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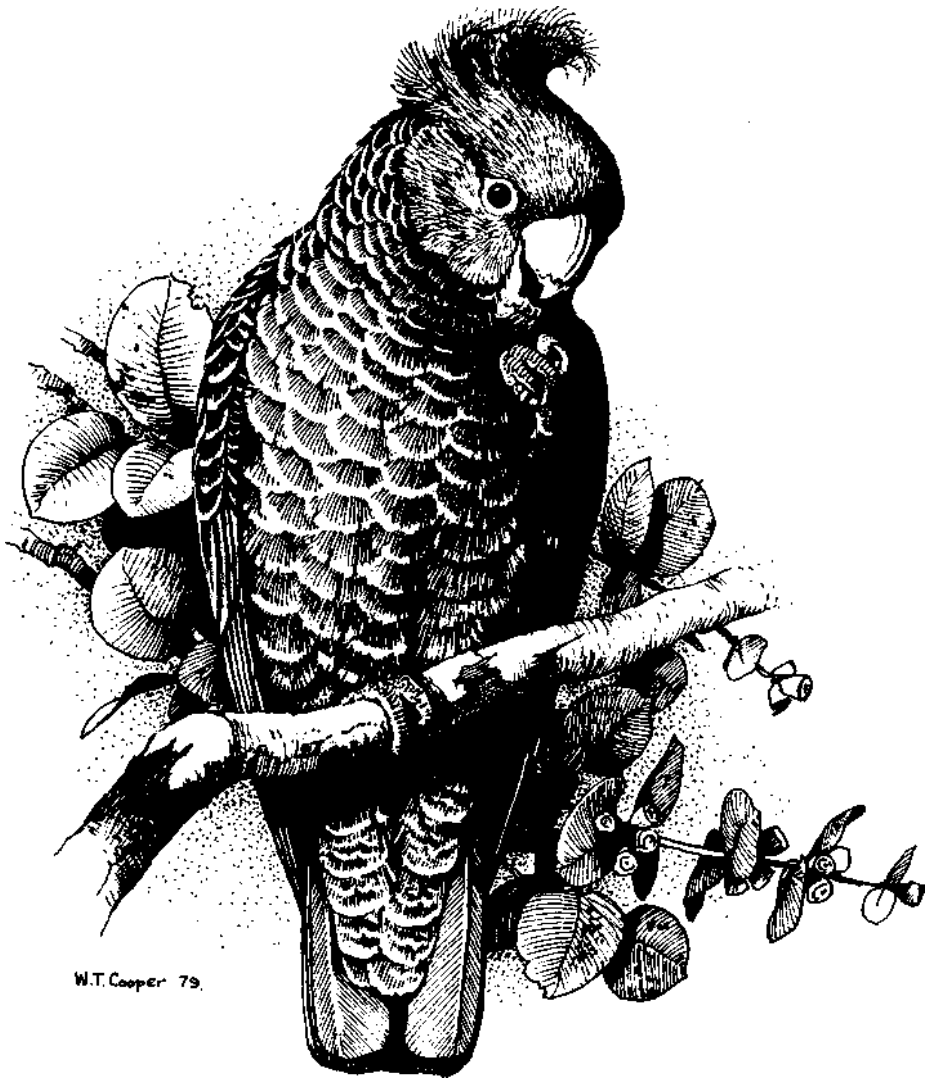

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(Continued inside back cover)

LOW NUMBERS OF *PLATYCERCUS* SPP. AT STIRLING PARK IN MID-JANUARY 1994

Kenneth Er

The Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans* and Eastern Rosella *P. eximius are* common in suburban gardens and lowland woodlands around Canberra and are two of the most frequently reported birds (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) 1992). However, a survey in mid-January 1994 at Stirling Park on the south side of Lake Burley Griffin in Yarralumla (Australian Map Grid FA923913) revealed low numbers of both species.

Study Area

Stirling Park is the only remaining remnant of Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodara* woodland in the proximity of Lake Burley Griffin. The vegetation is of the *E. melliodora - E. blakelyi* association. interspersed with *E. mannifera* and *E. dives* (Frawley 1991). Introduced *Populus* sp., *Fraxinus* sp.. *Quercus* sp., *Cedrus* sp. and *Pinus* sp. are found in small dominant clumps scattered within the remnant stand. Towards the interior of the remnant, the understorey is predominantly shrubby with dense clumps of *Rubrus* sp., while it tends to be more grassy towards the edge. Occasionally, patches of daisies. such as *Helichrysum* sp., *Rutidosis leptorhynchoides* and *Leptorhynchos squamatus, can* be found in the understorey.

Methodology

Three strip transects were set up as part of a study to evaluate the effectiveness of various census durations and strip widths for the censusing of birds in Yellow Box woodland. Nine combinations of census duration and transect width were employed and replicated in across the three transects. On three days between 16 and 27 January 1994, the site was censused 27 times (each transect was censused nine times. each time with a different treatment). All censuses were made between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. in the absence of rain or strong wind.

