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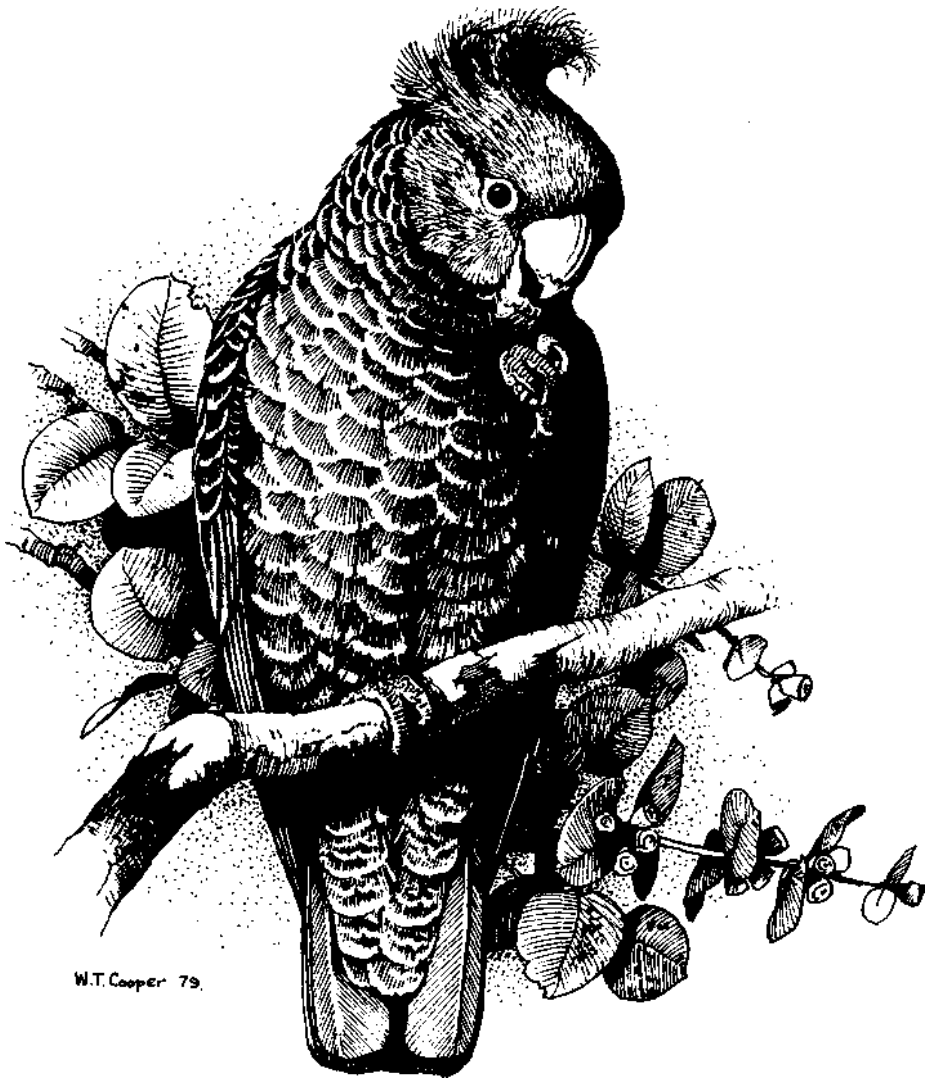

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(Continued inside back cover)

OBSERVATIONS OF A BREEDING COLONY OF FOUR PAIRS OF REGENT HONEYEATERS AT NORTH WATSON, CANBERRA, IN 1995-96

Jenny Bounds, Muriel Brookfield and Murray Delahoy

In the spring of 1995 there was a flush of sightings of Regent Honeyeaters *Xanthomyza phrygia* reported on the Canberra Ornithologists' Group Hotline from five different sites in and around Canberra. These included a report, in late September, of two feeding in cultivated Mugga Ironbarks *Eucalyptus sideroxylon* along the perimeter of the National Capital Village Motel (NCV), North Watson[1]. Several weeks later, Murray Delahoy reported four adults, two of which were a pair at a nest, in the Mt Majura Canberra Nature Park (MCNP) opposite the NCV.

Based on these and other sightings reported to the hotline and to Jenny Bounds, it is estimated that in the spring of 1995 there were at least 15 adult Regent Honeyeaters in the Canberra area, at sites which had flowering Yellow Box *E. melliodora*, cultivated Mugga Ironbark, or in one case Red Box *E. polyanthemos.* In addition to North Watson, the species was recorded at Black Mountain Peninsula and the Canberra Yacht Club near Lake Burley Griffin (possibly the same birds), the Campbell Park woodlands and the Newline Quarry near Canberra airport. This is the largest number reported in the ACT for many years.

Although breeding was suspected, no nests or other signs of breeding activity were reported from any of these sites except for North Watson.

On 1 November Jenny Bounds surveyed the North Watson site for several hours and estimated that seven adult Regent Honeyeaters were present and found a second nest. At that time, there were two pairs with females on nests within 50 m of each other, and about 150 m away three different birds seemed to be establishing territories. A few days later, a third nest being built was found just outside the MCNP in the grounds of the Australian Heritage Village (AHV). As the birds were not individually identifiable at this time, it took some time to establish that there was indeed a fourth pair breeding. Regular observations were made at the site from 25 October 1995 to mid-February 1996. Sexes were distinguished on the assumption that females constructed the nest and did the incubation (see also Davis and Recher 1993).

1. Trevor Kerr of Melbourne first reported the presence of two Regent Honeyeaters to Muriel Brookfield. The observation was later published in *The Bird Watcher* No. 761, March 1996, p. 14, in "Interesting Sightings".

In the past there have been only four published records of Regent Honeyeaters breeding in the ACT. All involved single pairs of birds, of which two bred successfully:

- 12 December 1966 to 10 January 1967, an unsuccessful breeding attempt by one pair at O'Connor—Belconnen (Wilson 1968);

- 29 September to 8 October 1987, a nest was abandoned after a fun run of a few thousand people passed directly under the nest tree at Kings Park, Lake Burley Griffin (Veerman et al. 1989);

- 21 to 29 November 1987, two birds at a nest with young, Lake Ginninderra (Veerman et al. 1989); and

- 4 to 29 January 1994, two birds successfully fledged three young in the grounds of the CSIRO, Gungahlin, and later were recorded in the grounds of the Norwood Park Crematorium (Anon. 1994, Mark Clayton pers. comm.).

The North Watson site

The site (Figure 1), which is a particularly rich lowland woodland with breeding populations of many bird species, is situated on the edge of the north-eastern urban area of Canberra, adjacent to the suburb of Watson. Part of the site is an entrance to the MCNP and part encompasses a horse paddock in the grounds of the AHV. There is a large dam immediately adjacent to the site in the grounds of the AHV. The woodland contains mostly Yellow Boxes and Blakely's Red Gums with a few Apple Boxes *E. bridgesiana.* The area mainly used by the Regent Honeyeaters has approximately 15 mature Yellow Boxes which were in profuse flower progressively over the spring and early summer, and a large number of sapling Yellow Boxes, which also came into flower.

A few of the Blakely's Red Gums also flowered in the period during which the Regent Honeyeaters were present, but the flowering was sparse. The Blakely's Red Gums were mostly small to moderately sized; epicormic growth indicated that they may have suffered environmental stress in the past, possibly caused by drought or insect attack (as is common in this species in the ACT), but had regenerated with good winter/spring rains.

