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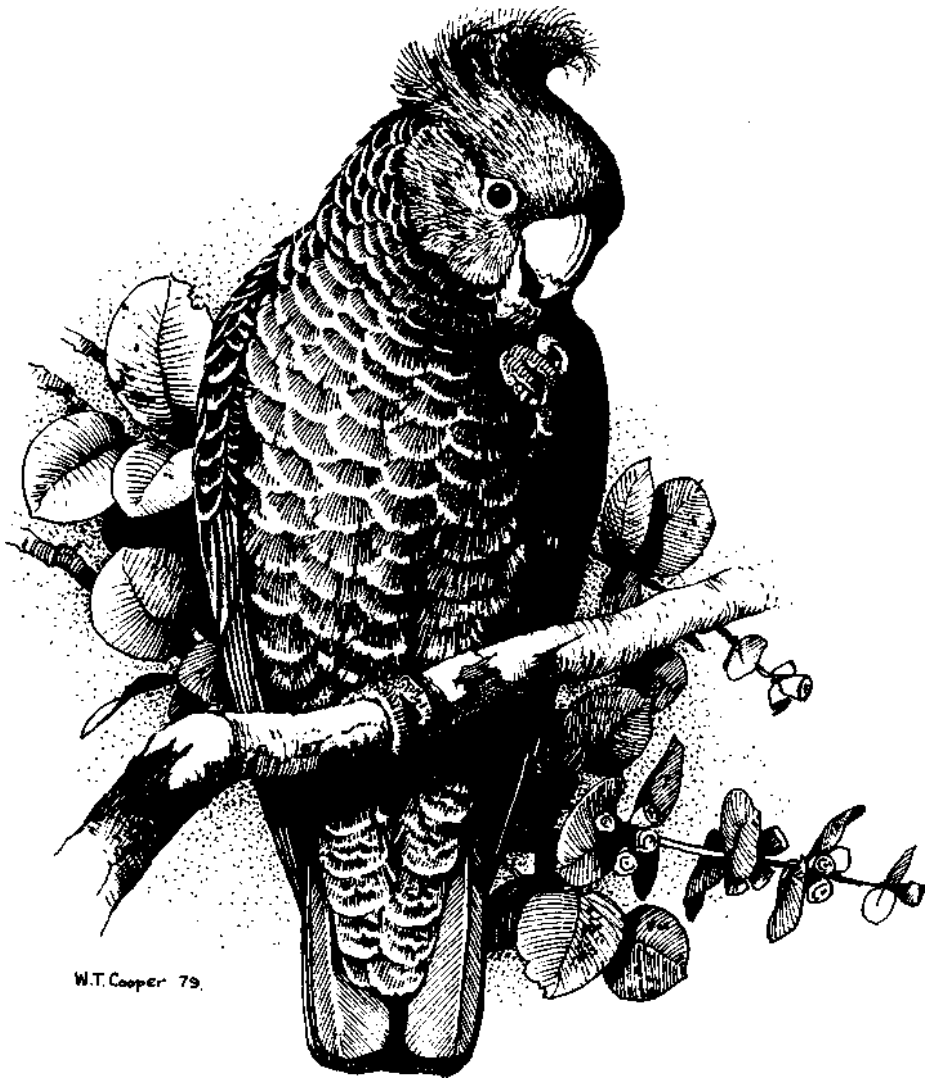

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**(Continual** inside back cover)

# OBSERVATIONS OF SUCCESSIVE NESTING ATTEMPTS BY CRESTED PIGEONS IN A CHAPMAN GARDEN

*Jack Holland*
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Davidson (1997) described the successful repeat nesting of a pair of Crested Pigeons *Ocyphaps lophotes* in Fisher in October and November 1996. Below for comparison I describe my observations of this species breeding during the following season, but at a much later time (January to March) in the adjacent suburb of Chapman. These additional records are of interest as the ACT Bird Atlas (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992) notes that few breeding records have been collected, and all appear to be in the September to November period. However, my observations are well within the range summarised by Frith (1982) for other parts of NSW.

As most local bird-watchers know, Crested Pigeon numbers have increased sharply in the suburbs of Canberra during the past 10 years. They were rare in the Chapman area until the beginning of the ACT Bird Atlas in the spring of 1986 and I can remember being very excited at the start of the data collection phase of that project when I heard them flying in the horse paddocks (a habitat the species is known to favour (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992)) adjacent to the NW edge of Chapman. While it took me some time to actually find them, they soon became much more visible and these days it is not uncommon to see them sitting in small numbers on overhead wires, or a more recent phenomenon, feeding along the roadside. Flocks of in excess of 20 birds can also often be found in the vicinity of the Chapman Primary School or the Rivett shops and oval. In spite of this the species has been only a sporadic visitor to my Garden Bird Survey area (i.e. within 100 m of my home) up to the end of 1997, with only the occasional bird or small group of birds seen, and usually only for a short time.

It therefore was something of a surprise that a pair of Crested Pigeons seemed to be hanging around our garden area for about a week from 10 January 1998. The reason for this became obvious on Saturday morning 17 January when an inspection of the trees and shrubs in the area in which the birds were most often seen revealed one sitting on a nest. This was a typical rather flimsy platform of small sticks, about 3 m above the ground in the north—eastern corner of a Willow-leaved Hakea *Hakea salicifolia,* besides and within easy view from a public path that runs along one side of our block. A second bird was observed calling from the overhead wires and later that day picking up dried grass and small dead sticks from the ground nearby and then flying up to the nest area and passing them to the sitting bird (presumably the male and female respectively, see Crested Pigeon in Higgins and Davies (1996)).

The next morning two birds were observed on or near the nest. Subsequent daily checking, mostly morning and night, showed that one bird was always on the nest where it stayed in spite of the close approach of the observer. The other was often nearby until 4 February, when they were heard calling to each other from the wires and nest. Unfortunately I was away interstate for a few days and on my return on 7 February I was disappointed to find the nest was empty with a single broken egg immediately under it.

Though the birds were still seen in the area that day, I expected this would be the end of the nesting attempt, which seemed to be confirmed by only a single sighting during the next few days, though a pair was seen several times later that week. This pair was heard calling on Saturday morning 14 February, and then seen to fly down from overhead wires to the top of a second hakea bush about 35 m away from the previous site. A bird was seen later that morning gathering nesting material, and the nest was located that afternoon. The nest was similar to the previous one but only about 2.8 m above the ground and facing west, away from the public path. A bird was on the nest the next morning, but not at 6.30 p.m. that evening, though two birds were later seen coming down from the wires to the nest and one then heard calling from several spots. I tried to check for eggs but these were not visible through the flimsy platform.

Regular checking until 12 March revealed one bird continuously on the nest with a second bird occasionally in the vicinity. During the last few days of this period the bird on the nest seemed to sit much higher, indicative of brooding chicks rather than incubating eggs. My wife and I were away for a couple of days but on our return on Sunday afternoon 15 March there was no bird on the nest. Again I suspected desertion but closer inspection the next morning revealed for the first time the outline of a single already well-feathered chick, with its crest clearly visible. Even more remarkable was the presence later of three adult birds, in or around the bush containing the nest, with one seemingly being driven off several times by another bird.

