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(Continued inside back cover)

AN APRIL BIRD SURVEY OF THE INGALBA NATURE RESERVE, WEST OF TEMORA (SOUTH WEST SLOPES, NSW)

A.M. Wilson

Introduction

The box—ironbark woodlands of NSW have been extensively modified through land clearing and subsequent land uses (Sivertsen 1993). What remains (7-10 % of the original woodland) is a fragmented network of box—ironbark woodland patches of various sizes from < 1 ha to 4000 ha. However, the majority of these patches are smaller than 10 ha (Goldney and Bowie 1990, Sivertsen 1994).

Bird use of box—ironbark woodland remnants of the South West Slopes of New South Wales has not been extensively documented. To date, there has been little research to determine: a) existing population levels of woodland bird species; and b) how these populations are responding to the reduction and fragmentation of their habitat. To assist a larger project interested in such questions, a preliminary study has been initiated in Ingalba Nature Reserve, a box—ironbark woodland about 8 km west of Temora, NSW (Figure 1).

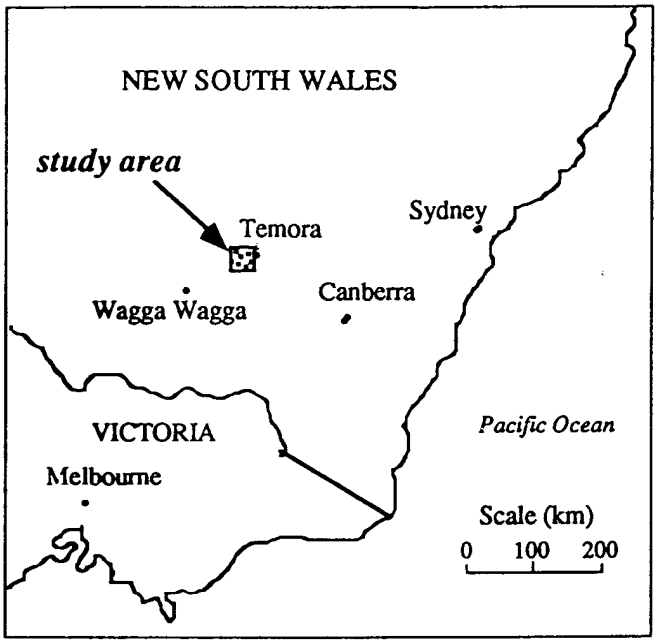

Figure 1. Location of study area (*c.* 250 km NW of Canberra).

Ingalba Nature Reserve is a 4012 ha woodland dominated by Grey Box *Eucalyptus microcarpa*, Red Ironbark *E. sideroxylon* and Cypress Pine *Callitris* sp. with a predominantly wattle *Acacia* sp. and *Cassinia* sp. understorey (Moore 1953). This area has never been cleared as it lies on a rocky ridge of relatively unproductive skeletal soils. In 1916 it was declared a state forest, supplying local fencing, firewood and charcoal needs (Thompson 1980). Since 1970, this woodland, currently the largest of its type in the area, has been protected as a nature reserve managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