The MCNP part of the site has a grassy understorey of native and non-native grasses and a few Native Cherries *Exocarpos cupressiformis,* with some Green Wattles *Acacia mearnsii* and Hickories *A. implexa* as well as a few Briar Roses *Rosa rubiginosa.* In the AHV part of the site there is a horse paddock with little understorey. This horse paddock is about 400 m away from any buildings and the

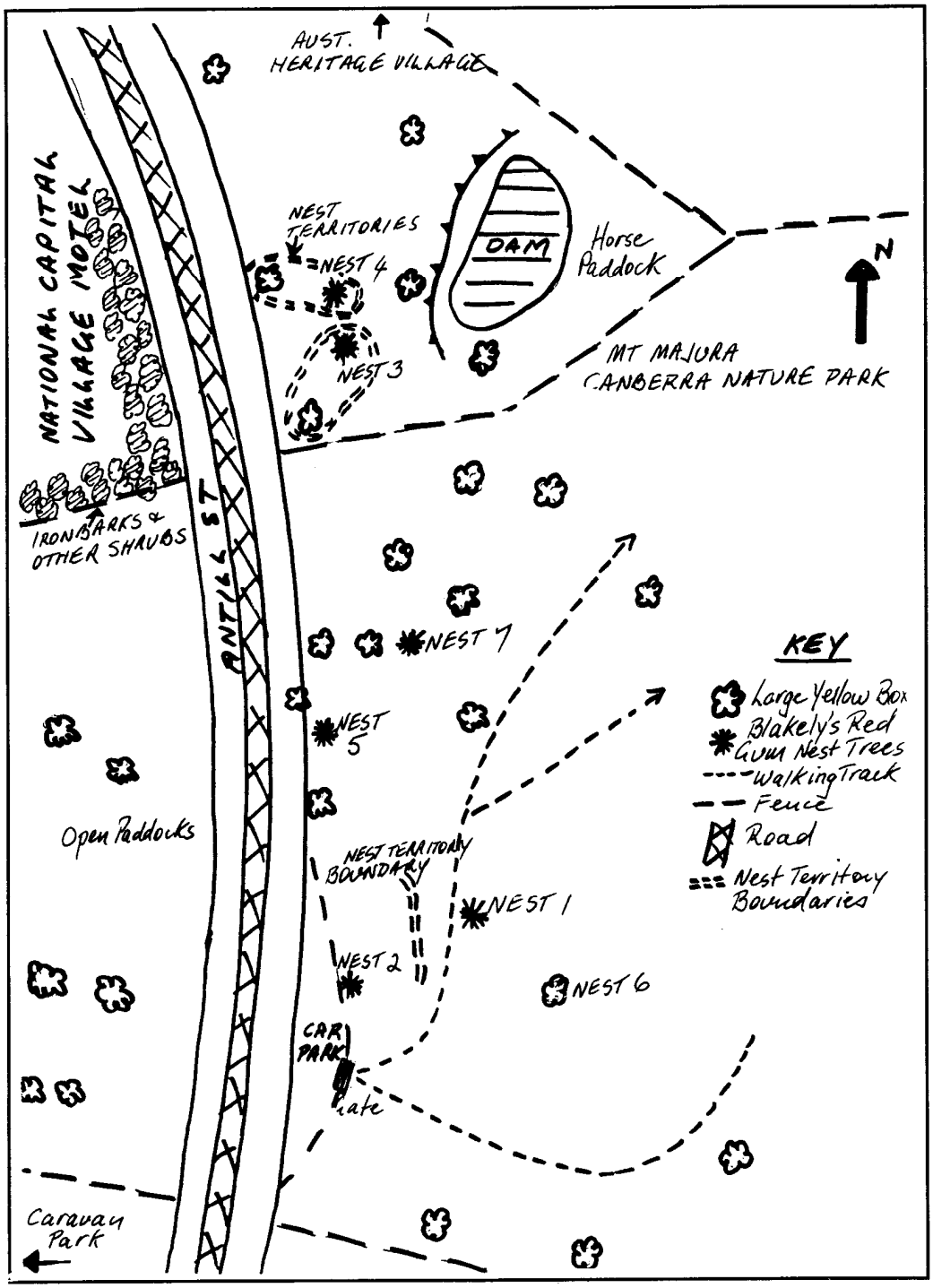

Table 1. Regent Honeyeater breeding site at North Watson (not to scale).

car park at the AHV, and apart from two grey horses, a few rabbits and other birds, nothing else seemed to use the paddock. Occasionally a fox or a hare was seen in or near the site and grey kangaroos were regularly around in the MCNP.

Antill Street runs parallel to the site about 30 m away, and across the road and to the south there are several open paddocks, some grazed by sheep and cattle, with scattered, mature Yellow Boxes, which also flowered profusely. Apparently, some of these paddocks to the south are part of the proposed North Watson urban development which local residents have opposed. Antill Street is a thoroughfare from the Federal Highway into the north-eastern suburbs of Canberra, but does not have heavy or continuous traffic except when there are large events at Exhibition Park.

On the other (western) side of Antill Street, at the northern end of the site, is the NCV where there are extensive plantings of native trees and shrubs across the front and southern boundaries of the property, including numerous Mugga Ironbarks, about 6 m tall, which are estimated to be seven to eight years old. These flowered profusely from at least mid-September through to late December and are mostly the pink-flowered variety. Mugga Ironbark is not native to the ACT, but is a common urban landscaping plant. It is known to be favoured by Regent Honeyeaters in Victoria (Franklin et al. 1987).

The Regent Honeyeaters were concentrated in a small area (referred to as the breeding site) about 300 m by 150 m, bounded on the west by Antill Street, on the east by the slopes of Mt Majura, on the north by the grounds of the AHV and on the south by horse paddocks and the lower slopes of the MCNP. Murray Delahoy regularly walked in the MCNP near the breeding site including to a small dam several hundred metres away up the slopes, but did not record Regent Honeyeaters elsewhere.

Weather conditions

The spring of 1995 was noticeable for its changeable weather with cool to mild conditions building up to warm conditions, and regular periods of rain brought in mostly by sub-tropical, low weather systems. There were regular thunderstorms accompanied by strong winds and moderately heavy rain, particularly in late November and in December. The summer months were cooler than normal and the rainfall a little above average, occurring on 28 days; the mean daily temperature was 24.7°C (two below normal) and the highest temperature was 34.3° C on 31 January 1996 (Anon. 1996a).

There were several periods with cool temperatures and constant rain over a couple of days, interspersed with occasional bursts of warm to hot weather in the high 20s and

low 30s, especially in late December and January. Night-time temperatures dropped to 6° or 7°C on occasions, but no extremes of cold or hot conditions occurred.

The Regent Honeyeaters were not visibly affected by the weather. It was noticed particularly that two of the groups of fledglings experienced very windy or thunderstorm conditions within a day or two of fledging with no ill effects. This contrasts with the experiences in the Chiltern Forest in Victoria in the same spring where storms destroyed many nests (Eileen Collins and Natasha Schedvin pers. comm.).

Food sources

The cultivated Mugga Ironbarks in the NCV were an important food source for the Regent Honeyeaters, as well as other honeyeaters in the area. It is estimated that the Regent Honeyeaters fed in the ironbarks for at least half or more of their feeding time while those trees were in flower. The birds would move from tree to tree, quickly going over the bunches of flowers to collect nectar. The ironbarks seemed to be neutral or communal territory which all the Regent Honeyeaters used; they did not squabble amongst themselves while feeding there. A preference for nectar from an ironbark was also observed by Davis and Recher (1993) who studied two breeding pairs of Regent Honeyeaters near Armidale, NSW.

