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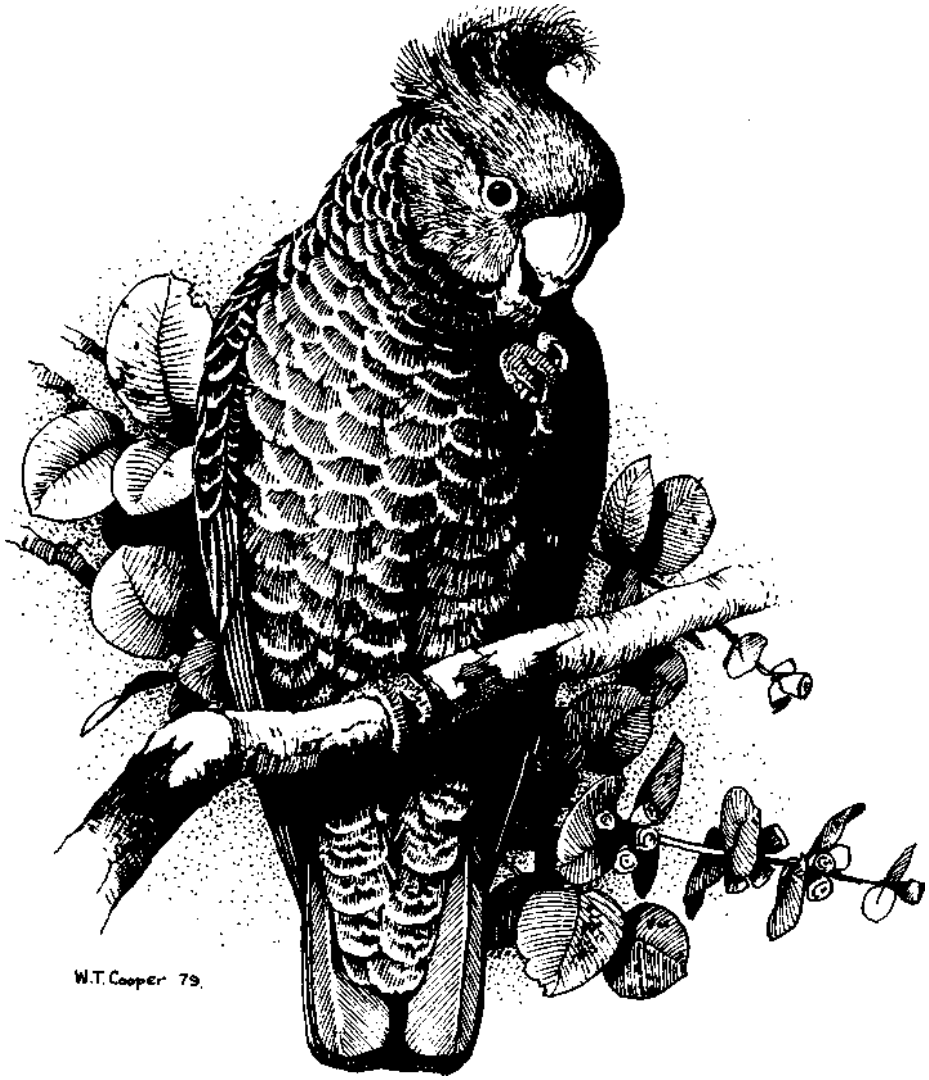


BIRDS, BERRIES, AND BAD BUSHES

Michael Mulvaney

Notes on a talk to COG, 9 April 1986.
Of work largely done while an Honours student in the Botany Department, ANU, under the supervision of Dr John Carnahan.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone likes to have a garden full of birds, and one of the best ways of attracting birds is through planting alluring trees and shrubs. Many birds find plants with massive displays of berries irresistible. Unfortunately birds often carry seed remnants of their fruit feasts, beyond your back fence and into nearby bushland. Thus birds have enabled a lot of garden plants to stray far from the garden path. Garden habitat is spreading into, and thereby altering, the surrounding native vegetation.

Pyracantha (firethorn) and *Cotoneaster* are two of these invasive ornamental plant genera. Both have been extensively planted in Canberra, and both are generally established together in the same bushland areas. The main species involved are *P. angustifolia, P. fortuneana, C. glaucophyllus* (serotina), and *pannosus.* They are evergreen woody shrubs with similar leaf, flower, and fruit structure. They also flower and fruit at the same time, have similar developmental stages, originate from South East China, and are genetically so close as to be placed in the one genus, by some authors.

Despite their similarity and close relationship, species of *Pyracantha* are much more often naturalised than those of *Cotoneaster,* and this is not because *Pyracantha* has been planted more than Cotoneaster (see fig. 1). Why then are the species of *Pyracantha* so more numerously naturalised than those of *Cotoneaster?* Perhaps it is related to the ability of these species to disperse from source planting to suitable bushland habitat.

