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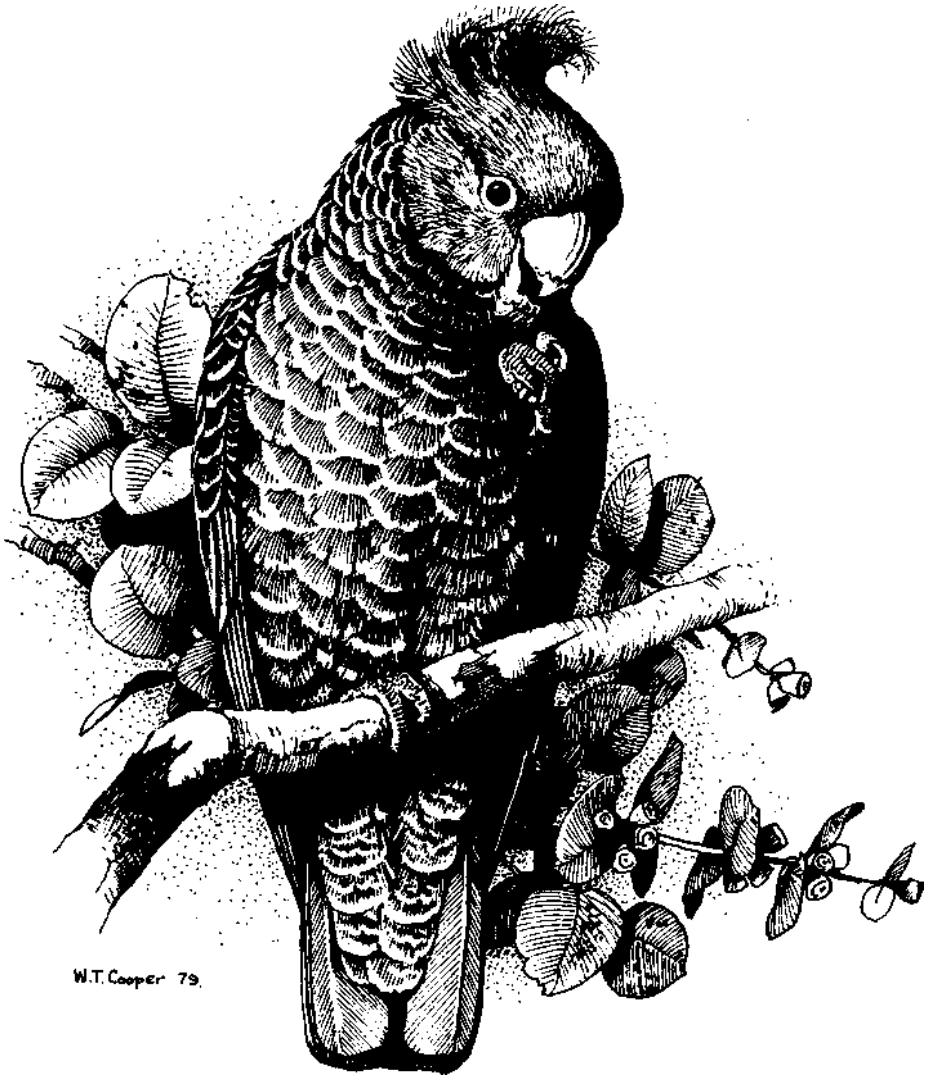

NOTES ON A BREEDING PAIR OF COLLARED SPARROWHAWKS: ARRIVAL TO HATCHING

R. Metcalf and E.C. Metcalf

For the last six years members of the COG Raptor group have been observing a pair of nesting Collared Sparrowhawks *(Accipiter cirrhocephalus)* in a Canberra park reputed to have supported breeding Sparrowhawks for at least 20 years. We are unable to say whether it was the same two birds over the last six years but there was no competition from other pairs of the same species within the park. The only other confirmed breeding pair resided 1.5km away though there was a possible third pair some 3-4km in the opposite direction.

All the nests were situated in *Pinus radiata,* most were about 18 metres up, near the crown of mature trees though in 1984 the nest was only 9 metres up in a slender 30 year old tree. Cupper and Cupper (1981) report a preference for Belar in areas where they occur. The actual site could be either in a fork or along a horizontal branch at a point where branchlets take off.

Usually new nests were made each year as the structure did not survive the winter. The 1981/82 nest, built in a fork, was an exception. A female was observed sitting on the nest in the following season but no young were fledged from that nest. However the presence of a newly fledged very vocal young female in March 1983 (two months later than our usual observations) suggests a second breeding attempt. Hollands (1984) reports that all five nests he recorded were used for only one season.

The young were fed almost exclusively on House Sparrows *(Passer domesticus)* though a European Goldfinch *(Carduelis carduelis)* was recorded on one occasion. The late youngster was twice fed very young squabs, presumably Feral Pigeon *(Columba livia)* which took some three hours to eat.

Table 2 summarises the breeding success of the years 1980-1985. Further information on a single male is to be found in Metcalf (1981) and Olsen (1981) while information on the nestling and fledging stages has been reported previously, Metcalf (1982). Brown and Amadon (1968) stated that 'nothing is recorded on display and mating.'

1983-84 BREEDING SEASON

The following notes on courtship, nest building and brooding are based on some 120 hours of observations. Table 1 helps to show the almost perfect monthly duration of the phases of courtship, nest-building, incubation and nestling.

CALL

On August 30 1983 (counted as Day 1) a very vocal adult female was heard in the area. Calaby's epithet of "silent" (in Frith 1984) does not apply to these birds during the

breeding season. The female called daily in the mid morning from one perch, with a constant raucous "Kkkwark". The male was first observed some ten days later and on Day 15 both were heard using a gentle "Kee-kee-kee" call. A louder more intense version of this call is used with increasing intensity when the birds are alarmed or are harassing birds such as Pied Currawongs *(Strepera graculina).* Once nest building began the female was seldom heard but after the young fledged (Day 124) she reverted to the raucous tones that announced her arrival. The male's common call is a persistent whistling "Chew chew" once heard continuously for 70 minutes. There was also a call heard during copulation. It is believed that the male makes the call as the female appeared to be eating prey.