The other main nectar source was the flowering Yellow Box at the site. Yellow Boxes in or very near to the two Regent Honeyeater nest territories in the AHV seemed to be favoured by the relevant nesting pair, which fed often in "their" tree and would chase off other Regent Honeyeaters and other bird species which entered the tree. Yellow Boxes outside the nest territories appeared to be used communally by the Regent Honeyeaters without any friction.

There were also large numbers of insects in the Yellow Box, mostly flies, small butterflies, moths and beetles which were attracted to the nectar. These insects were used as food, especially for the nestlings and fledglings. Insects appeared to be a substantial part of the diet of the young birds, but what percentage they formed of their total food was not determined. Adult birds occasionally hawked to the ground and around the base of trees and also skimmed the surface of the dam for insects. One bird was seen on one occasion hanging on a tree trunk like a treecreeper collecting insects from the bark.

A few Blakely's Red Gums in sparse flower did not seem to be used as a nectar source, but attracted insects on which the birds fed. This was observed in the nest 2 tree where the adults caught insects to feed to their nestlings and again in the nest 7 tree where the same pair re-nested. Interestingly, the male of pair 2 often returned to

the nest 2 tree for insects for the second brood, and also caught insects in the grass near the nest 7 tree (see Figure 1).

The eucalypts put on new growth following rain periods, and the Regent Honeyeaters were observed gleaning insects in this new growth (e.g. lerp, mini scarab beetles). The birds were also seen in clumps of Box Mistletoe *Amyema miquelii* feeding from a few flowers which came slowly into bloom from December, but mistletoe at the site was of low density.

Nest sites

In total, seven nests were known to be built. Six were in Blakely's Red Gums which were generally not in flower; although the nest 2 tree had a small number of flowers during the nestling and early fledgling period. These nests, except for nest 2, were sited in epicormic growth; nest 2 was built in a fork of dead branches. The other (nest 6) was atypical in that it was built, in epicormic growth, in a stunted Yellow Box.

Nest 1. This belonged to pair 1 and failed in the final stage of incubation on about 11/12 November. It was sited on the eastern side of a small to medium sized Blakely's Red Gum (trunk diameter at breast height (TDBH) = 30 cm), *c.* 5 m above the ground in a fork where leaves were regenerating, and beside a path used by people visiting the MCNP. The foliage of a Native Cherry, which was growing near its base, covered the lower part of the tree. The nest site was open from above and the regrowth was fairly sparse.

Nest 2. This was the first nest to fledge young, producing two on 27 November. It belonged to pair 2 and the nest, in a large Blakely's Red Gum (TDBH = 35 cm), was *c.* 15 m above the ground in a fork of upward pointing dead branches on the outer perimeter of the tree. This position was rather exposed to the westerly winds and also to rain during bouts of wet weather. The site was in the MCNP, only a few metres from the road verge and car park, but was not easily visible because of its height and position. The tree started to flower in the third week of November when the nestlings were about a week old, but the flowering was light. This tree was at the southern edge of the breeding site about 50 m from nest 1. A Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus* was nesting in a nearby tree.

Nest 3. This was the second nest to fledge young, producing two on approximately 14 December. It belonged to pair 3 and the nest, in a medium-sized Blakely's Red Gum (TDBH = 25 cm), was *c.* 6 m above the ground on a slender branch about 40° off the vertical, in a bunch of thin regenerating stems and leaves. The tree was in the AHV horse paddock, about 40 m from the fence beside the road verge and about 150 m from nest sites 1 and 2. A Noisy Friarbird nested in the opposite side of the tree.

Dusky Woodswallows *Artamus cyanopterus* and White-plumed Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus penicillatus* also nested nearby.

Nest 4. This was the third nest to fledge young, producing three on approximately 21 December. The nest, in a medium-sized Blakely's Red Gum (TDBH = 40 cm), was *c.* 8 m above the ground on a slender, horizontal branch in a bunch of regenerating stems and leaves. The tree was in the grounds of the AHV, only 10 m from nest 3, but on the side of the tree which faced away from the nest 3. This pair seemed to be very competent breeders as they fledged three young, the highest brood, and the male in particular was an energetic food collector.

Nest 5. This nest failed for no apparent reason on or about 1 December during the last few days of incubation. It has been assumed that this was the second failed nest of pair 1. It was in the MCNP, in a similarly sized Blakely's Red Gum (TDBH = 30 cm) as nests 1, 3, 4 and 7. The nest was *c.* 8 m above the ground, in a fork surrounded by a thick clump of leaves and was very difficult to see. The tree was only a few metres from the fence bordering Antill Street and was in the middle of the breeding site.

Nest 6. Incubation commenced at this nest, which is attributed to pair 1, during the second week of December, but ultimately produced a Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus* which fledged on about *15* January 1996. The Pallid Cuckoo is known to occasionally parasitise Regent Honeyeater nests (Longmore and the National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife 1991). This nest was in the MCNP *c.* 200 m from nests 3 and 4. and seemed to be adjacent to the nest territory used by pair 2, the nearest nesting pair. The nest was in a bunch of epicormic growth at the end of a large, horizontal, broken branch in a mature but stunted Yellow Box (TDBH = 60 cm). It was *c.* 6 m above the ground and rather open as there were no other bunches of foliage immediately near it. This spot was at the southern edge of the breeding site, some distance from the communal ironbark feeding area. It was in a quieter area, with fewer nesting birds. Fledgling Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* were often nearby.

Nest 7. This was situated in the MCNP, in the middle of the breeding site about half way between nests 1 and 2, and nests 3 and 4. The nest, in a medium-sized Blakely's Red Gum (TDBH = 30 cm), was in a fork with regenerating foliage, *c.* 6 m above the ground. A Noisy Friarbird was nesting on the other side of this tree and the nest of a Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae* with young was only 3 m away in an adjacent tree. This was the second nest of pair 2. Two nestlings were raised, but one apparently perished on 21 or 22 January due to unknown causes, a day or two before the expected time of fledging. The second, an undeveloped fledgling, was observed on 22 January, *c.* 15 m from the nest site, perched in a shrub

close to the ground, being attended by the anxious parents. This young bird later managed to fly up into a nearby Yellow Box and survived.

The nest details and breeding results of the four pairs are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of nest details and breeding results.

Pair No.	Nest No.	Tree Species (trunk diameter at breast height)	Position of Nest in Tree	Height above ground	Number Fledged	Date
1	1	*E. blakelyi* (30 cm)	Vertical fork — sparse leaf growth	5 m	Failed	11/12 November
	5	*E. blakelyi* (30 cm)	Vertical fork — thick leaf growth	8 m	Failed	1 December
	6	*E. melliodora* (60 cm)	Large, broken, horizontal branch in bunch of foliage at end	6 m	1 Pallid Cuckoo	15 January
2	2	*E. blakelyi* (35 cm)	Vertical fork high in tree — no leaf growth	15 m	2	27 November
	7	*E. blakelyi* (30 cm)	Vertical fork — moderate leaf growth	6 m	1 (1 nestling perished)	21/22 January
3	3	*E. blakelyi* (25 cm)	Slender branch, 40° to vertical in stem and leaf growth	6 m	2	14 December
4	4	*E. blakelyi* (40 cm)	Slender, horizontal branch in stem and leaf growth	8 m	3	21 December

Nesting behaviour, displays and calling

The Regent Honeyeaters established territories around their nest sites. In the case of nests 1 and 2 (pairs 1 and 2 respectively), the nests were about 50 m apart and the boundary appeared to be 20 m from nest 1, near some fallen timber. In the early stages of breeding, the two males could be seen interacting at the boundary as if in a stand-off, in a display where they faced each other, stretched their necks forward, called and then flew up briefly and settled again. The birds also bill snapped while calling. Nests 3 and 4 (pairs 3 and 4) were even closer to each other and there was a spot on the edge of a tree roughly half way between the nests where the males did a similar display to those from pairs 1 and 2.