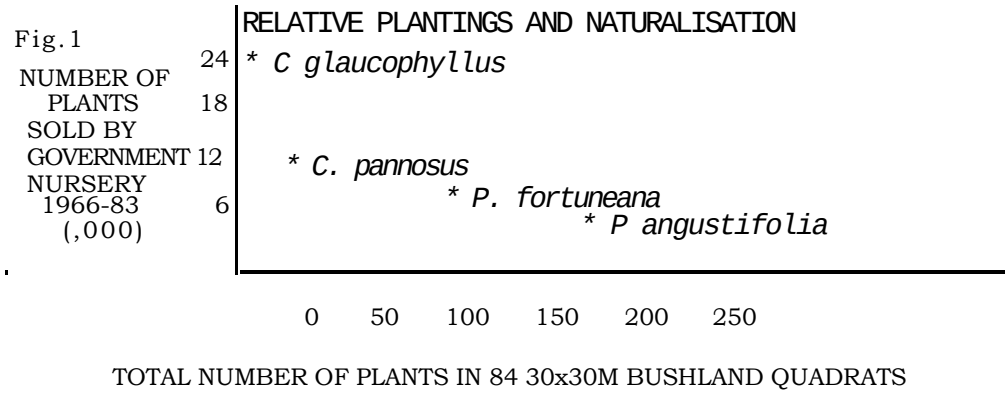


Fig. 1

BIRD FEEDING PREFERENCE AND INVASIVE SPREAD OF SHRUBS

Both *Pyracantha* and *Cotoneaster* are largely bird dispersed. Birds that regularly feed on either or both of these shrubs are the Gang-gang Cockatoo *(Callocephalon fimbriatum),* Australian King Parrot *(Alisterus scapularIs),* Crimson Rosella *(Platycercus elegans),* Eastern Rosella *(Platycercus eximius),* Blackbird *(Turdus merula),* Silvereye *(Zosterops lateralis),* Starling *(Sturnus vulgaris)* and Pied Currawong *(Strepera graculina).* Field observations, fruit preference trials on caged birds, and analysis of droppings and regurgitated pellets, suggested that *Pyracantha* is mainly a food source for the Blackbird, Silvereye, and Pied Currawong, and to a lesser extent the Rosellas and Starling. *Cotoneaster* in contrast, is almost exclusively fed on by the Gang-gang, King- Parrot and Rosellas (see Table 1-4, for experimental data)

TABLE 1. FEEDING PREFERENCE OF CAGED KING PARROT
(During six, three hour feeding trials)

species	*P.angustifolia*	*P.fortuneana*	*C.glaucophyllus*	*C.pannosus*
Mean number of selected fruits	20.0	32.3	48.6	193

TABLE 2. FEEDING PREFERENCE OF CAGED EASTERN + CRIMSON ROSELLAS
(During six, three hour feeding trials)

species	*C.glaucophyllus*	*P.fortuneana*	*C.pannosus*	*P.angustifolia*
Mean number of selected fruits	148	164	220	241

(Those means not underscored by same line are significantly different [0.05, Duncans New Multiple Range Test])

TABLE 3. FEEDING PREFERENCE OF PIED CURRAWONG

Total number of regurgitated pellets collected in the Canberra region	140
Number containing *Pyracantha* seed :	135
Number containing *Cotoneaster* seed :	1

TABLE 4. GENERAL IMPRESSION OF FRUIT AND SEED EATER FEEDING on the hundreds of naturalised *Pyracantha* and *Cotoneaster* shrubs.

(Fruit feeding is recognised by a large number of denuded flower stalks, remaining on shrub; seed feeding is recognised by large amounts of half eaten fruit remaining on shrub, and by the deposition of chewed fruit parts beneath it).

Species	Type of Feeding
P. fortuneana	predominately fruit eater
P. angustifolia	both fruit and seed eaters
C. glaucophyllus	predominately seed eater
C. pannosus	predominately seed eater

Is *Pyracantha* more abundant, in bushland areas, than *Cotoneaster* because of the different birds, and therefore possible seed dispersers they attract. Of over 10,000 *Pyracantha* and *Cotoneaster* seeds consumed, in fruit, by a caged Eastern and Crimson Rosella and a King-Parrot, ncne was passed in other than a completely disintegrated state. Therefore these birds are best thought of as seed eaters rather than seed dispersers. Seed recovered from Currawong pellets and Silvereye droppings, on the other hand, had the same germination viability as undigested seed collected straight off the shrub. Blackbirds and Starlings will also pass viable seed (Sorensen 1983, Beveridge 1964). These four birds are best thought of as fruit eaters capable of dispersing viable seed.

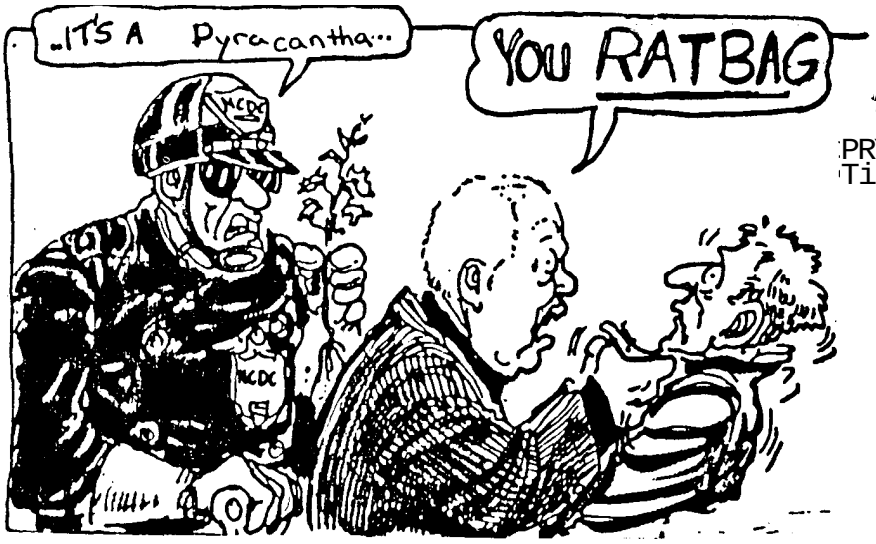
Thus it is possible that *Pyracantha* is more abundantly naturalised than *Cotoneaster* because its fruits largely attract seed dispersers, while those of *Pyracantha* are perhaps more likely to be eaten by seed predators. Other factors may also contribute to the predominance of *Pyracantha,* such as its seed having a less stringent dormancy breaking requirement than *Cotoneaster.* It is clear however, that birds are of great importance to the naturalisation of these two exotic shrubs.