NUPTIAL FLIGHT

The nuptial flight was only observed twice, on 21 September (Day 23). It started with the birds circling about above the canopy. Then while one continued to circle the other climbed swiftly to 100 metres to fall with folded wings towards its mate only to shoot skywards again at the moment of meeting. The impression at the time of observation was that the larger (female) was the climber.

(This would be unusual, generally the males would be the ones to engage in a display flight - Debus, & Ed.).

COPULATION

The first observed mating took place at 9.00am the following day (24). The male returned to the female, who had been calling spasmodically for 90 minutes. He carried a small piece of prey and flew with a fluttering beat, unlike his usual glide, to land near the female. She sidled up the branch towards him and they engaged in a little hopping dance, both birds balancing with spread wings. Then the female accepted the prey from the male and they mated for three seconds before flying off, the female to eat and the male to rest. There did not appear to be any sign of aggression in the manoeuvre. Copulation was then observed on most visits to the site and rose to a maximum number of six times on Day 57 and duration of 11 and 12 seconds on Day 59. It was last observed on 30 October (Day 62) about the time brooding started. However, watch on the nest site relaxed once brooding was established and our previous study had shown that copulation occurs again later in the season once the young have hatched. This was confirmed in the 1986 season with another pair.

TWIG DROPPING AND TERRITORIALITY NOTE

Numerous other birds were nesting within 50m of the Sparrowhawk's nest. These included Australian Magpies *(Gymnorhina tibicen),* Australian Magpie-larks *(Grallina*

cyanoleuca), and Pied Currawongs the last being both the instigators or receivers of most of the physical harassment observed as they attempted to steal food and cached prey. The territorial boundary which received greatest respect was that between the Sparrowhawks and a pair of Australian Ravens *(Corvus coronoides)* who were already nesting when the raptors showed up. Though active harassment was never observed between them, three times during the nest selection stage, the Ravens appeared to reassert their territorial rights. They were observed to break off a twig from the lower part of their tree and hop to the top and drop the twig. The boundary marked by this display was respected by the Sparrowhawks even after the Raven family moved away.

NEST BUILDING

On the day of the first mating, 22 September (Day 24) the female started to collect dry straight pine twigs about 30 cm long. To collect them she selected a dead branch and walked down it balancing on spread wings and testing branchlets with her weight until one broke off. She would fly off with the selected twigs in her beak. At first she seemed to be practising as she often dropped the twigs. This may have been before she started nest site selection, when motivation was low. It may also have territorial significance or be an example of redirected aggression, apparently also shown by neighbouring Ravens.

The female took ten days over the choice of a nest site during which she tried out five positions but when she came to the sixth site on 1 October (Day 33) it was obvious that this was it. Most building was done in the late morning. She would work for 20 minutes placing and readjusting five or six twigs and then rest for ten minutes. On the first day she laid a platform of parallel twigs and on the second she set down a similar platform at right angles across the first. By the third day she was using carefully selected fine twigs to build up the body of the nest and on the fourth day set in place some large forked twigs that would later be used by the young as perches. Finishing touches and decoration continued for another four days and the nest was finished around 9 October (Day 41) but over the next two weeks an occasional twig would be placed and the female would sit briefly. By this time the male was bringing food to the female but on two occasions he was observed trying to break off dry twigs and several times brought dry or green twigs to the nest. These offerings seemed more of a ceremonial than a utilitarian nature. In 1980 the male brought green leaves to the nest on the days that the two young fledged. In 1983 his first offering was on Day 41 when the nest appeared to be structurally completed.

NOTES ON USE OF GREEN TWIGS

On the third day of building the female brought a terminal spray of *Eucalyptus rossii* leaves to the nest and was seen to repeat the action 14 more times until the young hatched. The female used only *Eucalyptus sp.* but the male brought in some Chinese Elm *(Ulmus chinensis)* and a green pine twig on a total of three occasions. It has been suggested that green leaves have antibiotic benefit (Clarke & Mason 1985). This may be so, or fresh leaves may simply be better (more pliable) nest lining than old leaves, therefore there is value in renewing them. Cupper and Cupper (1981) suggest that this relining stopped at about the time the chicks grew feathers.

(They misuse the word "fledge" - Ed).

BROODING

By 21 October the female was spending more time at the nest than before. She had been the main defender of the territory in September but now left that more to the male, who had become more vocal and aggressive as she grew quieter with the approach of moulting and egg laying.

The two fixed points in the area were the nest and the feeding bough where the male and female exchanged food. The male had a special perch but would not always sit on it and changed it twice during the season.

On day 62 (when copulation was last observed) the female had her usual early morning flight but for the first time the male sat on the nest, for 34 of the 48 minutes she was away, presumably on an egg. By Day 64 the female was definitely brooding, sitting low on the nest. The male would take over daily for periods of 40 to 70 minutes while the female ate the prey he had brought in. On day 90, there was a change in behaviour, she left the nest 2 hours late and after feeding she called the male from the nest and the pair spent five minutes calling and flying through the trees, a display possibly indicative of pipping. On day 93 she had been seen apparently inspecting the contents of the nest. On one occasion 2 December (Day 95), prey supplied by the male was inadequate and the female shot off for 30 seconds and returned with a Sparrow, despite the fact that half her new tail feathers had only just appeared. At that time it was obvious that something had hatched as she was sitting higher in the nest.