Unfortunately, I had to go interstate again that afternoon, not returning until Thursday evening 19 March when inspection revealed the chick was much more obvious and truly resembled a miniature version of the adult bird, with red eyes and the unique crest clearly visible. This was also the case the next evening but the nest was empty the following day, 21 March and a search of the bush did not reveal the fledgling. However, when my wife and I walked past later that evening the chick dropped to the ground from a nearby gum, pursued by a Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina*. We tried to catch it, but it walked quickly to the shelter of some prickly bursaria bushes, from where it could not be easily retrieved in spite of our efforts. Throughout all this a Pied Currawong stayed in close proximity. Though we attempted to shoo it away and hoped we had stayed long enough to see it off, the fate of the fledgling remains unknown as it was not seen again.

The next morning two, possibly three adult birds were still observed, and one or two birds continued to be seen on the wires, or feeding on the ground, or occasionally heard calling until 31 March. when it was also noticed that the original nest has almost gone (used for a new nest?). After this with the rapidly shrinking hours of daylight observations became more difficult, being basically limited to the weekends. However, the following observations, indicative of courtship/nesting behaviour were made:

- At about 8 a.m. on Saturday 5 April two birds were heard flying to the overhead wires near the two nest sites, where they stayed for about 5 minutes. Then they flew down individually, but in close succession, to the bush of the second nest. Suspecting a new nest I checked this several minutes later to discover the pair sitting side by side on the old nest (unlike the first nest this one has survived till the end of April at least). They had gone when I looked again shortly after.

- One bird was constantly on the wires from about 8 to 9 a.m. on Friday 10 April. When it flew off, two birds were

heard soon after flying in from the east, were seen rest on the wires for about 5 minutes and then to fly off to the north, only to return shortly after. Soon they both dropped to lower wires behind a neighbour's garden where a third bird was also observed. This resulted in significant courtship behaviour over several minutes (cooing, fanning and raising of tail, drooping of wings and puffing out of chest, similar to that described in detail by Frith (1982)), including when one of the birds dropped down to the lawn to a fourth bird.

- Two birds were heard on the wires to the south-east of our garden at about 8.50 a.m. on Sunday 19 April. They soon flew across to the bottom of our garden and spent the next 40 minutes exploring bushes there as well as the hakea of the original nest, before they flew off in the direction from which they had come.

In spite of this activity and further regular sightings of one or two birds (including for the first time two birds at one of my water baths), no further nests have been found to the end of April. This may have been caused by the long spell of hot and dry weather starting to break over Easter and definitely doing so one or two weeks later. However, the species seemed to be particularly this period, whether this was the result of a very successful breeding season (more so than those described above), or whether there had been a big influx into the suburbs due to the hot and dry conditions is unclear.

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*Jack Holland is a long-standing member of COG and has completed a Garden Bird Chart for his garden area each year since the inception of this project in 1981. He is a firm believer that some of your most rewarding bird watching can be done close to home.*

# A TALE OF TWO CITIES — GARDEN BIRDS IN CANBERRA AND PERTH

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We present a total of 12 years observations of the birds in our home gardens, comparing six years observations in Cook, ACT (1977-82) with six years in Gooseberry Hill, WA (1984-89). We have not attempted a formal statistical analysis of these data but rather use them to illustrate some of the interesting patterns of occurrence and differences between the two sites.

The Cook garden (0.07 ha) was typical of south-east Belconnen, which began to be used for suburban housing in the early 1960s. A few of the original trees (e.g. Blakely's Red Gum *Eucalyptus blakelyi*, Brittle Gum *E. mannifera)* remained in and near our garden with Argyle Apple *E. cinerea* and Willow-leaved Peppermint *E. nicholii* growing on the nature strips along the kerbsides. Gungurru *E. caesia*, pines and various shrubs, including callistemons, had been planted in the garden itself, which was within earshot of Mt. Painter and grazed grassland.

Gooseberry Hill was first settled around 1900 and reached its present development in the 1960s. Our garden at Gooseberry Hill (0.24 ha) has retained most of its original vegetation — a fairly dense woodland of Marri *Corymbia calophylla* with some Jarrah *E. marginata* and Wandoo *E. wandoo,* a middle layer including Parrot Bush *Dryandra sessilis* and a sparse lower layer of heath. Superimposed plantings within this native vegetation were a variety of overseas and eastern states species including Sugar Gum *E. cladocalyx*, two species of wattle and various grevilleas. The soil in the Gooseberry Hill garden (lateritic and rocky) is poor compared with that of Cook, the block is much steeper and it contains about ten times as many trees.

During a six-year period in each garden we kept weekly records of all species of birds seen in the garden, seen from the garden (if not seen in) and heard from the garden (if not seen). These data form the basis for comparison between Cook and Gooseberry Hill. In addition, observations were made between 1975 and 1983 on Black Mountain, 1.5 km from the Cook garden and from 1984 onwards on a CSIRO study area on the Darling Scarp (Rowley 1981), 1.5 km from the Gooseberry Hill garden. These areas represent 'undisturbed' habitats similar to that of their respective garden prior to settlement. Data from these undisturbed sites is used for broad comparison with the garden data.

## Results

In the six years 1977-82 at Cook, a total of 90 species were recorded — 81 were native, of which seven were waterbirds (Australian Wood Duck *Chenonetta jubata,* Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo,* Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus*, White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae,* Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis,* Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*, Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae);* six were introduced from overseas and three were aviary escapees (Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*, Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*, Peach-faced Lovebird *Agapornis roseicollis).* In the six years 1984-89 at Gooseberry Hill, 64 species were recorded — 56 native species, including one waterbird (White-faced Heron), four species introduced from

overseas and elsewhere and four escapees (as at Cook plus Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea).* Waterbirds and aviary escapees are not considered further here. The numbers of weeks in which each of the remaining 106 species were recorded are shown in Table 1.

*Methodological comparison*

The proportions of observations 'seen in', `seen from' and 'heard from' the two gardens are shown in Figure 1. Proportionally more species were recorded outside the garden at Cook than at Gooseberry Hill. This was probably because the Cook garden was much smaller than the Gooseberry Hill garden, because there were proportionally more migrants visiting Cook, because birds spent longer in the Gooseberry Hill garden due to the greater number of trees and so were more likely to be recorded in than outside the garden, or because the wide open spaces at Cook allowed for greater detectability of birds outside the garden. In both gardens there was a tendency for 'heard from the garden' observations to be greater in spring than at other times of the year, most probably because birds are more vocal at this time.

For simplicity, data from the three types of observations (seen in, seen from and heard) were combined in the following analyses.

*Species richness*

On a seasonal basis, the number of species at Cook exceeded that at Gooseberry Hill at all times of the year except late summer (Figure 2). The difference in species richness was particularly marked in spring and early summer, a time when several of the more common species at Gooseberry Hill (Galah, Short-billed Black-Cockatoo, Australian Raven, Grey Fantail, Weebill') probably moved elsewhere to nest. The number of species at Cook peaked in early spring and autumn, probably because of the overlap of summer migrants and winter visitors at these times.

Similar peaks (March and September) in species richness were found in a garden survey in Melba (north-west Belconnen, ACT) during the period 1981-86 (D. Purchase pers. comm.). The timing of this period since the urbanisation of Melba roughly approximates the stage of development of Cook in 1977-82 (i.e. the development of Melba began about four years after Cook).

*Comparison of temporal patterns*

A comparison of the annual distributions of sightings for selected species (or congenerics) are shown in Figure 3:

(a) The annual pattern for Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes was similar in both gardens, the species being less common in winter.

(b) The two species of spinebills showed different patterns, with the Eastern Spinebill present at Cook in autumn—winter while the Western Spinebill at Gooseberry Hill was present most often in the late summer—autumn with a few records in winter and spring.

(c) In both gardens, the Grey Fantail was common from late summer to spring but was sighted much more frequently at Gooseberry Hill.