In all censuses the number of birds sighted of each species was recorded. The total number of sightings for each species recorded in the 27 censuses was collectively termed the number of encounters for that species. It should be noted, however. that I could not be sure if the same individuals were seen in subsequent censuses. A percentage of encounter for each bird species was then calculated as:

$$e/E \times 100$$

where e = the number of encounters for the species; and E = the total number of encounters for all species.

Results

Results of the study show that Crimson Rosellas and Eastern Rosellas each have a low percentage of encounter (3.0% and 1.5% respectively) at Stirling Park in mid-January. Birds most frequently encountered were the Superb Fairy-wren *Malurus cyaneus* (36.4%). Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* (13.6%). Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata* (10.6%), Weebill *Smicrornis brevirostris* (9.9%) and Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* (9.1%). Table 1 shows the number of encounters and percentage of encounters for each of the 13 species observed during the 27 censuses in the three transects.

Table 1. Percentage of encounters of birds at Stirling Park in 27 censuses

Species	Number of Encounters	Percentage of Encounters
Crimson Rosella	4	3.0
Eastern Rosella	2	1.5
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	2	1.5
Willy Wagtail	12	9.1
Superb Fairy-wren	48	36.4
Weebill	13	9.9
Brown Thornbill	1	0.8
Buff-rumped Thornbill	6	4.6
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	9	6.8
White-throated Treecreeper	2	1.5
Red Wattlebird	14	10.6
White-eared Honeyeater	1	0.8
Australian Raven	18	13.6
Total encounters	132	

Discussion

A survey conducted at about the same time in Ainslie Nature Reserve (Australian Map Grid FA976968) showed Crimson Rosellas and Eastern Rosellas to have relatively much higher percentage of encounters (20% and 6% respectively) than those recorded at Stirling Park (K. Er unpublished data). At first glance, one would regard these results as surprising and inconsistent. However. I am inclined to think the low percentage of encounters of rosellas at Stirling Park may possibly be linked to their behaviour.

Crimson Rosellas are essentially tree feeders and are extremely adaptable to a range of habitats from rainforest to woodland and even urban areas. Eastern Rosellas are ground feeders and tend to be more habitat specific, requiring open areas with trees

and an understorey of grasses (Wyndham and Cannon 1985). The diet of rosellas consists of seeds of grasses, shrubs and trees; fruits, blossoms. buds, insects and insect larvae (Forshaw and Cooper 1981). Although the same type of food is taken, Crimson Rosellas are noted to be more flexible, feeding on fruits. seeds. flowers, nectar. buds. shoots and leaves from introduced and native shrub and tree species (Taylor and COG 1992). On the other hand, Eastern Rosellas have been observed to rely primarily on seeds from grasses (Wyndham and Cannon 1985). Finally, both species rely upon trees for cover and nest hollows, although they are known to nest in buildings in suburban areas. Breeding in both species usually begins in mid-August and extends to about the end of February (Taylor and COG 1992).

Given the foraging and nesting requirements of the rosellas, two explanations for their low percentage of encounters at Stirling Park in mid-January may be viable. Firstly, one might question the availability of food and suitable foraging areas in Stirling Park. Secondly, there may be a lack of suitable nesting hollows.

The survey was carried out in mid-January when most of the rosellas would already be nesting with young (Taylor and COG 1992). The nesting period is one where much energy is expended and food becomes important as a source of energy. At Stirling Park, most of the eucalypts were observed not to be flowering or fruiting. However, the clumps of introduced tree species, dominant stands of *Rubrus* sp. and grasses were, at the time of the survey, flowering and fruiting profusely. As such, there was a great availability of seeds, fruits and young shoots for the rosellas. While the vegetation of the remnant, in general, is suitable to Crimson Rosellas as a foraging area, the dense shrub layer in the interior will prove to be less attractive to Eastern Rosellas, given that they are ground feeders and that grass seeds form the bulk of their diet. Nevertheless. the dense grass cover at the edge, coupled with the profuse flowering of these grasses, should provide sufficient and suitable foraging for the Eastern Rosellas. Therefore, it appears that the low percentage of encounters of rosellas at Stirling Park may not be attributed to the lack of food and suitable foraging areas. At this juncture, it must be emphasised that the relatively high percentage of encounters of Australian Ravens on the site may also bring about some form of competition to the rosellas for foraging area. However, this remains unconfirmed. This then leaves the question of available nesting sites.

Tree hollows serve as important nesting sites for rosellas. The formation of hollows take a considerable length of time and hence, are found most often in old eucalypt trees. Blakely's Red Gum *E. blakelyi* and Yellow Box provide the majority of hollows in Yellow Box woodland which is the vegetation type at Stirling Park. A check of the trees at Stirling Park shows that many of the trees are regenerating and there are few old Blakely's Red Gums or Yellow Boxes. The existing ones also do not seem to have any hollows in them. The exotic trees at Stirling Park do not provide nesting hollows and serve as competition to the regenerating eucalypts. Rosellas are sedentary birds (Wyndham and Cannon 1985). but local movements from suburban areas to bushland during the breeding season have been recorded by Taylor and COG (1992). It is possible that because of the lack of nesting hollows at Stirling Park, the rosellas have had to move during the breeding season to other nearby bushland reserves

where old eucalypt trees with nesting hollows prevail. This may explain the low percentage of encounters of rosellas at Stirling Park. as compared to the percentage of encounters at Ainslie. Pending further long term observations, I can only provide such a hypothesis.