OTHER INVASIVE ORNAMENTAL PLANTS

Other bird-dispersed and invasive ornamental plants, important in the Canberra region, include *Crataegus monogyna* (Hawthorn), *Sorbus domestica* (Service Tree) and *CeZtis australis* (Nettle Tree). It is not just exotic overseas plants that are spreading away from garden plantings, but Australian natives cultivated outside their natural ranges are also being dispersed, by birds, from gardens into areas

in which they were formerly not found. **Thus** *Sollya heterophylla,* the West Australian **Blue Bell Creeper, is** spreading in the Eastern **States, while** *Pittosporum undulatum* a plant local co parts of the east coast **is invading** along parts of the south coast (Gleadow **1982).**

So far we have concentrated on the direct **relationship** between bird feeding and the naturalisation of exotic shrubs. In addition to this, many of the plants you **may** have grown in order to provide nectar or shelter for birds are also capable, by some other means, such as wind, to disperse away from plantings. Of the twenty plants listed as being nectar producers, on the COG publication sheet "Attracting Birds to your Garden", five are invasive in the Canberra region. They are *Callistemon citrinus, Grevillea rosmarinifolia, Grevillea X 'Canberra gem', Hakea eriantha* and *Melaleuca armillaris.*



Adapted from GEOFF PRYOR, Canberra Times. Dec.16, 1984.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

So why should you worry if your garden plants are straying beyond your garden path? Firstly they may hinder the productivity of agricultural land, as briar rose and hawthorn have done to much of the local grazing land. Of more immediate concern, however, is the fact that much of their spread has occurred into areas of natural vegetation. This means that our local gums are often surrounded by halos of exotic 'bird dropping' flora, local acacias struggle for the same light as *Pyracantha* and Privet, and it means that local grasses and herbs are overshadowed by such plants as Japanese honeysuckle. The spread of your garden plants further destroys the intrinsic nature of the local flora. All too often a garden escapee may so dominate an area that it virtually kills and excludes all the local flora. Boneseed, Lantana and Privet are some of the more well known bird dispersed garden escapees (Buchanan 1978, Liddy 1985).

One would also expect that the invasion of garden plants would also affect the local bird communities. Exactly what these effects are, or will be, I can only guess at. A few general observations are that; shrub invasion may increase the number of shelter and nesting sites for small birds; non-local plants support a low number of invertebrates relative to local species, which will be of importance to insectivorous birds; and exotic bird species such as the blackbird and starling seem most common in bushland in which a large number of garden plants have invaded. Some of the possible affects may be quite bizarre. Birds have, for example, become drunk after feeding on ornamentals on which the fruits had fermented, and then flown head-on into cars or overhead powerlines. Then there is the suggestion that the planting and naturalisation, of fruit bearing shrubs, has provided a large winter food source for the Pied Currawong, allowing their population to reach unnaturally high numbers. This, in turn may have adverse affects on small bird breeding, as the Currawong is a notorious nest robber.

There is a need to choose our garden plantings carefully, and preferably plant local species, so that the birds, which we are attracting to our gardens, do not spread the garden habitat beyond our back fence. WE NEED TO BE AWARE OF BIRDS, BERRIES AND BAD BUSHES.

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Now to give a bird the last say.

THE SILVEREYE

Down among the firethorn
Up among the plums
Creeping in the Cotoneaster
When early autumn comes.

In our silver spectacles
And sober olive suits
We're very, very innocent
We wouldn't touch your fruits.

Well, maybe just a speckled one
A windfall here and there
But spread them all about the bush
Oh no, we wouldn't dare.

Behold our bland astonishment
The charge is quite absurd
It must have been a parrot
Or some other kind of bird

It must have been a Currawong
It may have been a crow
It couldn't possibly be us;
We are so meek, you know.

With our silver spectacles
The accusations vile
How can you deam us guilty
When we're whistling all the while?

Well if you caught us in the act
There's no more to be said
The plums are blue and succulent
The Cotoneasters red.

So if you want to save the bush
Before its filled with weeds
Plant some local trees and shrubs
And no foreign fruits 'n seeds.

Adapted from C.J. Dennis.
1935, The Singing Garden.
Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

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THE STATUS OF THE YELLOW-TUFTED HONEYEATER IN THE CANBERRA DISTRICT

Ian M. Taylor

SUMMARY

All recent published data on the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater *(Lichenostomus melanops melanops)* in the Canberra district were examined. Records were classified into 'high country' (>800m) and 'low country' (<800m). The species has only been recorded in the higher country above 800m between September and March and in the low country between March and November. This altitudinal movement is more marked than was previously realised. Since 1982, the species appears to have been a passage migrant in urban areas. The number of overwintering birds has fallen. Recent records suggest an overall decline in the numbers.

