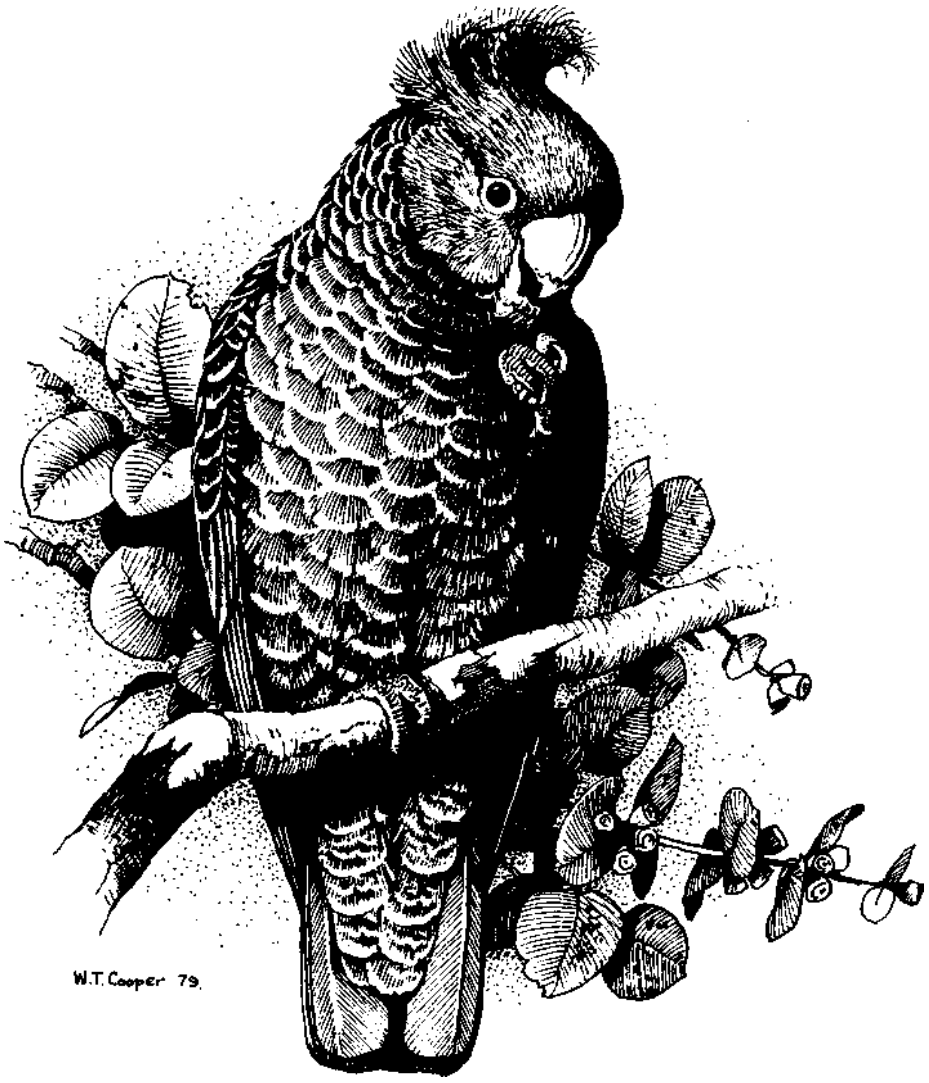
ISSN 0314-8211

CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

Volume 17
Number 3
September 1992

Registered by Australia Post - publication No NBH 0255



CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP INC.

P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608

Committee Members
(1992)

		Work	Home
President	Bruce Lindenmayer	288 5957	288 5957
Vice-President	Jenny Bounds		288 7802
Secretary	Robyn Elliott	272 3172	254 5700
Assistant Secretary	Grahame Elliott	276 0107	254 5700
Treasurer	Noel Luff	245 6240	288 3291
Editor, Canberra Bird Notes	David Purchase	258 2252	258 2252
Assistant Editor, Canberra Bird Notes	Grahame Clark		254 1279
Editor, Gang-Gang	Barbara Allan	277 3532	254 6520
Publications	Tony Lawson	264 3125	288 9430
Exhibitions	Ann McKenzie	—	288 0167
Member	Richard Schodde	242 1693	281 3732

The following people represent Canberra Ornithologists Group in various ways although they may not be formally on the Committee:

	Cedric Bear		258 3169
ADP Support			
Australian Bird Count	Chris Davey	242 1600	254 6324
Barren Grounds Representative	Tony Lawson	264 3125	288 9430
Conservation Council Representatives	Bruce Lindenmayer		288 5957
	David Pfanner	—	247 7572
	Philip Veerman		231 4041
Database Manager	Ian Baird	242 1600	248 5424
Librarian	Graham Browning		288 9450
Records Officer	Malcolm Fyfe		254 3310
Shopfront Coordinator	Sarah Thomas		281 4982

Conservation Subcommittee:
Bruce Lindenmayer (Convener - 288 5957), Bill Handke, David Pfanner, Jo Vandermark

Fund Raising and Membership Subcommittee:
Noel Luff (Convener - 288 3291), Jenny Bounds, Sue Webb

(Continued inside back cover)

NOTES ON AN ISOLATED RURAL POPULATION OF HOUSE SPARROWS

Brendan J. Lepschi

The House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* is a common introduced species throughout much of eastern Australia and is closely associated with areas of human settlement such as towns and cities. It also occurs in rural areas. but again is largely restricted to human habitation (Blakers et. al 1984). In the Canberra region small populations exist some distance from major towns (such as in the Tinderry Ranges), but these are all closely tied to human settlement (B.J. Lepschi unpubl.).