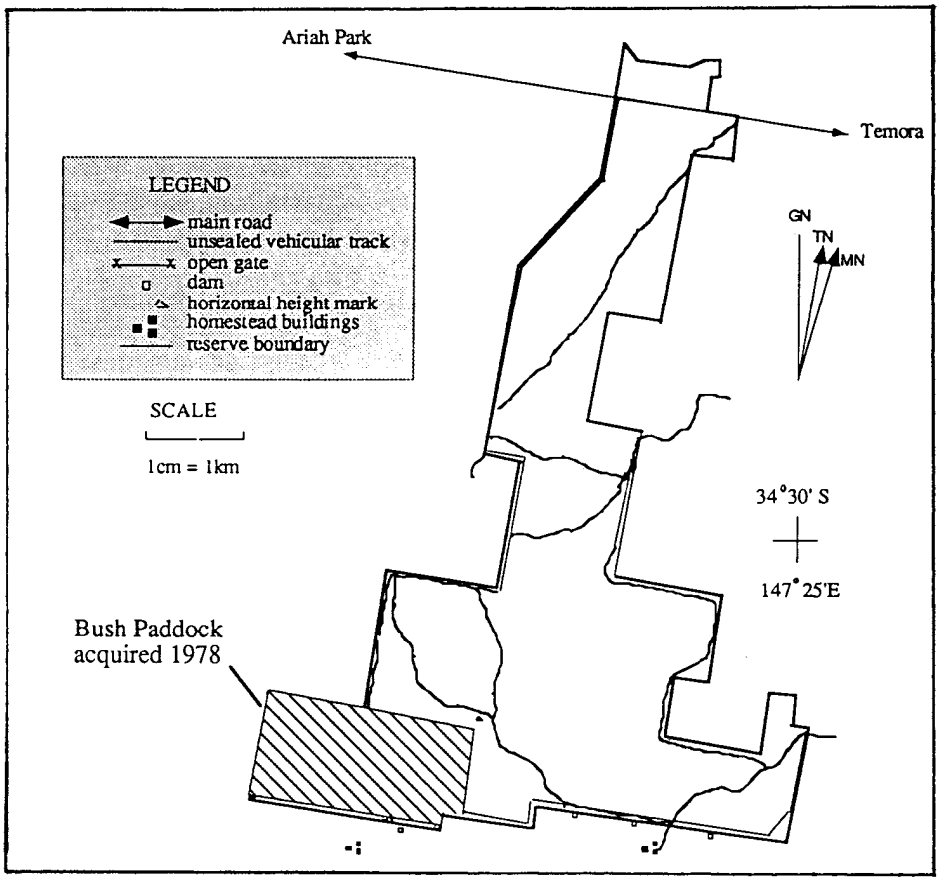

Figure 2. Map of Ingalba Nature Reserve, NSW.

Notes provided by Marjorie Cochrane (pers. comm.) and NPWS fauna records indicate that 164 bird species have been sighted in and around the nature reserve since 1968. This includes a number of threatened and vulnerable species (Table 1).

Table 1. Threatened, vulnerable and extinct birds of Ingalba Nature Reserve and surrounds, Temora, NSW. (From the NPWS database, Atlas of Fauna of NSW 1993).

Vulnerable	Threatened	Extinct (in Ingalba N.R.)
Gilberts Whistler *Pachycephala inornata*	Bush Stone-curlew *Burhinus grallarius*	Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata*
Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta*	Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia*	
Purple-crowned Lorikeet *Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*		
Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura*		
Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii*		
Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor*		
Turquoise Parrot *Neophema pulchella*		

Methods

In February and March 1995, preparations for a preliminary study of birds of Ingalba Nature Reserve began. This included the selection (from aerial photos and *in situ)* of 12 sites of 1 ha to represent the variety of vegetation groupings which exist in the nature reserve and remnant vegetation of the district. These sites have been visited monthly since April 1995.

The first monthly visit to Ingalba Nature Reserve was undertaken with the assistance of the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) from 15 through to 17 April 1995. Each site was visited twice over a period of three days. The duration of each site census was 30 minutes. Pairs of observers censused two sites each morning, recording all birds seen and/or heard within the 1 ha site. All sites were visited between 8.30 and 10.00 a.m. in sunny, dry, and slightly breezy conditions. A brief description of the dominant vegetation of each site is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Brief vegetation descriptions of bird survey sites at Ingalba Nature Reserve.

Site No.	Brief description of dominant vegetation
1	open woodland: mature Grey Box—ironbark, very sparse cassinia understorey
2	open woodland: stringybark—ironbark—casuarina, little to no understorey
3	open woodland: ironbark—Grey Box, acacia understorey
4	open woodland: Grey Box—ironbark—callitris, cassinia understorey
5	dense woodland: callitris—Grey Box—ironbark, acacia understorey
6	open woodland: stringybark—ironbark—Ross's Gum, cassinia understorey
7	open woodland: Grey Box—ironbark—callitris, cassinia understorey
8	open woodland: Grey Box—ironbark—callitris, cassinia understorey
9	dense woodland: callitris—ironbark—Grey Box, cassinia—acacia understorey
10	dense woodland: Callitris—Grey Box—ironbark, acacia—cassinia understorey
11	open woodland: stringybark—ironbark—Ross's Gum, cassinia understorey
12	open woodland: Grey Box—Ross's gum—ironbark, acacia understorey

Results

Table 3 is a summary of the 43 woodland bird species observed during the April survey, in order of most to least frequently sighted. This does not represent all the bird species seen on the weekend visit (83 species) — it lists only those recorded within the 12 sites during the census times.