INTRODUCTION

Frith (1984) describes the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater as a 'fairly common resident' and states that 'in the highlands it is found in scattered breeding colonies of up to 200 birds. A few visit Canberra gardens in winter.' In the article entitled 'Status of Birds in Canberra and District' the species is described as a 'breeding resident occurring in isolated colonies at a few restricted locations in the local area ... In some years a few birds are recorded in Canberra gardens in winter' (Anon, 1976). The *Field List of the Birds of Canberra and District* indicates that this species is rare, but present all year (COG, 1985).

METHOD

Forty-one published, plus three previously unpublished records, of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater in the Canberra district are presented in Table 1.

The first column shows the number of individuals recorded. Note that '1+' is used for records where no precise numbers were given. If the record covers an extended period of time, the maximum number of individuals present during the period is shown. GBS data is given in the form '5w Apr', meaning '5th week of April', etc.

The altitude of the site at which each record was made is indicated. A delimiter of 800m was selected to differentiate the ranges to the South and West of Canberra from Canberra itself, its surrounding areas and the Murrumbidgee River. Records originating from sites with an altitude of 800m or more are designated with a 'H' (high). The remainder are marked with an 'L' (low).

TABLE 1. THE YELLOW-TUFTED HONEYEATER IN THE CANBERRA DISTRICT

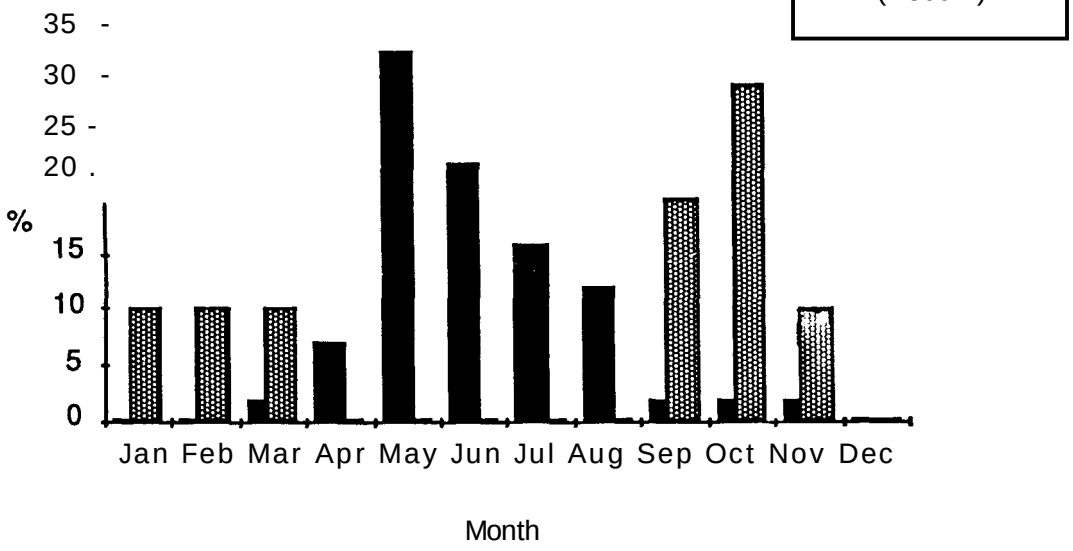
No	Date	Year	Location	Alt	Observer	Source
3	17 Jul	1965	NBG	L	Anon	AR 1965-66
1+	3 Mar	1966	O'Connor	L	Anon	AR 1965-66
1	15 Jul	1966	Gungahlin	L	Anon	AR 1966-67
1	13 Aug	1966	NBG	L	Anon	AR 1966-67
1+	22 Nov	1967	Gudgenby	H	Anon	CBN 1(3),14
1+	9 Mar	1968	New Chums Road	H	Anon	CBN 1(3),14
1+	12 Apr-12 Jun	1968	Canberra	L	Anon	*CBN 1(3),14
12	12 Apr	1968	Dairy Flat	L	J.McNaughton	CBN 1(4),12
1+	Sep-Oct	1968	Gudgenby River	H	Anon	CBN 1(7),15
1+	May	1969	NBG	L	Anon	CBN 1(7),15
5	May-Jun	1973	Campbell	L	M.Basten	CBN 2(8),4
1+	26 May-8 Jun	1973	Torrens	L	Anon	CBN 2(9),22
1+	6 Aug	1973	Torrens	L	Anon	CBN 2(9),22
1-2	Aug	1973	Campbell	L	M.Basten	CBN 3(1),9
1+	11 May-3 Jul	1974	Ainslie	L	D.Balfour	**(pers.comm)
1+	July	1975	Campbell		M.Basten	CBN 3(8),12
1	15 Feb	1976	Glendale Crossing	H	N.Hermes	CBN 3(6),26
1+	6 Jun	1976	Campbell		C.Appleby	CBN 3(8),12
5	6 Jun	1976	O'Connor		H.Nix	CBN 3(8)02
c.6	Jul-Sep	1977	NBG		G.Clark	CBN 4(4),11
1	1-2 Jul	1977	Melba		D.Purchase	CBN 4(4),11
1	Jun	1977	Campbell		M.Basten	CBN 4(4),11
1	19 May	1979	Mt Ainslie		M.Lenz	CBN 5(1),15
1	4 Aug	1979	NBG		A.Drake	CBN 6(1),32
1	20 Oct	1979	Kambah Pool		G.Guy	CBN 6(1),32
2	10 Nov	1979	Tharwa		R.Metcalf	CBN 6(1),32
2	7 Jun	1980	Chapman		J.Slobbe	CBN 6(1),32
2	9 Jul	1980	Chapman		J.Holland	CBN 7(1),26
4	23 Sep	1980	Mt Molonglo		A.Morrison	CBN 7(1),26
2	18 Oct	1980	Mt Molonglo		A.Morrison	CBN 7(1),26
1	26 Oct	1980	Gudgenby area	H	R.Gregory-Smith	CBN 7(1),26
2	1 Jan	1981	Mt Molonglo		A.Morrison	***CBN 7(1),26
8	18 Apr	1981	Tharwa		R.Metcalf	CBN 7(1),26
1	6 Jun	1981	Chapman		J.Holland	CBN 7(1),26
1	21-24 Jun	1981	Hughes		D.Johnson	CBN 7(1),26
1	5w Apr	1982	Ainslie		I.Taylor	(author's data)
1+	9 May	1982	Hall		J.Mcllroy	CBN 8(1),42
1	13 May	1982	ANU		M.Lenz	CBN 8(1),42
1	14 May	1982	NBG		M.Lenz	CBN 8(1),42
1	2w May	1983	Chapman		J.Holland	CBN 9(3),121
1	8 May	1983	O'Connor		H.Nix	CBN 9(3),121
1	4w Apr	1985	Kambah		K.Goodridge	CBN 11(2),??
1	15 May	1985	Aliens Creek		M.Larkin	CBN 11(2),??
5+	16-17 May	1986	Kambah Pool		J.Lipscombe	(pers comm)