On 27 February 1992. about 1 km south-west of Taemas Bridge on the eastern extremity of the Burrinjuck Reservoir *(c.* 18 km south of Yass, NSW), I located a small breeding population of House Sparrows. During the two or so hours I spent in the area. I observed only four birds (one adult male and three female-plumaged birds); another two or three birds may have been present, although this was not confirmed. The birds frequented an area on the east bank of the reservoir about 100 m long. extending further eastwards into pasture land for about 30 m. and seemed reluctant to leave this area. Most of the surrounding vegetation has been cleared, the only remaining trees being scattered (mostly dead) River Red Gums *Eucalyptus camaldulensis,* with some (introduced) Weeping Willows *Salix babylonica.* No understorey exists. The river/reservoir banks and adjacent pasture are heavily infested with various introduced weeds although some native grasses and herbs remain. These plants and associated insects would provide the sparrows with an abundant food supply. with water readily available nearby.

Breeding was confirmed by a single female bird seen carrying food (a grasshopper) into a nest hollow; the bird flew up to the hollow, perched briefly at the entrance, entered, and re-emerged (minus food item) *c.* 10 seconds later. The nest hollow was situated in a vertical branch of a dead River Red Gum at the water's edge, about 15 m above ground, with the hole itself about 5-10 cm in diameter. Numerous other hollows were present in other (living and dead) River Red Gums. providing an ample supply of nest sites, although some competition from other hole-nesting species seen in the area, such as Red-rumped Parrots *Psephotus haematonotus* and Striated Pardalotes *Pardalotus striatus,* could be expected. Sometime later a female sparrow was observed "soliciting" (unsuccessfully) to a male, with her body more or less prostrate, rump exposed, tail down and wings drooped and fluttering.

This breeding record would also appear to be somewhat late for this species, with the bulk of breeding activity usually finished by late February (I.M. Taylor pers. comm., Canberra Ornithologists Group 1985).

The population is also rather isolated; the nearest areas of human settlement are four homesteads 2 to 2.5 km away to the north, south. east and west. All of these could be expected to support populations of House Sparrows. The closest major populations of this species are in the towns of Yass. Murrumbateman and Wee Jasper,

all 18 km to the north, east and south-west respectively. The ability of this species to survive, and apparently also breed, some distance from human habitation suggests that its spread into non-urban areas should be monitored.

References

Blakers, M., Davies, S.J.J.F.. and Reilly, P.N. (1984). The Atlas of Australian Birds. Melbourne University Press: Melbourne.

Canberra Ornithologists Group. (1985). A Field List of the Birds of Canberra and District. Canberra Ornithologists Group: Canberra.

BJ. Lepschi, 24 Fullwood Street, WESTON ACT 2611

****

ADDITIONAL SIGHTINGS OF THE COMMON MYNA

Chris Davey

During July 1990 a survey of the numbers and distribution of the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* was conducted in Canberra (Davey 1991, *Canberra Bird Notes* 16: 41-50). July was chosen as the month in which to do the survey in an attempt to minimise counting individual birds more than once - during July most birds would be strongly territorial in preparation for the forthcoming breeding season. A survey conducted outside the breeding season may do little to indicate the distribution of the species as the observations may include those of young birds passing through a suburb.

A conclusion from the survey was that Common Mynas are widely distributed in southern Canberra but are found in only a few locations in Belconnen. Given that there does not appear to be any difference in food or nesting sites for mynas between Belconnen and southern Canberra there is every possibility that Belconnen is still being actively colonised.

Having lived in the Belconnen suburb of Holt and worked at the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology at "Gungahlin" for the past 18 years, I have had reason to get to know the area reasonably well. Recently Common Mynas have been seen in many places in Belconnen that I have not seen them in before. None of these new locations were picked up in the survey even though the areas were searched. Although many of the observations may be of transient birds it is worth documenting the observations in case they become permanent residents. The observations are listed in approximate geographic order.

27 October 1991. Two mynas seen at Calvary Hospital and were present for a couple of months.

4 October 1991. Two mynas seen flying over the Barton Highway from Kaleen disappeared into the woodland on Gungahlin Hill.

27 October 1991. A single bird seen at the Barton Highway end of Bellenden Street in Mitchell.

29 October 1991. Two mynas recorded at "Gungahlin" homestead. Single mynas were subsequently recorded there on 4 and 16 December 1991.

23 January 1992. Two mynas seen flying over the Barton Highway from Kuringa Drive towards Hall.

5 October 1991. A single myna seen flying over Drake-Brockman Drive from Higgins into open paddocks.

14 September 1991. Two mynas were in my garden (shock. horror) in Holt with a maximum of three present on and off until early December. In early November two were seen with nesting material.

2 March 1992. Seven mynas were seen feeding in the front garden of a house in Lindrum Crescent, Holt.

11 July 1991. David and Shirley Purchase reported seeing seven Common Mynas in east Melba (1991, *Canberra Bird Notes* 16: 50). They have since seen two birds roosting with a small number (<10) Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* at Orchard Place, Melba between 4-14 October 1991 (D. Purchase pers. comm.).

20 October 1991. Two mynas seen for the first time feeding on a front lawn at Burns Circuit. McKellar (B. Moore pers. comm).

27 February 1992. Two mynas were seen flying over William Slim Drive into southern McKellar.

C. Davey, 24 Bardsley Place, HOLT ACT 2615

****

SUNBATHING (7) BY BLACKBIRDS AND PIED CURRAWONGS

Rosemary Metcalf

In my garden there are two spots where I frequently observe birds lying in a spread-eagled trance-like state. The sites are characterised by a sunny aspect and unvegetated ground (bare or dried leaf matter).

