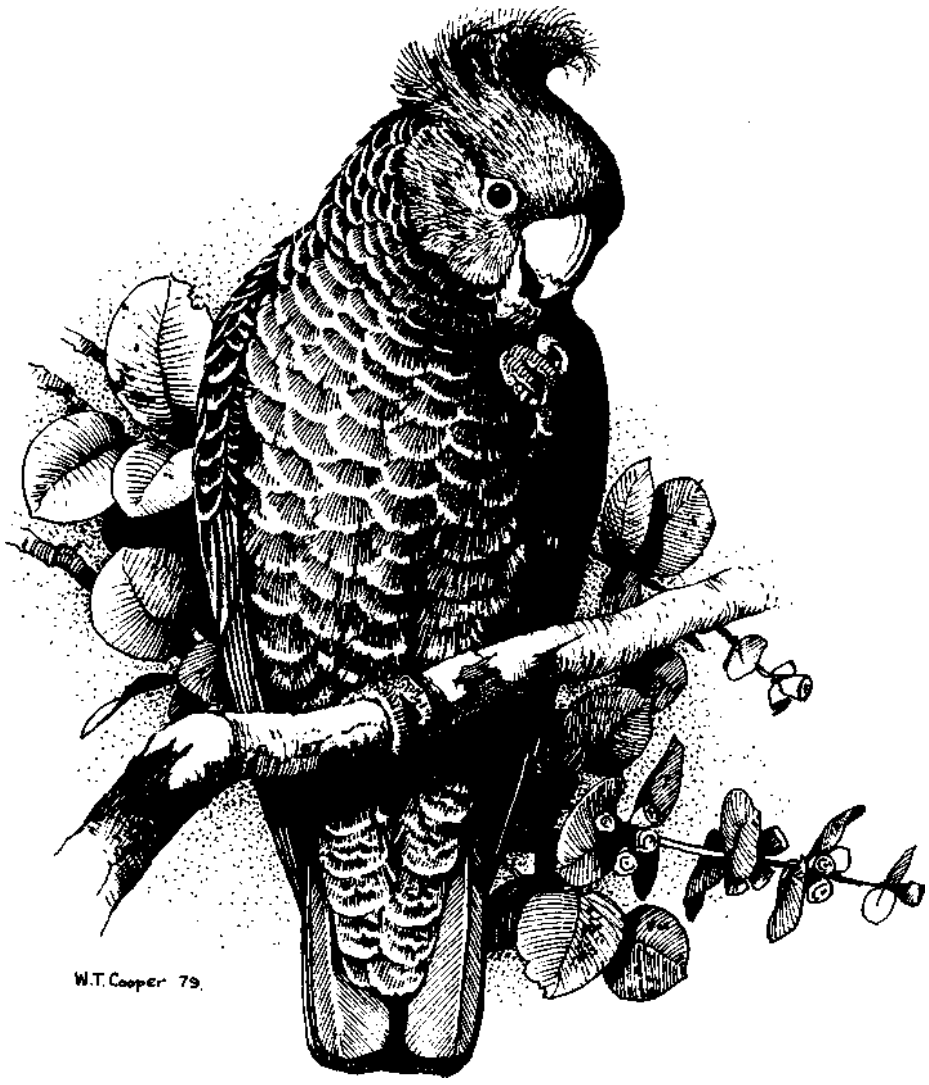
ISSN 0314-8211

CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

Volume 19
Number 4
December 1994

Registered by Australia Post - publication No NBH 0255



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(Continued inside back cover)

PAINTED HONEYEATERS AT JINDALEE STATE FOREST, NEAR WALLENDBEEN, NSW, AND THEIR STATUS IN THE CANBERRA REGION

Jenny Bounds

In late October and early November 1994 Painted Honeyeaters *Grantiella picta.* were observed at Jindalee State Forest by members of the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG).

Painted Honeyeaters are listed as "vulnerable and rare" under the 1991 NSW Endangered Fauna (Interim Protection) Act. They are sparsely distributed over a large area of eastern Australia west of the Great Dividing Range (NT, western Qld, inland NSW, south-west Vic, and SA). Their distribution is erratic and patchy and it is generally accepted that in south-eastern Australia the birds breed mainly south of latitude 26° S (which crosses eastern Australia about 160 km north of Brisbane) from November to February then migrate north into Queensland and the Northern Territory (Longmore and National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife 1991).

Garnett (1993) and other authors indicate that. because of their general scarcity, preferred diet and nomadic habits, Painted Honeyeaters cannot be effectively protected in established reserves. By contrast, another rare woodland species, the better publicised Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia.* although nomadic to an extent, is known to concentrate and breed in specific woodland enclaves where long-term recovery work such as surveying and tree-planting can be focussed. The Painted Honeyeater may. therefore, be in a more precarious position than the Regent Honeyeater, although officially the Regent Honeyeater is listed under NSW legislation in the more endangered category of "threatened".

There is little detailed information about Painted Honeyeaters in the literature, but two articles are of interest. Eddy (1961) and Hindwood (1935) refer to active calling and flying erratically from tree to tree when Painted Honeyeaters arrive from migration. Eddy. who observed Painted Honeyeaters for twenty years in Bendigo, Victoria. says the procedure is repeated throughout the day for about a fortnight or so until the female birds arrive. Eddy thought it was part of a mating ritual. Although the observations made at Jindalee State Forest were brief, the behaviour of the birds was similar to that described by Eddy and Hindwood.