Probably includes the Dairy Flat record below.
** A small number was present nearly every day during this period.
*** Given as 'Woolcarra Station' in the original record.

INTERPRETATION

The number of occurrences per month from high and low altitude areas has been calculated. Single records that cover an extended period (eg three months, Jun-Aug) are treated as three separate occurrences, one for each month. There are 43 occurrences in low altitude areas and 10 in high areas. The number of occurrences per month in each altitude category are expressed as percentages of the total number of occurrences in each category, see Fig. 1.

FIG. 1 SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE YELLOW-TUFTED HONEYEATER (percentage of high and low altitude records by month)



Most occurrences in low altitude sites were between May and August. Although there are comparatively few data for high altitude sites, all occurrences were during the period September-March. The lack of high altitude records for December probably just reflects the incomplete nature of the data.

The Yellow-tufted Honeyeater has only been recorded at high altitudes in warmer months, and is generally only recorded in low altitude sites during the cooler part of the year. It appears to leave the high country in about April, to return in about September. This roughly coincides with its appearance in low altitude areas and its subsequent disappearance in the spring.

It is interesting to note that all nine records since 1982 have been from low altitude sites during the period from the end of April to the middle of May. There have been no winter records in Canberra for the corresponding period.

The birds appear to pass through Canberra, like the Yellow-faced Honeyeater *(Lichenostomus chrysops)* and White-naped Honeyeater *(Melithreptus lunatus),* on their way from their summer quarters in the ranges to the winter quarters. In the period before 1981, overwintering birds were frequently recorded in Canberra, but since that time, most records have been of passage migrants.

One further point of interest is that in spite of a tenfold increase in the total numbers of observers in Canberra and in an even greater increase in the total number of records of all species received annually by COG over the past 20 years, the number of records of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters has remained approximately constant. It may be that this species is declining in numbers.

CONCLUSION

The lack of winter records of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater from the high country and the predominance of autumn and winter records in low altitude areas suggest that the species is an altitudinal migrant - a breeding summer migrant in the ranges and a passage migrant in lower areas with some overwintering.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANU Australian National University
AR Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union
ACT Branch Annual Report
CBN *Canberra Bird Notes*
GBS Garden Bird Survey
NBG National Botanic Gardens
W week

REFERENCES

Anon. 1976 . 'Status of birds in Canberra and district', CBN 3(6), 6-15.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Joan Lipscombe for bringing to my attention the Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters at Kambah Pool in May 1986, thus providing the initial stimulus for these notes.

OBITUARY; MISS JANET WYATT

Steve Wilson

Members will be saddened to note the death of Miss Janet Wyatt from a head-on car collision on William Hovell Drive late on the night of Wednesday 2 July in bad weather conditions. This left me with a great sense of shock and loss.

Janet was a person of great talent and enormous religious commitments. She was a senior editor with the Australian Government Publishing Service and was one of an amateur group which founded Acorn Press, an organization publishing Christian material.

She was a tireless worker in the Church of England. For a number of years she did missionary work in East Africa, lectured in Tanzania and was involved in the publication of Christian material in the local language. On her return to Australia she became very involved in the work of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

I became Editor of Canberra Bird Notes from Vol. 3 No. 2 April 1975 when Frank Crome was President. Soon after, Janet offered to type our Journal and a look at the Canberra Bird Notes of that time shows an immediate improvement in its appearance, within the existing format.

Janet was no ordinary typist and she was immediately given the task of Assistant Editor with a place on the Committee and she eased the Editor's task enormously.