The only birds observed using these sites have been male Blackbirds *Turdus merula* and Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* of unknown sex. At present (late November 1991) only one currawong is involved - a solitary bird which uses my Blackwood *Wattle Acacia melanoxylon* for perching, and prey dissection and storage. (Prey observed includes Black Rats *Rattus rattus* and young Blackbirds.) I have assumed this currawong to be a male. attendant on an incubating female in a nearby nest (Schodde and Tidemann 1986). This is based on the fact that it stores food on the wattle for short periods, and when it reclaims the food, it flies off with it in the same direction each time, which suggests that it is one of a nesting pair.

I originally thought the birds were "anting" - a curious piece of behaviour in which birds allow ants to swarm over their bodies, or they apply ants to their bodies (Simmons 1964). Twice in November, at about midday, I surprised the supine currawong and immediately inspected the spot in which it had been lying. On the first occasion there was no sign of ants, although there were a couple of nests of small black ants to one side not showing much activity despite the warmth of the day. On the second occasion, examination of the site revealed one small black ant carrying what on brief inspection before I dropped it appeared to be a shaving of a feather shaft. In the one to two minutes I spent examining the spot, two small black ants foraged across it.

Maybe *the* bird took off with all the ants on it or there had not been time for them to gather before I turned up. but it seems to me that the attraction of both spots was heat, both from the sun direct and radiant heat from the ground. Therefore. I think the birds were "sunning" as described by Simmons (1964), and more recently by Lepschi (1989). Maybe such heat moves parasites around but I also theorise it could be a way of restoring energy to birds hunting to feed a family with no time to feed themselves. This theory received a setback when the Currawong was observed swallowing bits of prey before taking off in the usual direction with the remainder. Maybe it subsequently regurgitated them to the female, maybe not

References

Lepschi. B.J. (1989). Sunbathing by an Australian Magpie. *Canberra Bird Notes* 14: 7

Schodde, R. and Tidemann, S. (editors) (1986). Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds. (2nd edition) Reader's Digest: Sydney.

Simmons. K.E.L. (1964). Feather maintenance. *In:* A new dictionary of birds (ed. A. Landsborough Thomson) p. 278-286. Nelson: London.

Rosemary Metcalf, 18 Hemmant Street, O'CONNOR ACT 2601

MORPHS, PHASES AND FORMS: SEMANTIC OR FACTUAL CONFUSION?

David McDonald

On the Queen's Birthday long weekend, 1992, members of the Canberra Ornithologists Group were observing Eastern Reef Egrets *Ardea sacra* feeding on ocean-side rocks in Ben Boyd National Park, NSW. A member of our group noted that the birds were dark coloured and, recalling having read about white Eastern Reef Egrets being described as "white morphs", asked the excellent question: Just what is the meaning of the term "morph"?

I had a copy of *the Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds* (Slater et. al 1989) with me. In describing the Eastern Reef Egret. that source of information refers to the "dark phase" and "white phase" of the species. Does this mean that the bird changes between the dark and white forms, as the word "phase" suggests? This begged the question: What is the difference, in ornithological usage, between the terms "morph", "phase" and, indeed, "form"?

Morph, Phase and Form

In biological usage, the term "morph" has a specific meaning. The word was introduced by Julian Huxley in 1955. Writing in the journal *Heredity.* he presented the issue in the following words (Huxley 1955: p. 3; his emphases):

> "I propose to introduce the term *morphism* and its derivatives, *morphic* and *morph. I make* no apology for this. Brief terms for genetic polymorphic variance are badly needed; *form is* too general, and *phase,* though sometimes used, especially by ornithologists and mammalogists, for colour-morphs, has other connotations, and is, I think luckily, not generally accepted ..."
>
> "I restrict the term *morphism* to genetic polymorphism ... in which (usually sharply distinct) genetic variants or *morphs* coexist in temporary or permanent balance within a single interbreeding population in a single spacial region, and in such frequencies that the rarer cannot be due solely to mutation, or to the spread of selectively neutral mutants. It is important to have a term applicable in this restricted sense, since the evolutionary implications of other phenomena often loosely included under the heading of polymorphism - geographical, seasonal. and all non-genetic cases. as well as mere high recombinational variance. whether with or without previous hybridisation, are very different."

This rather long quotation justifies close study. It is quite clear just what Huxley intended by introducing the word "morph". A term was created to remove the confusion that follows the imprecise use of language.

This concept is pinned down further in the glossary in volume 1 of the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds.* There "morph" is defined as "one of two or more well-defined forms in the same population of a species". "Form" is defined as a "neutral term indicating an individual variant or a taxonomical unit" (Marchant and Higgins 1990: pp. 38-39). (It is worth noting that volume 1 of the *Handbook of the Birds of Europe the Middle East and North Africa - Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Cramp 1977: p. 34) uses similar definitions.)

The third term that I have used in the title of this paper, "phase". has a quite different meaning. The *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* does not use or define the term. According to the second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, however. "phase", in the zoological context, means *"a particular period of an animal's We,* distinguished by a characteristic form. colour. or type of behaviour" (my emphasis).

What we have, then, is the term "morph" to serve as a distinctive label for the differences between the white and the dark forms of the Eastern Reef Egret. quite independently of other variations which may represent different stages in the lifelong development of a particular bird (e.g. from juvenile to immature to adult); or annual cycles of plumage changes; or genetically and geographically distinct sub-species.

The term "morph" is used to refer not only to plumage colour differences, as in this example. but also to a multitude of variations, both easily observable ("phaneromorphism") and not so easily observable ("cryptomorphism"). In *Homo sapiens,* according to Huxley (1955: p. 33), "one universal morphism is that of the blood-groups". Another is red/green colour-blindness. Back to the avifauna, in the cuckoos we have mimetic egg-colour morphism: "eggs of cuckoos ... often mimic those of main hosts, individual birds laying different egg types to match" (Schodde and Tidemann 1986: p. 625).

