of the large areas of reeds had disappeared and some trees had died, but all waterfowl had returned to breed.

After hours of searching, a nest was discovered in a dense thicket of Casuarina. So dense was the stand of young trees, that the party had difficulty getting close to the nest and in being able to find their way in and out.

On approach, the brooding female slipped into the water and slowly swam away. The nest was made of sticks and twigs and was built 50 cms above the water in the tangled limb of a fallen tree.

There were nine eggs in the deep nest chamber which was lined with down and compressed neat and firm to the side. Unlike other duck nests, the lining was tidy and not loose.

A hide was built to photograph and observe the bird, which after a short time became very quiet and paid no attention to the intrusion. Up to six hours at a time was spent watching the bird as she sat patiently, only moving every half hour to alter her position or turn the eggs.

Visibility from the hide was fair but at no time was a male sighted near the nest. On the first day however, a male Freckled Duck with a bright red basal patch between the nostrils and forehead (evident only in the breeding season) was seen swimming in amongst thick tea-trees at one end of the lake.

During observations two Blue-billed Ducks approached the nest and tried to climb aboard. However the sitting female was content to lean over and ward off the intruders with her beak.

Time spent in the hide was also rewarded with the constant appearance of a Crested Grebe swimming back and forth with a beak full of weed for an intended nest.

Five other pairs of Freckled Ducks were observed on the lake during the excursion but no more nests were found.

Subsequent to the sightings of Freckled Duck and other unique birds, Lake Toolibin was closed to hunting during the game season.



Female Freckled Duck about to resettle on her nest.



The nest from above, note the use of down as a lining.