The present format of Canberra Bird Notes was largely Janet's brainchild; the more modern style and presentation was a giant step forward. Unfortunately for me as Editor and for COG, increasing private and church commitments forced her to retire as Assistant Editor after the first CBN in the new format, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 1980. She continued as a COG member until her death.

Janet was a person of great ideas and principles and a most valued member of our organization and I was privileged to know and work with her.

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INSTINCT ERROR IN CAPTIVITY

Philip Veerman

As I approached an aviary, housing Australian Brush-turkeys *(Alectura lathami)* one of these birds was searching for food in a completely illogical way. The bird was standing, with one foot in what obviously was the food tray, vigorously scratching the empty metal tray with the other foot. After about ten strokes - and the bird's big feet made quite a racket on the bare metal - the bird would peer into the empty dish. It would then change feet and start again. It continued for several minutes while I watched from about two metres distance and was still at it after I left. Clearly, the bird was combining a learned behaviour, that its food comes in the metal tray, with an instinct that to find food it is necessary to scratch way the surface litter with its feet then see what it has uncovered.

The observation occurred at Healesville sanctuary Victoria, several years ago.

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IDENTIFICATION OF THE LITTLE EAGLE AND WHISTLING KITE

Philip Veerman

Summary of a talk *given to COG at July 1985 General Meeting*

Australia has several species of medium large, brown, diurnal raptors. In general, identification of such hawks differs from methods used in identifying other birds. Colouration is less important than aspects such as shape, posture, movements, wing height in flight and particular plumage patterns, which assume greater importance. The Little Eagle *(Hieraaetus morphnoides)* and Whistling Kite *(Haliastur sphenurus)* are widespread and common. Confusion arises because both have distinctive dark panels on the underwings and don't hold their wings raised in flight. However, this confusion is often overstated as these two hawks are far from the most difficult to distinguish among the local species.

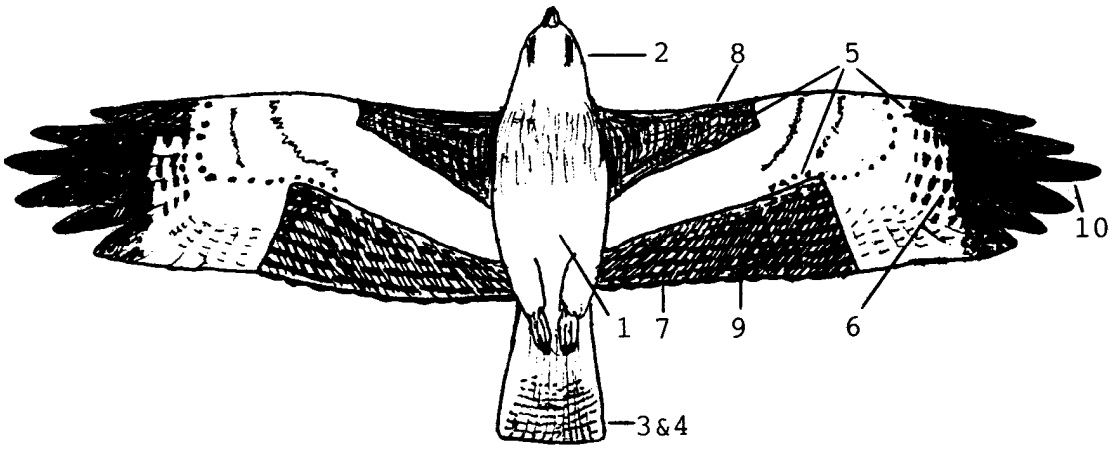
Having pointed out the similarities, there are certain consistent differences listed below. Any one of these features, if clearly observed, can be regarded as sufficient to distinguish between these two species. A point to recall is that the Little Eagle is a small eagle, whereas the Whistling Kite is a large kite. This explains why many aspects of the overall bearing of these birds differ, such as the flight pattern.

FEATURES OF THE LITTLE EAGLE (see figure)