Two Southeast Australian Bird Species and Five Australian Authorities

It is instructive to observe how these three terms are used by the writers upon whom many of us depend for our information about the bird life around us. In south-eastern Australia we have two bird species whose colour morphism is both distinctive and well-known. I refer to the Eastern Reef Egret and the Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae.* Both species have grey and white forms or. more precisely (and following Huxley's usage), grey and white morphs. The three terms "morph", "phase" and "form" appear among the reference books (listed by year of publication of the most recent editions) as follows.

Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds (Schodde and Tidemann 1986).

This is the oldest and most confusing of the five sources cited here. With regard to the Eastern Reef Egret, the caption to the photograph of a grey morph bird describes it as the "grey phase". The main body of the text refers, however, to "two forms" of the Eastern Reef Egret. The editors are more

consistent in describing the Grey Goshawk. All references there are to two colour "phases". No mention is made, with regard to this species. of "form" or "morph".

Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds (Slater et. al 1989) With regard to the two species under consideration, this book is consistent, using the term "phase" throughout. We read of the Eastern Reef Egret having a "dark phase" and a "light" and "white" phase. Similarly, the Grey Goshawk is described in terms of its "grey phase" and its "white phase". (With regard to other species, however, the term "form" is used in combination with "phase" and "race". The Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae is* an example.)

Field Guide to the Birds of Australia: A Book of Identification (Simpson and Day 1989) This is the newest of the pocket-size Australian field guides and uses Huxley's terminology. We read of the "two colour morphs" of both species, the grey morph and the white morph. (No definition of "morph" is provided in the glossary.) This usage is in contrast to the second large format edition of their book (Simpson and Day 1986) which used "phase" with regard to each species.

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (Marchant and Higgins 1990) Volume 1 includes an entry on the Eastern Reef Egret (but not on the Grey Goshawk which will be covered in a later volume) and uses the term "morph" exclusively.

A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia (Pizzey 1991) Like Slater's field guide, this uses the term "phase" throughout.

These various usages are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of usages

Source	*Eastern Reef Egret*	*Grey Goshawk*
Schodde & Tidemann. 1986	phase; form	phase
Slater, 1989	phase	phase
Simpson and Day, 1989	morph	morph
Marchant & Higgins 1990	morph	n/a
Pizzey, 1991	phase	phase

Discussion

Each of the publications (except perhaps for the Handbook) is widely used by amateur bird observers, including beginners. The variation in terminology illustrated above is, I suggest, an impediment to learning about and understanding our native birds. All of the authors undoubtedly know which species exhibit colour morphism. The use of the words "phase" and "form" to refer to these morphs introduces confusion with: (a) different plumage forms of a species in different locations, i.e. sub-species or races; and (b) different plumage forms of an individual bird at different stages in its life cycle. Assuming that our knowledge of the plumage colour variations of most species is reasonably complete. and we can differentiate morphic differences from other sources of variation between birds within a particular species, one may conclude that we do not have a confusion of fact. The authorities are presenting us with a confusion in word usage.

It may be argued that "phase". in accepted ornithological usage, has both the everyday speech meaning of changes which occur over time plus the quite distinct technical meaning of Huxley's "morph". This may have been the case in the past. but it seems inappropriate now that "morph" has been with us. and widely used in both technical and popular contexts. for many years.

Perhaps the authors of the field guides, conscious that their readers are, at least in part, amateur birders, took the view that "morph" is too technical a term. one which would confuse their readers. If this is so, I suggest that they reconsider their positions. All field guides include technical material not familiar to people innocent of birding.
The nomenclature of the parts of a bird and of its life cycle are familiar examples. Most field guides and the less portable reference books include glossaries and/or sections which have the specific aim of assisting users to understand the terminology. This is the place to define "morph", "form" and "phase". along with the other technical terms used. To do so is not elitism - it is an aid to understanding.

I wonder if the next editions of Pizzey's and Slater's field guides and of the *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds* will follow the lead of Simpson and Day, and Marchant and Higgins. and clearly differentiate morphs, phases and forms?

References

Cramp. S. (chief editor) (1977). Handbook of the birds of Europe. the Middle East. and North Africa: the birds of the Western Palearctic. Volume 1. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Huxley. J. (1955). "Morphism and evolution". *Heredity* 9: 1-52.

Marchant, S. and Higgins, P. (co-ordinators) (1990). Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 1. Oxford University Press: Melbourne.

Pizzey. G. (1991). A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia. (revised edition) Collins: Sydney.

Schodde, R. and Tidemann, S. (editors) (1986). Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds. (2nd edition) Reader's Digest: Sydney.

Simpson. K. and Day, N. (1986). The Birds of Australia: A Book of Identification. (second edition) Lloyd O'Neil: Melbourne.

Simpson, K. and Day, N. (1989). Field Guide to the Birds of Australia: A Book of Identification. Viking O'Neil: Melbourne.

Slater, P.. Slater. P. and Slater, R. (1989). The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds (revised edition) Weldon: Sydney.

David McDonald, PO Box 1355, WODEN ACT 2600

****

COMMENT BY RICHARD SCHODDE

David McDonald has made an excellent and correct case for use of the term "morph" to describe the colour *"phases"* of birds in adulthood. The term, coined by Huxley, is used exclusively for such phases or forms by all competent ornithologists in technical papers and handbooks. Thus Marchant and Higgins employ it in this sense alone in the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds.*

Strict use of so technical a term in more general texts for not just the amateur, but also the beginner, is more debatable, particularly if those texts lack a glossary. On top of "species", "genus", and the various other technical terms needed to describe plumages and extremities precisely, "morph" comes as yet another item of ornithological jargon for the beleaguered novice to assimilate. If it can be introduced gently, its way paved by such equivalent but looser explanatory terms as "form" or "phase" (providing these latter terms are used in the correct context), then I can see advantage in the confusion.