Despite the difficulties of precisely pinpointing laying and hatching times, incubation time would appear to be around 30 days rather than the "probably incorrectly" recorded 19 days still mentioned in Frith (1984) and mentioned with apparent reluctance by Brown and Amadon (1968). T. Ross has separately confirmed an incubation period of 35 days.

NESTLING

From 5 December (Day 98) intensive observations ceased. However inspection of the nest revealed one young and one addled egg. The youngster flew on 1 January 1984 (Day 125) and finally left the area on 20 January 1984, 144 days after the female was first sighted. This was some 22 days later than in the 1980 brood which had moved out by 29 December 1980 but 4 days earlier than the brood that left in 1985.

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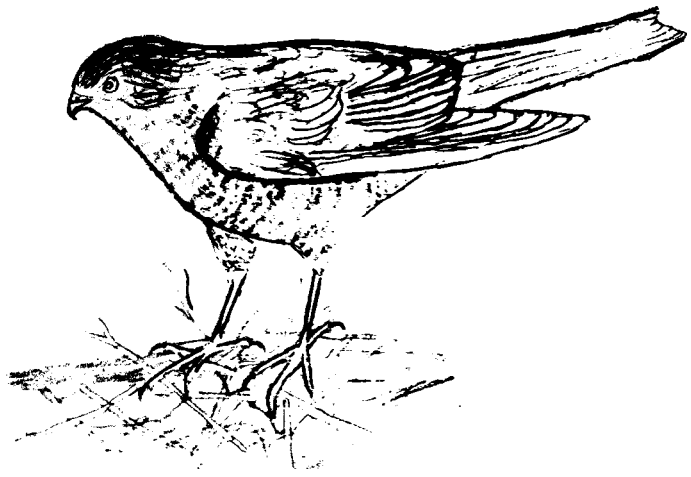


TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF EVENTS IN 1983-84
COLLARED SPARROWHAWK BREEDING SEASON

DATE	OBSERVATION DAY	ACTIVITY
30/8/83	1	Calling female first seen. Male seen in area.
8/9/83	10	Nuptial flight.
21/9/83	23	First Mating. Female starts breaking off twigs.
22/9/83	24	For next six days female builds at five nest sites.
25/9/83	27	Female decides on a nest site and building proper begins.
1/10/83	33	Nest structurally complete. Male brings green twigs.
9/10/83	41	Male on nest for 34 minutes of 48 minute break taken by female.
30/10/83	62	Presumably there was at least one egg in nest.
1/11/83	64	Brooding underway. Female fed on nest as Currawongs attack.
27/11/83	90	Male and female do short vocal flight together. Nest unattended for ten minutes. Male brings dry twig under stimulus of pipping? hatching?? Over next few days small changes in behaviour eg. inspection of nest before settling and more movement while brooding.
1/12/83	94	Female sitting high on nest. Female catches her own prey. Her tail feathers just growing back after moult.
2/12/83	95	Male feeds young.
5/12/83	98	Tree climbed. Contents: one young (banded) one addled egg.
8/12/83	101	Young flies.
1/1/84	125	Young leaves area altogether.
20/1/84	144	

TABLE 2 SUMMARY OF BREEDING SPARROWHAWKS IN CANBERRA 1980-1986

YEAR	AREA	NEST	FIRST OBS.	ACTIVITIES	YOUNG	LAST SIGHTING OF YOUNG
1980	A	1	28 Oct.	Nest being built by single male. Gave up after 1 month (Metcalf 1981 and Olsen 1981).	none	
1980	B	2	12 Nov.	Nest found with brooding female.	two	30/12/80
1981	C	3	3 Dec.	Nestling and fledgling recorded by Metcalf (1982).	two	18/12/81
1982	C	3	14 Oct.	Nest and young. 1 sighting of adult female on nest. No young.	none	-
1982/3	B	-	6 Mar.	1 vocal juvenile observed over 1 month no nest found.	one	3/4/83
1983/4	B	4	30 Aug.	Nest building observed. Young banded.	one	20/1/84
1984/5	D	5	Sep.	Female seen flying in direction of Area D. Two fledged young found there later in season.	two	24/1/85
1985/6	-			All areas checked through season. Adult female seen once in Area 2.	none	

A BREEDING ATTEMPT BY POWERFUL OWLS IN THE ACT

Tony Ross

In the autumn of 1984 I began a search on the eastern slopes of the Brindabella Range for nesting Powerful Owls *(Ninox strenua).* I was unaware of any confirmed breeding records for the species in the ACT so, after finding a resident pair, I attempted to locate their nest-tree but no evidence was found to indicate a breeding attempt that year.

1985 FAILED NESTING

On 2 June 1985 two owls (most likely the same pair) were located roosting together in a Brown Barrel *(Eucalyptus fastigata).* On 11 July at 8.15 pm I heard a strange call reminiscent of a Feral Pigeon *(Columba livia)* coming from a hollow in a huge Manna Gum *(Eucalyptus viminalis),* that I suspected (rightly) they were using. This presumably is the call Fleay (1968) describes as the "grating, peevish rumbles" used by the female in the nesting hole. Schodde and Mason (1980) give the egg-laying period for the species as the first week of May to the second week of June. Similarly, Fleay's (1968) egg-laying period for Victorian owls is the last two weeks of May or the earliest days of June. The birds are known to lay two eggs in a clutch. Although three young have been reported (Conole 1981).