The females collected nesting material of bark and other vegetable matter and built the nests, often with the males accompanying them. Material from old nests, such as

Noisy Friarbird nests, was utilised. Pair 2 probably used the material from their first nest (nest 1) which had failed, to build their second nest (nest 5) as the first nest completely disappeared over a day or two after it had failed. Regent Honeyeaters are known to recycle their own nest material (Natasha Schedvin pers. comm.). The pair 3 female was observed collecting small feathers from the ground to line her nest (nest 3) with the male in close attendance. Nests appeared to take between five and seven days to build; the shorter time applied following a nest failure where old nest material was likely to have been re-used.

While the females incubated, the males acted as sentries around the nest sites, sitting in the nest tree or on a branch nearby at a position higher than the nest but with a clear view. The males would swoop down on any birds which ventured close to the nests. The males also seemed to be more active than the females in collecting food and feeding young and took fewer rest periods. Sometimes a female would be observed for ten or fifteen minutes resting or preening while the male continued to collect food.

The birds were highly vocal in October and November when nest territories were being established and incubation was in the early stages. Their calls could be heard in the woodland very clearly. The males had a call like "plick-a-plick" or "plink-ple-plink" which they made from perches near nest sites, and all the birds used a "whi, whi, whi" call to partners or to the other Regent Honeyeaters which seemed to be a recognition or contact call. The pairs used this contact call frequently when the females left the nest and the males flew down from their perches. The males also had a couple of other single note calls, a "plick" or "plink" and some variations of this and a call which sounded like "youp".

As the breeding period progressed, particularly after the eggs had hatched, the birds called less and less. Pair 2 which nested for the second time used a "plick" or "plink" call frequently at their second nest, possibly a contact call, and they were observed calling similarly to their one surviving fledgling to locate it and to urge it to fly. At no time were any of the Regent Honeyeaters at the site heard mimicking other species of birds, as has been observed by Jenny Bounds and others (Ley and Williams 1994, Veerman 1994).

Social behaviour and interaction between Regent Honeyeaters

The Regent Honeyeaters often interacted together in a non-aggressive way outside nest territories in common areas; for example, in some feed trees three or four birds would be seen flying around or feeding near each other. On one occasion seven of the adult birds were seen flying around together near the dam.

In nest territories, the pairs were generally aggressive to other Regent Honeyeaters, often chasing them away. Pair 2 was seen physically attacking pair 1 on one occasion when pair 1 had failed in their second nest attempt and were inspecting a new nest site in the nest 2 tree; at that stage pair 2 which had fledged young in the nest 2 tree were feeding the fledglings some 60 m away. Pair 2 flew over and persistently swooped pair 1 until the latter moved on. It is likely that pair 2 was particularly dominant or territorial in the dispute, even though they had ceased to use the particular tree. Pair 1 eventually built their third nest some 60 m away, on the southern edge of the breeding site.

Interactions with other bird species

The most common honeyeater at the site was the Noisy Friarbird, of which there were possibly four or five pairs. There were also at least two pairs of Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata,* a few White-plumed Honeyeaters, a few Yellow-faced Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus chrysops* and a pair of Little Friarbirds *P. citreogularis.* The last species is uncommon in the ACT. All these birds foraged for nectar in the flowering ironbarks at the NCV. Occasionally Brown-headed Honeyeaters *Melithreptus brevirostris* moved through the site.

At the end of September, the Red Wattlebirds were particularly aggressive in the cultivated ironbarks at the NCV, and chased all other birds, including the Regent Honeyeaters, for long distances through the feed trees. Small groups of Noisy Friarbirds hassled the Regent Honeyeaters briefly, then left them to have a quick feed. The Red Wattlebirds became less aggressive as the season progressed and there was only occasional aggression in the ironbarks. By then, there seemed to be such an abundance of flowers available that, if on the receiving end, the Regent Honeyeaters would simply move to another flowering ironbark. Leonard (1995) describes similar interactions between a single Regent Honeyeater and a group of Red Wattlebirds feeding in flowering Brittle Gums *E. mannifera* in Belconnen.

The observations show that Regent Honeyeaters can be aggressive and territorial, and are able to hold their own against other bird species in their nest territories, including in flowering Yellow Box trees in nest territories as mentioned earlier. Davis and Recher (1993) also comment on the aggression shown by Regent Honeyeaters to other birds in defence of their nest territories.

Noisy Friarbirds nested near three of the Regent Honeyeater nest sites, but the two species largely co-existed. There was some friction while territories and nests were being established, but this diminished as incubation began. For example, pair 3 selected a nest site on the other side of a tree where a pair of friarbirds was also nest building. For a couple of days, as the Regent Honeyeater nest was built, a friarbird would frequently perch near the former's nest site, with the Regent Honeyeaters

making swoops at it. Finally, the friarbird tired of the unwanted attention and appeared to remain on "its" side of the tree as no further altercations were noticed.

The Regent Honeyeaters usually swooped or chased away any birds that went into their nest tree or near the nests. For example, they were observed behaving aggressively towards a juvenile Australian Magpie, a Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Brown-headed Honeyeaters and even a tiny Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum.* The male Regent Honeyeaters took the dominant role in nest defence.

Fledging and dispersal

It was not possible to determine the incubation period or the nestling period with absolute precision. It was observed that the eggs took about 14 to 15 days to hatch, and the total time from commencement of incubation to fledging was probably 28 or 29 days. This is consistent with similar observations of the species in the Armidale district in NSW, where the eggs hatched after 14 or 15 days (Ley and Williams 1994).

On fledging, the young remained together in or near the nest tree for several days, usually sitting quietly in a bunch of foliage, and only calling (a single note repeated, "wheet, wheet", rather like young Red Wattlebirds) when the parents were near with food. They rarely called attention to themselves when the parents were away and were often hard to locate. After four or five days out of the nest they began to make short flying sorties following a parent through the canopy of a tree. After seven or eight days they were quite mobile, and were flying freely for short distances at about 11 to 12 days after fledging. However, the fledglings stayed within 50 to 100 m of the nest tree in this time.

At about four weeks old (two weeks out of the nest) the fledglings were near full-sized, semi-independent and foraging for themselves, although they also begged for food from the parents. They seemed to become independent about five weeks of age. The juveniles appeared to disperse from the breeding site at independence or shortly after, as did some of the adult birds. One juvenile with almost adult plumage was seen in the company of pair 2 and their one fledgling on 23 January, possibly one of pair 2's first brood. The pair 3 female was seen on a couple of occasions near pair 2's second nest site when they were present, but was not chased away by pair 2. Groups of fledglings were not seen mingling or interacting; such opportunities were limited as hatching times were staggered over the site.

An interesting observation was made on 25 January 1996 when the Pallid Cuckoo fledgling in the care of pair 1 was seen being fed by a Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis,* which also attempted to exclude the Regent Honeyeater foster parents. It

appeared that the cuckoo fledgling, then about a week out of the nest, had perched in a tree near a hollow where the myna probably nested and the cuckoo's begging calls stimulated the myna to feed it. Secondary adoptions similar to this have been recorded in other places (Ley and Williams 1994).