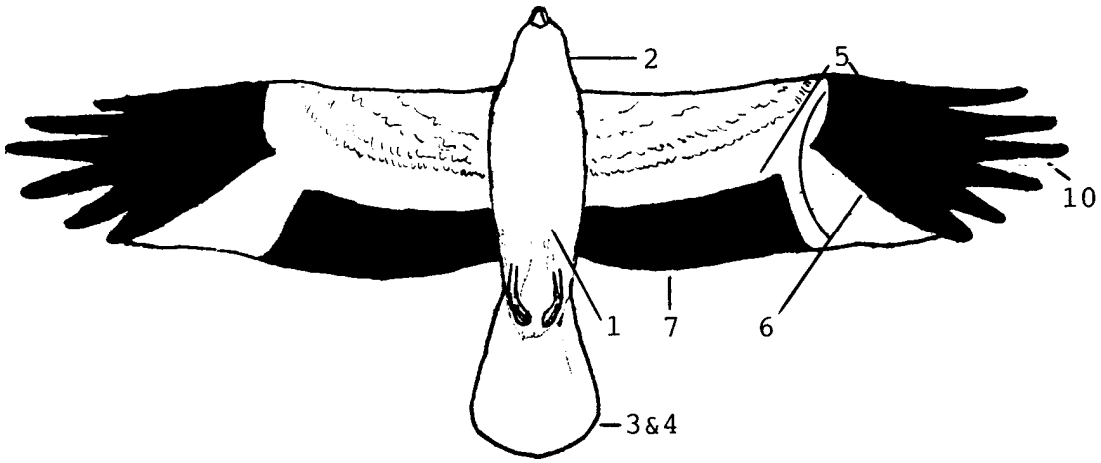
1. Stocky build, with fully feathered legs.
2. Dark markings on head, small crest.
3. Distinctly barred tail, of medium to dark brown colour.
4. Short, square or rounded (when spread) tail.
5. Three dark panels on each underwing (light phase birds), (wing tip, secondaries and front edge).
6. Primary feathers comprising the wing-tip panel, are dark only on outer part. The inner edge to this dark panel is nearly perpendicular to the trailing edge and near the tip of the wing. There is no trailing edge to the dark primary panel.
7. Dark panel on secondaries is vaguely triangular, narrowest close to body. It extends further from body than the dark panel at the front of wing.
8. Dark panel at front of wing is vaguely triangular, broadest close to body, reddish colour.
9. Clear barring on all primaries and secondaries.
10. Minimal slotting between primary feathers.
11. Call is loud, diagnostic, though not well known, a double or triple whistle or series of monotone notes.
12. Very variable in plumage, above notes and figure refer to adult, light phase, the form most similar to Whistling Kites. Immatures are reddish on head, neck and underparts. Dark phase birds are not confusable with Whistling Kites but are similar to Black Kites, which also fly with flat wings but are slender, small footed and have a very long forked or square tail which is shuffled in flight.

FEATURES OF WHISTLING KITE (see figure)

1. Slim build with unfeathered lower legs.
2. Unmarked head, no crest.
3. Tail virtually unmarked, grey to fawn colour.
4. Long tail appears rounded whether closed or fanned.
5. Two dark panels on each underwing (wing tip and secondaries).
6. Primary feathers comprising wing tip panel, appear entirely dark. The inner edge to this dark panel is a crescent just outside the wrist, its trailing edge is conspicuous at about 45 degrees to the trailing edge of the wing.
7. Dark panel on secondaries similar width throughout, giving vaguely rectangular appearance.
8. Lacks dark panel at front of wing although middle area of wing may be paler than surrounding areas.
9. Inconspicuous wing barring, only on secondaries.
10. Large slotting between primary feathers.
11. Call is loud, diagnostic, well known, descending whistle followed by ascending staccato whistles.
12. Minimal variation, immatures are reddish, with pale spots above.



LITTLE EAGLE (P.V.)



WHISTLING KITE (P.V.)

Notwithstanding all these features (of which 4 and 5 should almost always allow positive identification), distinguishing these species can be difficult if they are seen only briefly, at a great distance or in other sub optimal circumstances. This unfortunately, is the way many observations of raptors are made, so sometimes one has to be satisfied with "unidentified raptor". That is a better option than trying to interpret the observation as the rarest species possible! Unlike most birds, the appearance of hawks may change drastically according to what they are doing. For convenience, most field guides, like my figures, show hawks as they would appear soaring or gliding overhead. A Little Eagle in undulating courtship flight or attacking a rabbit or a Whistling Kite snatching a fish can look very different. Even someone who knows them well can interpret such a sight quite incorrectly.

A SIGHTING OF MAGPIE GEESE NEAR COLLECTOR

Wayne Lawler

While travelling along the Federal Highway north of Collector in the late afternoon of the 31st of March, 1986, I noticed an interesting swamp beside the road, with a picnic ground beside it, so drove in to investigate.

The wetland is on the next watercourse north of Willow Creek, is roughly circular, several hundred metres in diameter and heavily vegetated with a sedge similar to *Eleocharis.* It did in fact resemble many swamps of North Queensland.

Scanning the swamp with the naked eye, I noted many Black Swans and a few Purple Swamphens among the sedges. There were also some large whitish birds. Binoculars confirmed my initial identification, Five Magpie Geese *(Anseranas semipalmata)* were standing about 60 metres from the shore among sparse sedges.

During the following half hour I was able to approach within 30 metres with camera and long lens, and was able to photograph them and determine that at least three were not banded. The legs of two were obscured. I then left the birds undisturbed to continue my journey.

Two slides were shown at the June 1986 COG general meeting. The identity of the five birds was unmistakable and several members recognised the swamp as Roses swamp beside the Federal Highway - Ed.

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ADDITIONAL CANBERRA RECORD OF A RED-CAPPED PARROT

F.H. Ordish

For a week from 22nd to 30th September 1985, a Red-capped Parrot *(Purpureicephalus spurius)* fed at a bird table, provided with grain including sunflower seeds, in a garden in Forrest. As the natural distribution of this species is South-Western Australia, this specimen would have been an escapee from a private aviary. A bird of this species was recorded two years earlier at O'Connor (CBN 10(2):62).

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A RECORD OF KOELS FOR CANBERRA

Doug Ross

The Narrabundah and Red Hill ridge is rich in bird watchers but the area's avifauna is not conspicuously exciting or exotic. In consequence anything novel tends to produce great excitement. There was a positive shiver in the area in early December 1985 when a new and unfamiliar bird call was heard, in most days the call started at around 2am and continued on until sunset.

