

LAKE CHANDALA— A PROPOSED NATURE RESERVE

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Negotiations have been completed in connection with the purchase of Lake Chandala by the Western Australian Wildlife Authority. The portion of Swan Location 1371, part lot 2, was offered for sale by Mr Alan Fewster of Muchea and the Authority took advantage of the opportunity to acquire one of the State's most important proposed nature reserves.

Formalities for the finalisation of the area as a nature reserve are now under way.

Lake Chandala, 50 km north of Perth, is a fauna sanctuary of great importance as the large old swamp paperbarks which grow in it support one of Western Australia's few remaining Straw-necked Ibis nesting colonies. This is a very attractive ibis with dark blue wings with a metallic sheen, white underparts and straw-like yellow feathers on its lower neck. It stands about 70 cm tall and has the long curved beak characteristic of all ibis which it uses to catch insects in long grass fringing swamps and in pasture lands.

All ibis nest in colonies which sometimes number thousands of pairs. Lake Chandala supports at least several hundred pairs during the breeding season and these present a magnificent natural spectacle.

In the early sixties this was also the site of bird banding activities by the C.S.I.R.O. when more than 2 000 nestlings were banded. Some of these have since been recovered in the Kimberleys, the Northern Territory, Queensland and even New South Wales, establishing the species as one of the most nomadic in Australia.

The lake also supports a large variety of waterbirds, many of which are nesting species.



Flock of Straw-necked Ibis over Lake Chandala.



Straw-necked Ibis nest.

In the past attempts have been made to drain the lake and to clear the vegetation but although they have modified the environment to a certain extent, these have been unsuccessful. Although the reserve will undoubtedly be one of the most important fauna sanctuaries in the State, it will still face management problems.

It is close to the proposed Pacminex Alumina refinery site so the threats of industrial pollution are great and increased human disturbance may result from subsequent associated urbanisation. There is also the serious threat of lowering of the water table in the area by groundwater extraction from private and government bores.

Lake Chandala therefore presents an ideal example of the planning that is necessary for the conservation of fauna and of some of the problems this involves. At the same time, it offers the opportunity for ornithologists to observe a spectacular congregation of birds at only a short distance from Perth.

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(Editor.)