Nest failure and re-nesting

There were two nests known to have failed, nest 1 which failed on about 11/12 November and nest 5 which failed on about 1 December. No obvious causes for the nest failures were apparent. For a number of reasons, it is concluded that the two failed nests belonged to pair 1, which then fostered a Pallid Cuckoo at their third nesting attempt in nest 6. The three nests of this pair, nests 1, 5 and 6, were all within the same general area, an oblong shape about 80 m in length and it would make sense that a pair would be likely to remain in their territory or nearby to re-nest if they failed. The area where these three nests were located was not in the nest territories of the other Regent Honeyeaters. Pair 1 seemed to be less confident and the male bird less vigilant at the nest compared with the other Regent Honeyeater pairs at the site and this may have been a factor contributing to the nest failures. They also appeared to be subordinate to pair 2, which had an adjacent territory, and after the first nest failure pair 1 became very quiet and hardly ever used contact calls.

Re-nesting after successful nesting

In the second week of January, a seventh nest which was then believed to have just hatched eggs was discovered in the middle of the breeding site. As by then the birds had been colour banded (see next section), it was possible to confirm that pair 2 had re-nested after successfully raising one brood of two fledglings to independent juveniles. Unfortunately, this pair lost one of their nestlings on about 21 or 22 January from unknown causes, but the second, which appeared to fledge prematurely, did survive.

During the 1995 breeding season, in several places in the Regent Honeyeater's distribution, including the North Watson site, it was positively confirmed for the first time that this species re-nests after successfully fledging young (Natasha Schedvin pers. comm.). In the Armidale district, for example, two pairs were found to have re-nested and produced one young each (Beth Williams pers. comm.). This success rate is consistent with the North Watson pair 2, which also had one surviving young the second time around, a rate lower than the norm of two or three for a first brood.

Banding the birds

Soon after the discovery of the nesting birds, Jenny Bounds discussed with Natasha Schedvin, the National Coordinator of the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program, the

possibility of colour banding the birds so that they could be individually identified. It was agreed that this should be attempted. In addition to banding, blood samples were also to be taken for DNA sequencing as part of a study throughout the range of the Regent Honeyeater to determine whether the population is homogeneous or made up of separate sub-populations. The paperwork for permits etc. was put in train and the banding and blood sampling was undertaken on 15 and 16 December. This was just before the time the first brood of fledglings would be independent and start dispersing. Natasha, Mark Clayton and a group of experienced Canberra bird banders were involved.

With careful placement of mist nets near the communal feed trees and nest sites, seven of the eight adults were caught and banded (the female of pair 2 was not caught). All were fitted with a numbered metal band and a white coloured plastic band on the left leg, and two bands of different colours on the right leg. The colour of the band on the left leg distinguishes Regent Honeyeaters banded in Canberra from those banded in NSW (red and orange) and Victoria (green) The combination of different coloured bands on the right leg distinguish the individual birds.

Experience has shown that banding while the birds are incubating or feeding young apparently does no harm to the birds, as they have a strong instinct to return to the nest or fledglings (Natasha Schedvin and Richard Jordan pers. comm.).

Conclusions

The observations made at this site are generally consistent with other published material about the biology of the species (e.g. Franklin et al. 1989), particularly with respect to territorial aggression, the nectar tree species preferred and the food sources which are exploited. The observations at North Watson are also consistent in many respects with observations of the nesting behaviour of the species in the Armidale district of NSW (Ley and Williams 1994).

The North Watson observations, and those made by Davis and Recher (1993), indicate that Regent Honeyeaters can be quite aggressive in defence of their nest territory, and can hold their own against other honeyeater species both in territorial defence and exploiting available food sources. Whether this may have been influenced by the strength of numbers of the species at this particular site is arguable, as the birds generally operated singly or in pairs, rather than as a concerted group. The abundance of food which was available, both nectar and insects, may have been a factor which limited competition from other species when feeding.

The breeding success at this site, eight young which survived to juvenile stage from four pairs of birds from seven nests, is a good breeding success rate. Put another

way, four out of seven nests fledged eight young. Figures from other sites (Anon. 1996b) during the same period are:

- Chiltern Forest, Vic., three nests (17%) fledged young out of 23 breeding events*, the poor fledging rate being largely due to storms;

- Capertee Valley, NSW, where an intensive study was undertaken, 47 nests (37%) fledged 83 young out of an estimated 125 nests, nesting failures being due to a wide variety of factors; and

- Armidale district, NSW, 22 nests (73%) out of 30 breeding events* successfully fledged at least one young (28 young in total); extreme cold and hot weather conditions were listed as some possible reasons for nest failure.

* A breeding event is a nest containing eggs or young, or fledglings being attended by adults away from an undiscovered nest.

The Regent Honeyeater is an endangered species (Garnett 1993) and as such there is a need to protect whatever habitat there is available for it in the ACT. However, at the North Watson site there is a possible conflict between the needs of habitat protection for the Regent Honeyeater and urban development. On the western side of Antill Street, about half a kilometre or so to the south of the breeding site, are paddocks containing a substantial number of mature Yellow Boxes, most of which flowered in the 1995 spring. These paddocks have been proposed for urban infill which has been vigorously opposed by local residents. This area was not surveyed for Regent Honeyeaters, although those at the breeding site occasionally foraged in the Yellow Boxes in the grazed paddocks immediately opposite the breeding site.

A preliminary examination of the locations of all previous sightings in the ACT suggests that the Mt Majura and Mt Ainslie Canberra Nature Parks are part of a wider corridor extending to Mulligan's Flat to the north and possibly to the Newline Quarry site to the south which is preferred by Regent Honeyeaters (Mark Clayton pers. comm.). There is, therefore, a strong argument for preserving from any further development or disturbance these fringe Yellow Box alliance woodlands at North Watson adjacent to the nature parks and other, similar, unreserved woodlands in the ACT.

Reports of these records have been submitted to the Rarities Panel for endorsement.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge Natasha Schedvin who read a draft of this article and provided much helpful advice.

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SOME OBSERVATIONS OF LITTLE CORELLAS IN SOUTH CANBERRA 1994-96

Geoffrey Dabb

Small numbers of Little Corellas *Cacatua sanguinea* have been seen in Canberra for several years and are generally regarded, at least in origin, to be escapees (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992; Taylor 1993). In particular there are a number of records from the Red Hill — Narrabundah area (e.g. Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992, 1993, Anon. 1994). I have been told by the present operator of the Mugga Lane Zoo, Mr Doug Lloyd, that free-flying Little Corellas were present in and around the zoo before he acquired it in 1988, although he does not know if these had originated from birds which had been captive in the zoo. This note records some of my observations of Little Corellas in South Canberra over the last two years up to May 1996.

Although I have been living in Brockman Street, Narrabundah, since 1988, only in 1994 did I become aware of Little Corellas regularly overflying the area. During 1993 I had, however, occasionally seen up to three Little Corellas at feeding trays in front of 14 Caley Crescent, near La Perouse Street. Since September 1994 I have seen, or heard, flights of corellas on most days and almost every week.

A daily movement pattern in more typical corella country involves Little Corellas making two round-trips a day between roosting/play areas and feeding areas (Crome et al. 1992, Lendon 1979 — both quoting N.W. Cayley). From the vantage point of Rocky Knob (a hill on the corner of Brockman Street and Carnegie Crescent) it is possible to gain a good idea of the flight patterns of the local birds. The early morning flights are usually in a north or north-westerly direction and the evening flights are in the reverse direction. From this I infer that the usual "base" locations of the South Canberra birds are generally in the vicinity of the north end of Mugga Lane and most feeding locations are in, or to the north of, inner South Canberra. The flight paths generally lie between Captain Cook Crescent and Monaro Crescent.