(d) Although Golden Whistlers were present in both gardens during winter, there was considerable variation among years.

[1] See Table 1 for the scientific names of these and all further bird species discussed in this paper

(e) Mistletoebirds were seen throughout the year at Gooseberry Hill but less frequently from spring to early summer, the period when they were most often recorded at Cook.

(f) Spotted Pardalotes showed no distinct seasonal pattern at Cook whereas they were infrequent winter visitors to Gooseberry Hill.

(g) Striated Pardalotes were always present at Gooseberry Hill in spring and summer but, in three of the six years, were absent in autumn and winter. At Cook, Striated Pardalotes were recorded in all weeks of the year.

(h) The pattern for Weebills was similar in both gardens, with lower frequencies in spring and summer.

Of the 11 species of honeyeaters seen at Cook, two were rare (New Holland, one record; Brown-headed, six records) and one was a spring—summer migrant (Noisy Friarbird). The temporal distributions of the eight other species (Figure 4) shows them to be most frequently present in autumn — winter. Over 90% of records for Eastern Spinebills, White-eared Honeyeaters, Noisy Miners and Fuscous Honeyeaters were made during this period. This influx of honeyeaters at Cook during winter coincides with their period of lowest frequency in Box — Red Gum woodland remnants in the ACT (Er and Tidemann 1996). Of the eight honeyeaters shown in Figure 4 only Yellow-faced, White-eared and White-naped were common on Black Mountain counts. White-eared and White-naped Honeyeaters on Black Mountain showed a similar seasonal pattern to the Cook garden. However, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were absent during winter (June to August) on Black Mountain, whereas at Cook some were present during winter.

At Gooseberry Hill, ten species of honeyeaters were recorded. Brown Honeyeaters and Red Wattlebirds were numerous throughout the year. Little Wattlebirds showed no marked seasonal pattern and were less numerous than Brown Honeyeaters and Red Wattlebirds. White-cheeked Honeyeaters were uncommon in spring. Western Spinebills (Figure 3) were more numerous in autumn. Only the White-naped Honeyeater showed the autumn and winter pattern prevalent at Cook. Brown-headed, Singing, New Holland and Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters were rare (< 10 records each). On the CSIRO study area, only Brown Honeyeaters, Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters and Western Spinebills were common throughout the year.

## Discussion

Comparable lists of the top ten most frequently recorded species in the Cook and Gooseberry Hill gardens show a number of similarities. Each garden had two parrots (Eastern and Crimson Rosellas at Cook versus Australian Ringneck and Red-capped Parrot at Gooseberry Hill) and four species in common (Australian Magpie, Silvereye, Galah, Red Wattlebird). Of the 20 most frequently recorded species, a further three were common to both gardens (Australian Raven, Laughing Kookaburra and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike). With the exception of the Silvereye all of these equivalent species and species in common are relatively large birds. Woodall (1995) obtained a similar result from a garden survey in south-east Queensland, where seven of the 10 most frequently recorded species were large birds. Does this mean that larger birds are more likely to be habitat generalists than small birds, or does it mean that small birds are less likely to occur in gardens, perhaps because it is a more dangerous habitat for them?

During 95 monthly bird censuses on the north-western section of Black Mountain

Reserve, 1.5 km from the Cook garden, 70 species were recorded whereas in 12 years of observations on the 120 ha CSIRO study area, 1.5 km from the Gooseberry Hill garden, 90 species were recorded. What are the characteristics of the species present on these 'undisturbed' areas of Black Mountain and the Darling Scarp but absent or rare in the gardens? Missing from the Cook garden were the ground-feeding granivores. Painted Button Quail and Common Bronzewing and those species preferring dense vegetation, the White-browed Scrubwren and Eastern Yellow Robin. Similarly, Painted Button Quail and White-browed Scrubwren were absent from the Gooseberry Hill garden while present on the undisturbed Darling Scarp site and Splendid Fairy-wrens and Western Thornbills, both of which prefer dense vegetation, were rare in the garden but abundant on the Darling Scarp. Unlike the Splendid Fairy-wren, the Superb Fairy-wren does live in non-native gardens in Canberra. During the first half of each year (except in 1981), a party or parties of wrens appeared in the Cook garden, stayed for a few days and then either moved on or were eaten by cats (pers. obs.). On the other hand, both the Western Thornbill and its ecological equivalent in Canberra, the Buff-rumped Thornbill, were rare in their respective gardens (Western Thornbill three records; Buff-rumped Thornbill one record).

Given that the species pool in the ACT is considerably larger than in Perth (ACT: *c.* 120 species which, according to Taylor and Day 1993, were not 'very rare' or found only in wetlands or wet forests; Perth: c. 90 species Storr and Johnstone 1988, MB pers. obs.) we were not surprised that the Cook garden had a greater species richness of native landbirds (74) than the Gooseberry Hill garden (55). What did surprise us, was how similar the gardens were, in that relatively few of the smaller birds that could have frequented them in fact did so, even with undisturbed habitat only 1.5 km away. It is clear that the value of undisturbed native habitat within our cities and towns should not be underestimated.

## Postscript

Our Cook neighbours, Brian MacDonald and Peter Lion report that there are fewer species of small birds in their gardens now (1997) than was the case when we lived there (1977-82). More abundant now are Crested Pigeons (not on our list), King Parrots, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Noisy Miners.

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(Biographical details of the authors appear on page 27.)

**Table 1.** Total number of weeks in which each species was recorded for Cook garden (six-year total 1977-82) and Gooseberry Hill garden (1984-89) according to method of detection. Maximum number of weeks: Cook 293; Gooseberry Hill 307.