Judging by the birds' behaviour their first egg was laid on or around 9 June. As we intended to band the owl chicks, 38 days were allowed for incubation (Fleay, 1968; Schodde and Mason, 1980) and 17 days for growth of the young, before the nest-tree was climbed. Observations of food transfer had been made within that period. The entrance to the nest was 21 metres from the ground, 24 cm in diameter and faced south-west. The nesting chamber was 1.5 metres deep and had a floor area of approximately 1 sq metre (see figure). Inside the nest-hollow were found the intact carcasses of four or five possums; Greater Gliders *(Petauroides volans* also known as *Schoinobates volans)* and Common Ringtails *(Pseudocheirus peregrinus).* Prey remnants in the nest are typical, as was the nest hollow and its position (Beruldsen 1980). Also, the hollow contained some pieces of eggshell and one dead owlet. The owlet was retrieved with much difficulty and on examination was found not to have absorbed its yolk-sac, so presumably death occurred at less than two days of age.

As the female owl did not flush whilst the nest-tree was being climbed and was not seen or heard on three subsequent visits I then assumed that she had deserted the chick, or died, around hatching day. If then alive this would have killed the chick which would have been effectively preserved by the extreme (-8 to -10 deg C) overnight temperatures. Two birds were present in the

territory in February 1986 and being unlikely that the male found a new mate so quickly (Schodde and Mason, 1980), one would then assume the female deserted. Possible reasons for deserting include. death of the chick from an air-sac mite infestation (Fleay, 1968) or human disturbance, as trail-bike riders, rally drivers, shooters and day-trippers all frequent the immediate vicinity of the nest-tree.

As "during incubation and the early period when the young are small, all food is brought by the male" (Burton 1973), another possible explanation for this failure may be loss of the male. The presence of whole prey carcasses in the nest hollow would make this unlikely - Ed.

OTHER BEHAVIOUR

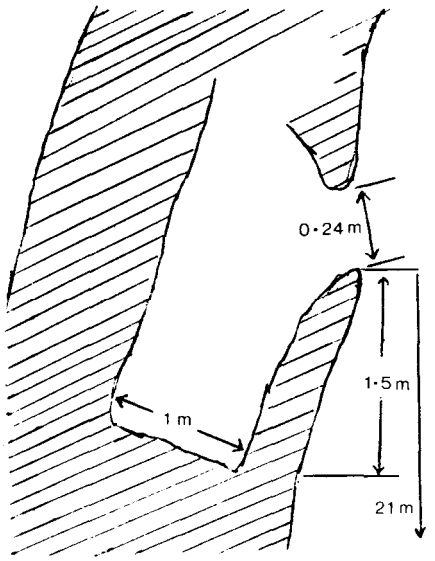
This pair of owls seems to prefer Narrow-leaved Peppermint *(E. dives)* and Brown Barrel as daytime roost trees. Many pellets (or castings; disgorged, indigestible food remains) were collected for analysis by the CSIRO. Most castings seemed to contain only Greater Glider remains.

A tall dead tree 60 metres from their nest was used by the male as a prey transfer point when bringing food to the incubating female. He would alight on this tree and give a single, drawn-out, very quiet double-note call, after which the female would emerge from the nest-hollow. The only prey items seen outside the nest-hollow were Greater Gliders.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dave Mallinson, Brianne & Robert Bartos, Penny & Jerry Olsen for their assistance. I would like to know of any local breeding records of this bird - address, 42 Willis Street, Evatt, 2617.

CROSS SECTION OF POWERFUL OWL'S NEST HOLLOW IN MANNA GUM



POWERFUL OWL AT DAY TIME ROOST - (P.V.)

FURTHER COMMENT ON POWERFUL OWLS

Philip Veerman

Members will note that the status quoted for the Powerful Owl in the annual report *(CBN* 11,67) is "common breeding resident". I believe this is misleading. All status values given therein are derived from the "Field List" *(CBN* 11,43). The implication of this assessment would be that this bird's abundance or distribution is of the same order of magnitude as eg the Feral Pigeon, Superb Fairy-wren or Australian Raven and slightly more common than the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. No doubt there would be a few or perhaps even several, pairs of Powerful Owls, holding widely spaced, permanent territories and breeding in the ranges, in the COG area of concern. However, neither in numbers, biomass or likelihood of observing at least one, would this species be on par with the other examples given. The species is mentioned only rarely in *CBN* and breeding reports are sparse, this is not because the bird is too common for people to bother reporting! It may be, in part, because of its habitat and being nocturnal (Clayton 1971). Frith (1984) records it as a breeding resident but that there are no breeding records for the region. Actually, there are such records eg Routley (1980) & Hoskin (1972). Shaw (1979) gives the bird's status as "rare, coastal slopes of S.E. and E. mainland". It could be expected to be rarer on the inland ranges of the ACT. Wilson (1982) sums up the species as needing "a considerable area of undisturbed habitat".

The diet of this, largest of the Australian owls has been well researched (eg Tilley 1982), though in addition to the data presented there, it is also known to take young Koalas (1) (Veerman 1985) and herons (1) (Evans 1986). Its preference for the two possum species recorded as prey, in the above paper, is well known. 'James (1980) suggests the bird does not discriminate between these two species. The differing ratios of these species within this owl's diet may be a useful environmental indicator. The Greater Glider, like the owl, is territorial and requires mature forest, with tree holes for sheltering. The Common Ringtail, in contrast is social and may build its own shelter (drey), it is able to survive in disturbed, regenerating or more open forest, that would not support the other two species. Indeed, the ecology of these two possums differ substantially (Strahan 1983, Tyndale-Biscoe 1973).

I'll now indulge in an optimistic, simplistic interpretation (others are possible). A Powerful Owl subsisting mainly on Greater Gliders is likely to be doing this because they are the commonest prey around. The bird would be hunting and presumably residing in habitat which meets that prey species requirements, which match its own. This is a good sign. A diet of species less dependent on

mature forest, while presumably nutritionally equivalent, may indicate the birds are short of suitable habitat.

See next issue of *CBN* for details of a quite different and successful nest.