If the above hypothesis proves to be true, then it shows that the removal of old trees will have an adverse effect on the continual survival of rosellas and other parrots. Stirling Park is the closest native woodland remnant to Lake Burley Griffin where an extensive stretch of suburban gardens lie along the periphery of the lake. Parrots which forage in these gardens depend upon the availability of nearby bushland for breeding and nesting. The removal of old eucalypt trees would mean the loss of hollows which in turn would deprive the parrots of nesting sites.

Proper management of woodland remnants is required to ensure that exotic tree and shrub species are kept at a low level so as to enable rapid regeneration of eucalypts. native herbs and grasses. More eucalypt species capable of forming hollows readily should be planted to provide suitable nesting sites for parrots. Lastly, more work is required to enhance our understanding of the behaviour of parrots and their use of remnant woodland. This will then provide the basis for the management of remnant woodland in a way that will facilitate the conservation of parrots.

Conclusion

The low percentage of encounters of the Crimson Rosella and Eastern Rosella at Stirling Park in mid-January 1994 can be attributed to the loss of suitable nesting hollows due to the removal of old Yellow Box trees in the past. More long term observations are required to understand the relationship between parrots and remnant stands of native woodland.

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SUPERB PARROTS IN HUGHES

Bernice Anderson

After reading Mary Ormay's report in the March 1994 issue of *Canberra Bird Notes* of a Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* sighting in Melba, I feel I must put my own experiences on record.

On 1 January 1994. while in my garden about mid-day, I heard an unfamiliar bird call. I investigated its source and observed two Superb Parrots, a male and a female, perched in a Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* on my neighbour's boundary. The birds remained in the tree for at least 10 minutes, giving me plenty of opportunity to note their distinguishing features, before they flew into another neighbour's garden. I realised I had heard the same distinctive call in the gardens several times during the previous two weeks.

Over the next several days one or both birds were seen almost every day. From 13 January, after discussing the significance of the sighting with some COG members, I began to keep daily records of the times and locations. Over a five-week period I recorded 26 observations on 14 separate days.

The birds were frequently observed from my kitchen window in the early morning or late afternoon, flying from a large deciduous tree in one garden to a large eucalypt in another. The brilliant yellow face and red collar of the male flashing in the sunlight were unmistakable. The loud, insistent, slightly querulous call was also frequently heard on occasions when the birds were not seen.

At 5.30 p.m. on 16 January, while my son was mowing the lawn, both birds perched unperturbed for several minutes on the telephone wire above our outdoor living area.

Several times I observed one or both birds perched on my neighbour's telephone wire, intensely surveying something in the garden which I could not see. On each occasion, after a few minutes, the birds would dive down behind the fence out of sight.

Although the birds were frequently seen perched in deciduous trees - Silver Birch *Betula pendula,* Crab Apple *Malus* sp,, Rowan - which were bearing fruit. berries or seeds, I never observed them feeding.

The female Superb Parrot was last sighted in the area on 4 February, and the male on 20 February.

Ted Hesterman (pers. comm.). who lives about 200 m to the north-west in Poynton Street, Hughes, has also been observing a pair of Superb Parrots which have been coming to a bird feeder in his garden. They are probably the same birds which

have been visiting my garden. He first saw them in early January and they are still visiting the feeder (the last date prior to publication of this note was 15 June). They approach from the north-east and depart back in the direction from which they came. It should be noted that Superb Parrots are rare summer visitors in the Canberra area and normally leave by early February. Ted reports that the pair which visit his garden are fairly tame and will allow him to quietly approach to about 1 m. when they are at the feeder. However, while at the feeder they are dominant over other parrots, including Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla* and Australian King-Parrots *Alisterus scapularis*.

The tameness of the pair of Superb Parrots, and the fact that they have not left the area, suggests they may be a pair that have escaped from an *aviary*.

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ODD OB

CRESTED SHRIKE-TIT MIMICRY OF EASTERN YELLOW ROBIN

Isobel Crawford

Graham Pizzey (1980) notes that Crested Shrike-tits *Falcunculus frontatus* mimic the calls of other species. I observed a fascinating example of such mimicry on 24 June 1988 in a group of three shrike-tits on the Bonang Highway. approximately 20 km N of Orbost in east Gippsland. One bird was giving the Eastern Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria australis* call. described as "k-k-kair" by Pizzey. The other was making the Eastern Yellow Robin tentative piping call, and the third was giving its own mournful whistle. reminiscent of a distant Brush Cuckoo *Cuculus variolosus*. The gender of the birds were not noted (females have an olive-green throat, males black). All were in adult plumage, were clearly visible, and could be seen calling. as they pulled pieces of bark off smooth-barked eucalypts in typical Crested Shrike-tit fashion.