To sum up, the term "morph" alone should be used exclusively to refer to the adult colour "phases" of birds in the more technical literature. In literature for the general public, however, I believe that greater flexibility in employing the more familiar "phase" or "form" is justified, providing that the meaning is clear. There it is not so much the term as the context that provides the information - and education. This was the approach that Sonia Tidemann and I took in the *"Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds"*.

****

ON COMING HOME

Martin A. Butterfield

My wife and I recently had the pleasure of a posting to Ottawa. Since our return I have been interested to record the learning processes in getting back to bush birding in Bruce, ACT. I have said processes, because I think I have had to re-learn the birds and they have had to learn (or re-learn) about us.

Before leaving I used to regularly see about 23 species each week in our garden or the adjoining part of Gossan Hill in Bruce. Many of these bathed in our bird bath or dined on parrot food which I spread on a 60 cm diameter stump of a Red Stringybark *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha.* I also used to hand feed strips of Devon sausage to a number of Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen,* Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina,* and occasional Laughing Kookaburras *Dacelo novaeguineae.*

While we were away the bird bath entered a fractural condition: apparently "birds overbalanced it". Knowing the size of the bath, some friends have suggested this is incontrovertible evidence of thirsty emus *Dromaius novaehollandiae* on Gossan Hill. I doubt if the Rarities Panel will accept such circumstantial evidence. While we were away, I don't think the tenants of our house supplemented the diet of the avifauna to the same extent we did.

On returning in January 1992 the first thing to strike me was the chirping racket of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus.* These were almost totally absent from the area before we left: it is hard not to conclude that the completion of West Bruce has provided a corridor to allow their spread from Belconnen Town Centre. They were gratified to discover food on the stump.

Very few birds seemed to be around in the bush: an observation echoed later by a caller to the Hotline. Indeed, so few birds were evident on the first weekend of January that I concluded my observational skills had totally atrophied. Could I no longer recognise anything smaller than a Canada Goose *Branta canadensis as* a bird?

My systematic recording for the Garden Bird Survey revealed that things were not totally desperate. I was still seeing 19-25 species a week, and by 10 February have recorded 35 species. Most of those I would expect to see in summer have appeared. although some are less frequent than I remember (notably White-winged Choughs *Corcorax melanorhamphos,* which used to visit the stump feeder with great regularity and raucousness: they have only appeared once so far).

One Australian Magpie has appeared banging its beak on the glass door to demand Devon sausage. This was intriguing since the bird appeared to be in juvenile plumage, and thus could hardly be viewed as a previous client. Pied Currawongs have fed on the stump sometimes sharing it with the House Sparrows.

Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* have used the stump occasionally and once reacted very aggressively to the gang of sparrows who had previously been feeding there. (I didn't object to this in the slightest!) An unusual sighting has been a Common Bronzewing *Phaps elegans* feeding on the stump: while seen in the past they had never, to my knowledge, previously eaten off the stump.

A Canadian cylinder seed feeder was erected, largely from a spirit of experimentation, since it wasn't designed with parrots in mind. (In fact the salesperson from whom I acquired it was most impressed at parrots having a life outside aviaries.) I had expected that the sparrows would love this equipment, since their trans-pacific relatives had unfortunately made use of it in hordes. So far they don't seem to have worked out what the feeder is. The only users have been a Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica* (which may have been chomping on insects in the seed tray, rather than the seeds) and two Crimson Rosellas which ate spillage in the tray rather than attempting to extract seed from the cylinder. This effort also showed that the platform was too small for rosellas. requiring continued and robust use of the tail feathers to maintain balance.

A new bird bath has been installed in the same place as before, and is gradually gaining acceptance. Surprisingly, the greatest use seems to have occurred during thunderstorms. The heaviest use, in a storm, involved a mixed flock of four Superb Fairy-wrens *Malurus cyaneus.* two White-browed Scrubwrens *Sericornis frontalis,* a Grey *Fantail Rhipidura rufifrons,* and six Striated Thombills *Acanthiza lineata* diving in and out over a 10 minute period.

Martin A. Butterfield, 4/18 Jaeger Circuit, BRUCE ACT 2617

****

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

The question of whether it is beneficial, or not, to artificially feed birds in winter is often debated by bird watchers. Those in favour say that any extra food provided to the birds will enhance their survival by supplementing the diminished amount of natural food. Those against say that such birds end up dependent on hand-outs and will be unable to fend for themselves if there is an interruption to the hand-outs.

The *New Scientist* reported on a study carried out by Margaret Brittinghan and Stanley Temple of the University of Wisconsin and published in volume 63 of the *Journal of Field Ornithology*. The trial was carried out on two rural groups of Black- capped Chickadees *Parus atricapillus*. One group had been artificially fed for the past 25 winters and one had not. For a year neither group was fed in winter. The outcome was that both groups survived equally well. The researchers did, however, caution against drawing general conclusions from the study since chickadees are resident birds, and migratory birds flying into unfamiliar habitat for the winter may rely more on human hand-outs as may birds in urban or suburban habitats.

The report gives the number of people in the USA who feed birds on a regular basis as 82 million.

A recent article in the *Canberra Timues* reported a presentation by Monash University zoologist Barry Train. He believes that collecting firewood for fuel in Australia is an environmentally destructive activity which each year consumes more native timber than the woodchip industry (6.1 million tonnes versus 4.8 million tonnes according to the recent Resource Assessment Commission enquiry). Mr Train was speaking at a conference in Benalla which is trying to draw attention to the plight of the native box and ironbark woodlands. An estimated 85% of the woodland has been cleared since white settlement and about 33 to 40 per cent of the annual firewood collection came from what remains of the woodlands.