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CANBERRA BIRD LIST OF 1943

Philip Veerman

An article which appeared in "The Canberra Times" between 23 and 25 June 1943, has been contributed through Bryan Fitzgerald by Bob Weston. The article is of interest not only for the list of bird species then recorded in the Canberra region, but also in indicating some status changes (such as the now common species, listed as extremely rare or even not mentioned and those listed, which are now rare or unknown). The article is also entertaining in the arrangement of species groups (eg, teal are not included among the "five kinds of ducks") and the names used, many of which are now spelt differently or have probably been forgotten. The article is here reprinted verbatim with the only changes being the insertion (in brackets) of comments or modern species or group names where the ones used are not likely to be recognised. Redundant components of old names have not been deleted. Asterisks (*) have been inserted after each species not listed as having been recorded in the region, according to the 1984/85 Annual Bird Report *CBN* 11(2),26-88. A (?) is inserted where the species identity cannot be determined. Some species, as listed differ from what we currently recognise as species. Interpretation of old species names is based, in part, on names given in Cayley (1967). Neil Hermes (1982) has provided a detailed review of local ornithological records of this period. He cautions that Mathews' list may not be fully accurate. FitzGerald (1984) has already commented on this article.

"Bird Population of A.C.T. Includes 150 Varieties

More than 150 of Australia's 720 known birds have been either observed or identified in and around Canberra by the famous Australian ornithologist, Mr Gregory Mathews, who has been resident here during the last two years. Mr Mathews, who has devoted his life to the interests of Australian ornithology was compelled to spend most of his life abroad completing his research work. In the course of his labours, he accumulated a unique scientific ornithological reference library covering a period of 150 years. Various institutes including the British Museum competed for the collection but Mr Mathews eventually decided to present it to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, where it is now deposited. He arrived in Canberra two years ago to give his services in cataloguing the books under the Dewey System, and the work has now been completed.

Mr Mathews hopes that one day a small illustrated hand-book or brochure showing the birds that frequent the environs of the national will one day be published together with one on Canberra's trees and another on the animal life found here. Of the 151 birds noted, all except perhaps a score have been personally observed by the ornithologist.

Those that he has not actually seen have been reported to him by dependable observers.

Birds such as the red-chested (Button-) quail, white-headed stilt, plumed (Intermediate) egret, (?) bittern, grey teal, little falcon (Australian Hobby), yellow-tailed black cockatoo, green leek (Superb Parrot), superb lyre bird, leaden fly-catcher, spotted quail thrush, white-browed babbler, eastern white-face, noisy friar-bird, and the brush lark (?) are, of course, extremely rare but are nevertheless inhabitants or visitors to the Territory.

An item of interest to local ornithologists is the fact that 11 different varieties of honey-eaters are to be found here. They include the white-naped, blue-faced, spine-billed (Eastern Spinebill), regent, yellow-faced, yellow-eared (Lewin's *), singing (*), white-eared, white-plumed, yellow-winged (New Holland) and spiney-checked (Spiny-cheeked) honey-eaters. Incidentally, the singing honey-eater is (was?) known in technical ornithological language as the *Mathuai Virescens Walgetti,* and was called after Mr Mathews in 1912. Five varieties of robins have been identified, namely, the scarlet-breasted, red-capped, flame- breasted, hooded and yellow robins. In addition, there are four varieties of quail, the stubble, brown, little and red- chested (Button-). There are five kinds of ducks - the black, pink-eared, musk, wood (Maned) and mountain duck (Australian Shelduck) and four of magpies, the black-backed (and) white-backed (Australian), pied bell and grey bell (Currawongs). Four larks, brown song-lark, Rufus song-lark, magpie and bush (Singing Bushlark). The A.C.T. can boast two kinds of eagle, the wedge-tailed and the singing (Whistling Kite) as well as the collared sparrow hawk and swamp (Harrier) and brown hawks (Falcon).

Other birds identified include the diamond dove, (?)bronze-wing pigeon, slate-breasted (Lewin's) rail, buff-banded rail, moor-hen, coot, dabchick (Australasian or Hoary-headed Grebe), silver gull, spur-winged (Masked) plover (&) banded plover (Lapwings), stone plover (Bush Thick-knee), blackfronted dotterel, (?) snipe, bustard, brolga or crane, white ibis, straw-necked ibis, yellow-billed spoon-bill, white-necked, white-fronted (faced) and (Rufous) night herons, black swan, green-headed (Chestnut) teal and grey teal, black, little black and little (Little Pied) cormorants, pelican, grey goshawk, Australian (Brown) goshawk, black-shouldered kite, peregrine falcon, nankeen kestrel, boobook and barn owls, the musk and little lorikeet, red-tailed black cockatoo (* or is it Glossy Black Cockatoo?) white cockatoo, gang gang, galah, cockatiel or quarrion, king parrot, red-backed (rumped) parrot, crimson and eastern rosella, budgerigah, tawny frogmouth, dollar bird or roller, (Laughing) kookaburra, sacred kingfisher, rainbow bee-eater, spine-tailed swift (White-throated Needletail), pallid, fan-tailed and golden (Shining) bronze cuckoo and welcome swallow, tree martin, fairy martin, brown flycatcher (Jacky Winter), white-throated fly-eater

(Gerygone?), restless fly-catcher, (?) fantail, black and white fantail (Willie Wagtail), black-faced cuckoo shrike, caterpillar eater (Cicadabird) or (?) white-winged triller, grey-crowned babbler, white-fronted chat, reed warbler, little field wren (any guesses), little (Yellow) and yellow-tailed (rumped) thornbill, superb blue (Fairy-) wren, masked, white-browed and dusky wood-swallows, grey shrike thrush, grey butcher bird, (Crested) shrike tit, golden and rufous whistlers, orange-winged tree-runner (Varied Sittella), brown and white-throated tree-creepers, grey-breasted silvery (Silvereye) mistletoe bird, spotted diamond bird (Pardalote), red-tipped (Striated) pardalote, soldier bird (Noisy Miner), red-wattle bird, diamond sparrow (Firetail), zebra finch, plume- (plum) headed finch, waxbill (Red-browed Firetail), satin bower-bird, olive-backed oriel (Oriole), crow (* or is it Little Raven?), (Australian) raven, white-winged chough and pipit."