Table 3. Survey of Ingalba Nature Reserve, NSW. Summary of bird species seen in 12 woodland sites during 15-17 April 1995. (Nomenclature after Christidis and Boles 1994).

RAOU Species No.	Name	Individuals per ha *	No. of sites they were observed
465	Weebill *Smicrornis brevirostris*	8.5	10
273	Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla*	7.5	9
976	Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*	5.9	9
361	Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*	4.2	9
565	Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus*	3.7	10
583	Brown-headed Honeyeater *Melithreptus brevirostris*	3.2	5
558	White-throated Treecreeper *Cormobates leucophaeus*	3.1	8
930	Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*	2.7	5
625	White-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus penicillatus*	2.6	7
638	Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*	2.4	7

Table 3 *(continued)*

288	Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius*	1.9	6
408	Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica*	1.6	9
634	Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala*	1.6	6
471	Yellow Thornbill *Acanthiza nana*	1.4	5
617	White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis*	1.2	7
619	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater *Lichenostomus melanops*	1.2	3
401	Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*	1.1	7
693	White-winged Chough *Corcorax melanorhamphos*	1.1	1
702	Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus*	0.9	4
392	Eastern Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria australis*	0.7	5
484	Buff-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza reguloides*	0.6	2
424	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*	0.6	4
705	Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*	0.6	6
555	Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus*	0.6	2
034	Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera*	0.4	4
322	Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae*	0.4	1
369	Restless Flycatcher *Myiagra inquieta*	0.4	2
381	Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii*	0.3	2
398	Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis*	0.3	2
364	Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*	0.3	1
954	Little Raven *Corvus mellori*	0.2	1
295	Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus*	0.2	1
415	Australian Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*	0.2	1
463	Western Gerygone *Gerygone fusca*	0.2	1
475	Brown Thornbill *Acanthiza pusilla*	0.2	2
291	Australian Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius*	*0.1*	1
640	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater *Acanthagenys rufogularis*	0.1	1
700	Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*	0.1	1
622	Yellow-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus ornatus*	0.1	1
224	Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax*	0.1	1
476	Inland Thornbill *Acanthiza apicalis*	0.1	1
030	Peaceful Dove *Geopelia striata*	0.1	1
470	Striated Thornbill *Acanthiza lineata*	0.1	1

* average based on the sum of all 12 sites

Not one bird species was recorded at all sites. However, 14 of the more frequently observed species were widespread, occurring at more than five sites (i.e. occurred in at least half the sites) (Figure 3).