I can remember the days when the sellers of open fireplaces were using the "naturalness" of wood fires as a major selling point. Now it appears that not only do open fireplaces and other appliances that utilise firewood, contribute the major part of the smog that hangs over Canberra on a clear winter morning, but also the collection of wood is a major environmental problem, the size of which is only just being realised. The use of firewood is obviously not an ecologically sound method of heating.

Following on from the above item I recently read a report in the latest *Australian Bird Watcher* on the conservation status of the Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* near Armidale. This mentions that the birds need woodland containing ironbark and box species and that ironbark has a pivotal role in the ecology of the

Regent Honeyeater. These two species of tree are also favoured species for firewood so the Regent Honeyeater and people using bush firewood for open fires are direct ecological competitors. Does anybody know what trees Regent Honeyeaters favour in our area?

By the way, Andrew Ley and M. Williams who wrote the article, mention the importance of Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs) as places where remnant stands of ironbark can be found. They also state that a draft Greenways program which targets TSRs for the maintenance of corridors and habitats is being prepared by the NSW Tree Forum and Greening Australia. I previously wrote about the importance of TSRs for flora and fauna preservation in *Out and About* in September 1991.

Birds build nests in some strange locations. A very interesting one that recently came to my attention was in the wing of a A-300 Airbus. The observer who reported the event had boarded the aircraft and noticed on the mid-point of the wing "a small bird with yellow beak and legs; possibly of the Starling family". Within minutes it had been joined by another bird carrying a long twig which it took into the wing. By the time boarding was completed six trips had been made into the wing with nesting material. Eventually the aircraft completed boarding and the aircraft left to the distress of the birds. The aircraft had been parked for less than 40 minutes and the birds had decided in that time that it would make a good nest site and had started building. In a big aircraft like an Airbus **a** nest may not be dangerous but the thought of a nest being built in a single-engined aircraft and causing problems is a bit frightening.

The Bird Observers Club of Australia has found a way of dispersing Domestic Pigeons from a factory where their droppings were causing problems. They sold the factory manager a copy of their audio tape "Field Guide to Australian Birdsong No. 2" which includes a good selection of raptor calls. The bird of prey calls were then played at a reasonably loud volume over the factory intercom for several days. Exit the pigeons. Two other factories have since used the same method, with equal success.

This is a neat and inexpensive way of removing pigeons from inside factories.

More and more people are composting their kitchen and garden scraps. and are using plastic bins for that purpose because of their compactness and convenience. An alternative to paying $60.00 or so in the shops is to go to the Queanbeyan City Council buildings. There they have bins for $25.00 which are made out of recycled plastic (including old $10 notes).

****

REVIEW

Classic Natural History Prints: Birds of Prey by Joseph Wolf. Introduced and edited by S. Peter Dance (1991). Published by Studio Editions: London. Pp. 128. $39.95.

Here we have a handsome hardback volume featuring full-page reproductions of Joseph Wolf's prints. The quality reproductions are accompanied by some 300 words of explanatory text on the opposite page. A definite coffee table accessory.

So how to approach it? As art critic, raptor freak, historian, or coffee drinker?

Peter Dance in his introduction stated that his aims were:

1. to introduce to a wider public the man described by Landseer as the best all-round animal artist of his day; and
2. say something about the birds portrayed.

Dance has a good chance of achieving his first aim (I must admit that the name "Wolf' meant nothing to me though his work and I often met in second hand print shops). The three-page introduction brought Joseph Wolf (1820-1899) to life. A farmer's son from the Moselle Valley he made his own paint brushes from animals he shot and then designed his own spring traps so he could capture and paint live animals. His sketching of animals, especially his beloved raptors, brought him commissions to illustrate books on birds, first in Germany and later in London. In London he worked with John Gould on *The Birds of Great Britain* but there was always tension between Wolf, the dedicated observer and painter, and Gould, the business man with a book to sell.

The prints in this book include examples from *Fauna Japonica, Description des Oiseaux* (1844-50), *Traite de Fauconnerie* (1844-53). *The Birds of Asia* (1849-83), *The Birds of Great Britain* (1862-73), *A History of the Birds of Europe* (1871-96). as well as from Wolf's *Zoological Sketches.* and the scientific journals *Ibis* and *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London.*

The use of a small selection of raptors to introduce an artist of "all-round" capacity could be questioned. but raptor freaks such as myself and Joseph Wolf are unlikely to complain.

The author's second aim is less well served. The taxonomic ordering of the prints and the bringing up to date of scientific names are the only concessions to serious ornithologists. Dance's main field is conchology (the study of shells) and it shows. The captions are generally superficial, somewhat repetitive (especially where different races of the same species are portrayed), and they lack an overall cohesion. They do, however, contain vignettes of the time: the slaughter of raptors to preserve the

19th century gamebirds; an intrepid egg collector trying to get an egg out of his mouth where he had thrust it for safe-keeping when surprised by the local Indians; sparrowhawks dashing themselves against windows to get at the caged songbirds inside.

But the pictures speak for themselves: the squash of feathers as a sparrowhawk pins its prey to the wall; the dozey face of the Eagle Owl's smallest chick; the hunched 'Rill(of the peregrine. You know the artist has seen these things and is aiming to site a naturally posed bird against a natural background. Despite this they fail to overcome
my personal feeling that prints are usually lifeless and fail to impart the vitality of the subject being portrayed. Maybe any "life" in the original drawings was lost during the process of lithography and tinting. or maybe Wolf's own concentration on feather colour and pattern has obscured this "life". There is, however, one exception that stops me as I flick through the book. and that is the print of the Rufous-banded Owl. I am not acquainted with this species which comes from the Andes. and Wolf apparently had only one skin to work from, so I cannot say whether it is an accurate representation. But in this picture all the parts, posture, feathers. eye lighting, and more, have come together to produce a greater whole, the essence of an owl ducking and stretching its head intent on its prey.