The vegetation was tall open forest with a well-developed shrub understorey, as would be used by Eastern Yellow Robins.

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SOUTHERN BOOBOOK EATING HABITS - BLACK-FACED CUCKOO-SHRIKES, BLACKBIRDS AND GREY FANTAILS?

Roy Harvey

On 20 December 1992, our neighbour found five Southern Boobooks *Ninox novaeseelandiae* - one adult and four young - in a large Monterey Pine *Pinus radiata* in their backyard. The young, which had a few light chest markings, flew well, A second adult joined the group soon after. Each evening at about dusk they would start a chorus of insect-like calls and the young would go through elaborate head and neck exercises - twisting their head so their eyes were vertical, and bobbing and weaving their heads about. The adults and young were unafraid of humans and would remain on fences or branches as people walked 2 to 3 m from them.

In late December a pair of Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina novaehollandiae* nested in a Blakely's Red Gum *Eucalyptus blakelyi* in our backyard. The nest was in a fork about 5 m from the ground and about 10 m from our dining room window. By mid-January there were three well-developed chicks being fed.

At dusk on 13 January I heard a boobook's insect-like call coming from the Blakely's Red Gum and on investigating found one boobook about 3 m from the cuckoo-shrike's nest. An adult cuckoo-shrike was on the nest. The boobook remained stationary for about three minutes then flew to within 30 cm of the nest, looked closely at it for a few seconds, then flew off.

At about midnight I heard calling again from near the nest and found two boobooks together about 3 m from the nest. They were not frightened by me shining a torch on them, shouting at them, or throwing sticks (and missing). After five minutes of this the boobooks moved apart and a little further from the nest. I left them to it.

In the morning a claw pointing skywards from the nest suggested that the boobooks did not retire when I did, I watched for sometime and eventually an adult cuckoo-shrike came to the nest carrying food. After waiting near the nest for a minute or two the bird ate the food. Over the next day and a half I saw only one adult cuckoo-shrike at any one time, though previously they had often been two together. I removed the nest the following afternoon and found two dead chicks, one complete and one headless. The complete chick was about 15 cm from tip of beak to tip of tail. It appeared that the boobooks had taken one of the adults and one of the three chicks.

Our neighbour said they had found the beak of a Blackbird *Turdus merula* under the tree where the boobooks roosted. I had observed a Blackbird, with worms in its bill, clamouring about an adult owl. After the Blackbird flew off the owl also flew off in the same direction. I wonder whether I had incorrectly blamed the neighbourhood cats for the destruction of a Grey Fantail's *Rhipidura fuliginosa* nest and the disappearance of a chick and egg?

Barter and Vestjens (1989) list records of Southern Boobooks eating Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis,* House Sparrows *Passer domesticus,* Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* and Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis;* and FitzGerald (1983) gives an account of a Southern Boobook eating a Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris.*

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ODD OB

AN OLD WHITE-BROWED SCRUB-WREN

Grahame Clark

On 20 November 1976, during a study of the birds of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, I caught and banded (with band 022-11656) an adult male White-browed Scrub-wren *Sericornis frontalis.* On 30 October 1992, this bird was recaptured by Robert Magrath during his study of White-browed Scrub-wrens in the botanic gardens. As far as could be seen, this bird was healthy and living a normal life nearly 16 years (15 years, 11 months, and 10 days) after it was banded. As the bird was an "adult" when it was banded its actual age would be greater than 16 years.

Although this is undoubtedly old for a White-browed Scrub-wren, it is not altogether unexpected. Steve Wilson, during the course of his studies in the Brindabella Range, recaptured several individuals from 10 to 14.5 years after they had been banded as adults. White-browed Scrub-wrens of similar ages have been recaptured elsewhere in Australia.

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RED-CAPPED ROBIN IMITATING SCARLET ROBIN'S SONG

Jenny Bounds

On 15 August 1993, I participated in a COG field trip to the western side of Mount Ainslie, ACT, About half-way up the mountain, in dry eucalypt woodland with a dense wattle understorey. I heard what I identified as the song of a Scarlet Robin *Petroica multicolor*. However, when the bird was located it proved to be a male Red-capped Robin *P. goodenovii*. For approximately the next 20 minutes, 15 people and I watched as the bird flitted from tree to tree, perching and repeatedly used the song of the Scarlet Robin. At no time did it use the song of a Red-capped Robin. There were no other robins of any species observed or heard in the immediate area.

The Scarlet Robin is the most common species of robin in the area, whereas Red-capped Robins are uncommon (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992). The songs of both species are distinct and I am familiar with each.