Jindalee State Forest

Jindalee State Forest is a remnant ironbark/box woodland about 10 km west of Wallendbeen on the Harden/Temora/Griffith Road, about 160 km from the ACT. It is

the nearest remnant of ironbark forest to the ACT. While it is outside COG's immediate area of interest (which ends around Yass), Jindalee State Forest has been regularly visited by members of the group for some years. Its status in terms of commercial use is unclear, but the understorey has become degraded in recent times, largely because of grazing by sheep.

During the years COG has been visiting Jindalee State Forest, other species of birds listed under NSW legislation as "threatened" or "vulnerable and rare" have been observed in or near the forest, including the Turquoise Parrot *Neophema pulchella,* Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* and Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* (unpublished lists compiled from COG field trips to Cocoparra National Park, Ingalba Nature Reserve and Jindalee State Forest over the years 1985 to 1994). The forest is also home to many other species of birds. It is the most easterly in a chain of state forests, nature reserves and national parks scattered across the cleared farmlands between Griffith and Canberra where small numbers of Painted Honeyeaters are observed from time to time.

In 1988, COG observed Painted Honeyeaters at Ingalba Nature Reserve, 50 km to the west of Jindalee State Forest and on 30 October 1994 the COG Twitchathon team recorded them near Griffith. The birds were also observed by COG in 1985 at Cocoparra National Park near Griffith. The Annual Bird Reports of the NSW Field Ornithologists Club for 1989 and 1992 (Morris and Burton 1992, 1994) show small numbers of Painted Honeyeaters in the spring/summer at Cocoparra National Park, Ingalba Nature Reserve, in several reserves and state forests in the West Wyalong area, and in September 1992 two were observed at Jindalee State Forest.

Painted Honeyeaters were seen by COG members at Jindalee State Forest on 30 October, and 4 and 5 November 1994 in an area off the eastern side of the Cootamundra road bordering on cleared farmland. This spot has very large, old ironbark and box trees with some mistletoe *Amyema* sp. in them, Fuscous Honeyeaters *Lichenastomus fuscus* and White-plumed Honeyeaters *L. penicillatus* are the common resident honeyeaters. The area is used by locals for recreation (including picnicking and trail-bike riding).

On 12 November 1994, a group led by the author spent several hours observing the Painted Honeyeaters. There was estimated to be a flock of about ten birds in an area of several hectares. Mostly males were observed, but two females were seen briefly. The birds were not found on several visits during the next month.

The male birds were calling loudly from perches in the trees, using the well known, two note "georgie, georgie" and a similar toned call of several notes repeated, "tu tu tu tu". The birds were actively flying from one tree to another in the upper and middle canopies of the trees. One bird kept returning to the same tree over a period of

an hour - it called from perches in the tree, flew off, then returned and repeated the procedure.

Mistletoe berries are said to be the favoured food of Painted Honeyeaters and a necessary food when breeding to feed the young (Hindwood 1935; Longmore and National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife 1991; Garnett 1993). Although there were some mistletoe berries around and a box species was coming into flower, the birds seemed to be feeding mainly on insects. In the time available, no nests were found or other behaviour noticed which might indicate the birds were nesting.

Occurrence of Painted Honeyeaters in the Canberra region

The first published record of Painted Honeyeaters in the Canberra area was by Lamm and White (1950) who reported seeing eight, including one incubating, on River Oaks *Casuarina cunninghamiana* along the Murrumbidgee River on 4 December 1948. Throughout December and January the number of birds which they observed increased, reaching a total of over 20 by 6 February 1949. During the same period Painted Honeyeaters were seen in the city area on several occasions. Lamm and Calaby (1950) also report seeing Painted Honeyeaters along the east bank of the Murrumbidgee River between Uriarra Crossing and Cotter on four of 37 traverses of the area made in the period from September 1947 to September 1949. It is likely that these are the same observations reported by Lamm and White.

The 1966 edition of "A Field List of the Birds of Canberra and District" (ACT Branch of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union 1966) indicates that small numbers of birds were regularly present from November to January. Wilson (1969) states "it is known to return to our area each year and breed in the river she-oaks along the Murrumbidgee River, particularly the large trees near Uriarra Crossing." He also reported that it was seen for several weeks in open forest on the eastern slopes of Mount Ainslie. In the "Status of Birds of Canberra and District" (Anon. 1976), the Painted Honeyeater is described as a "Rare summer breeding migrant. Present along the Murrumbidgee each year in small numbers from November to January where it breeds. Like the Mistletoebird, it is largely dependent on the fruiting of mistletoe and is rarely found away from trees bearing this parasite". In the Annual Bird Report for 1982-83 (Taylor 1984) the Painted Honeyeater was again described as a "rare summer breeding migrant".

In the 1985 edition of "A Field List of the Birds of Canberra and District" (Canberra Ornithologists Group 1985) the species status was downgraded to "vagrant". and the 1993 edition (Canberra Ornithologists Group 1993) does not show them as occurring in Canberra or district (presumably because of the few records in the previous 25 years). Painted Honeyeaters were not observed during the course of the

Murrumbidgee River Corridor Bird Survey conducted from July 1985 through to June 1986 (Taylor 1987), or during the ACT Bird Atlas Project conducted from 1 September 1986 through to 31 August 1989 (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992).