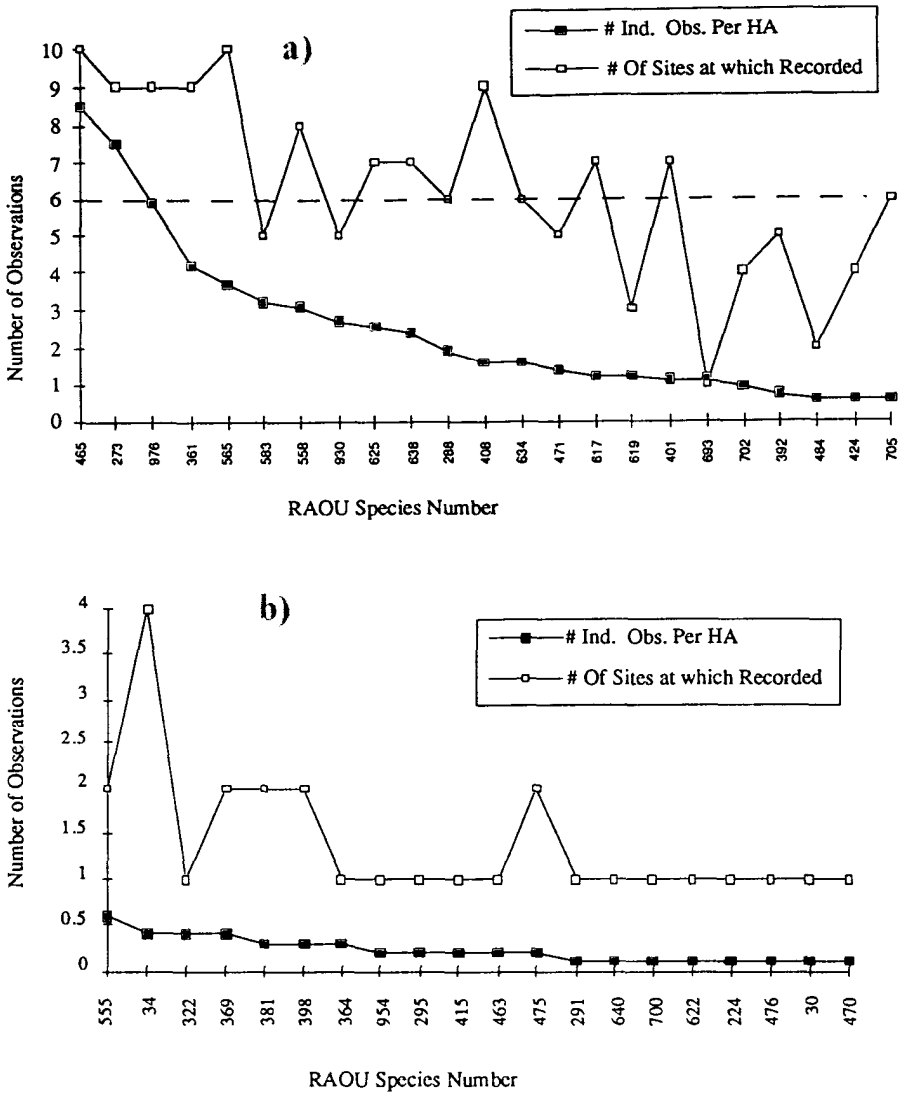

Figure 3. Bird species site distribution and frequency of occurrence:

a) Weebill to Australian Magpie (RAOU Species No's 465-705*)
b) Brown Treecreeper to Striated Thornbill (RAOU Species No's 555-470*)

* See Table 3 for list of RAOU Species Numbers and names.

Figure 4 is a plot of the number of species recorded at each site. The number of species per site varied from a minimum of seven to a maximum of 21.

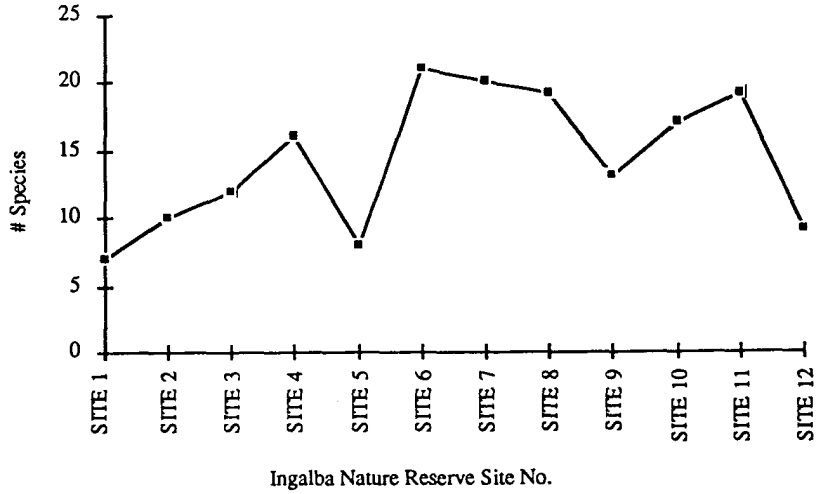

Figure 4. Number of species recorded per site.

Conclusion

The information from this April survey and subsequent monthly surveys of Ingalba Nature Reserve are the basis for a larger project investigating bird species occurring in the fragmented woodlands of the surrounding rural landscape, an area of mainly wool and wheat production (Wilson 1993).

Acknowledgements

A number of people have assisted me in this project, however I cannot list them all. **I** would like to thank the 14 COG members who participated in the April survey, particularly Malcolm Fyfe, the camp-out organiser. Others I would like to mention are Prof. Henry Nix and Dr. David Lindenmayer (Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU), Ian Thompson, Marjorie Cochrane and Stephen Bygrave. I thank the Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation for their financial support and NPWS for access to the Ingalba Nature Reserve and fauna data.