| Species | Cook | | | | Gooseberry Hill | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | seen in | seen from | heard from | total | seen in | seen from | heard from | total |
| Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* | | | | | | *2* | | 2 |
| Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* | | *1* | | 1 | 2 | | | 2 |
| Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrhocephalus* | | *2* | *3* | 5 | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides* | | | | | | *2* | | 2 |
| Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* | | *2* | | 2 | | | | |
| Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis* | *1* | 5 | | 6 | | | | |
| Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* | | *3* | | 3 | | 1 | | 1 |
| Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* | | *5* | | 5 | | 1 | | 1 |
| Rock Dove *Columba livia* | *2* | *7* | | 9 | 5 | 7 | | 12 |
| Laughing Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* | | | | | *39* | 72 | 56 | 167 |
| Spotted Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* | | | | | | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera* | | | | | 4 | | | 4 |
| Short-billed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus latirostris* | | | | | 146 | 45 | 89 | 280 |
| Gang-gang Cockatoo *Callocephalon fimbriatum* | 16 | 22 | 15 | 53 | | | | |
| Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla* | *45* | *15* | 14 | 123 | *75* | *94* | *93* | 192 |
| Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* | 7 | 103 | 82 | 192 | | | | |
| Purple-crowned Lorikeet *Glossopsitta porphyrocephala* | | | | | 4 | | 4 | 8 |
| Australian King-Parrot *Alisterus scapularis* | *3* | 4 | | 7 | | | | |
| Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans* | 114 | 67 | 10 | 191 | | | | |
| Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius* | *122* | *77* | 12 | 211 | | | | |
| Western Rosella *Platycercus icterotis* | | | | | *3* | | | 3 |
| Australian Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius* | | | | | *281* | *10* | | 291 |
| Red-capped Parrot *Purpureicephalus spurius* | | | | | 184 | 14 | 3 | 201 |
| Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus* | 1 | 3 | 2 | 6 | | | | |
| Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus* | 7 | 9 | 51 | 67 | | | | |
| Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cacomantis flabelliformis* | | | *2* | 2 | 4 | | 8 | 12 |
| Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* | | 2 | 6 | 8 | 1 | | 7 | 8 |
| Shining Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx lucidus* | *3* | | 1 | 4 | 2 | 15 | 31 | 48 |
| Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae* | | | 14 | 14 | 5 | 1 | 39 | 45 |
| Barn Owl *Tyto alba* | 1 | | | 1 | | | 5 | 5 |
| Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* | | | | | 4 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Australian Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus* | | | 1 | 1 | | | | |
| White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus* | | *2* | | 2 | | | | |
| Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus* | | | | | | *1* | | 1 |
| Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae* | *8* | *16* | 104 | 128 | 212 | 38 | 51 | 301 |
| Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sancta* | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 23 | 2 | 23 | 48 |
| Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus* | | | | | 3 | 6 | 56 | 65 |
| Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* | 7 | 14 | 28 | 49 | | | | |
| White-throated Treecreeper *Cormobates leucophaeus* | 4 | 4 | 10 | 18 | | | | |
| Superb Fairy-wren *Malurus cyaneus* | 21 | | 7 | 28 | | | | |
| Splendid Fairy-wren *Malurus splendens* | | | | | *1* | | | 1 |
| Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus* | *80* | *22* | *28* | 130 | 12 | | 14 | 26 |
| Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus* | 111 | 49 | 27 | 187 | 213 | 4 | 21 | 238 |
| Speckled Warbler *Chthonicola sagittata* | 1 | | | 1 | | | | |
| Weebill *Smicrornis brevirostris* | 108 | 16 | 16 | 140 | 89 | 3 | 13 | 105 |
| Western *Gerygone Gerygone fusca* | | | | | *298* | | *3* | 301 |
| White-throated Gerygone *Gerygone olivacea* | *30* | 13 | 25 | 68 | | | | |
| Brown Thornhill *Acanthiza pusilla* | 8 | | | 8 | | | | |
| Inland Thornbill *Acanthiza apicalis* | | | | | 51 | | 2 | 53 |
| Western Thornbill *Acanthiza inornata* | | | | | *3* | | | 3 |
| Buff-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza reguloides* | *1* | | | *1* | | | | |

Table 1. *(continued)*

| Species | Cook | | | | Gooseberry Hill | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | seen in | seen from | heard from | total | seen in | seen from | heard from | total |
| Yellow-rumped Thornhill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* | 131 | 12 | 4 | 147 | 3 | | 4 | 7 |
| Yellow Thornbill *Acanthiza nana* | 7 | | | 7 | | | | |
| Striated Thornbill *Acanthiza lineata* | 29 | 2 | | 31 | | | | |
| Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata* | 78 | 40 | 79 | 197 | 280 | 15 | 7 | 302 |
| Little Wattlebird *Anthochaera chrysoptera* | | | | | 2 | 7 | 31 | 40 |
| Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus* | 79 | 34 | 43 | 156 | | | | |
| Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala* | 23 | 10 | 18 | 51 | | | | |
| Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops* | 96 | 19 | 6 | 121 | | | | |
| Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens* | | | | | 6 | 1 | 3 | 10 |
| White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis* | 51 | 5 | 17 | 73 | | | | |
| Yellow-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus ornatus* | | | | | *1* | | | *1* |
| Fuscous Honeyeater *Lichenostomus fuscus* | 29 | | 2 | 31 | | | | |
| White-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus penicillatus* | 8 | 5 | 7 | 20 | | | | |
| Brown-headed Honeyeater *Melithreptus brevirostris* | 5 | 1 | | 6 | 1. | 1 | | 2 |
| Brown Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta* | | | | | 303 | 3 | | 306 |
| White-naped Honeyeater *Melithreptus lunatus* | 25 | 3 | | 28 | 22 | 3 | | 25 |
| New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* | *I* | | | *1* | *1* | 5 | | 6 |
| White-cheeked Honeyeater *Phylidonyris nigra* | | | | | 2 | 2 | 13 | 17 |
| Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris* | 68 | 9 | 19 | 96 | | | | |
| Westem Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus superciliosus* | | | | | 86 | 1 | 2 | 89 |
| Scarlet Robin *Petroica multicolor* | 12 | 2 | 5 | 19 | 1 | | | 1 |
| Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii* | | | | | | | *1* | 1 |
| Varied Sittella *Daphoenositta chrysoptera* | 5 | 3 | | 8 | 18 | | 1 | 19 |
| Olive Whistler *Pachycephala olivacea* | *1* | | | 1 | | | | |
| Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis* | 20 | | 12 | 32 | 34 | | 3 | 37 |
| Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris* | 20 | 11 | 35 | 66 | 290 | 3 | 4 | 297 |
| Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica* | 28 | 1 | 31 | 60 | 2 | | | 2 |
| Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula* | 7 | 3 | 2 | 12 | | | | |
| Restless Flycatcher *Myiagra inquieta* | *1* | | | 1 | | | | |
| Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca* | 83 | 43 | 68 | 194 | | | | |
| Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa* | 48 | 11 | 8 | 67 | 189 | 94 | 2 | 285 |
| Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* | 24 | 17 | 35 | 76 | | | | |
| Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike | 45 | 72 | 37 | 154 | 45 | 65 | 41 | 151 |
| White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii* | 3 | 4 | 5 | 12 | | | | |
| Olive-backed Oriole *Oriolus sagittatus* | 2 | 1 | 28 | 31 | | | | |
| White-browed Woodswallow *Artamus superciliosus* | 4 | | | 4 | | | | |
| Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* | | | *1* | 1 | 6 | 94 | 48 | 148 |
| Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* | 193 | 60 | 13 | 266 | 301 | 6 | | 307 |
| Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* | 145 | 55 | 39 | 239 | | | | |
| Grey Currawong *Strepera versicolor* | 9 | 10 | 34 | 53 | | | | |
| Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* | 11 | 72 | 67 | 150 | 33 | 59 | 51 | 143 |
| White-winged Chough *Corcorax melanorhamphos* | | *1* | | 1 | | | | |
| House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* | 234 | 40 | 7 | 281 | | | | |
| Double-barred Finch *Taeniopygia bichenovii* | *1* | | | 1 | | | | |
| Red-browed Finch *Neochmia temporalis* | *1* | 1 | | 2 | | | | |
| European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* | 57 | 35 | 6 | 98 | | | | |
| Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum* | 19 | 12 | 23 | 54 | 18 | 52 | 50 | 237 |
| Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena* | 2 | 4 | | 6 | 1 | 18 | 4 | 23 |
| Tree Martin *Hirundo nigricans* | | | | | 3 | 70 | 3 | 76 |
| Rufous Songlark *Cinclorhamphus mathewsi* | | | *1* | 1 | | | | |
| Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis* | 204 | 27 | 12 | 243 | 286 | 5 | 5 | 296 |
| Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* | 64 | 20 | 20 | 104 | | | | |
| Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* | 116 | 110 | 2 | 228 | | | | |
| Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* | *1* | | | *1* | | | | |