Other local records of Painted Honeyeaters published in *Canberra Bird Notes* are:

- "Pair Casuarina Sands 14/1/71" (Dow 1988).
- "Recorded on Queanbeyan - Captains Flat Road 20 Nov [1977], also at
- Rehwinkels Animal Park 4 Jan [1978]" (Clark and Lenz 1978).
- "1; Oct 88; J. Morse; Tharwa" (Anon. 1991).

The second of the above reports is the only record of Painted Honeyeaters in an Annual Bird Report published by COG or by the former ACT Branch of the RAOU.

Although there are few published observations of Painted Honeyeaters in the Canberra district, the anecdotal evidence, both published and unpublished, suggest there has been a decline in the occurrence of the species in the area.

Conclusion

Garnett (1993) indicates that remnant woodlands (such as the ironbark/box type found at Jindalee State Forest) are important for the long-term survival of species like Painted Honeyeaters. In view of the clearing of much of this type of woodland from eastern Australia, and the vulnerability of Painted Honeyeaters, there are good conservation grounds for Jindalee State Forest to be provided with better protection and management as a fauna reserve.

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POPULATION DENSITIES OF COMMON MYNAS, COMMON STARLINGS, CRIMSON ROSELLAS AND EASTERN ROSELLAS IN OAKEY HILL NATURE PARK AND ADJACENT SUBURBS

Stuart Pell and Chris Tidemann

Two introduced species, the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris,* use hollows in mature, senescent and dead eucalypt trees for nesting. This resource is also used by native parrots, for example Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans,* Eastern Rosella *P. eximius* and Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus.*

Although there are differences in preferred dimensions of hollows used by these species, there is considerable overlap in the size of hollows used in practice (Wilson 1973, Saunders *et al.* 1982). It is now generally accepted that the supply of naturally available tree-hollows has decreased substantially with the increasing development of Australia since European settlement. Depending upon the population of user species, the supply of tree-hollows can represent a limiting resource. Competition for available hollows then appears inevitable.

It is commonly believed that two introduced species usurp nest-hollows suitable for use by native parrots and may constitute a threat to breeding populations of parrots in suburban and open woodland habitats (e.g. Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992). However, evidence on the nature and scale of this threat is limited. A small number of observations indicates that the myna may aggressively displace native species from potential nest-hollows. Wright and Wright (1991) and Peters and Peters (1993) noted the expulsion of resident Eastern Rosellas from nest- hollows by mynas, while Lindenmayer (1993) described the successful use of a hollow by mynas, in competition with Crimson Rosellas, Eastern Rosellas and Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla.* The significance of these threats at a population level has not been quantified.

The starling is now well-established, at considerable population density, throughout urban, grassland and woodland habitats in the ACT (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992).

The population of mynas in Canberra has increased markedly in recent years. The figures given in Table 1 for 1984 to 1991 are taken from the Canberra Ornithologists Group's Garden Bird Survey (Taylor et al. 1986, 1987; Veerman et al. 1988, 1987; Canberra Ornithologists Group 1990, 1992, 1993) and indicate the degree of this increase and the spread of the myna over the Canberra region. This expansion is of concern, given increasing pressure on a finite supply of nesting hollows.

Table 1. Measures of abundance (A) and distribution (F%) of the Common Myna in Canberra over the period 1984-85 to 1990-91.

Year	84-85	85-86	86-87	87-88	88-89	89-90	90-91	
Abundance (A)*		0.58	0.62	0.66	l.66	1.20	l.72	2.79
Distribution (F%)#	33.0	33.7	34.8	44.3	46.4	52.5	54.2	

*A (a measure of abundance) = the average maximum number of individuals recorded for each week during the year.
#F% (a measure of distribution) = the number of sites at which the species was recorded at least once, as expressed as a percentage of the total number of sites surveyed.

Davey (1991) presented the results of a survey undertaken in July 1990 which mapped the distribution of mynas in Canberra and estimated population densities in the majority of Canberra suburbs. He found that the myna was present, at that time, in 46 of the 83 Canberra suburbs, with population densities varying considerably between suburbs. He called for information on the disturbance caused by mynas to the natural system.

The myna is predominantly a bird of urban areas, living commensally with humans (Councilman 1974). However, it can, to a lesser extent. colonise pastoral areas (e.g. Wilson 1973). The extent of use of nature reserves close to urban areas (e.g. components of the Canberra Nature Park) by introduced species has not yet been studied and requires investigation.

Mynas are known to destroy starling eggs and young in the vicinity of myna territories (Wilson 1973). It is important that evidence of similar interference with native species by mynas and starlings be documented.

This paper presents population density data for Common Myna, Common Starling, Crimson Rosella and Eastern Rosella in Oakey Hill Nature Park and adjacent suburbs for February, April and June 1994. The use of the park as a feeding resource during these periods is documented. Preliminary indications of its use for breeding are also given. The work is part of an on-going project examining the use of resources in urban nature parks by the above four species and the effect which the introduced myna and starling have on native parrot species.

Study Area and Methodology

Oakey Hill Nature Park is an area of approximately 60 ha consisting predominantly of grassy open eucalypt woodland. although in many areas trees are only isolated in occurrence. There have been various recent plantings (e.g. *Eucalyptus cinerea, E. viminalis),* but numerous mature or senescent trees (e.g. *E. blakelyi)* or dead stags remain. These provide many potential nest-hollows. Other species present include *Casuarina stricta, Acacia baileyana, A. dealbata* and *A. rubida.* The understorey is characterised by a dense grassy cover (mainly introduced pasture grasses but with some native grasses (e.g. *Themeda australis)* and by isolated shrubs (e.g. *Pyracantha* spp., *Rosa* spp.).