In the current economic crisis. this is not enough to persuade me to fork out $39.95 to buy the book, but I'm off to the library to see if there is anything more on Joseph Wolf's paintings and drawings.

Rosemary Metcalf

****

HELP WANTED

From time to time we need people to assist with the entering of records from our various projects into the COG Database. If you have a personal computer that runs on a DOS operating system and would like to assist please contact Malcolm Fyfe Ph. 254 3310. We will provide the necessary input program and data sheets.

Many thanks,
Projects Subcommittee

OBITUARY

Farewell - Betty Temple Watts

One of the best known foundation members of the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Betty Temple Watts, passed away at Goondiwindi. Queensland on 1 August 1992, and was cremated at Toowoomba on 5 August 1992.

In early June 1991, my wife Nonie and I spent a day with Betty, her son Steven (Ste) and his family. At that time she was looking forward to her 90th birthday a few days later. In February this year she underwent major surgery and failed to return to her normal good health, fading rapidly in her last few days.

Betty was one of the first two life members to be elected by Canberra Ornithologists Group and will always be remembered among Canberra's bird watchers - primarily in her role as a bird illustrator. She painted the plates for "Birds in the Australian High Country", which was edited by Dr. Harry Frith, and is still the standard reference book on the birds of the ACT and nearby regions. She did the illustrations for two books written by Dr Frith "Waterfowl in Australia" and "Pigeons and Doves of Australia", and the plate of Australian birds in "A New Dictionary of Birds" edited by Sir A. Landsborough Thomson. The designs for the Australian bird stamp issues of 1964 and the similar decimal designs of 1966 were also her work.

Betty was born in England in 1901, Nonie and I also had the privilege of knowing her sister Miss Winifred Flower, who stayed with us during the XVI International Ornithological Congress in 1974, and whom we visited when we were in England in 1978. The Flower family were very involved in natural history so it was not surprising that Betty turned to painting birds.

She was a natural artist with a remarkable eye for detail. From my recollection of conversations with her, after early art training she commenced drawing children during her years in Persia (now Iran) where her husband Harry (Hal) worked on the oil fields. She and Hal also lived in Papua for some time before coming to Australia in 1942 and settling in Melbourne.

In 1958 Betty was persuaded by Dr. Robert Carrick to come to Canberra to do the illustrations for a book on the birds of Canberra, at that time merely a dream in the mind of Dr Carrick - well remembered for his work on the local Australian Magpie. The illustrations took most of her spare time until the book was published in 1969 with the title "Birds in the Australian High Country" and it is indicative of the strong bond between the couple that Betty dedicated the book to her husband who died about the time of its publication. Later she did two extra plates for the revised edition published in 1984.

It was a pleasure to work with Betty and she was always eager to hear constructive criticisms of her work. She was intensely keen to learn and her lady-like disposition enabled her to request and accept suggestions. I remember criticising the early

designs of the 1964 stamp issues, but in that case the detail was limited by the ability of the printers to cope with the fineness of her work. To me her work is shown at its best on plate XVI of "Birds in the Australian High Country" where the Gang-gangs, Galah and other parrots appear ready to fly off the page.

In *Canberra Bird Notes* Volume 4, Number 8, pages 2-6. Betty gave details of the work involved in preparing the plates for "Birds in the Australian High Country", but as one who was very involved with her over those years, I feel her comments were rather understated.

Other notes written by Betty in our journal were in Volume 3. Number 6, page 15. regarding a White-throated Nightjar; and Volume 11, Number 1. page 19. where she discussed the method of feeding of the Gang-gang Cockatoo.

After Hal's death, Betty moved to southern Queensland and lived with her son Ste and his family for several years, ultimately moving to a retirement home at Goondiwindi where she spent her remaining years. By this time her son was also living in that town so she had family nearby.

In her retirement in Queensland Betty retained her interest in natural history and was associated closely with the Toowoomba Field Naturalists Club for whom she produced an annual Christmas card featuring one of her favourite birds.

It was a great pleasure for Nonie and me to have been able to have called Betty our friend. Her unruffled disposition could be better brought out in a full story of the work leading up to the publication of "Birds in the Australian High Country" - a story never yet told and as one of the survivors of the original group involved in that work, I will write this up for a future issue of *Canberra Bird Notes.*

Suffice to say that we loved and respected her greatly. She went through trials connected with the book that would have severely taxed a lesser person, she was always a lady and we are greatly saddened by the end of her very varied and productive life.

Much of what is said in the Foreword by Dr Francis Ratcliffe to "Birds in the Australian High Country" is a magnificent tribute to her as a person.

Steve Wilson

****

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

There are a few old records in this list which have come to light as a result of the editing of the ACT Bird Atlas.

The Glossy Black Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus lathami* have returned this winter after the single sighting last winter near Queanbeyan. The movement pattern of these birds is a mystery. It is possible that they regularly move into the Canberra region each winter but are often overlooked because of their small numbers and quiet behaviour. But if so, where do they spend the summer?

There was a record of a Black Kite *Milvus migrans* in Canberra itself at the Belconnen tip, an appropriate locality for this species, and an earlier one from Lake Bathurst. Another interesting raptor record was the Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae* at Weetangera. Each year there are single records in autumn - is this a post breeding dispersal of young birds or migration?