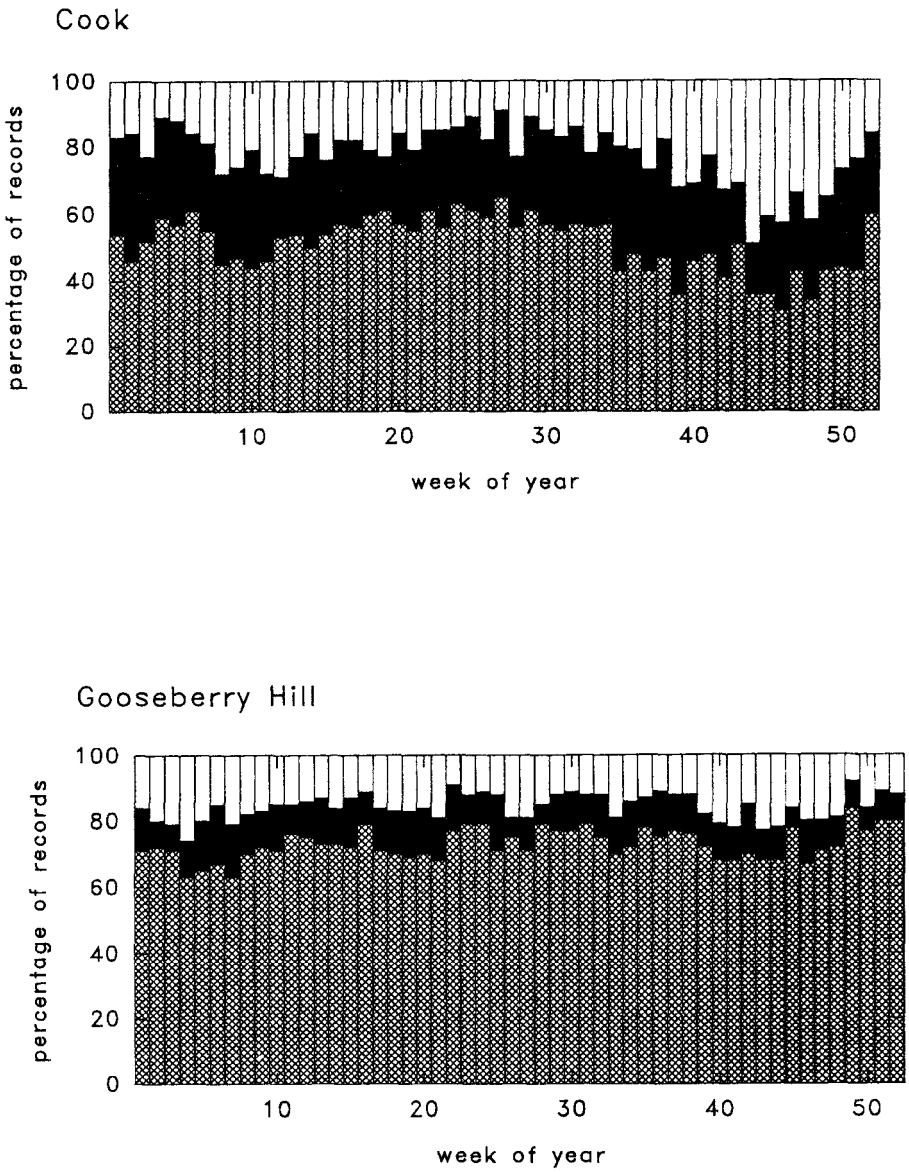


**Figure 1.** Proportions of observations of birds 'seen in' (cross-hatching), 'seen from' (solid) and 'heard from' (open) the gardens at Cook and Gooseberry Hill.

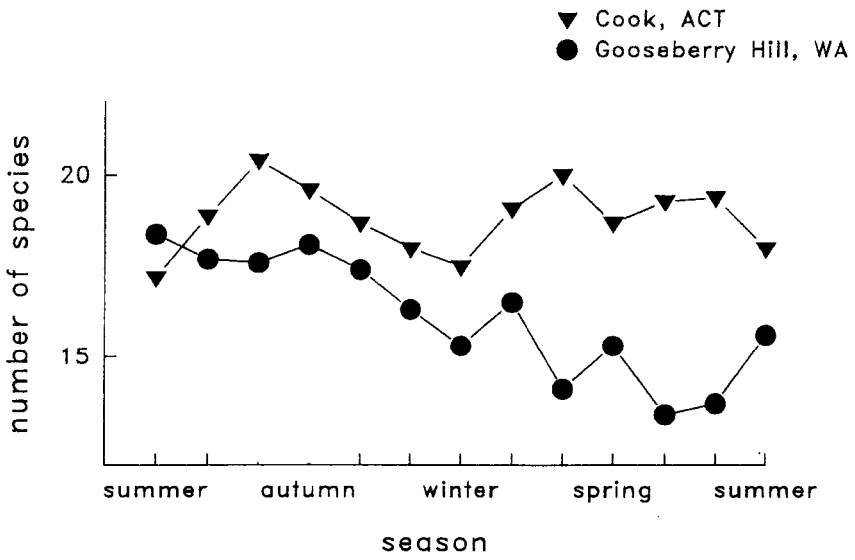


**Figure 2** Numbers of species recorded from the Cook and Gooseberry Hill gardens according to season (13 x 4 week periods).

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*Belinda Brooker lives in Perth. She has a zoology degree from the University of Western Australia and has recently been awarded a PhD by Murdoch University for her study of grasswrens and other passerines at Shark Bay, WA. She is the author of two children's books on wildlife.*

