

# Wild Bird Observations

Generally speaking, when civilized man moves into a wilderness area to live, he displaces nearly all of the wild creatures previously found in that area. Cities of the world and their rambling suburbs, although depauperate in wildlife, still manage at times to have a few areas where species can rest and recuperate—or even live and breed. Such places like natural wetlands, parks and zoological gardens are a boon to the education

of the people in these cities and help them to realign themselves with nature.

The City of Perth is and will be quite lucky in the future because of its location near the Indian Ocean, Swan River Estuary and the wetland depressions of the Swan Coastal Plain. Providing Perth's natural assets are maintained and managed, bird migrations and populations will continue.

Throughout every year, spectacular concentrations of our unique waterfowl can be observed on many local waterways. During summer, migratory, local and inland species provide an observers' paradise.

With these movements of waterbirds comes the influx of birds of prey and other predators and parasites alike. Whilst all these animals provide recreation and pleasure for the citizens of Perth, the Perth Zoological Gardens has had its work cut out coping with these intruders.

The Zoological Gardens Board Annual Report 1978, provides an interesting account of the wild birds which visited the park during the year. In his inimitable way, the Director Mr Tom Spence writes:

"The park has become a haven for wild birds, some species not always welcome. Over the years the numbers of Black Duck summering in the zoo have increased and last year's drought forced even greater numbers to take refuge on our lakes. Feeding them and dealing with their faecal contamination proved a big problem. Over 600 were trapped and relocated but it eased the problem not at all. White Ibis and Night Herons have increased: neither are welcome since both are serious nest predators. Although the Great Egrets nest every year, no young have been reared due to these predators. The Royal Spoonbills produced two young in each of two nests: when the young were advanced enough the parents no longer brooded them and the young birds were found disembowelled—characteristic of ibis predation. Silver Gulls continue to be a problem. Sometimes many hundreds invade the zoo and, in a feeding frenzy, soon devour the food intended for our birds and contaminate our lakes. Although measures are taken against them, it is difficult to dissuade their intrusion.

"More welcome are the Great Egrets. Each winter sees over 30 take up residence in the zoo and some full-winged birds remain, mated with the flightless ones. About 40 Little Pied Cormorants roost in the giant bamboo thickets, while Great Cormorants are regular visitors along with an occasional Great Peid Cormorant. Small numbers of darters roost in the

tall Araucarias. During the dry period, other waterfowl take up residence. These have included over a score of Shoveller, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, White-eyed Duck, even Musk Ducks and Bluebills.

"Perhaps the birds-of-prey are the most spectacular. The zoo harbours Peregrine Falcons regularly, attracted by the numerous Palm Doves, Necklace Doves and street pigeons. As many as four different birds have been present at the one time and at one time a parent pair were accompanied by a still dependent young female. At the time of writing a magnificent male is in residence. He came while still in sub-adult plumage but has now moulted to full splendour. He is the most reckless, impetuous hunter I have ever seen and pitches himself at his prey in breath-taking stoops: I fear that he will collide with branches some day. Little Falcons also visit the zoo but spend as much time chivvying the Peregrines as hunting. Goshawks on migration are a pest and usually about 30 are destroyed each year to protect out aviary birds. Whistling Kites are resident in the neighbourhood of the zoo and steal the fish intended for other birds. Other, rarer visitors include the Squaretailed Kite which has been seen on three occasions in recent years. Ospreys sometimes take a short cut over the Zoo from Perth Water to Melville Water and commonly Caspian and Crested Terns take the same route.

"However, the most spectacular bird invasion has taken place this year: pelicans! First a single adventurer, then ones and twos till the record of 83 wild pelicans joined our captives. They have become so tame that they are indistinguishable from our captive birds. Landing and taking-off is spectacular but unfortunately there have been casualties. Four have struck power-lines, one collided with a motor vehicle and one was killed by the elephant. Numbers vary from week to week but at the time of writing we have 70 of these greedy guests."