On the waterbird front there was a good crop of Freckled Ducks *Stictonetta naevosa,* plus a Blue-billed Duck *Oxyura australis* at Fyshwick Sewage Ponds.

The eastern edge of our area is being explored more and this time the contribution is Chestnut-rumped Hylacolas *Sericornis pyrrhopygius.* As far as other bush birds are concerned there are several records of Red-capped Robins *Petroica goodenovii* spread fairly widely over the area.

Finally, on the corella front there are records of both species from the Bungendore area, as well as a couple near Mugga Lane Zoo.

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO 33

Category 3

Brown Quail
1; 30 Mar 92; B. Lepschi; 12km SW of Gunning

Peaceful Dove
1; 14 Feb 89; B. Lindenmayer, Uriarra Road
2; 2 Jun 90;/ 1; 3 Jun 90;/ 7; 19 May 91; H. Wright; Bibaringa agistment paddock, Cotter Road

Red-necked Avocet
1; 26 Jul 92; B. Lepschi; Lake Road, south end Lake George

Intermediate Egret

9; 22 Oct 89; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst
2; 22 Apr 90;/ 8; 5 *Jam'* 8; 28 *Jan* 911 1; 23 Feb 91; M. Lenz; north end Lake George
5; 24 Jul 90; M. Lenz; south end Lake George

Freckled Duck

2; 2 Jan 92; R. Rehwinkel; wetland on Lake Road, Bungendore 12;
19 Jan 92; J. Bounds; Jerrabomberra Wetlands
1; 8 Mar 92; J. Bissett; Kelly's Swamp
3; 26 Apr 921 8; 27 Jun 92/ 2; 26 Jul 92; B. Lepschi; south end Lake George
1; 28 Jul 92; J. Gleeson; dam on Ginninderra Experiment Station
7; 1 Aug 92; D. McDonald; Jerrabomberra Wetlands

Blue-billed Duck

1; 1 Mar,/ 1; 8 Mar 92; J. Bisset; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds

Grey Goshawk

1; 2 Mar 92; M. Fyfe; Weetangera

White-bellied Sea-eagle

1; 19 May 92; B. Lepschi; Black Mountain/Lake Burley Griffin
1; 20 May 92; G. Elliott; Lake Burley Griffin
2; 17 Jul 92; J. Mcllroy; Murrumbidgee River - Kelly's Flat

Whistling Kite

1; 8 Mar 92; J. Bounds; near Uriarra Crossing
1; 26 Apr,/ 1; 27 Jun;/ 1; 26 Jul 92; B. Lepschi; south end Lake George 1;
24 May 92; M. Butterfield; Lake Road, Lake George

Black Kite

1; 27 Dec 90; M. Lenz; south end East Basin, Lake Bathurst 1; 8 Feb 92; C. Davey. Belconnen Tip

Black Falcon

1; 27 Dec 90; M. Lenz; south end East Basin. Lake Bathurst

Glossy Black Cockatoo

2; 23 May 92; B. Horrigan; Mt Majura
8; 8 Aug 92; L. & G. McVeigh; Mt Majura

Superb Parrot

30; 5 to 8 Jan 92; J. Gleeson; Evatt

Red-capped Robin

1; 23 Feb 92; B. Daly; near Boboyan Pine Forest
1; 15 May 92; M. Moffat; Southwell's Crossing. Molonglo River
3; 17 May 92; B. Lepschi; SW of Gunning
1; 23 May 92;/ 1; 6 Jun 92; T. Willis; Campbell Park
1; 1 Jul 92; N. Payne; Mt Ainslie

Chestnut-rumped Hylacola

6; 6 Apr 92; M. Fyfe; Mt Deua

Possible Escapees

Little Corella

4; 9 Sep 90; M. Fyfe; Mugga Lane Zoo
5; 29 Jan 92; R. Rehwinkel; Bungendore Village
2; 17 May 92; I. McMahon; near Mugga Lane Zoo

Long-billed Corella

1; 5 Jan 92; R. Rehwinkel; Gundaroo Road (near Millwyn Road) 1; 6 Jan to 22 Feb 92; R. Rehwinkel; Bungendore

****

Projects Subcommittee:
Malcolm Fyfe (Secretary - 254 3310). Grahame Clark, Chris Davey. Michael Lenz, David Purchase.

Rarities Panel:
Sue Webb (Secretary - 251 5407), Barry Baker, Graeme Chapman, Grahame Clark, Mark Clayton, Jack Holland, Bruce Male.

Records and Library Subcommittee:
Malcolm Fyfe. Graham Browning.

Shopfront Management Subcommittee:
Sarah Thomas (Convenor - 281 4982), Jenny Bounds. Grahame Elliott, Robyn Elliott.

Annual Subscriptions for 1992 are: Student (18 years of age and younger) $8.50; Individual $17.00; Family $20.00; Institutions $20.00. All receive one copy of *Canberra Bird Notes*.

Production and distribution of *Canberra Bird Notes:*
Typing: Louise Russell
Camera-ready Copy: Cedric Bear
Printing: Lowes - Printer
Distribution: Ann McKenzie and helpers

Shopfront:
Natural History Shopfront, Room G5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic, ACT

Hours:
Wednesday, Thursday, Friday: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Saturday: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Contributions are welcome. These should fit into one of the following categories: major articles (up to about 3000 words); short notes and "Odd Obs" (up to about 300 words); reviews of books and articles (up to about 500 words); and where to watch birds (up to about 800 words). The articles and notes should cover matters of the distribution, identification. and behaviour of birds occurring in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding area (i.e. New South Wales coast north to Jervis Bay. and west to the Riverina). Contributions can be sent to the editors c/o David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 258 2252).

CONTENTS *Canberra Bird Notes* 17(3) September 1992

(Issued October 1992)