

AVIARY BIRDS CONTAMINATE PORONGURUPS NATIONAL PARK

Silver Pheasants (*Lophura nycthemera*), an exotic species once kept in private aviaries at the tea rooms in the Porongurups National Park, are at liberty and thriving in the park. The original flock of 5 pheasants released several years ago has bred into two colonies of uncertain numbers.

Local opinion is that the birds are an interesting and most decorative addition to the Park and are already attracting the attention of tourists. It is not thought that their habits could be any more detrimental to the environment of the park than many of the native animals and birds that abound there.

Unfortunately, this is the time-worn precept of those in the past, who have introduced into Australia, rabbits, foxes, sparrows, starlings, cane toads and other noxious beasts. People have short memories.

Dr D. L. Serventy, well known Perth naturalist in his paper, "Menace of Acclimatization" states the following:—

"If there is no likelihood of a foreign animal becoming a pest, that is, obviously harmful to man and his crops and herds, or preying directly on the more conspicuous members of our fauna, the introduction is passed as neutral or harmless and possibly even as an ornament to the landscape. Further, if the creature is insectivorous it is looked on as a definitely desirable acquisition.

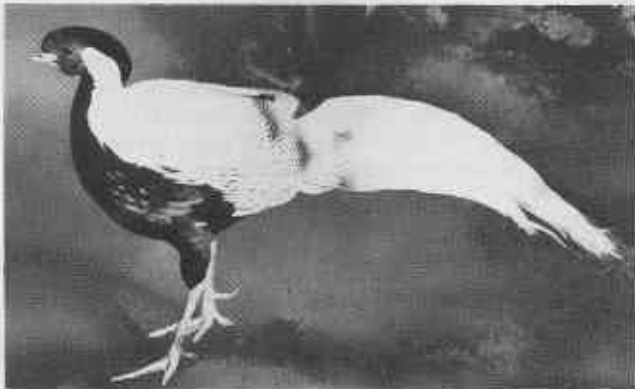
"To the person who has no interest whatever in the natural history of his own country this situation need occasion no concern. It is disquieting, however, when those who profess regard for the native species also share this view of detachment to so-called harmless or 'beneficial' acclimatizations. They can have little appreciation of the fact that *any* successful introduction, even if directly innocuous from the human standpoint,

must, by very reason of the fact that it has obtained a foothold, disturb the balance which had existed, and therefore have repercussions which will detrimentally affect the existing fauna. The phrase 'the balance of nature' has become such a glib commonplace expression these days that few pause to consider what it really implies.

"Our fauna has radiated in the long course of its evolution to occupy almost every niche in the bush or in water that will provide a living for any creature. If we introduce anything into the wild, it will in the ordinary course of events find all the places filled—food supply, nesting territory, living space in short, cannot support more until some of the original population is displaced—and that is what must happen when a foreign species is successfully acclimatized, unless it is going to cope with a food supply, etc., which is not already being exploited. The newcomer, to survive, can only do so by elbowing something else out of its place, as it were: something with habits most closely approximating to its own. It may succeed or fail, and frequently the results are very definite either way. The natural environment is far from being a vacuum into which we can indefinitely pour stranger species, expecting that it will support them in addition to those already in occupation."

The National Parks Authority, which proposes to eradicate the Chinese Silver Pheasant, has the full support of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. The loss of native wildlife, whether it be a species reduction or elimination, is usually subtle and insidious.

Australian wildlife is irreplaceable. The Wildlife Conservation Act recognises this and makes it an offence to try to acclimatize any exotic, or to keep exotics with that in mind.



The Silver Pheasant *Lophura nycthemera* from the south of China. The male has a full and long crest, chin, throat and under parts glossy bluish black; upper parts white with black lines always narrower than in all other subspecies, three to four in numbers, wavy and often broken; rectrices very long, the central pair almost pure white with only a few thin, broken black streaks on the base of outer web.