An area of approximately 10 ha contains dense plantings of *E. globulus* (ssp. *bicostata)* too young to be a source of potential nest-hollows. This area was not included in the transects surveyed (see below). One edge of the park. adjacent to the suburb of Lyons, comprises a narrow strip of introduced grasses totalling approximately 2 ha in area.

Bird population densities were estimated at two-monthly intervals by strip transect census in Oakey Hill Nature Park and in the adjacent suburbs of Lyons and Weston. Each suburban transect was 1 km in length and 60 m in width, covering 6 ha per transect and requiring approximately 20 minutes survey time per count. Oakey Hill Nature Park was censused using four contiguous transects, totalling 3.4 km in length, covering 34 ha and requiring approximately 70 minutes survey time per count.

Each site was censused on six separate occasions in each of February, April and June 1994. All censuses were carried out between 0700 and 0930 h in the absence of rain or strong wind.

Birds observed in trees or on the ground were recorded separately and totalled as the number of birds using the park. Birds observed on the grassy edges of the park, adjacent to the suburb of Lyons, were recorded and reported separately. Birds observed on wires or telegraph poles within the park were not included in the estimates of birds using the park - such birds either move further into the park or return directly to the suburbs. To include them would increase the risks of double-counting and overestimation of population density. Instances of hollow-inspection activity observed during transect counts were recorded and are reported below. Instances of aggressive interactions between or within species were similarly recorded and will be reported at the end of the breeding season.

Population densities (birds per km^2) are reported as means ± standard deviation

Some information on nest-hollow inspection activity is included from Red Hill Nature Park which is approximately 4 km east of Oakey Hill Nature Park.

Results

Population densities

The population density estimates for Common Myna, Common Starling, Crimson Rosella and Eastern Rosella in the Oakey Hill Nature Park for February, April and June 1994 are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Population density estimates (birds per km^2) in Oakey Hill Nature Park.

	Starling	Myna	C. Rosella	E. Rosella
February 1994	43±32	48±23	17±12	18± 6
April 1994	73±19	40±20	19± 6	10± 4
June 1994	77±24	16± 6	5± 7	2± 3

Table 2 indicates that the population density of mynas in the park was lower in June than in February 1994. Conversely, starling population density rose over the same period. Table 2 indicates that the population densities of both Crimson Rosellas and Eastern Rosellas were lower in June than in February 1994. The numbers involved in these rosella population density estimates were small.

Tables 3 and 4 give corresponding population density estimates for the suburbs of Lyons and Weston. They indicate that the population density of starlings in both suburbs increased over the survey period.

Table 3. Population density estimates (birds per km^2) in the suburb of Lyons.

	Starling	Myna	C. Rosella	E. Rosella
February 1994	175± 81	73±22	13±15	21±21
April 1994	186± 79	92±60	8± 9	3± 7
June 1994	253±107	125±54	31±22	14±13

Table 4. Population density estimates (birds per km²) in the suburb of Weston.

	Starling	Myna	C. Rosella	E. Rosella
February 1994	154±65	135±97	15±23	10±29
April 1994	245±85	142±71	11±14	0± 0
June 1994	270±98	142±55	19±19	6+14

Use of Oakey Hill Nature Park for feeding

Birds observed in the park while foraging on the ground or feeding on berries in low shrubs, expressed as a percentage of the total numbers recorded in the park (Table 2). were:

Common Starling	7% (28 of 394 records)
Common Myna	14% (29 of 210 records)

Birds observed feeding on the grass fringe of the park. immediately adjacent to the suburb of Lyons, expressed as the means of 12 daily counts made at the beginning of transect surveys, were:

Common Starling	10 birds per day (32%)
Common Myna	6 birds per day (35%)

The figures in parentheses are the numbers feeding on the grass fringe expressed as a percentage of the total of that species recorded in the park and on the grass fringe.

Nest-hollow inspection activity

Table 5 lists the numbers of instances of hollow inspection observed in the months of February, April and June 1994. Data are given for all four species and cover 19 hours of observation per month during transect surveys on Oakey Hill Nature Park (7 hours per month) and Red Hill Nature Park (12 hours per month). Additionally, mynas were observed feeding young on three occasions during February 1994 in Oakey Hill Nature Park.

Table 5. Nest-hollow inspection activity.

	Starling	Myna	C. Rosella	E. Rosella	Total
February 1994	3	2	3	0	8
April 1994	16	6	2	2	26
June 1994	20	9	1	5	35
Totals	39	17	6	7	69

Discussion

The introduced species and the two local rosellas all utilised the Oakey Hill Nature Park throughout the survey period (Table 2), but to considerably differing extents. Population densities of introduced species were. on average, four times greater than those of rosellas.

Table 2 indicates that the population density of mynas was lower in June 1994. We suggest that the higher numbers during February and April reflect increased use of Oakey Hill Nature Park as breeding (February) and, to a lesser extent, feeding resources during these months. Ambrose (1982), working in the La Trobe University Wildlife Reserve, Melbourne, found that mynas were most numerous in the reserve from August to February and then declined in numbers during autumn and early winter. At this time, they were most frequently seen in built-up areas on the campus, where they scavenged for food.