There have been several previous reports of Red-capped Robins using the song of the Scarlet Robin. Coventry (1988) describes this happening in 1981-83 during a temporary invasion of Red-capped Robins near Cooma, NSW, after a drought. In his paper, Coventry refers to an observation by Chisholm (1960) of a male Red-capped Robin giving its own call, followed by the call of the Scarlet Robin. Chisholm suggested the "two species of varying habitats had met somewhere". He added that the ironbark forest in north western Victoria, where he observed the Red-capped Robin, was not the "somewhere" as it was much too dry for the Scarlet Robin in breeding time.

Veerman (1994), in an article essentially about mimicry by Regent Honeyeaters *Xanthomyza phrygia,* noted the conclusion by Helb et al, (1985). that many European species of birds include mimicry segments of their close relatives in their breeding song. Although Australia has many mimicking species of birds, it appears that the Red-capped Robin, in its mimicry of only a close relative, is one of the few Australian species whose mimicry behaviour fits this particular pattern, which is apparently common in Europe. It is suggested that possibly the Red-capped Robin imitates the Scarlet Robin to facilitate territorial separation of the two species, providing some competitive benefit.

I acknowledge Philip Veerman for assisting with reference material for this article.

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ODD OB

WHITE-THROATED TREECREEPER AND WHITE-EARED HONEYEATER FEEDING ON EXUDATE FROM SUGAR GLIDER INCISIONS.

Isobel Crawford

On 15 July 1989, at 10.30 a.m. on Parrot Road, Brindabella Range, ACT, slash marks were noticed on a Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon.* They were just into the phloem and appeared to have been made by a Sugar Glider *Petaurus breviceps* (they were too small and delicate to have been made by a Yellow-bellied Glider *P. australis* or a Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus funereus).* A White-throated Treecreeper *Climacteris leucophaea* came and fed on the sap oozing from the gash and then a White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis* which chased away a flock of Striated Pardalotes *Acanthiza lineata* feeding in the canopy and returned to the sap. The vegetation of the area is open forest of Alpine Ash *Eucalyptus delegatensis* and Snow Gum *E. pauciflora.*

This event brought back memories of seeing White-eared Honeyeaters feeding on the exudate from phyllode ('leaf') glands on Coastal Wattles *A. longifolia at* Rotamah Island, in the Gippsland Lakes, Vic., and also on sap oozing from gashes made in the same species by Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos extracting wood-boring larvae.

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WILLIE OR WAGTAIL?

David McDonald

Bird observers visiting Australia are often puzzled and amused by the common names given to our birds. One species that draws particular attention is the Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*. Why call it a "wagtail", they exclaim, when it is really a flycatcher? They sometimes go to pains to point out that. internationally, the term "wagtail" is used for birds of the family Motacillidae (to which our Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* belongs). The Willie Wagtail is actually not a "wagtail" but a fan-tailed flycatcher belonging to the family Monarchidae, they pedantically point out.

Now a simple response to these complaints exists. So far as I know, the "true" wagtails do not wag their tails at all! I have never seen the vagrants that occasionally make it to the RAOU observatory at Broome and elsewhere, but wagtails I have seen in East Africa bob their tails up-and-down, not mainly side-to-side as does the Willie Wagtail. (The Australian field guides point to this difference as an identification criterion.) If one takes the view that "wagging" is a side-to-side motion, as in a dog waging its tail, then the Willie is a wagtail but the wagtails are not!

Which leads to the alphabet. How, pray, does one deal with the Willie Wagtail alphabetically? Most bird observers keep lists and I imagine that most lists are sorted alphabetically. Should the Willie Wagtail appear as "Wagtail, Willie" or as "Willie Wagtail"? The most obvious approach is the former. The problem arises, however, that Willie is not really a wagtail and looks quite out of place in an Australian list that reads "Wagtail: Black-backed, Grey, White, Willie, Yellow, Yellow-headed".

How do authors handle the dilemma? The three national field guides (Pizzey 1991, Simpson & Day 1993, and Slater et al. 1989) take an identical approach: they list the bird in their indexes as "Wagtail, Willie". Frith's (1984) *Birds in the Australian high country* does the same, as does the RAOU's *The atlas of Australian birds* (Blakers et al. 1984).

The *Reader's Digest complete book of Australian birds* (Schodde & Tidemann 1986) has it both ways: it indexes the bird under both "Wagtail, Willie" and "Willie Wagtail".

The opposite approach has been taken by some. The data collection form used by the Canberra Ornithologists Group for the atlas project in 1986-89, listed the ACT's species alphabetically and the bird in question was shown as "Willie Wagtail". (If it had been listed as "Wagtail, Willie", the entry would have come between "Triller, White-winged" and "Warbler, Speckled".) The publication which resulted from the atlas project, *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory: an atlas* (Taylor & Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992) does the same. (It will be noted that no "true" wagtails have been reported from the Australian Capital Territory and they are unlikely to be seen here in the future.) Macdonald's (1987) *The illustrated dictionary of Australian*

birds by common name does the same as the ACT *Atlas,* as does Taylor and Day's (1993) *Field guide to the birds of the ACT.*

What are we to make of this information, if anything? I index the bird as "Willie Wagtail" in my lists. It is the only Australian species that I handle this way as most of the others with composite names have the last part of the name common to a number of closely-related species - it serves as a surname. (Of course there are exceptions to this. Most of the exceptions are the birds cursed with two- or four-barrelled eurocentric names such as the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike. Certainly no cuckoo!)