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A.M. Wilson, Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY ACT 0200

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BOWERBIRD DYNAMICS

Harriett Swift

It would be anthropomorphic to accuse Satin Bowerbirds *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* of being thieves with bad taste. And not altogether accurate. While some of the objects they collect may not be up to scratch aesthetically, this cannot be said of my sapphire ear-ring which is believed to be adorning a bower somewhere near Bega, NSW. The ear-ring was removed from a table in the garden of our house in the forest near Mimosa Rocks National Park and a bowerbird is the prime suspect.

The search for blue objects to decorate their bowers leads to some remarkable dynamics in the bowerbird world. Objects are stolen and can change hands many times. They can move over great distances as they are transferred from one bower to the next.

I first became interested in this phenomenon when I realised that a bowerbird had taken all the blue letters of the alphabet from the children's sandpit in our garden. The sandpit was there for the entertainment of visiting children and was at various times equipped with toys which included multi-coloured plastic letters of the alphabet and a set of blue Apaches on horseback.

We knew there were bowerbirds around and have occasional visits from a suave violet/black mature male and see large flocks of females and immatures feeding on the rainforest fruits in the nearby gullies. They also feed on the fruit of our Mulberry Tree *Morus nigra* as well as any fruit scraps left lying around.

The first bower

In spite of much searching, it was some years before we found the first bower, and even then it was by accident. A visitor had got lost in a nearby gully and when giving directions to the search party as to where to find him, he yelled "I'm just near the bower!".

"Don't move!" we shouted. "We'll be right there, just keep on yelling so we can work out were you are!". And so it was that we discovered the first bower, an exquisite construction aligned north-south and adorned with the usual array of rosella feathers and blue mint flowers *Prostanthera* sp. and - you guessed it - the blue letters A, X, H and Y.

This was very exciting because the letters were quite large - about 8 cm square - and had been moved nearly 1 km from the sandpit.

The following weekend we displayed the Apaches to see what would happen. Sure enough they disappeared. When we checked the bower, they were there in pride of place. This bird had placed his blue objects not just at the end of the bower, but had made an avenue of them to mark the direction of the bower starting about 3 m from the northern end. Although the Apaches were present there were some less positive changes in that the structure of the bower had been damaged, the points having become very dishevelled.

The next time we visited the bower, about three weeks later, it had been abandoned. The upright structure had been flattened and all the blue objects had gone. Only the finely woven floor remained intact to indicate that a bower had once been there.

The second bower

We continued to see male bowerbirds and about six months later came across a second bower about 50 m from the site of the first. The area in which these bowers were built was very wild. It is on a flat low ridge between two branches of a rainforest gully. It is densely covered in shrubs which predominantly have blue or purple flowers - the September-flowering *Hovea longifolia* and a very aromatic October/November-flowering native mint *Prostanthera* sp. It is possible that this influenced the choice of location as the flowering times of these blue-flowering shrubs would coincide with the male Satin Bowerbird's waxing interests in mating matters.

The new bower was more modest than the first but did contain two of the five blue alphabet letters, but no sign of the Apaches. The other blue items were rosella feathers and a few mint flowers. This bower remained fairly stable for several months, then seemed to fall into disuse, with the blue objects gradually disappearing.

The purist bower

Over the next few months we were again mystified. At one time the letter "H" turned up back on the croquet lawn at the house. It was gone the following week. Eventually a third bower was found about 100 m upstream from the second one, across the gully at a higher elevation and behind a large log. The builder of this bower was a purist, using only feathers and flowers; no manufactured objects, even though they were readily available.

We continued to leave out blue objects at the house. Items such as pieces of string or cloth disappeared, but we had no idea where they were going. We found objects such as blue clothes pegs in the bush, and they were generally gone after a few days.

The ultimate bower

A few months later there was great excitement. In one of the wildest, densest parts of the rainforest gully appeared the most splendid bower imaginable. It was amongst ferns in a substantial remnant of forest left intact after the surrounding area of state forest had been hideously clear-felled. Majestic old Mountain Grey Gums *Eucalyptus cypellocarpas* and stringybarks had been carried off to Eden for woodchips, but the rainforest gully was unharmed.