Numbers

The largest numbers appear to occur in summer and several flocks of about 20 were seen in the period from December 1994 to February 1995 — the largest was 23 in the second week of December. Except for a flock of 20 in July, no flocks of more than 10 were seen from March 1995 until a compact flock of 22 appeared over Rocky Knob on 14 January 1996. As about that time more individuals were heard calling, or seen soon after some distance away, a reasonable estimate of the local numbers would be about 30 on that day.

Feeding

I have seen Little Corellas feeding or foraging:

- at feeding trays in Caley Crescent, Captain Cook Crescent and Mugga Lane Zoo;
- on seeds of exotic garden trees in Narrabundah (Roman Cypress *Cupressus sempervirens* [several times] and Silver Birch *Betula pendula* [once]);
- on spilt stock feed in the paddocks between Narrabundah Lane and Hindmarsh Drive;
- on weedy ground in the above paddocks and within, and on the hill behind, the Juvenile Detention Centre (JDC) in Mugga Lane;
- on seed pods of Cootamundra Wattle *Acacia baileyana* near the JDC; and
- under loose bark, and on the bark, of a eucalypt, the possible objective being the cambium (under-bark layer) as a food source.

Other Behaviour

Groups of Little Corellas often flew and fed on the ground with groups of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita*, but not, on the evidence of 1995, with the very large winter flocks, which I suspect displace them. Groups of Little Corellas also engaged in playful and noisy sparring with small numbers of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Gang-gang Cockatoos *Callocephalon fimbriatum.* Noisy inter-actions were also observed with Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* and Australian King-Parrots *Alisterus scapularis.*

Over periods of a few weeks at a time, locations favoured for playful behaviour by groups of about six birds (possibly the same group) were on Captain Cook Crescent, where activity centred on dangling by the beak from a loose wire on a light-pole, and the roof of the bell-tower of St Christopher's Cathedral, Manuka.

Roosting, in the evening and the middle of the day, was observed in trees in and near the Mugga Lane Zoo and the JDC, and during one period of several weeks in the summer of 1994-95, on the open space at Rocky Knob to the south of Carnegie Crescent.

Breeding

An attempt was made during spring and summer of 1995 to observe signs of breeding activity in trees in the area. As Little Corellas are said to favour their nest-sites of previous seasons (Crome et al. 1992; Forshaw 1981), it is worth recording these observations. All the trees involved appeared to be mature Blakely's Red Gum

Eucalyptus blakelyi and their locations are shown in Figure 1. It should be noted that Mugga Lane Zoo is private property and access, other than for paying customers, is at the discretion of the management; "Callum Brae" is a private farm holding that takes in most of the area immediately to the south of Narrabundah Lane; and the area south-west of Hindmarsh Drive and Mugga Lane, outside the boundaries of the JDC, is publicly accessible open space.

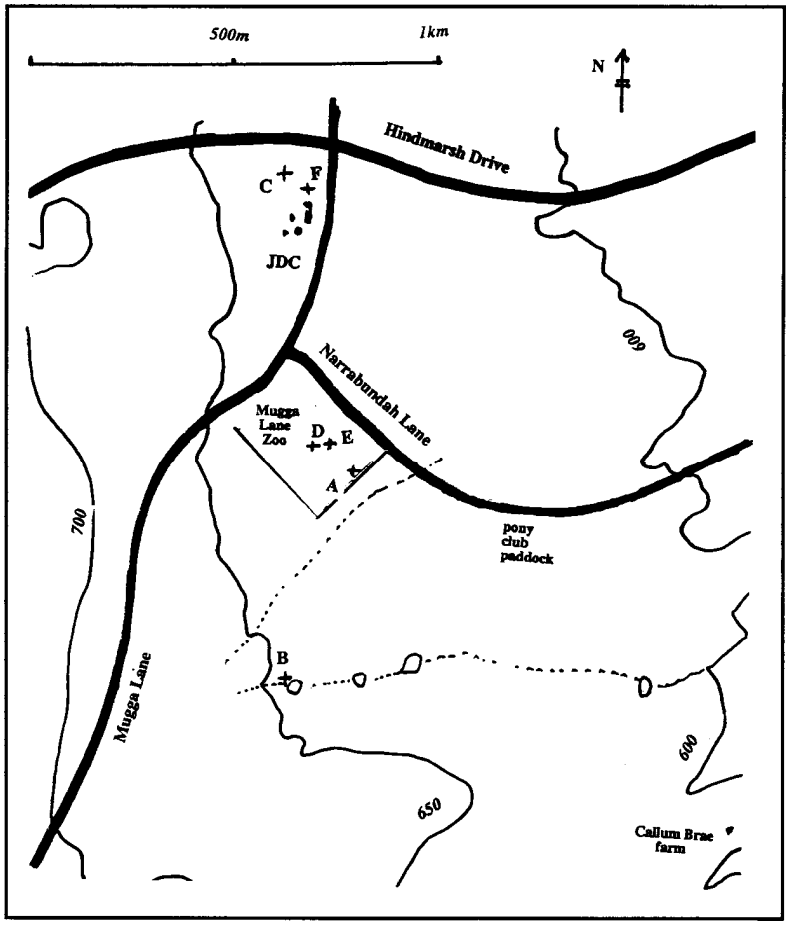

Figure 1. Mugga Lane area, South Canberra, showing locations of trees A, B, C, D, E and F.

In assessing possible breeding behaviour, it is useful to bear in mind that not all pairs are necessarily engaged in breeding. According to one study of this species in Western Australia (cited in Forshaw (1981)) 50% of the individuals in the study flocks were non-breeding pairs and only 20% were breeding pairs.

Tree A: This was one of the tallest trees in its area, with several dead limbs and spouts, just within the eastern boundary of the Mugga Lane Zoo. It was a favoured perching tree for corellas, cockatoos and other birds. From August 1995 corellas were seen several times on or near prominent spouts on the north *(spout x)* and south sides *(spout y).* 16 September 1995: Little Corella drives a Long-billed Corella C. *tenuirostris* away from spout y , enters and remains within for the several minutes it was observed. 23 September: three corellas in the tree — one enters and sits just inside spout y for several minutes. 28 October: tapping on the tree base causes a corella to emerge from *spout y,* it looks about for several minutes before re-entering the spout. 26 November: corella enters and sits, but still just in view, inside *spout x.* 14 January 1996: two corellas perch and preen, just above *spout x,* then clamber about the tree and eventually fly off — based on their shortish tails and pale face colours, they appear to be young birds.

Tree B: A large spreading, fairly low-branched tree by a farm dam on "Callum Brae". 27 August 1995: a pair of corellas inspect hollows and spouts, and copulate on a horizontal limb until disturbed by Galahs *C. roseicapilla,* then perch together for at least 15 minutes in a nearby tree. 23 September: when a corella arrives at middle spout, another emerges and both spar with a pair of Galahs nesting in a hole 1-2 m below. 8 October: two corellas emerge from middle spout, enter and re-emerge several times over 30 minutes. 29 October: corella emerges from the spout and sat at the entrance for several minutes. 26 November: tapping causes a corella to emerge from the spout. 5 and *7* January 1996: on both days tapping causes an adult bird to emerge; a young bird can be glimpsed peering from the hollow, but retreats on seeing the observer.