I would be interested to know how others deal with this issue. And what do the professional lexicographers have to say on the matter?

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A GILLY-WATTLER UP A GUM TREE

Malcolm Fyfe

My son called me recently seeking advice on what to do to help a young gilly-wattler which had, quite literally, got stuck up a gum tree. The bird was hanging upside down and squawking very loudly for help.

Closer inspection, via a ladder, for the unfortunate creature was some twenty feet up in the outer canopy, revealed that it was held quite fast with its body encased in sticky leaves.

The tree, a eucalypt sapling, was itself under siege from a gum tree scale *Eriococcus* sp, which was exuding copious quantities of "honeydew". These secretions were very sweet, as I can testify. and temptation obviously overcame this bird, as the offer of free lollies does to many a young thing.

In its enthusiastic **and** unsuspecting romp the bird had itself become increasingly covered in the sticky mess and the foliage had adhered forming a wrapper around the bird's body rending it unable to escape.

Enter the good guys, Up a ladder, rescue young gillbird and into a tub of warm water (no detergent) which quickly removed the honeydew. The bird was released and quickly escaped to the upper branches of a nearby casuarina to dry out, hopefully having learned a lesson.

A word of caution - if ever confronted with a similar situation don't try to remove the leaves prior to washing. Unfortunately we did and with the leaves came the downy feathers. Our friend looked a trifle bald in places, and quite hurt and mollified by the entire experience - but he'll live to terrorise another Blackbird.

And just in case you didn't know, the gilly-wattler or gillbird is that bully of the bush playgrounds, known to the authorities as 638 Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata.*

Malcolm Fyfe, 27 Kilby Crescent, WEETANGERA ACT 2614

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INCOMPLETE ALBINISM IN AN EASTERN SPINEBILL

Joe Barr

On 10 July 1993 at 10 a.m., I observed a light-coloured small bird fly from a hedge of *Grevillea rosmarinifolia,* and across Lalor Street, Ainslie. At 12.30 p.m. I again saw the bird about 1.5 m above the ground in the same hedge, searching and apparently feeding. on and around blossom. On this occasion I was able to see the bird in more detail.

The bird was a small honeyeater with a long curved bill typical of an Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris.* It was not in company with any other bird so it was difficult to estimate its size, but it was about that of an Eastern Spinebill, or very slightly larger. Its over-all colour was ash-grey to white with darker grey primaries and irregular dark spots on its wings. It had a pale chestnut patch under its chin, and dark grey/black eyes. bill and legs.

A single Eastern Spinebill call was heard coming from the hedge during the second sighting. The bird was not seen to give the call, but no other bird was known to be in the hedge at the time. No normal-coloured Eastern Spinebill was seen in the vicinity of the hedge within a week either side of the sightings.

On 12 July at 8.30 a.m.. I saw what **I** assumed to be the same bird, *c* 50 m away in Hannan Crescent.

There is little doubt that the bird was an Eastern Spinebill and details of this sighting were submitted to the Rarities Panel and endorsed by them (Rarities Panel News *Canberra Bird Notes* 19: 14-16). In his review of literature published to 1986. Brendan Lepschi (1990, *Corella* 14: 82-85) located one record of an Eastern Spinebill from 298 published instances of albinism in Australian birds.

Joe Barr, 1 Lalor Street. AINSLIE ACT 2602

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ACT BIRDWATCHERS HOTLINE **Telephone 247 5530**

An up-to-date five minute recorded message with interesting news such as returning migrants, rarities, meetings, outings, and bargains for bird-watchers in Canberra. Twenty-four hour service regularly updated.

SILVEREYES MIGRATING AT NIGHT

David Purchase

The recent note by Isobel Crawford (1994) on Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis* migrating at night has prompted me to delve into my records and extract the following observations. All observations were from my home in Melba and, unless stated otherwise, were from outside the house. The presence of the Silvereyes was identified by their flight contact call. described by Schodde and Tidemann (1986) as a sharp "pyeeew". Regrettably. I rarely recorded details of the weather and moon.

3 Apr 76, 0500 hrs. An unknown number heard calling as they flew overhead in a northerly direction.

7 Apr 76. 0200 hrs. A large number heard calling. The number was so large and the noise of their calls so loud. I could hear them while I was in bed prior to going outside. When I was outside I gained the impression that hundreds of birds were passing overhead in a northerly direction.

1 Apr 78, 0340-0355 his. Cool. light overcast, no moon. Twice I heard what I thought were Silvereyes faintly calling from the south.

3 Apr 78, 0525 hrs. It was not yet first light and Silvereyes were heard calling briefly while I was in bed. Unfortunately, personal comfort got the better of scientific endeavour and I did not get up to investigate any further.