In the current study. it is possible that the trend towards increased myna numbers in the adjacent suburb of Lyons in June 1994 (Table 3) may be, in part, due to mynas. including juvenile birds, moving into the suburb from the park at the end of the breeding season.

The increase in starling numbers over the survey period in the suburbs of Lyons and Weston (Tables 3 and 4) and the Oakey Hill Nature Park (Table 2) may be related to the increasing development of feeding flocks during the autumn and winter period. This is consistent with the findings of Ambrose (1982) where starling population densities rose during winter and early spring at the La Trobe University Wildlife Reserve, and at Bundoora. a nearby suburb, with large feeding flocks being frequently observed. Pairs and smaller flocks were more often encountered during spring, with numbers observed declining in late spring and summer.

The suburban population density figures for the myna (Tables 3 and 4), when compared to earlier estimates, indicate that the suburban density of this species continues to increase markedly, at least in Lyons and Weston. Earlier assessment

(Davey 1991) gave estimated myna densities of 15 birds per km^2 (Lyons) and 8 birds per km^2 (Weston), based on surveys carried out in July 1990. The current estimates for June 1994 are 125 ± 54 birds per km^2 (Lyons) and 142 ± 55 birds per km^2 (Weston).

The 1 km suburban transects used in the current surveys were close to Oakey Hill Nature Park which could have led to abnormally high population density estimates. This appears unlikely, particularly in the case of Weston where the suburb is separated from the nature park by the Tuggeranong Parkway (a 4-lane arterial road). It may be that the myna populations will fall as winter progresses and food availability is reduced. However, in neither Lyons nor Weston is any fall off in numbers apparent in early winter counts (June 1994). Wilson (1973) notes that. once fledgling mynas have become independent of parental feeding, mortality in juvenile mynas is relatively low, even in the cold winters of Hawke Bay, New Zealand (39° S).

Table 2 indicates that the rosellas may move away from the Oakey Hill Nature Park during winter, although numbers involved in these estimates are small.

The relative proportions of the two introduced species and the two native rosellas in Lyons and Weston can be calculated from Tables 3 and 4. On average, over the survey period, the introduced species outnumber the rosellas by a factor of 13:1. This figure is higher than the corresponding ratio for Oakey Hill Nature Park (4:l), probably reflecting the greater extent to which mynas and starlings live commensally with humans in the suburbs.

The use made of Oakey Hill Nature Park

All four species utilised the park throughout the survey period. Use of the park as a feeding resource by mynas and starlings appears to be relatively limited. These species feed predominantly on or close to the ground. Only 13% (myna) and 7% (starling) of total observations in the park were made on or close to the ground. Both species were observed to take invertebrates from the ground and to feed on berries of *Pyracantha* spp. present in the park.

Common Starlings. Common Mynas, Eastern Rosellas and Red-rumped Parrots all make use of the grassy fringes at the suburban edge (Lyons) of the park for feeding.

Preliminary indications are that both Oakey Hill and Red Hill Nature Parks may be used as a breeding resource by the four species under study. All have been observed to continue hollow-inspection activity throughout the non-breeding months of April and June (Table 5). Mynas were observed on three occasions feeding young in February 1994 in Oakey Hill Nature Park.

The behaviour of mynas and starlings in the park during autumn and winter is of particular interest. Birds are usually observed in mature. senescent or dead eucalypt trees. A small number of pairs of mynas commonly occupy particular trees, essentially as winter "home range". Hollows in these trees are inspected periodically, suggesting that the pairs endeavour to continue "ownership" of the hollow through the non- breeding season. Starlings, likewise, are observed in older, hollow-bearing trees. often in groups larger than pairs, and also periodically inspect hollows. Again. these trees may represent winter "home range" to the birds concerned. Both species roost in the suburbs during the night and fly to these "home ranges" during the day, following early feeding activity.

Observations on the use of Oakey Hill and Red Hill Nature Parks as breeding resources and on antagonistic interactions between introduced species and native parrots will continue during the forthcoming 1994 breeding season. Differential use of artificial nest-boxes established in both parks will also be determined.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the contribution made by the Projects Subcommittee of the Canberra Ornithologists Group, who pointed out the need for work in the above areas and suggested the use of Oakey Hill Nature Park as an appropriate site.

We are grateful to the ACT Parks and Conservation Service for a grant supporting operating costs within the project and for permission to use Oakey Hill and Red Hill Nature Parks as study sites. The advice of Mr **R.** Cunningham on statistical procedures used in the analysis is gratefully acknowledged.

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ACT BIRD WATCHERS 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 up-dated.

AN UNUSUAL ROOST SITE OF A WHITE-THROATED TREE-CREEPER

Alan Scrymgeour

At Myrtle Mountain west of Merimbula, my wife Lyn and I are working to regenerate and develop a 40 ha property to bring back and support its population of Sugar Gliders *Petaurus breviceps* and honeyeaters - especially the Scarlet Honeyeater *Myzomela sanguinolenta.* At night we often search the bushland with a powerful torch built from the landing light of an aircraft. On one such night the light illuminated a little ball of feathers clinging to the brick work under the extended back roof area of our house. Closer inspection revealed this to be a sleeping White-throated Tree-creeper *Climacteris leucophaea.* It was a great place for it to sleep, protected from predation. but it was windy and cold. During the next few months the bird moved to a high gable next to the disused nest of a Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena.* This was a better place to sleep as it was not so windy but was still exposed to rain gusts. Late one Friday night, having just arrived after driving down from Canberra, I switched on the outside back light and alongside the door, at head level, 30 cm from my eyes, was the tree-creeper sound asleep with its head tucked in. The brick wall was still warm from the heat it had collected during the day. the roof was sheltering the tree-creeper from predation during the night, and the verandah line protecting it from all wind.