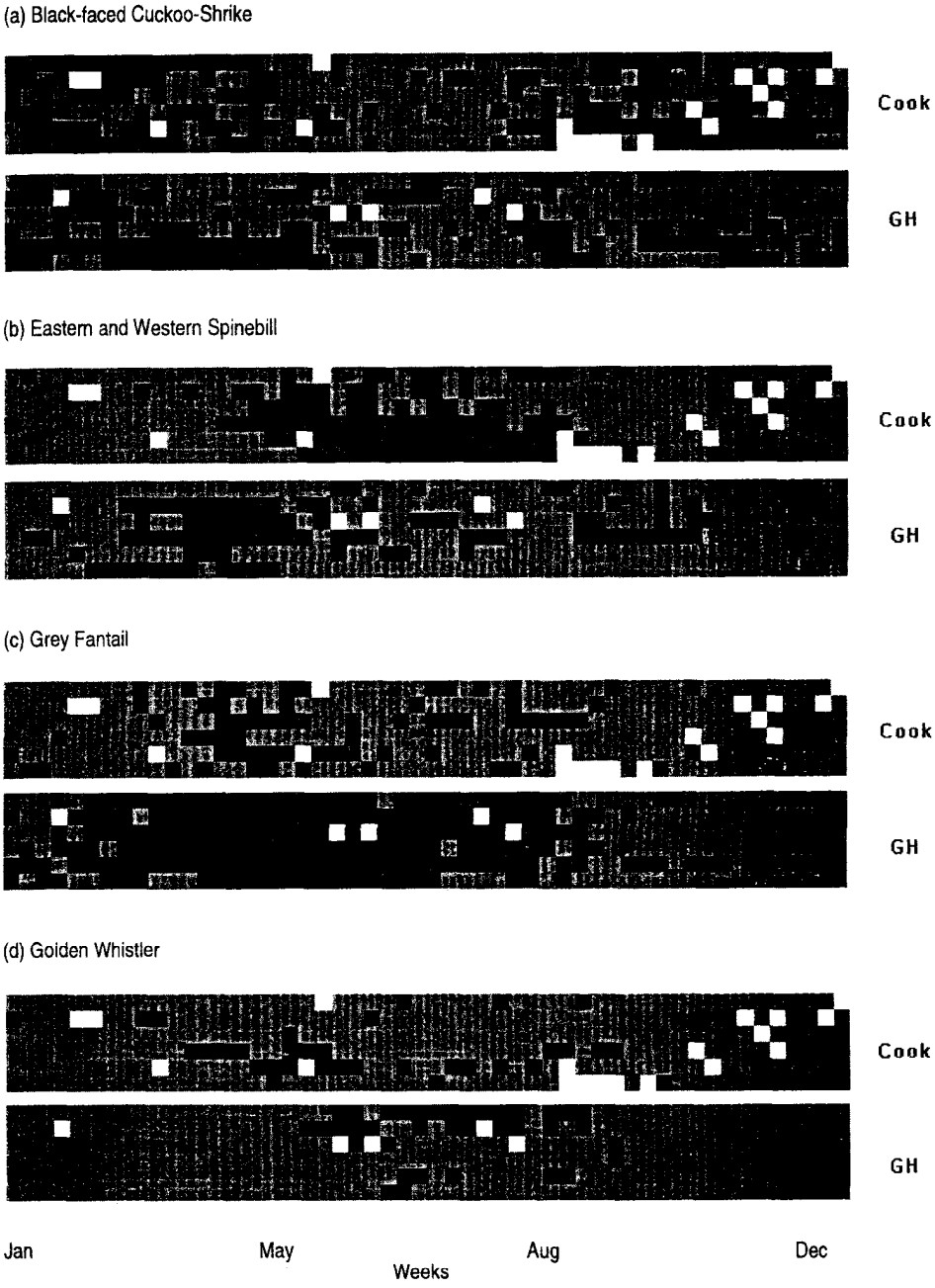
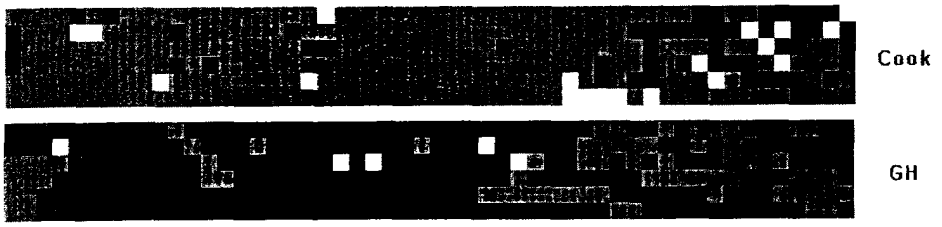
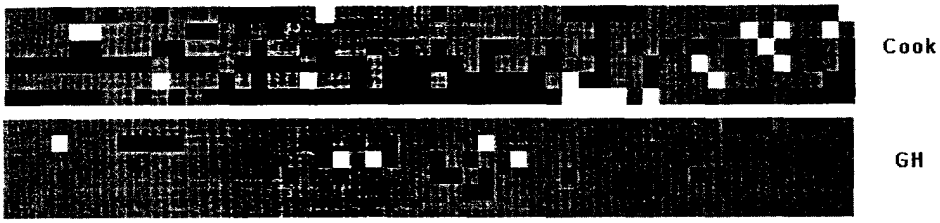



**Figure 3.** The annual distributions of sightings for selected species (or congenerics) over six years at Cook (1977–82) and six years at Gooseberry Hill (1984–89). Blocks commence at

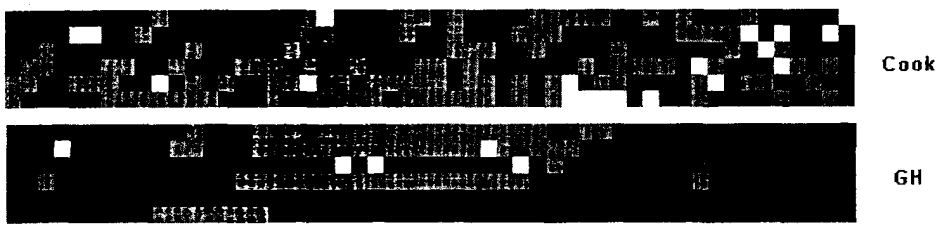
(e) Mistletoebird



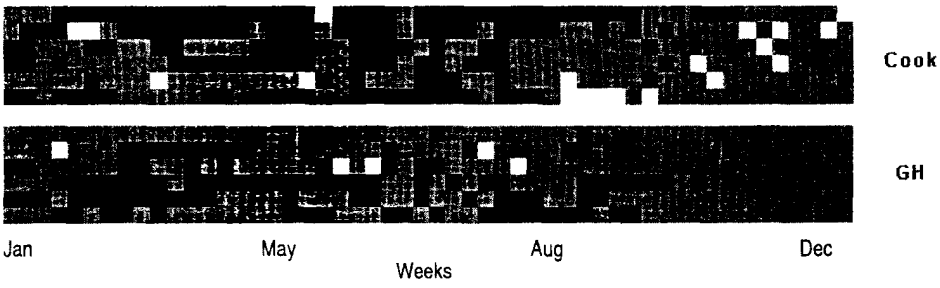

(f) Spotted Pardalote




(g) Striated Pardalote




(h) Weebill




week 1 (Jan 1–7). Black = species present; grey = species not recorded; white = observer absent.

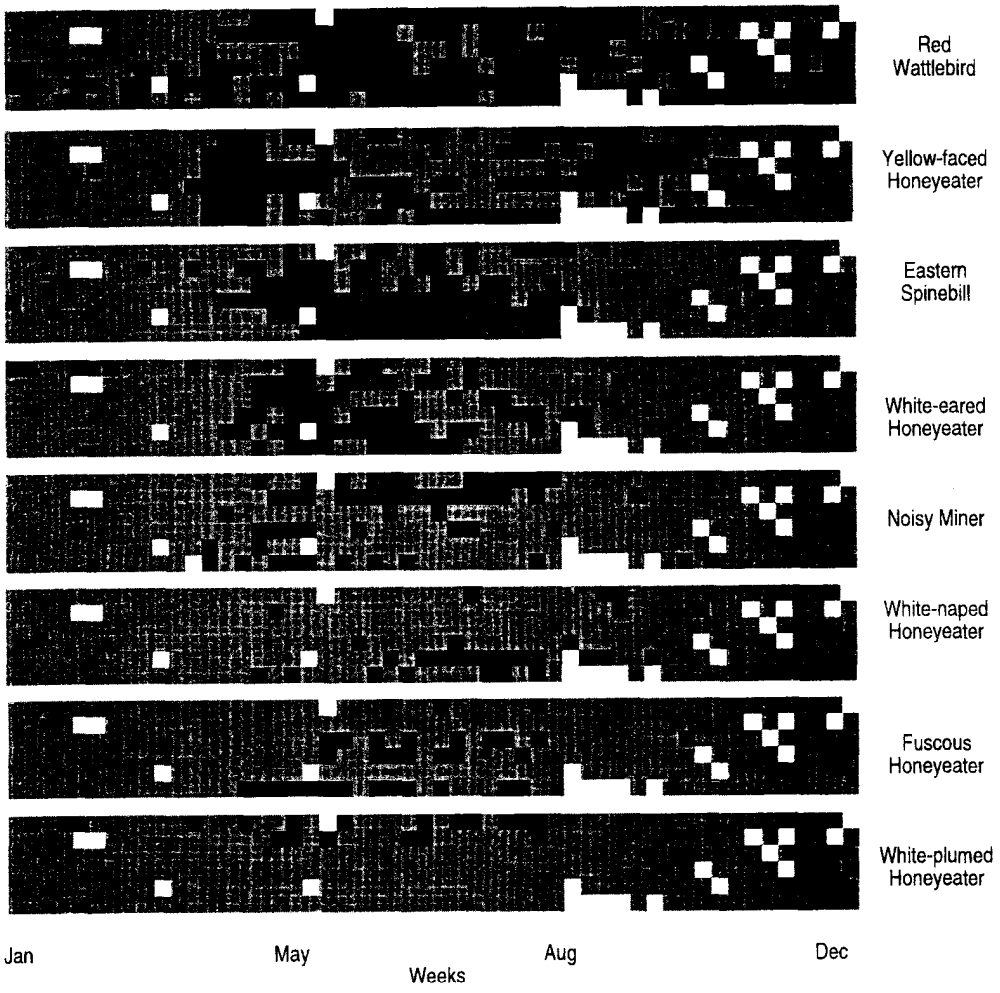



**Figure 4.** Annual distributions of sightings for eight species of honeyeaters at Cook over six years (1977–82) in descending order of abundance. Blocks commence week 1 (Jan 1–7). Black = species present; grey = species not recorded; white = observer absent.