In addition to the above observations. there were occasions when I went outside and did not hear Silvereyes calling. Those occasions noted in my records are:

1977: 12 Apr 0430 hrs. 13 Apr 0545 hrs.
1978: 3 Apr 1130 hrs, 4 Apr 0400 hrs, 6 Apr 0150-0200 hrs, 14 Apr 0430 hrs, 16 Apr 2100 hrs, 18 Apr 2230 hrs, 19 Apr 2330 hrs. 20 Apr 2230 hrs. 22 Apr 0400 hrs, 23 Apr 0410 and 2325 hrs, 25 Apr 2145 hrs.
1980: 4 Apr 0400 hrs. 5 Apr 0200 hrs. 7 Apr 0500 hrs.
1984: 14 Apr 0010 hrs and 0100 hrs.

How often do Silvereyes fly and call of a night in Canberra? Listening for them during the night, and recording the time, direction of movement, weather. state **of** the moon. and some idea of the numbers involved. would make a worthwhile project for members who have to respond to the needs of a baby, work shifts, or are insomniacs.

References

Crawford. I. (1994). Silvereyes migrating at night. *Canberra Bird Notes* 19: 3.

Schodde, R., and Tidemann, S.C. (editors) (1986). Reader's Digest complete book of Australian birds. Reader's Digest Services: Sydney.

David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, MELBA ACT 2615

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OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

The views expressed in "Out and About" do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

The Wetlands Centre at Shortland near Newcastle are interested in receiving sightings of egrets wearing wing tags. The tags are carried like epaulettes on the shoulder of the wing and are either in one or two colours. The tags also have a number and/or letter code. although this can become partly obscured when the birds stand in a hunched-up position.

The Shoalhaven area has been identified as a major staging area for migrating egrets, so if you are there, or anywhere else where there are egrets, please look to see if any are wearing tags. If you do see any tagged ones, please note the species, colour or colours of the tag and. if you can read it, the code. These details should then be sent, together with the date and place of the sighting. to Project Egret Watch. PO Box 130. Wallsend. NSW 2287 (tel. (049) 51 6466, fax. (049) 50 1875). Please include your name, address, and telephone number, so they can contact you and tell you where and when the egret was tagged.

An important way the amateur bird watcher can help increase our knowledge of bird life is by participating in a scheme whereby many individual observations are gathered together to give a comprehensive picture of one aspect of bird life. By participating in such a scheme single random observations that are made by any bird watchers (even beginners) can be used to understand what is happening in the total environment. An example is the Beach Patrol Scheme run by the RAOU. This requires participants to walk along sections of the coastline and report the details of any beach-washed birds they find, or the fact that no birds were found. This scheme has two advantages: first

the birds cannot get away and therefore are relatively easy to identify (providing they are not too decomposed!); and second, even a nil return adds something to our knowledge of seabirds. For the casual or beginning bird watcher who wants to do more than "twitch" this is a good way to participate and to return something to the birds. If you are interested in helping, please contact Paul Scofield. c/o RAOU, 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds. Victoria 3039.

How many people have noticed the television advertisement for Ansett Airlines that uses a large flying bird? The advertisement is impressive, but why did they have to use a Mute Swan rather than an Australian bird such as a Black Swan? Is it the cultural cringe striking again, or is the company ashamed of its Australian origin?

Did you know that in August 1992 the *Adelaide Advertiser* published a letter from a homing pigeon owner saying, *inter alia:*

> "I would like to make it known to the conservationists that the Peregrine Falcon is not a native bird of Australia. It was brought to this country from Saudi Arabia. The Peregrine Falcon, in my opinion, is on an equal basis with the feral cat that is now being extinguished."

If you think that is somewhat preposterous, would you believe that some pigeon fanciers think the CSIRO is breeding Peregrine Falcons in Canberra in large numbers for release? Or that others believe Peregrine Falcons were introduced, as the Japanese Golden Falcon (whatever that is), to Australia and the south Pacific region by the Japanese aimed forces, to destroy Allied messenger pigeons? Presumably the falcons could distinguish between Allied and Japanese pigeons as the Japanese themselves, made extensive use of messenger pigeons.

A year after the letter was published in the *Adelaide Advertiser,* an editorial in the *Pigeon Fanciers Gazette* represented Peregrine Falcons as a plague sweeping westwards from eastern Australia, destroying native bird life in its path. It was coupled to a call to end legislative protection of the Peregrine Falcon.

Obviously the above attitudes are not typical of the views of the majority of pigeon fanciers. However, the fact such false statements are published, show that the Peregrine Falcon is still in danger from those people who believe such statements.

If you are interested in reading more about Peregrine Falcons and pigeons. there is an article on the subject by Hugo Phillipps in the September 1993 issue of the RAOU's magazine *Wingspan.* Hugo is the RAOU's conservation officer and he

suggests in the article that there should be more control over racing pigeons. This is because they add to the population of feral pigeons which, to quote the late Dr. Harry Frith "..... deface public buildings. damage ornamental gardens, market gardens, and vegetable crops in some districts. They cause great wastage of animal feed and stored grain. They are potential reservoirs of human and poultry diseases. As their populations increase, and the older mature trees die, they could become competitors with native hole-nesting birds for the remaining nest sites."