Since then, by removing the droppings and watching the build-up of fresh droppings, I have discovered this tree-creeper uses the house as a bedroom most nights. Perhaps "Timbarra House" will one day be the sleeping quarters for all this bird's offspring. I hope so.

There is a similar account in *Canberra Bird Notes* of a female White-throated Tree-creeper which, for 20 months, roosted in the porch of a house in Turner (Spate 1986, *Canberra Bird Notes 11:* 128). In about 1976, a White-throated Tree-creeper was also observed for a period of at least six months roosting on the wall under an over-hanging roof at the entrance to the ladies toilet at the Australian National Botanic Gardens (Nicola Clark pers. comm.).

Alan Scrymgeour, 2 Holroyd Street, WATSON ACT 2602

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ODD OBS

AERIAL MANOEUVRES OF A MOBBED MARSH HARRIER

John Leonard

At Jerrabomberra Wetlands in the late afternoon on 9 October 1994 I observed an immature Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* flying up the creek at tree-top height. Mobbed by two Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen.* it dodged several times and finally executed a complete barrel-roll. striking upwards with both feet at one of the magpies, when it was completely upside down.

John Leonard, PO Box 243, WODEN ACT 2606

BROWN FALCONS HAWKING FOR INSECTS

Isobel Crawford

Brown Falcons *Falco berigora* are known to occasionally feed on flying insects (Veerman 1988, *Canberra Bird Notes* 13: 118). On 25 January 1989. at dusk on the Tharwa Road, near Gudgenby Creek. ACT, I observed two Brown Falcons hawking for insects of unknown species. The insects were 2 to 3 cm. in length.

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

IMMATURE MALE SUPERB LYREBIRD PRACTISING ITS SONG AND DISPLAY?

John Leonard

On 3 November 1994 near the car-park at Billangabee Creek, in Ben Boyd National Park. I observed an immature Superb Lyrebird *Menura novaehollandiae* apparently practising its song and display. It was approximately 10 a.m. on an overcast and humid morning. I observed the bird for about three minutes as it moved about raking at the leaf-mould under dense evergreen shrubs in the coastal sub-rainforest. There was no attempt to construct a display mound as the raking movements were in random directions and, in any case, the area was under cover. Two or three times the bird paused, erected its tail over its back (showing its filmy plumes, but its lack of the lyre-shaped outer plumes) and began its song. The song, although brief, included its own harsh introductory notes and some mimicry, including that of the Pied Currawong

Strepera graculina. It was accompanied by bowing, a little hop-and-a-skip two-step and tail shaking.

John Leonard, PO Box 243, WODEN ACT 2606

STARLING MIMICRY

Isobel Crawford

The Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* is known to mimic the calls of other birds (Schodde and Tidemann 1986. *Reader's Digest complete book of Australian birds*. (2nd edition.) Reader's Digest Services: Sydney). I have heard starlings mimic a Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus pyrrhophanus* (Parkwood Eggs, ACT, 29 April 1989); Superb Fairy-wren *Malurus cyaneus* (Rotamah Island, Gippsland Lakes, Vic., 1985-86); and Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* (Araluen, NSW, 7 July 1993).

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

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OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

In several "Out and About" articles I have referred to the way in which bird watchers in overseas countries have behaved in a less than civilised way when pursuing their urge to "tick" a particular species. Examples quoted have included the inadvertent killing of the bird being "ticked", by walking on it, and the invasion of private property, destroying fences and trampling crops. There was a certain smugness in reporting these incidents because, of course, it couldn't happen here - Australians are more "laid-back" and do not undertake the compilation of personal bird lists in such a rapacious manner. Well they say pride comes before a fall and right in COG's backyard! Recently the president of COG has had to appeal, through the RAOU, to bird watchers not to trespass on properties surrounding Lake Bathurst. Apparently bird watchers chasing the elusive "tick" have been entering these properties without permission. Local landholders have become so fed up with this behaviour that they are threatening to withdraw permission from COG to enter their properties to undertake the Waterbird Survey. The selfish actions of these few "tickers" is now threatening to bring to an end one of the longest running regular surveys of waterbirds in Australia.

There are two things you can do to help prevent this invasion of private property. The first is not to go to Lake Bathurst unless you are participating in an organised visit, such as the Waterbird Survey, which has the permission of the landowners. The second is not to pass on the details of unusual sightings at Lake Bathurst which you hear about. The fewer people that know of the presence of an unusual species at Lake Bathurst, the fewer the number of people which will try to visit the area. The landholders surrounding Lake Bathurst have cooperated with COG by permitting us to enter their properties in order to undertake the Waterbird Survey. In return we should do our best to ensure their properties are not invaded by unwanted visitors. It should also be remembered that a bird is more likely to survive if it is not continually hounded by bird watchers.

The Werribee Sewage Treatment Complex south-west of Melbourne, a 10,850 h farm where more than 60 per cent of Melbourne's sewage is treated, has been well-known for its birdlife for many years. Indeed it has been systematically visited and studied by bird watchers since the early 1950s. Unlike Lake Bathurst, which is surrounded by private property, bird watchers are encouraged to visit the complex and it is worth doing so if you are in Melbourne. Permits to visit the complex can be obtained from the Wildlife Section. Werribee Farm, Private Bag 10, Werribee Post Office, Vic 3030 (telephone 03 742 9209). Melbourne Water, who own and run the complex, have produced a very nice brochure of the birds and other natural features of the complex which is available for your visit.