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SPOTTED PARDALOTE BUILDS IN CHILD'S SAND-CASTLE

Fred Ordish

In September 1985, a European diplomat, living opposite my house, had a truck-load of sand deposited in his backyard in Baudin St. Forrest, ACT for his 2 boys to play in.

The boys arranged the pile of sand into a cone shape about 1.5 metres high and constructed roads in spiral form along which to move their toy cars and trucks. With sand buckets they inverted compressed sand into castles surrounding the sand pile.

On 26 October 1985, a pair of Spotted Pardalotes *(Pardalotus punctatus)* began excavating a hole in the north side of the sandhill which had been tightly compressed by the recent heavy rain.

Despite the movement and noise of the 2 boys playing around the sand pile, the Pardalotes continued to scratch out their nesting burrow about 45cm above ground level, with little apparent dislocation of their building activities. Even adults could stand within a metre of the burrow and watch the birds enter their entrance hole. The boys

introduced a hose into their play, and formed a 60 cm wide pool in the south-side of the sand pile with water flowing round past the northern side. The small coloured toy vehicles were left all over the sand pile day and night but did not disturb the birds.

The Pardalotes perhaps responded to the sand and water as though it formed part of a river bank which is their usual nesting habitat. Their lack of fear of humans was truly remarkable. Three young fledged from this nest. The birds repeated the nest in 1986.

It is not uncommon for these birds to be confiding at their nest - Ed.

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UNUSUAL ROOSTING OF A TREECREEPER

OHK Spate

We live in the well-wooded inner suburb of Turner, and first became aware of the existence of "Creep", as we call her, about the end of April 1985. Coming in the front door one night, my hair was brushed by what I thought was a large moth or a bat, entering the house, it turned out to be a small dark bird, we got the bird out, without too much damage to itself or the furnishings. We have since not been allowed to forget her. On succeeding nights we found that sometimes when we left the house after dark the bird flew ahead of us to a large *Eucalyptus melliodora* only a few metres from the front door and fully illuminated by the porch light. At first we were charmed, but she was distinctly careless in her toilet habits. Bryan FitzGerald identified the bird as a female White-throated Treecreeper, *(Cormobates* or *Climacteris leucophaea)* and agreed that this was odd behaviour, but thought that about mid-June or early July she would find a mate and reside elsewhere.

June came, and "Creep" stayed out late, perhaps all night, or even for one period of twelve nights but thereafter she returned. Since then she has come in every night, about 8-9pm, and installed herself in the dark well angle of the high porch; the intervals between the bricks are enough to give her a firm grip. Normally she pays no attention to our comings and goings, staying as if glued to the wall in her corner, but when visitors are leaving she sometimes flies off to the gum tree until this invasion of her privacy is over, staying there in full view until quiet is restored. After some 20 months of this, it seemed appropriate to entice her away. A piece of cloth was placed on her roost spot, thus discouraged she recently left.

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MORE PARLIAMENTARY BIRDS

Doug Ross

In a note in the January 1985 issue of *CBN* 10(1),12-17 I commented on the rich avifauna of the area of 9 hectares or so bounded by the Lake shore, the rose garden path, the National Library and the High Court. 73 species were listed as seen or heard in or about the area over a period of about eight years.

Much of the area has now disappeared under the National Science Centre and there is talk of further development. In view of that and in an anticipatory spirit (for those who like this sort of thing) *"Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit".* I list below the further species seen to date (1 December 1986) and those with changed status. The new buildings will, no doubt, have their uses and attractions. It seems a pity, nonetheless, that they should be the vehicle for destructive pressures on an area in the heart of the city that can, over time, produce at least 83 species.

ADDITIONAL SPECIES

Latham's Snipe *(Gallinago hardwickii)*
Diamond Dove *(Geopelia cuneata)*
Cockatiel *(Nymphicus hollandicus)*
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *(Chrysococcyx basalis)*
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo *(Chrysococcyx lucidus)*
Barn Owl *(Tyto alba)*
Restless Flycatcher *(Myiagra inquieta)*
White-throated Gerygone *(Gerygone olivacea)*
Olive-backed Oriole *(Oriolus sagittatus)*
Grey Currawong *(Strepera versicolor)*

SPECIES ORIGINALLY SEEN OVERFLYING AND SINCE SEEN ON THE GROUND OR IN TREES

Sacred Ibis *(Threskiornis aethiopica)* (feeding on lawns converted into swamp by sprinker system failures).
Brown Falcon *(Falco berigora)*
Black-shouldered Kite *(Elanus notatus)*

The up-dated numbers are thus:

Species seen on ground or in trees	73
Species seen overflying	8
Species heard at a distance	2

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COG OUTING AT KIOLOA NSW

Kay Hahne

20 plus members, their families and friends of COG went to Kioloa on an outing the weekend of August 30/31 1986. We stayed in the cabins at the Edith and Joy London Foundation, the ANU Field Station. A total of 88 bird species were seen at the campout.