Hugo also mentions the case of Baudin Rocks Conservation Park in South Australia. This is a small island where Bridled Terns used to breed. It has been occupied by thousands of feral pigeons, and now no Bridled Terns breed there.

In the 21 May 1994 issue of *New Scientist* there is an article on cats and their role in Australia as predators of native fauna. David Paton, a zoologist at the University of Adelaide. in research started in 1989, shows that Victoria and New South Wales each have about 900,000 domestic cats, which between them kill almost 60 million vertebrates a year (the article does not disclose how many of these are native). Feral animals wreak even greater havoc. Paton estimates that Australia has about 3.8 million feral cats, which kill about 3.8 billion native animals a year.

Several communities in Australia have taken action to control domestic cats. In 1991. the council at Sherbrooke became the first to act against cats, which were blamed for the rapid decline in the population of lyrebirds. It passed by-laws that required cats to be confined at night, and to be registered and indentified by a collar, an implanted microchip, or a tattoo. From 1 July, no household in Gladstone, Qld., will be allowed to keep more than two cats, and from next January the animals will be under a night curfew - cat owners will have to keep their pets confined in some form of escape-proof building from eight at night until six in the morning. At Halls Gap, in the Grampians National Park, the local council has declared the town a cat-free zone. Residents can keep the cats they have, but cannot acquire new ones. At a state and territory level, most governments are planning legislation to control cats.

I must confess to being concerned about the emphasis which is being placed on the night-time confinement of domestic cats. Surely most birds are killed by cats during daylight hours and therefore night-time confinement will do little to stop this.

An interesting suggestion made by Mary Bomford, a researcher with the Bureau of Resource Sciences, is that the feral population of cats is self-sustaining and likely to have originated from animals shipwrecked off the western coast of Australia in the 17th century.

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RARITIES PANEL NEWS

A rather mixed bag this time including a couple of old records (Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* and Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis).*

The Red-capped Robins *Petroica goodenovii are* still around. at Mount Ainslie and at Southwells Crossing where a pair has been seen several times. Will they breed?

The Scarlet Honeyeater *Myzomela sanguinolenta* was a record of a "brown" bird feeding on a honeysuckle bush *Lonicera* sp. in a garden.

Other interesting records were the Common Sandpiper *T. hypoleucos* at Lake Ginninderra and a dark **morph** White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis at* Campbell Park at an unusual time of year. Remember to have a good look at the "dark-headed" juvenile Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes *C. novaehollandiae* - it is possible some could be White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes.

A couple of Little Friarbirds were seen in the north of our area. Are these birds becoming more common, or are there just more observers?

Although the Little Lorikeet *Glossopsitta pusilla* is not strictly a species to be reported, a sighting has been included in this list as they have never been a common bird in our area.

Finally, where have **all** the corellas gone - both the Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea* and the Long-billed Corella *C. tenuirostris?* Are they still out there?

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO. 39

Grey Goshawk
1; 28 Mar 94; M. Fyfe; Australian National Botanic Gardens.

Common Sandpiper
1; 24 Apr 94; D. McDonald; Lake Ginninderra.

Marsh Sandpiper
3; 22 Dec 91; I. Crawford; Lake Bathurst west.

Little Lorikeet
5+; 7 May 94; B. Lepschi; Woodstock Reserve, near Uriarra Crossing.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike (dark morph)
1; 21 Nov 93; M. Butterfield; Campbell Park Offices.

Red-capped Robin
1 male; 15 Aug 93; J. Bounds; Mt. Ainslie.
- 1 male & 1 female; 5 Jun 94; E. Tulip; Southwells Crossing.

Little Friarbird
5; 2 Nov 91; B. Lindenmayer; Mulligans Flat.
1; 21 Nov 93; M. Argall; Ridge End (Grid L5).
1; 14 Feb 94; H. Linacre; Page.

Scarlet Honeyeater
1; 15 Nov 93; H. Stephinson; 17 k S Captains Flat (Grid S24).

Escapees:

Spotted Turtle-Dove
1; 21 Dec 93; M. Larkin; Evatt.

Budgerigar
l; 16 Mar 94; B. Lepschi; Weston.

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ODD OB

A FEEDING FLOCK OF GANG-GANG COCKATOOS AND YELLOW-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOOS

Isobel Crawford

A mixed feeding flock of more than 50 Gang-gang Cockatoos *Callocephalon fimbriatum* and more than 50 Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus funereus* was seen on 14 April 1989, feeding on the seed cones of *Pinus elliottii (?)* at the top of the hill SW of the Cotter, ACT. Other individuals of both species, including young Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos, could be heard. A similar flock was seen by Tony Howard (pers. comm.) in 1993.

Isobel Crawford, PO Box 31, O'CONNOR ACT 2601

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(Continued from inside front cover)

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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* 19(2) June 1994

Articles

Odd Obs

Out and About

(Printed June 1994)