The bower had everything; all the blue letters from the alphabet, a blue plastic cigarette lighter, two blue caps from detergent bottles, rosella feathers, some yellow crest feathers from a cockatoo, a collection of bottle tops and much more. The second time we saw it, a blue "Lakeside Hotel" matchbox had been added. The *piece de resistance,* however, was a fabulous collection of blue plastic surveyor's tape which is used by NSW State Forests to mark the boundaries of the logging compartments. Were it not for the heart-breaking state of the surrounding forest, it would have been funny. But on this occasion at least, the birds have had the last laugh.

Postscript

There is no real end to this story, but the letter "X" has again turned up back at the house and is in the sandpit. Only the letter "H" remains in the "ultimate" bower. The sapphire ear-ring seems to have disappeared altogether, but I am hopeful it will turn up again one day.

Harriett Swift, 21/3 Lane-Poole Place, YARRALUMLA ACT 2600

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ODD OBS

OF BEGGARS AND THIEVES

Ian Fraser and Margaret McJannett

On 14 June 1994 we were camped at Noccundra Waterhole, south-west Queensland. Our cholesterol conscientiousness was rewarded when we cut off the chop fat and threw it into the waterhole for the yabbies. Immediately a previously unseen Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* swooped down and skilfully seized it off the surface a few metres from us. This would have satisfied us, but then a Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* attacked it, grappling claws with it. The resulting tumble almost to the water level ended with the falcon flying off with the fat.

PS. We had some consolation fat left for the kite!

Ian Fraser and Margaret McJannett, 43 Boldrewood Street, TURNER ACT 2601

UNUSUAL FOOD ITEM OF THE YELLOW-TAILED BLACK COCKATOO

Chris Davey

Whilst driving through COG grid cell F 10 *(c.* 14 km WNW of Hall) on 15 February 1996 I came across a flock of ten Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus funereus* perching in a eucalypt. One of the birds held what appeared to be a 15 cm long stick of sugar cane with its foot. The bird was seen to tear off the outer leaves from the "stick" and continue to eat the white stringy pith inside.

In a nearby dry creek was a patch of Cumbungi (Bulrush) *Typha domingensis* in the process of flowering. An area of this had been cut down and strewn with pieces of stem and dead leaves. It looked as though it had been trampled by cattle. On close examination of the cut stems it became obvious the damage had been caused by the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos and it was a stem of Cumbungi that the bird was eating. There was no indication the birds were eating the flowering heads, rather it appeared to be the pith inside the stems that the birds were after.

Of the three species of black-cockatoo (genus *Calyptorhynchus)* the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo appears to have the most varied diet. The staple diet of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo is eucalyptus seeds whilst the Glossy Black-Cockatoo feeds almost exclusively on the seeds of casuarinas. The Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo on the other hand feeds on the seeds of native and introduced trees and shrubs as well as grass seeds, nuts, berries, fruits, nectar, blossoms and insects and their larvae (Forshaw, J.M. (1969) *Australian Parrots* Lansdowne: Sydney). Even so it came as a surprise to find the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo feeding in this way and I have been unable to find any reference to them including Cumbungi in their diet.

Chris Davey, 24 Bardsley Place, HOLT ACT 2615

UNUSUAL METHOD OF FOOD SEARCHING BY AN AUSTRALIAN RAVEN

Justin Stanger

Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides* are omnivorous, taking insects and their larvae, grain and carrion. Their bills are best adapted to probing into cracks and crevices and turning over branches, litter and cowpats, (Rowley, I.C.R. *In.* Frith, H.J. Birds in the Australian High Country. A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1969). To obtain such a wide variety of food items the birds must utilise various feeding techniques and consequently are opportunistic and inquisitive. It therefore is not surprising to find ravens using unusual methods to obtain food.

On 12 September 1995 I noticed one such unusual method. Whilst working outside Gungahlin Homestead I saw an Australian Raven hovering approximately 2 m above the ground amongst a row of planted Bastard Eurabbie *Eucalyptus pseudoglobulus.* As I watched, the raven hovered closer to the tree, took hold of a protruding piece of bark with its bill and dropped to the ground, tearing a long strip of bark off the tree. The raven then proceeded to pick what I assumed to be insects or grubs from the bark before repeating the whole process, tearing strip after strip from the tree. I continued to watch the process until the pressures of work drove me elsewhere.