Tree C: An old tall tree with dead and broken upper limbs, it has some iron climbing spikes, possibly used for access to some nest of a long-past season. A large prominent spout with at least two entrances is on the south side. 2 September 1995: four corellas, after feeding in the grounds of the JDC, perch in the upper limbs of the tree; one entering the spout for a few seconds. 9 September: a single corella sits in view just inside the spout for about 20 minutes, withdrawing back out of view when a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo flies over calling. 10 and 16 September: four or five corellas perch in upper limbs. 14 October: no corellas in view until a group of three fly past calling, whereupon a corella emerges from the spout, sits in view for 5 minutes, then withdraws again. 18 November: from an elevated vantage point a corella can be seen sitting back in the spout, out of view from side-on.

Tree D: This tree, in the antelope enclosure of the Mugga Lane Zoo, was pointed out to me by Mr Lloyd as a corella nest-site in previous years. A central spout remained where the tree had lost most of its top. On 16 September and 28 October 1995, a corella was seen to emerge from this spout. A nearby tree *(Tree* K) had a spout with a different pair of corellas perched near it, at about the same times.

Tree F: This was near *Tree C,* but closer to the JDC and Mugga Lane, and seemed a possible nesting site when two pairs of corellas were seen in it on 11 November 1995. In each pair the birds were only about one metre apart, and one member of each was energetically excavating, and largely disappearing from sight, in its own tree-hole. However, the birds were not seen again in this tree, and closer inspection of the holes showed that they were relatively shallow "bark-cavities" of a kind not unusual in large mature eucalypts of the Canberra woodlands. These are typically just above a limb, or other perch, and range in diameter from saucer to dinner-plate size. They apparently result from an attack on otherwise healthy bark, the possible objective being the cambium as a food-source. Old bark-cavities can become deeper, as the "dead" surface does not grow outwards with the surrounding bark. *Tree F* contains two apparent examples with depths of *c.* 15 cm, and another much deeper.

I do not know whether the behaviour seen in this tree was related to feeding, play, nesting or courtship.

Another question concerns the extent to which corellas are responsible for the bark-cavities evident around Canberra, in particular those around Mugga Lane. Corellas, more than any other cockatoo, have a reputation for vigorously attacking the cambium to the extent of ring-barking limbs of living trees (Forshaw pers. comm.).

Long-billed Corellas

On several occasions a Long-billed Corella was seen flying or feeding with groups of Little Corellas, and sometimes by itself. During the spring of 1995 it tended to perch with single, or pairs of Little Corellas in *Tree A,* often around *spout* y, into which it would peer, and seem to guard, when by itself. Probably over the period there was more than one Long-billed Corella, as the bird first seen was old with a silver-coloured band on its leg, and the later observations were of a fresher-looking bird which seemed to be unbanded.

Nankeen Kestrels

Pairs of Nankeen Kestrels *Falco cenchroides* took a close interest in *Trees A, B* and *C* at the same time as the corellas. A pair of kestrels nested in *Tree B* contemporaneously with the corellas, possibly raising more than one brood, using a large low spout on the western side.

Feral Honey Bees

In the woodlands of South Canberra, a significant proportion of tree-hollows is now occupied by colonies of feral Honey Bees *Apis mellifera.*

In early spring 1995, *spout x* in *Tree A* was the site of, or at least one very active entrance to a colony of bees. Since the observation of a corella entering that spout on 26 November 1995 no bees were seen about it, although a small hole a few metres below was being used by bees. In *Tree B* the hole used by Galahs below the corella spout appeared, during October, to have been taken over by bees. A pair of Galahs, possibly the displaced pair, were then nesting in an adjacent tree. On two occasions a corella sitting in its spout above the Galah hole was seen aggressively snapping at bees, and on another occasion was seen peering in, but not entering, the lower hole. By November the whole limb in question seemed to have been abandoned by the bees. There are various possible explanations of these interactions between corellas and bees, one is that corellas are well-equipped to resist competition from bees for tree-hollows. If so, this might give them an advantage over other psittacids that need to compete with both bees and corellas for a limited number of hollows.

Reports of the records for Little Corellas and Long-billed Corellas have been submitted to the Rarities Panel for endorsement.

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COMMON MYNA MOVEMENT

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In response to the increase in the abundance and distribution of Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* in Canberra (Davey 1991) a study of their dispersal in Canberra was begun in August 1990. As part of the study two Common Mynas were trapped, banded and released at Chris Davey's home in Bardsley Place, Holt on 14 March 1993. One of these was seen again on 3 April 1993 at the release site.

Nearly three years later, on 16 February 1996, one of the two birds was found dead within a few metres of Mark Clayton's back garden in Maribyrnong Avenue, Kaleen, by Lauren Clayton.

This is a movement of at least 9.5 km in just under three years and is substantially greater than the movements between roosting and feeding sites recorded by Gillian Slocum (1995) in her study of Common Mynas. The greatest distance she recorded was 2.3 km. In a study in Auckland, New Zealand, Counsilman (1974) concluded that mynas probably moved a maximum of 3 km between roosting and feeding sites.

At the time of banding the bird was assessed as being in its first year of life, in other words a juvenile from the 1992-93 breeding season. When found in 1996 there was evidence of the bird being, or having recently been, in breeding condition as the feathers on its head were black and lanceolate.

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ODD OBS

A "BIRD-WAVE" IN THE SUBURBS

John Leonard

It is generally known that in winter small insectivorous birds are frequently encountered in large feeding flocks of mixed species (e.g. Possingham 1989, *Canberra Bird Notes* 14: 94-96). These flocks usually behave much as the individual birds do at other seasons, that is, they move around feeding at-a moderate pace, as often on the ground as in trees or bushes.

On 4 June 1996, in our backyard in Hughes, I witnessed what I believe to be an example of a "bird-wave". This phenomenon is found amongst birds in the tropics and consists of a mixed flock of species, often just before rain, charging through the middle storey. It is thought their numbers and speed will startle and dislodge more insects than deliberate gleaning and result in increased feeding success (Glenister, A.G. 1951, *The Birds of the Malay Peninsular, Singapore and Penang* Oxford University Press: London). What convinces me that what I saw was behaviour similar to this is the number of birds involved, the fact that they flew fast through low trees, feeding, but not gleaning, and the flock included species which one normally thinks of as ground feeders.

This event occurred at around noon, about half an hour before a rain shower. The main species was Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis* (the Tasmanian race *lateralis* with very buff flanks), and 200 or so of these passed rapidly through the garden in the space of five minutes (the largest bird movement I have ever seen there). Accompanying them were Weebills *Smicrornis brevirostris (10-20),* Yellow-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* (5), Red-browed Firetails *Neochmia temporalis* (5), Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris* (1), Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus* (2), White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis* (2), Yellow-faced Honeyeater *L. chrysops* (5) and Superb Fairy-wren *Malurus cyaneus* (5).

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RED-RUMPED PARROTS BENEFITING FROM SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOOS' FEEDING

David McDonald

Twice in early July 1996 I observed flocks of Red-rumped Parrots *Psephotus haematonotus* feeding on the ground under Pin Oaks *Quercus palustris* in Kennedy Street, Griffith, ACT. While their usual foods are the seeds of grass and herbaceous plants, along with green plant material (Forshaw, 1984, Red-rumped Parrot. In: *Birds in the Australian High Country.* [revised edition] [editor H.J.Frith] pp. 173-175. Angus and Robertson: Sydney), I was interested to investigate what they were eating at that location as they were feeding on all kinds of surfaces including hard bare soil, lawn and bitumen footpaths. On close observation it became apparent that they were feeding on the fruit of the Pin Oaks. But how can a small, grass-seed-eating parrot possibly eat the very hard, 10 mm diameter acorns?