The open grassy paddocks and yards around the farmhouse and cabins provided good viewing for such birds as Welcome Swallows *(Hirundo neoxena),* Tree *(Cecropis nigricans)* and Fairy Martins *(C. ariel) all* at once (nice for comparison), a flock of 16 Topknot Pigeons *(Lophalaimus antarcticus)* flying over in the same direction at about the same time early both mornings, at least 2 adults and 1 immature White-bellied Sea Eagles *(Haliaeetus leucogaster),* a pair of resident Australian Kestrels *(Falco cenchroides),* a Whistling Kite *(Haliastur sphenurus)* and several Cattle Egrets *(Ardeola ibis).*

As we entered the woods back of the farm we heard the calls of several honeyeaters - Lewin's *(Meliphaga lewinii),* Yellow-faced *(Lichenostomus chrysops)* and Fuscous *(L. fuscus);* and some managed a glance of the Eastern Whipbird *(Psophodes olivaceus).* Not so for the Superb Lyrebird *(Menura novaehollandiae)* in the far distance or for the Beautiful Firetail *(Emblema bella)* so very close. I think we all memorized its call.

We had a beautiful view of a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *(Chrysococcyx basalis)* sitting in the sun. Both it and the Fan-tailed Cuckoo *(Cuculus pyrrhophanus)* were calling. And there was much excitement over Rose Robins *(Petroica rosea),* with three males in different locations. Another party decided they spotted a Pink Robin *(P. rodinogaster).* Other good finds were Noisy Friar birds *(Philemon corniculatus)* back early and a Grey Butcherbird *(Cracticus torquatus).*

At the beach the first day we were all rewarded with a long and good comparative view of a single Black-browed Albatross *(Diomedea melanophrys)* and several Australasian Gannets *(Morus serrator).* The albatross flew very low over the water, barely flapping a wing tip, gently wheeling just up above the horizon and dropping down again. The gannets, flew much higher above the water, showing much more white on their body and wings (with large black tips) and dive straight into the water from a fair height up.

The Friday night was quite pleasant, weather wise, but Saturday pm it turned bitter cold. Nevertheless some went spotlighting hoping for a Powerful or Sooty Owl, but no luck, only a large, dark shape, winging away, unidentified. We did hear a Boobook *(Ninox novaeseelandiae)* and those who stayed even longer saw two Sugar Gliders *(Petaurus breviceps)* and a Tawny Frogmouth *(Podargus strigoides)* ar collected some leeches.

Many thanks to Richard Mason and Brendon Lepschi who organised and led us and routed us up at 6.00am in spite of the cold and frost on Sunday morning. There were many species of flowering shrubs and trees to be seen as well.

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MISIDENTIFIED AS DANGEROUS

Philip Veerman

For the several minutes taken to walk the length of the sports field near the Chifley Primary School and shops, on my way home from work one late 1984 afternoon, I observed many Australian Magpie-larks *(Grallina cyanoleuca)* calling vigorously and flying towards a point near the shops (the direction I was heading). Common Starlings *(Sturnus vulgaris)* were also assembling there and later, joined by a pair of Common Mynas *(Acridotheres tristis)* and Willie Wagtails *(Rhipidura leucophrys),* it was clear that they were all mobbing a brown object on the grass. They were making alarm calls and diving at, but not too close to this thing, while some were just fussing about the sidelines.

Various alternatives were considered. Had they grounded a brown falcon or cornered a cat or small dog? On approaching the scene, I noticed that the object wasn't moving. Also the mobbing resembled attacks birds make on a snake. Indeed the object appeared quite reptilian. A snake or even a blue-tongued lizard would be unlikely there. The birds were reluctant to stop their mobbing barrage until I walked over and picked up, an apparently poised and ready to strike, baseball glove, lying fingers up, on the ground. The stitching, which made the glove look so reptilian presumably had fooled all the birds. I placed the glove on a post so that it no longer looked dangerous and so the owner could find it. The birds then, slowly dispersed.

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CHOUGHS MOB FOX

Ian M. Taylor

On 16 October 1986, at Gungahlin Hill, I saw about eight White-winged Choughs *(Corcorax melanorhamphos)* chasing a fox *(Vulpes vulpes)* through the undergrowth. They chased it about 100m whereupon three Australian Magpies *(Gymnorhina tibicen)* took over and chased it out of sight.

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UNUSUAL FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF PIED CURRAWONG

Brendan J. Lepschi

In May 1986 I observed a young Pied Currawong *(Strepera graculina)* feeding on Dandelion *(Taraxacum* sp.) stalks, in suburban Weston. The bird nipped off the seed-bearing head, discarded it, then broke the stalk off at its base and swallowed that whole. It repeated the procedure on a few more plants before flying off. This behaviour is unusual in that the bird chose the stalk, apparently the plant's least nutritious part, rather than the leaves or seed head.

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PIED CURRAWONG; THIEF

Philip Veerman

In December 1983 at Nariel (N.E. Victoria), I observed an Australian Hobby *(Falco longipennis)* using perch hunting and direct flying attacks to capture airborne Green Monday Cicadas *(Cyclochila australasiae),* returning to the perch to eat them. A Pied Currawong arrived at a lower branch and fluttered up to snatch a cicada from under the Hobby's foot, it then departed. The falcon showed no obvious reaction, there was no shortage of cicadas.

PIED CURRAWONG INTRODUCED BIRDS

Ian M. Taylor

The Pied Currawong is often criticised for being a predator of the nests of native birds. It may be, however, that the species also checks the numbers of "unwanted" introduced birds as part of its varied diet.

On 12 November 1985, I observed an adult currawong disembowelling a Common Starling *(Sturnus vulgaris),* on the ground at the ANU, Acton. Four juvenile currawongs (that had left the nest some days before) looked on from above. The devoured starling was a juvenile, ready to leave the nest. At that time, many young starlings were observed near the entrance of nest holes, making them easy prey.

John Gibson has informed me that he has seen adult currawongs carrying juvenile House Sparrows *(Passer domesticus).* A study of the diet of Pied Currawongs in the urban environment may reveal that they take many of the "introduced pest" species, as food, simply because they are common, and so, on balance, it may not be as harmful as popularly considered.