# BIRDWATCHING IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL FIFTY YEARS AGO

*David White*
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When I was born in 1931, in the maternity wing of the old Canberra Community Hospital (now one of the few surviving weatherboard buildings of the Institute of Advanced Studies at the Australian National University), the population of the city was one per cent of that today. Canberra was a small country town and every child lived within easy walking distance of relatively untouched bushland. In 1936. my father, later to become National Librarian. moved to 27 Mugga Way, Red Hill. At almost 3 acres (1 ha) this was, and remains, the largest residential block in Canberra. It was still available to my father because it contained an unappealing swamp. Undaunted, he proceeded to drain the swamp and planted 500 trees, many of which grew to over 20 m, forming the basis of what was arguably the outstanding 'English woodland garden in the city. More of that later.

Meantime, throughout the long, cold Canberra winters, I would milk a cow and feed the chooks before cycling several miles to school across relatively unpopulated grassland dotted with the occasional patch of savannah woodland, e.g. at Westlake now Stirling Park and the south-east corner of the embassy area of Yarralumla. One could hardly fail to become interested in nature, including birds. We could not afford binoculars at the time, so some of the LBJs in the treetops may have been missed, but one learnt to recognise most birds from their calls, flight and behaviour — their ‘jizz' as it is now called.

Red Hill was my local patch, rather than the much superior Black Mountain or Mount Ainslie, which were more convenient to Canberra High School classmates from 'the north side of the river'. Lake Burley Griffin did not yet exist, of course, but during school holidays, intrepid cyclists such as the Bailey brothers (John, Vernon and Peter), the Balmfords (John and Peter), my young brother John, and myself would tackle the hot and dusty roads to the Cotter River, Kambah Pool or Pine Island, where we would camp, swim and birdwatch.

During World War II, I had the good fortune to meet the great Gregory M. Mathews -- indeed, I still have a signed copy of his autobiography *Birds and Books.* My father had made available the facilities of the National Library, then still part of the Parliamentary Library, for Mathews to catalogue his renowned personal collection of books, manuscripts and pictorial material, which he had presented to the Australian Government in 1939. Once or twice, he took me out birdwatching on what was then the Royal Canberra golf course (subsequently inundated by the lake). Then in his late sixties, he struck me as wonderful company rather than a great field observer. His forte was as a 'cabinet' ornithologist rather than a 'field' ornithologist. Though born in Australia, he was very much one of the 'landed gentry', more English than the English, and of substantial independent means. He engaged numbers of collectors to bring in specimens from all over Australia, which he identified and classified. As a taxonomist, he was a 'splitter' rather than a ‘lumper'. Not all his decisions withstood the test of time, but his contribution to Australian ornithology was enormous.

Shortly after the war, I met a young American diplomat, Donald W. Lamm, whose passion was ornithology. His

previous posting had been to Japan, where he was arrested briefly for birdwatching (with binoculars, of course) near a military installation around the time of Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. I went birdwatching with him perhaps half a dozen times during summer vacations from Sydney University, and encouraged by his infectious enthusiasm, e.g. we were almost catapulted through the windscreen when he hit the brakes on sighting his first black-cockatoo! Our little paper (Lamm and White 1950) was one of several he published during this and subsequent visits to Australia. My last recollection was of his out-voting his wife on her preferred choice of their next diplomatic posting — Rome (a culturally rich but bird-free zone) or the wilds of Africa (a birder's dream)!

My impression is that Canberra was then much drier than it is today. This may explain why such birds as babblers, finches (especially Double-barred Finch *Taeniopygia bichenovii*, but also Zebra Finch *T. guttata* and Diamond Firetail *Stagonopleura guttata)*, Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*, Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis*, Speckled Warbler *Chthonicola sagittata*, Banded Lapwing *Vanellus tricolor*, Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus*, Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus* and Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* were relatively more common than they are today.

Why was Canberra drier in those days? I would suggest three reasons. Firstly, I recall several drought years around the time of World War II — it may be of interest to check whether, statistically, this period was indeed drier than average. Secondly, the city of Canberra was dramatically transformed by the long-delayed creation of Lake Burley Griffin in 1964. My daily journeys by pushbike to the old Canberra High School (now occupied by the Canberra School of Art) took me across rather monotonous dry grasslands characterised by certain roads that ended suddenly for no obvious reason in the middle of a paddock. The surveyors had done their homework well, as following the filling of the lake, it became apparent that these mysterious roads to nowhere led right to the high-water mark at its edge. All the early Canberra bird-lists (Barrett 1922, Jones 1929, Mathews 1943, Lamm and White 1950) are notable for the paucity of waterbirds. Lake Burley Griffin, and associated areas such as the Jerrabomberra Wetlands, have now attracted the expected range of waterbirds. Moreover, the city as a whole has become somewhat more humid, as a permanent consequence of the lake.

The third significant influence on the avian population was the greening of Canberra that followed the long-delayed installation of a permanent water supply to the parks and gardens. I do not recall the exact year after World War II when the decision was taken to maintain the green lawns of the main public parks for which Canberra is now so renowned, rather than letting them die during the hot, dry summers. The effect of this change, together with the great interest of most Canberra residents in creating and maintaining well-watered gardens, whether native or European, was dramatic. Canberra has become a particularly birdy city, and I imagine that both the total bird population and the variety of species have increased accordingly. This was certainly the case at 27 Mugga Way, which although basically an `English' garden, became a mecca for nine species of parrots and cockatoos, and a winter haven for altitudinal migrants such as Australian King-Parrot *Alisterus scapularis*, Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*, Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* and Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons*. There is also a downside to this — I note that the Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* was not on our list of the birds of the

ACT compiled in 1949, yet today this exotic is perhaps the most common bird at 27 Mugga Way. Nor was the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* on our list. Oddly enough, though, whereas the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* was always common, nesting in cypress trees across the road, its numbers do not appear to have increased correspondingly.

For the past 40 years I have lived in Melbourne where the range of avian species is much the same as Canberra's. You have a few we never see, notably Double-banded Finch, Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus* and Glossy Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami.* In addition, you have some we see much more rarely than you do, such as Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis,* Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* and, of course, Gang-gang Cockatoo *Callocephalon fimbriatum* — Canberra undoubtedly being the nation's capital for this lovely bird, which devoted much of my childhood to consuming our avenue of hawthorns at 27 Mugga Way.