For some days prior to this observation, large flocks of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* had been feeding on the Pin Oaks. They had no trouble removing the acorns from their stalks, biting off suitably-sized pieces, and eating them. Apparently, in the process a substantial quantity of small pieces of acorn had fallen to the ground where it was available to be eaten by the Red-rumped Parrots. These pieces were readily accessible to the parrots, as accessible as grass seed and similarly sized.

Here is an example of one species benefiting from the behaviour of another, without any competition for resources being involved.

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EARLY NEST-BUILDING ACTIVITY IN A WHITE-BROWED SCRUBWREN

David McDonald

On 23 July 1996 in the Rainforest Gully at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra, I observed a White-browed Scrubwren *Sericornis frontalis* engaging in nest-building activity. Over a period of about ten minutes I saw it fly four time to a clump of vegetation. On each occasion it was carrying a large quantity of plant material in its bill. It disappeared inside the vegetation, only to reappear moments later without the plant material. It was a typical nesting site for this species.

In the Canberra region the White-browed Scrubwren normally breeds in spring. Wilson (1984, White-browed Scrubwren. In: *Birds in the Australian High Country.* [revised edition] [editor H.J.Frith] pp. 273-274. Angus and Robertson: Sydney) states that the breeding season in the Southern Highlands extends from September to January, although it is earlier at the coast where the climate is milder. The Australian Capital Territory bird atlas (Taylor, M. and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992, *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory: An Atlas.* p. 133. Canberra Ornithologists Group and National Capital Planning Authority: Canberra) reports records of nest building in the ACT from late August to late October. So far as I am aware, the 1996 winter in Canberra ws not unusually mild so it is unclear why this bird commenced nest-building so early.

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A PIED CURRAWONG HARASSING A RING-TAILED POSSUM

David McDonald

The Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* has a well-earned reputation for harassing other birds, often for no apparent reason. They are also known to harass domestic animals. On 25 July 1996, at approximately 1230 hours, at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra, I observed a Pied Currawong doing something similar to a Ring-tailed Possum *Pseudocheirus peregrinus.*

My attention was drawn to the Pied Currawong as it was vigorously tearing leaves and twigs from a thick clump of rainforest-type vegetation growing on a horizontal branch of a tree overhanging (and part of) the Rainforest Gully at the Gardens. Not only was it tearing off the plant material and dropping it, the bird also repeatedly jabbed its bill into the foliage. After observing this behaviour for a few minutes

through 10 x binoculars, I noticed a movement in the foliage some 20 to 40 centimetres immediately below the currawong. It was a Ring-tailed Possum, apparently curled up in its day-time nesting place. The currawong continued jabbing at the possum and tearing away the vegetation above it. After some ten more minutes of this, the possum uncurled in a sudden movement, jerking its upperbody towards the currawong, which suddenly took flight, presumably startled by the rapid movement of the possum. The possum then resumed its former position deep in the foliage.

Why was the Pied Currawong behaving this way towards the Ring-tailed Possum? The currawongs are carnivorous but a healthy (if sleepy!) possum could not possibly be a prey item. It is unlikely that territoriality would come in here, as the two species have totally different needs for food and territory. Perhaps the possum or the nest smelt, to the currawong, like carrion? Or perhaps it is simply yet another example of the inclination of Pied Currawongs to harass other species of birds and animals, even when no survival advantage seems to be associated with such harassment?

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REVIEW

A Field Guide to the Birds of Western Australia by G.M. Storr and R.E. Johnstone, illustrated by Martin Thompson (1985). Published by the Western Australian Museum, Francis Street, Perth, Western Australia, 6000. Pp. 214, 40 colour plates, 220 x 148 mm, paperback.

I placed an order for this book with a Canberra bookshop in preparation for a visit to the south-west of Western Australia in 1995 and to the Kimberley region in 1996. The book was not readily available and took some four to six weeks to obtain, but eventually it arrived. I duly paid and took my new possession to the car before I opened it for a closer inspection.

Immediately, I was disappointed! The introduction was aimed at the male reader, and I wonder if the authors realise that females are bird observers, too. I believe authors should be able to eliminate references to gender from their text and recognise that statements such as "he will take notes", "he will refer to his books" are unacceptable.

But my disappointment did not end there. I had assumed that the introduction in a field guide would provide the type of information an amateur ornithologist might require "in the field"; information on the geographic variations within the state, an explanation of the endemics and their relationship to endemic plant species, or perhaps information about basic bird-watching techniques, selection of binoculars, etc. But instead, Storr and Johnstone provide a list of the orders and families of birds, and an explanation of the composition of the scientific names. All very interesting to read at home, but really, not necessarily of use in the field.

The word "cere" is used in the introduction and also in the glossary, although is not indicated on the "topography of a bird" inside the front cover. To me, "cere" needs more explanation than shoulder", "nape" or "belly".

The main section of the book is divided into two parts: colour plates and keys up front; followed by descriptions of the birds. It is noted in the introduction that "the book is essentially to enable readers to identify the birds they see alive or find dead on roads or beaches. The reader is advised to seek additional information on breeding and behaviour in other publications. Calls or food sources are also omitted, except the White-lined Honeyeater, where its call is given. The omission of these characteristics place limitations on the usefulness of the book, especially in the field.

In the "Description of Birds" section, the authors provide detailed descriptions of the birds and it seems obvious that they had specimens to refer to in developing these descriptions. Many of the colour variations described would not be observed in the field.

An inordinate amount of information is given about vagrant and very rare visitors, for example the Chinese Little Bittern and the Pheasant-tailed Jacana. Each, according to the authors, has only one Australian record, so it is unlikely an observer would require such information in the field.

It is to be regretted that Storr and Johnstone did not follow the systematic order and nomenclature used in Recommended English Names for Australian Birds" (1978, *Emu* 77: 245-313). At the time their book was published, this had become the standard for most publications in Australia, and the systematic order and nomenclature which it used was familiar to the majority of bird watchers. The unfamiliar names used by Storr and Johnstone make their book less "user-friendly" as time is wasted when trying to locate these birds through the use of the index or by their place in the systematic order. (It should be noted that this book was published before *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories* (1994, Monograph 2, RAOU: Melbourne) which is now becoming the standard for most publications in Australia.)

The quality of the colour plates is acceptable but not up to the standard found in many recent publications. The numeric order used in the description section has been used in the colour plates, so that cross-referencing is possible, but the illustrations are not in numerical order.

In summary, considering the deficiencies noted, this book cannot be recommended as a field guide. *A Detailed Description of the Birds of Western Australia* would have been a more fitting title. Clearly, one should evaluate the features of any publication before buying.

Caveat emptor!

Hazel Wright

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NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR *CANBERRA BIRD NOTES*

Currently *Canberra Bird Notes* is issued in four parts each year. Normally three of these contain articles and one contains the Annual Bird Report. As from the start of volume 22 (1997) the number of parts issued each year will be reduced to two (No. 1 in March and No. 2 in September). These two parts will form a volume. Annual Bird Reports will be issued as supplements to the volumes. Although only two parts will be issued each year, it is anticipated that the amount of material contained in each volume will remain the same.

The new arrangements are being introduced in order to reduce the cost of printing and postage.

(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, preferably on an IBM-formatted disk together with a hard copy, to the editors c/o David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 258 2252).

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