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LETTER TO THE EDITORS

CONSERVATION POLICY - WATERFOWL HUNTING

11 November 1994

Following the opening of the 1994 duck shooting season. the media brought to our attention the now all too familiar and melancholy news that. in addition to numbers of Freckled Ducks. such birds as ibis, swans, cormorants, darters, pelicans and even a Southern Boobook suffered the ultimate fate at the hands of shooters. One of the authors of this letter handled and identified some of these species. Clearly the education of shooters in identification skills was not proving particularly effective.

Regrettably, at the time. it was decided not to have a monthly meeting talk on the anti-duck-shooting case. The preferred way of permitting the presentation of all

points of view and of involving members, was to turn a monthly meeting into a debate on the issue. This approach, it was suggested, would permit views to be aired "without COG's being seen to espouse a particular position".

Those among us who. faced with these annual slaughters, have shrunk back from becoming involved in the fight to change prevailing attitudes, should note that the RAOU has (again) seen fit to go into print on the issue. An article in "Wingspan" No. 15, September 1994, pp 4-6, which incorporates a truly sickening picture of a Hardhead dreadfully injured by shotgun, considers "Why we should be opposed to recreational duck-shooting: a South Australian Perspective". Author David Close concludes that "The available evidence shows, that the environmental damage done by duck-shooters in South Australia outweighs the environmental benefits. Both ecological and ethical considerations require an end to recreational duck shooting".

This article is followed by statements, adopted by RAOU Council on 29 May 1994, relating to RAOU Conservation Policy and the RAOU policy on waterfowl hunting. The latter reads -

"RAOU policy on waterfowl hunting

To ensure the appropriate management and conservation of native waterfowl in Australia, the 1988 RAOU policy on recreational duck hunting stated that the following initiatives must be undertaken:

1. An annual Australia-wide survey must be published on the timing, duration, distribution, and success of waterfowl breeding events. The impact of hunting on waterfowl populations must be determined. Biologically meaningful season specifications need to be set.
2. Non-game and threatened species must be protected through better hunter education, changes to shooting times and periodic closures of waters to hunting.
3. The use of lead shot should be banned wherever it is identified as detrimental to waterfowl populations.
4. There must be a vigorous program which increases the area of biologically productive wetlands in Australia.
5 Wetland research and management and conservation programs need to be adequately funded from hunting fees and supplemented by consolidated revenue.

A review of progress towards achieving these basic requirements shows that there are neither the data available nor the programs in place to meet them. Therefore, until such time as the actions listed in the 1988 policy are achieved, the RAOU does not support recreational waterfowl hunting in Australia."

On the first page of the recently published "Birds of the Canberra Region - Field List", COG, 1993, is writ for all to see .

Canberra Ornithologists Group is dedicated to the study of birds and the conservation of native birds and their habitats.

These words reflect COG's objectives as stated in the Constitution. The killing of native birds. for entertainment, does not seem to us to fit in with these objectives.

Should COG then stand up and be counted on the issue of waterfowl hunting? Have we got any position? If not, why not. in view of our stated conservation objectives?

It is unlikely that many COG members are without an opinion on the duck-shooting issue. Indeed. it is clear that a number hold very strong views. That being the case it is not acceptable for it to be given little or no priority simply because it is contentious or because it does not occur in our region.

The RAOU position can hardly be seen as radical but it does represent a stand. It is high time that COG stood up to demonstrate how serious is our dedication to the conservation of native birds including waterfowl. Until all those with an interest in conservation issues combine to present a united front and show that they have stomach for a fight, progress, if any. will be painfully slow.

Malcolm Fyfe and Ian Fraser

RESPONSE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP

11 January 1995

Members' views presented in a fair and balanced way are welcome in *Canberra Bird Notes*. There is. however, an implied criticism that COG has been remiss in the way it has handled the issue of duck hunting, and on this I am responding on behalf of the present COG Committee.

Broadly speaking, there are issues of priority and resources which influence the Committee's agenda and it is not possible nor appropriate for COG to actively take on every worthy conservation cause. It has been the policy of recent COG Committees

to focus on local conservation issues, and to pursue these with Government and others in a rational and balanced way. There has been very good progress with this approach, e.g. Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve.

The COG Committee has discussed the RAOU's policy on duck hunting and generally supports it. To my knowledge, COG has not espoused its own policy on the matter and there has not been an occasion where the need for a specific policy or other action has arisen locally. This is understandable given that duck hunting does not occur in the ACT.

Duck hunting is one of several controversial issues in ornithology which have the potential to be divisive in a large organisation like COG where there is a diverse membership and different views held. When Malcolm Fyfe sought to have a discussion about the anti-duck shooting case at a COG meeting, it was considered that a more appropriate way of promoting an informed and educative discussion for members would be to have a debate about the pros and cons of duck hunting. so all views could be aired. This was planned for March 1995.

The Committee intends to develop a general conservation statement for COG, which will include reference to duck hunting, and the views of interested members would be appreciated. Members will be given the opportunity to comment on the draft in due course.

These approaches are seen as an appropriate way for COG to deal with the issue.