Currawongs regularly prey on small birds and may be seen carrying then in their feet. They have already been reported to take young Blackbirds *(Turdus merula)* and Goldfinches *(Carduelis carduelis),* by "G. Tibicen" *(1978 CBN* 4(2),26), who suggests they be trained to feed on introduced species! - Ed.

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MAGPIE ATTACK ON SPARROW

Joe Barr

As I was leaving Northbourne House, Turner, on 28 September 1985, I heard an unusual noise coming from the resident House Sparrow population. Looking up I saw an Australian Magpie *(Gymnorhina tibicen)* flying down the north face of the building carrying a squawking, struggling House Sparrow in its feet. As the pair passed the second floor, the Sparrow either escaped or was released and flew off across MacArthur Avenue pursued by the Magpie. I lost sight of the birds as they passed through the intervening trees.

Magpies have attempted to breed in the area for at least the last five years and a successful nest was built outside the NCDC Headquarters in 1983. Ravens *(Corvus coronoides)* and Pied Currawongs also attempt to breed in the vicinity of Macarthur House and the spectacular territorial battles that take place over the Northbourne/ MacArthur/ Wakefield Avenue cross roads have increased in intensity over the years. This may be the reason why none of the species appeared to breed successfully in 1984/85 season.

In 1985 the Magpies returned in about mid-September but at the time of the observation above, only passing Ravens and Currawongs had been seen. Normally, Magpie aggression in the area seem to be confined to the above two species and it is unusual for other birds or even pedestrians to be attacked. This is the first time I have seen or heard of a Magpie grasping another bird in its feet.

I suggest that this behaviour is more likely food based than aggression based by analogy with the Currawong report above. Whilst Currawongs often eat smaller birds this is unusual for Magpies, although Magpies frequently chase other birds, and starlings and rosellas usually beat a hasty retreat, with alarm calls - Ed.

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A TALE OF MAGPIES

B. & L. Balfour

For the past few years we have been visited regularly for food handouts by two Australian Magpies *(Gymnorhina tibicen)* whose territory is Calvert Street, (Ainslie) park. In the breeding season these visits have been on a "many times a day" basis, and considerable quantities of food have been uplifted and transported to the park. These relationships creep up on one, and we cannot recall precisely when this association commenced nor how it began.

The male Magpie is without fear of us and will take food from within inches or from the hand if offered. If we don't notice him waiting on the top of the electricity pole at the bottom of the garden, he will swoop down to the kitchen window to remind us. The female will only approach the food table if we move away from it. If impatient she will position herself on the edge of the nearby garage and peer at us in the kitchen.

For some time they were unsuccessful in raising young. In 1985 two young were produced, of which one was injured by a cat. We took it to the Wildlife Foundation, it recovered and was later released.

The second young survived and on reaching maturity was not evicted from the park by her parents, she has remained with them to form a threesome of callers, expecting food. Like her father she has no fear of us, although she is slightly less confident. This bird will often give us a powerful, prolonged, rollicking carol outside the back door. Sometimes the father will join her, equally powerfully, to make it a duet. Occasionally her mother completes a trio.

This year (1986) the pair produced two more young. The feeding of the new arrivals while in the nest was shared conscientiously by the three adult birds, and they have continued to share this responsibility since the young left the nest at the end of October. The young are being gradually familiarised with our immediate surroundings by their three minders, and we expect soon to be formally introduced to them.

But what of the future? Three birds sharing one territory might be alright - but we wonder whether the original pair will allow their three offspring to remain in the area, even if we supply a take-away food service.

We admire our three friends for all sorts of reasons - their spirit, their persistence, their intelligence, and their devotion to the young. On two occasions the male has contracted some form of infection which has resulted in a large swelling around one eye, in consequence apparently losing half his sight for some weeks. On each occasion we have feared for him, but he has battled on and thankfully the trouble has cleared up.

Of more concern was a broken leg. In December 1985 we were distressed to see, as he flew, his left leg dangling

uselessly. It was obvious that it was broken at the top of the tibia. There was nothing we could do as any attempt to assist would only have made matters worse. For some weeks, he came to us each day for food, as he had always done, hopping on one leg and dragging the other. In between he spent much time resting on the roof of the next door house.

But very gradually, we noticed that where his leg had previously swung uncontrollably as he flew, it began to assume a suggestion, and then a semblance, of rigidity. After a time he was able to maintain some sort of balance at the food table by using his damaged leg as a support. Then he began to shuffle in an awkward, peg-leg fashion. Later his awkwardness became less pronounced, and then, one memorable day, just for a moment, he supported himself on his bad leg and gave a lightning scratch to his head with the other. He has continued to improve. Now, (Nov 1986) most of the time, he walks a little stiffly but with only a suggestion of a limp. He has almost complete mobility. Occasionally he favours his injured leg, which indicates some discomfort and he is not able to fully retract that leg, so that in flight he is easily recognisable. For all practical purposes he has recovered, and during that time he fathered two more offspring. Such is nature. - (When you're lucky enough to have human benefactors! - Ed).

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WHY A RED-RUMPED PARROT?

Ian M. Taylor

The brilliant red rump of the male Red-rumped Parrot *(Psephotus haematonotus),* is usually concealed beneath his folded wings. This spring I noticed several pairs inspecting nest holes on the ANU campus, Acton. While the female investigated the inside of the hole, the male perched near the opening. Instead of folding his wings across his back in the normal way, he held them down low along his flanks, exposing the red patch on his rump. The brilliant plumage was very conspicuous against the greys and greens of the vegetation. This suggested to me that the bird uses his red rump as a territorial signalling device.

In *'Australian Parrots'* (2nd ed, 1981, Lansdowne), Forshaw refers to what may be the same display, as a courtship display, but doesn't mention this particular aspect - Ed.

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