Justin Stanger, 2/51 Freda Bennett Circuit, NICHOLLS ACT 2913

SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO POSSIBLY FEEDING ON NECTAR FROM GUM FLOWERS

David Purchase

There are frequent reports of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* and other parrots damaging eucalypts by nipping off branchlets that are bearing flowers and then dropping them.

At 1012 hrs on 21 November 1995 a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo flew into a Red Ironbox *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* which was in flower in our back garden. The cockatoo walked along a branch and with its beak nipped off a branchlet containing a group of three flowers. It then took the branchlet in its left foot and held it to its beak where it passed the tip of the upper mandible through the stamens of one of the flowers. After subjecting each of the three flowers to this treatment it dropped the branchlet. It then moved to another branchlet containing a group of flowers and subjected it to the same treatment. On several occasions it appeared that the tongue was also being used, but I could not see this clearly. Altogether it repeated this action 11 times (for a total of *c. 50-60* individual flowers) before flying off at 1021 hrs. On four of these times it nipped off branchlets containing flowers that were old and faded - these were dropped to the ground without being transferred to the beak. On all occasions it used its left foot. I could not see exactly what the bird was achieving but it may have been obtaining nectar. Shortly afterwards I examined 10 flowers on a branchlet that was lying on the ground (I presume as a result of the cockatoo's actions) and none of them showed any sign of physical damage.

The observations were made with the aid of 7 x 50 binoculars from a second-storey window at a distance of *c.* 10 m.

David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, MELBA ACT 2615

OPPORTUNISTIC FEEDING BY WILLIE WAGTAIL

John Leonard

In the mid-afternoon of 31 March 1996 I observed an interesting feeding strategy by a Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* in our back garden at Hughes. The bird had arrived some days previously and had adopted the garden as its territory, acting aggressively towards other birds, particularly Magpie-larks *Grallina cyanoleuca.* On the day in question, a party of five Superb Fairy-wrens *Malurus cyaneus* had arrived in the garden and had been feeding for some time, mostly ignored by the wagtail.

However, I observed that two of the wrens were feeding on a cleared patch of the garden which had had pine-chips placed on it and which had subsequently been covered in the fallen leaves of a hawthorn *Crataegus* sp. The wagtail watched them from a fence above and whenever a wren discovered an insect, spider, or grub the wagtail would fly down in a flurry of wings and tail, and snatch it away. This occurred five times in as many minutes before the wrens moved away.

John Leonard, PO Box 243, WODEN ACT 2606

AN EARLY RECORD OF WHITE-THROATED TREE-CREEPERS ROOSTING IN A BUILDING IN THE ACT

David Purchase

There have been two reports in *Canberra Bird Notes* of White-browed Tree-creepers *Cormobates leucophaeus* roosting under the over-hanging roofs of buildings (Spate 1986, *Canberra Bird Notes* 11: 128; Scrymgeour 1994, *Canberra Bird Notes* 19: 67). In view of these reports the following record of the first White-throated Tree-creeper to be banded under the auspices of the then fledgling Australian Bird-Banding Scheme is of interest.

On 26 April 1954 one of two adult White-throated Tree-creepers roosting in the loft above the stable at "Gungahlin" was caught and banded by the late Robert Carrick. The bird was identified as "male?". The second bird was not caught. There is no record of the time of day when the bird was caught or whether it was ever seen again. At the time, "Gungahlin", which had recently become the headquarters of the CSIRO Wildlife Survey Section (now the Division of Wildlife and Ecology), was in an isolated patch of trees, including many exotic species, surrounded by pasture and savannah. It consisted of the homestead and a number of outbuildings. A sketch of the stable, which was demolished in the late 1950s, is contained in *Old Canberra - a sketchbook of the 1920s* by Eirene Mort (1987, National Library of Australia: Canberra). In 1954 the nearest suburb to "Gungahlin" was O'Connor.

The association of this species with buildings is not altogether surprising as it has been recorded roosting of a night in cave entrances and mine tunnels, including the Cotter Cave in the ACT (Hamilton-Smith 1965, *Emu* 65: 152-155). It has also been recorded catching what were apparently small Diptera, on the walls of caves up to *c.* 45 m from the entrance (op. cit.).

David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, MELBA ACT 2615

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