

as fast as they could and I jumped to the conclusion that they were eating hoppers. Wishing to find out how many of these pests they had eaten in a minute, I shot them, and cut them open when, to my amazement, I found not one hopper. The hoppers had eaten the grass, leaving the ground quite bare, but the crows were filling themselves with green curl grubs that had been exposed.



This proves that even scientific people must not jump to conclusions. Eagles and hawks create a great deal of attention all over Australia, and we know that at times the eagle-hawk does quite a lot of harm in taking very young lambs and also fowls that stray into the open paddocks. However, in other places the eagle feeds mainly on rabbits, as a visit to its nest will prove. Most graziers shoot eagles on sight, but there are others who will not allow them to be shot because of the vast numbers of rabbits they destroy; such an attitude is, of course, for the particular grazier to decide for himself, but with hawks it is quite a different matter.

Goshawks are probably the only destructive kinds, as they invariably attack poultry when living near poultry runs, but kites and kestrels are extremely useful birds in the fields, where they devour thousands of mice and different kinds of large insects, including many pests. If you ever wish to satisfy yourself concerning the value of birds, particularly hawks, cut open and examine the stomach of the next one you find dead.

In America, where bird conservation is widely practised, the stomachs of over seventy thousand hawks of different kinds have been examined, and most were found to be the friends of the farmer. In one State where a certain kind of hawk was known to attack poultry, a bounty was placed on its head, and in one year eighty thousand dollars were paid to persons destroying them, but the value of the poultry saved was only three thousand dollars; this should make us think quite a lot before doing such a thing in Australia; personally I think it would pay us in the long run to conserve our hawks.

In regard to the nocturnal birds of prey, we should regard the owls as our best friends, and as excellent and silent mouse traps. Let me give you only one example. The barn owl, as with other similar birds of prey, does not swallow and digest the feathers of birds or the fur of mammals. These are separated from the fleshy parts and then cast up in the form of a pellet. It has been estimated that a barn owl casts up at least two of such pellets each day, so an Australian scientist collected seven hundred and thirty of these from the roosting site of one old owl, and he regarded them the remains of one year's food of that bird. On examination it was shown that the pellets contained the remains of 1,401 mice, 143 rats, 5 rabbits, 375 sparrows, 23 starlings, 25 unidentified birds, 4 lizards, 174 frogs, and many insects.

What a friend that owl was to the farmer, and what wonderful friends all owls must be to mankind generally, so we must at all costs conserve our owls. It is only through the education of the public that we can hope for improvement in the protection and general conservation of our Australian wild life, and as the children to-day are in a position of contact specialists and learn of the economic value of fauna, especially the value of birds to mankind, it is for the children to encourage all to do their utmost to see that the shooting and general destruction of birds, their nests and eggs is stopped.

It would be a very sorry day for Australia if our valuable birds were exterminated, or even considerably reduced in numbers, and it is only with your interest and activities in conservation that we can hope to combat pests.



Youngsters at Erambie School pose for the camera.

BURNT BRIDGE BURSARY WINNER

Elva Lang, pupil of Burnt Bridge School last year, has been awarded one of four bursaries provided by the Aborigines Welfare Board.

The bursary is in the amount of £50 per annum for three years and is tenable at the Kempsey High School.

She has received advice to that effect from the Superintendent of Aborigines Welfare (Mr. A. W. G. Lipscomb).

"I am always very happy," wrote Mr. Lipscomb, "to learn of the success of aboriginal students and to add my congratulations to those of the other members of the Board. I am confident that you will go forward to further honours in your school career."

The girl is the second pupil of Burnt Bridge School to receive a bursary, the other being John Ridgeway, who was successful in 1950.

Three pupils went from the school to the Kempsey High School this year.