The calling bird was eventually tracked down to Logan Street. It was a male Koel *(Eudynamys scolopacea).* A female was later seen in the area although her behaviour was less obtrusive than the male (Bob Digan & John Penhallurick). There are in the neighbourhood at least two species parasitised by the Koel: Noisy Friar-bird *(Philemon corniculatus)* and Australian Magpie-lark *(Grallina cyanoleuca).*

I last heard the Koel in the week beginning 28 February 1986.

The latest annual bird report (CBN 11(2):67) gives the last record as 1981. Most Field Guides give the Koel's Eastern Australian range as, as far south as the Victorian border, the range shown in Atlas of Australian Birds does not extend so far south. None indicate westward extension to Canberra.

The second (1971) edition of the COG Bird List classified the Koel as 2 (No recent records). The third (1985) edition describes the bird as a Vagrant (December and January), in open forest and woodland. This area could, at a pinch, come into either category.

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BIRDS FEEDING ON INSECTS

Brendan J. Lepschi

Soldier flies *(Diptera: Stratiomydae),* are common insects through Australia that characteristically swarm at certain times of the year. During the later weeks of April 1986, around my home in Weston, I observed 8 bird species feeding on swarms of these insects. Species seen were: Red Wattlebird *(Anthochaera carunculata),* House Sparrow *(Passer domesticus),* Common Starling *(Sturnus vulgaris),* Pied Currawong *(Strepera graculina)* and, to a lesser extent, Grey

Fantail *(Rhipidura fuliginosa),* Willie Wagtail *(Rhipidura leucophrys),* Noisy Friarbird *(Philemon corniculatus)* and Common Myna *(Acridotheres tristis).* The most common method of capture involved the birds hawking from exposed perches and feeding aerially, while the Pied Currawong also flew from the ground. This method of feeding is similar to that mentioned by Nix (CBN 4(5):20).

On a similar incident, Welcome Swallows *(Hirundo neoxena)* were seen by a number of observers at CSIRO Gungahlin on 14 May 1986, feeding on insects presumed to be Gall wasps *(Hymenoptera: Ciripadae),* congregating around mature Argyle Apples *(Eucalyptus cinerea).* The method of feeding employed by the birds was most unusual; apart from catching insects in flight, the birds occasionally flew very close to the foliage or hovered briefly and plucked the insects off the leaves. I know of no published report of this behaviour among this or other aerial species.

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RED FEATHER MONEY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Edited extract from a letter by Trevor Sofield (Australian High Commissioner, Solomon Islands).
Contributed by Mrs C. Crowe.

On leaving Nola (one of the reef islands), we were presented with some "red feather money". This is one of the most exotic art/craft forms of the South Pacific. It is highly prized by museums and art galleries around the world and collectors may pay $20 000 for a band in good condition. Only a few craftsman have possessed the skills to make it, the last acknowledged master died two years ago.

The feathers come from the male Cardinal Honeyeater *(Myzomela cardinalis)* (similar to our Scarlet Honeyeater). To obtain the feathers, money makers follow birds to their nesting site and, from up a nearby tree, poke a pre-gummed, bare branch through the foliage, while remaining hidden and mimicking the bird's distinctive call. The birds alight on the gummed stick, which traps them. The stick is then pulled through the foliage, the bird removed and secured to the catchers special belt by a leg ring. The birds are gregarious and as many as twenty pairs may share one tree. The trap is repeated, so sometimes 30 to 40 birds may be caught. On the ground, the red breast feathers are plucked and the birds are released. Fortunately, as they are sacred it is forbidden to kill them. They are common around all the villages, feeding from nectar of the cocoa-nut flowers and flitting in the trees above the thatched rooves.

The money is made by stripping a central palm frond and wrapping tapa cloth around it. The whole 5 to 8cm wide band is then covered with gum from a special tree and thousands of the tiny red feathers are glued to all sides, encasing the band in a soft vibrant cloak.

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LEUCISM IN THE AUSTRALIAN KING-PARROT

Brendan J. Lepschi

Leucism, a condition which alters normal plumage colouration, is not uncommon among parrots. Carins (1974) reported the presence of a leucistic juvenile Crimson Rosella *(Platycercus elegans)* in the ACT (and other similar captive specimens), and Richardson (1979) noted the condition in a Red-rumped Parrot *(Psephotus haematonotus)* near Temora, NSW. Other records also exist from farther afield.

Leucistic individuals of the Australian King-Parrot *(Alisterus scapularis)* have also been reported, with two sightings in the ACT in recent years (Braithwaite 1977, Palmer; CBN 1:(2):64, I.M. Taylor pers. comm.), and two from the South Coast (J. Bounds pers. comm. and J. Hancocks; in litt.). In all specimens the red (carotenoid) and green (porphyrin) pigments were affected around the head, breast, back and wing regions; the result being a patchy, predominantly yellow bird. Despite their unusual appearances, the birds were accepted without incident into flocks of their own and other species.

These birds are regarded as leucistic rather than albino since their plumage still showed traces of normal colouration, whereas in albinism the affected areas are completely colourless. Albinism also tends to occur more frequently in species that owe their colouration to melanin pigments rather than carotenoids (red, orange, yellow or violet colours). or porphyrins (green and brown colours).

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Editor: Philip Veerman, PO Box 301, CIVIC SQUARE, ACT, 2608

Rarities Panel: B. FitzGerald (Secretary - Ph 485140), G. Clark, B. Baker, C. Bear, R. Schodde.

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