While not wishing to take sides, I would mention that members might be interested to read an article and letters in the December 1994 issue of the RAOU's newsletter "Wingspan" (No 16). which respond to the September 1994 Wingspan article quoted in the Fyfe/Fraser letter, giving different perspectives including the conservation benefits of recreational duck hunting.

Jenny Bounds
President
PO Box 403
WODEN ACT 2606

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RARITIES PANEL NEWS

The most unusual record in the list is the record of a single Bell Miner *Manorina melanophrys* at the Australian National University from 17 through to 20 January 1994. The nearest known colony is about 80 km to the south-east at Goodenough Creek in the Araluen Valley (see Marchant 1993, *In* "Nature in Eurobodalla" No. 8. Eurobodalla Natural History Society) and for a bird to travel that far on its own seems most unusual.

The records of up to five Brown Gerygones *Gerygone mouki* in the Australian National Botanic Gardens during the period May to September is the first for many years. This is an interesting record because it conforms to the pattern of previous ones where a small group arrives and stays for a few months before moving on. It will be interesting to see whether one day a group stays permanently in Canberra.

Again this winter there were a couple of records of White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina papuensis* (including one dark-morph bird) at the Australian National University. Red-capped Robins *Petroica goodenovii* are continuing to appear in our area, including one record of a "brown" pair that were possibly breeding. Is this a fall-out from the drought?

Recent sightings of waterbirds include Cape Barren Goose *Cereopsis novaehollandiae* (presumably spreading from Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve), Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* and Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*.

Finally, to round the list off, there were a series of records from Lake Bathurst for the period 1988-91 covering waterbirds seen during the Waterbird Survey.

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO. 41

Intermediate Egret
1; 22 Oct 94; and 2; 29 Oct 94; G. Clark; Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

Cape Barren Goose
2; 31 Oct 94; J. Nicholls; "Yellangalo", *c.* 12 km SW Gunning.

Grey Goshawk
1; 21 Feb 94; P. Goddard; Campbell Park.

Grey Plover
2; 21 Sep 91; and l: 19 Oct 91; P. Milburn; east end Lake Bathurst.

Ruddy Turnstone
2; 21 Sep 91; and l; 19 Oct 91; P. Milburn; east end Lake Bathurst.

Marsh Sandpiper
l; 25 Sep 88; P. Milburn; east end Lake Bathurst.
1; 21 Sep 91; 3; 19 Oct 91; and l; 23 Nov 91; P. Milburn; east end Lake Bathurst.

Bar-tailed Godwit
2; 19 Oct 91; P. Milburn; east end Lake Bathurst.

Pectoral Sandpiper
2; 19 Oct 91; P. Milburn; east end Lake Bathurst.

Australian Pratincole
17; 19 Oct 91; P. Milburn; east end Lake Bathurst.

Gull-billed Tern
3; 19 Oct 91; P. Milburn; east end Lake Bathurst.

Superb Parrot
13; 17 Oct 93; C. Davey; Murrumbateman.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
1 (dark morph); 4 Jun 94; P. Milburn; ANU.
1 (dark morph); 28 Jul 94; S. Pell; ANU.

Red-capped Robin
l; 3 Sep 94; G. Neumann and D. Beaumont; Ginninderra Creek, Latham.
1; 19 Sep 94; J. Nicholls; Denham Street, Yarralumla.
2; 23 Oct 94; G. Clark; junction Hume Highway and Burrinjuck Dam road.

Brown Gerygone
3; 17 May 94; and up to 5 present until 21 Sep 94: J. Nicholls; Australian National Botanic Gardens.

Bell Miner
l; 17 to 20 Jan 94; R. Martin, A. Cowan, C. McCrae and K. McAndrew: eucalypts between the Nuclear Physics building and John Curtin School of Medical Research, ANU.

Lewin's Honeyeater
l: 20 Nov 94; M. Fyfe; Tallaganda State Forest, *c.* 35 km E Bredbo.

Escapees:

Domestic Goose

1; 7 Jul 94; B. Lepschi; Fullwood Street, Weston.

Little Corella

2; 23 Sep 93; C. Davey; Kaveneys Road, Grid 19.

4; 24 Dec 93, C. Davey; Bardsley Place, Holt.

2; 18 Sep 94; and 9; 30 Sept 94; Brockman Street and Red Hill Primary School oval, Narrabundah.

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet

1; 3 Jan 93; P. Fennell; Pickles Street. Scullin.

Cockatiel

l; 11 Jan 93; E. Fennell; Pickles Street, Scullin.

Records noted by the Rarities Panel:

Glossy Ibis

4; 22 Nov 94; 4; 27 Nov 94; l; 3 Dec 94; and l; 10 Dec 94; G. Clark; Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

Freckled Duck

8; 17 Jul 94; S. Mugford; west shore Lake George.

Lesser Golden Plover

8; 25 Sep 88; P. Milburn; Lake Bathurst.

Red-necked Avocet

1; 12 **Jul** 92; P. & E. Fennell; dam by Lake Road, Lake George.

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(Continued from inside front cover)

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	Gwen Hartican		281 3622
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Typing: Louise Russell
Camera-ready Copy: Cedric Bear
Printing: Lowes - Printer
Distribution: Ann McKenzie and helpers

Annual Subscriptions for 1994 are: Student (18 years of age and younger) $15.00; Individual $25.00; Family $25.00; Institutions $25.00. All receive one copy of *Canberra Bird Notes.*

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).

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(Printed March 1995)