The other day, I came across a cumulative list of birds seen at 27 Mugga Way, compiled mainly during occasional summer visits through the 1980s. The garden (not the house) was classified by the National Trust and the ACT Heritage Commission, but tragically, deteriorated badly following its sale on my father's death in 1992. While I am certain the appended list is incomplete, it may be of interest to other Canberra residents. Bear in mind that 27 Mugga Way was an English garden, not a native one, accounting no doubt for the limited variety of honeyeater species, and also that Red Hill is now an inner suburb of Canberra and nowhere near the lake, hence the absence of large birds of prey, waterbirds and waders, quail and crakes. Even so, 85 species is not a bad list for one suburban backyard. Some such as Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus* and Jacky Winter *Microeca fascinans* I've not seen in the garden since the early days when the 'garden' comprised of three large eucalypts and much rank dry grassland abutting Red Hill.

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*David White was born in Canberra in 1931 and was educated at Telopea Park Primary School, Canberra High School and, later, the Australian National University's John Curtin School of Medical Research. His interest in birds was kindled by Gregory Mathews. As a young medical student, White published an article in Emu with Don Lamm which updated the existing list of the birds of Canberra. His pursuit of birds was diverted for several decades by a busy career at The University of Melbourne, as Professor of Microbiology, Chairman of the Professorial Board, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, and Pro-Vice Chancellor, in recognition of which he was appointed Officer of the Order of Australia in 1992. Now retired, he has returned to birdwatching with renewed enthusiasm, having recently found his 3000th species, high in the Andes.*

Australian Wood Duck *Chenonetta jubata*
Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*
White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*
Great Egret *Ardea alba*
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus axillaris*
Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*
Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrhocephalus*
Brown Falcon *Falco berigora*
Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis*
Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*
Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*
Rock Dove *Columba livia*
Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera*
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus funereus*
Gang-gang Cockatoo *Callocephalon fimbriatum*
Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla*
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*
Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*
Australian King-Parrot *Alisterus scapularis*
Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans*
Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius*
Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus*
Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus*
Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cacomantis flabelliformis*
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx lucidus*
Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae*
Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides*
Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae*
Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sanctus*
Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus*
Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
White-throated Treecreeper *Cormobates leucophaeus*
Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus*
Superb Fairy-wren *Malurus cyaneus*
Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus*
Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*
White-browed Scrubwren *Sericornis frontalis*
Weebill *Smicrornis brevirostris*
White-throated Gerygone *Gerygone olivacea*
Brown Thornbill *Acanthiza pusilla*
Buff-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza reguloides*
Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*
Striated Thornbill *Acanthiza lineata*
Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*
Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus*
Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala*
Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops*
White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis*
White-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus penicillatus*
White-naped Honeyeater *Melithreptus lunatus*
Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*
Jacky Winter *Microeca fascinans*
Scarlet Robin *Petroica multicolor*
Rose Robin *Petroica rosea*
Eastern Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria australis*
Crested Shrike-tit *Falcunculus frontatus*
Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis*
Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*
Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica*
Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula*
Restless Flycatcher *Myiagra inquieta*
Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*
Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons*
Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*
Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*
Olive-backed Oriole *Oriolus sagittatus*
Dusky Woodswallow *Artamus cyanopterus*
Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*
Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina*
Grey Currawong *Strepera versicolor*
Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*
White-winged Chough *Corcorax melanorhamphos*
Richards Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Double-barred Finch *Taeniopygia bichenovii*
Red-browed Finch *Neochmia temporalis*
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*
Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*
Tree Martin *Hirundo nigricans*
Rufous Songlark *Cinclorhamphus mathewsi*
Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*
Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

## ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN CROW IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

*Steve Wilson*
*56 Harrington Circuit, Kambah ACT 2902*

Recently, while perusing the early ornithological literature of the ACT, I read a list prepared by G.M. Mathews (1943) which shows the 'Australian Crow *Corvus cecilae'* as being present in the ACT. A later list by Lamm and White (1950) also included the Australian Crow but with the comments:

> He [Mathews] has substantiated his record of the Crow by examination of actual specimens. The authors consider that information on the relative status of these two species is inconclusive, but believe the Crow to be much scarcer than the Raven. They base this on differentiation of the call notes, concerning which they concur with the statement by Serventy and Whittell *(A Handbook of the Birds of Western Australia,* Perth, 1948).

The statement on call notes by Serventy and Whittell is:

> In appearance it is difficult to distinguish [the Crow] from the Raven, but the call-notes have a different quality. The Crow has a shorter note, not so deep as that of the Raven, sounding more like 'oh! oh!' rather than the bass, long drawn-out 'ah-h-h' of the Raven.

The records by Mathews, and Lamm and White are the only records of the Australian Crow (now called the Torresian Crow *C. orru)* from the ACT.

In addition to the Australian Crow, both Mathews, and Lamm and White included the Raven *C. coronoides* in their lists. The Little Raven *C. mellori* could not have been included as it was not described until much later (Rowley 1967).

I was puzzled by the reference to Mathews made in the comments by Lamm and White. I knew Lamm very well but he never

referred to meeting Mathews. I sought the opinion of the late John Calaby who had spent considerable time with Don Lamm during Don's tours of duty at the American Embassy in 1947 to 1949, and again in 1960 to 1964. John thought the link was probably the junior author David White. David was the son of Harold White who was then Parliamentary Librarian.

Mathews lived in Canberra from 1940 to 1945 while preparing a catalogue of his ornithological library which he had donated to the Commonwealth of Australia in 1939. This collection was placed in the National Library which at the time was part of the Parliamentary Library (the National Library of Australia did not become an independent institution until 1960). During his time in Canberra Mathews taught David White, who was then a schoolboy, how to identify birds (White 1998).

An effort has been made to locate the specimens which Mathews was reputed to have used to substantiate the inclusion of the Australian Crow in his list of ACT birds. His extensive collection of bird specimens now forms part of the Rothschild collection which is housed at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. A check has been made of this collection as well as those held by the Australian Museum in Sydney and the Victoria Museum in Melbourne. No specimens were found that could have been used to justify the inclusion of the Australian Crow on the list of ACT birds (Paul Sweet, Walter Bowles and Rory O'Brien pers. comm.).

In view of the comments by Lamm and White (1950) that they could differentiate the two species on the bases of their call notes, the most likely explanation is that the `Australian Crow' was in fact the form of the Australian Raven which subsequently became the Little Raven (Rowley 1967). Both occur in the ACT and are identifiable on call. The Little Raven is less frequently encountered than the Australian Raven.

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*Steve Wilson is a frequent contributor to Canberra Bird Notes and requires no further introduction. The above article is a result of the research he is doing towards the preparation of a definitive list of the birds of the ACT.*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF PAUL FENNELL'S SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF TWO COG SURVEYS

*Mr Brendan Smyth, ACT Minister for Urban Services, officially launched two new COG surveys on Sunday 18 October 1998 at Majura Nature Park. The following are highlights of the speech made at the launch by Paul Fennell.*

COG is undertaking two new surveys: the long term monitoring of the distribution and abundance of birds in Yellow Box / Red Gum communities - our Woodland Survey; and as Regional Organiser of the new national atlas of Australian birds, part of a national effort coordinated by Birds Australia.

These new surveys are additional to other surveys which COG organises, or in which COG members participate. These are the Garden Bird Survey, the Water Bird Survey, Mulligans Flat Survey, the Murrumbidgee Corridor Honeyeater Migration Survey, Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot surveys, NSW Beach Bird Survey, and Bird of Prey watch.

*Woodland Survey*

First, thanks to the ACT government for the grant of $5,000 for this project. Funds are being used mainly to pay an honorarium to the coordinator of the project, Mr Anthony Overs. Thanks too, to those who organised the project, Mr Chris Davey and Ms Jenny Bounds, and thanks for advice from Dr Ross Cunningham and Professor Henry Nix. And thanks also to the seven site coordinators, and to those who will be helping them over the next four, five or more years.

Hopefully, the Woodland Survey will produce hard evidence of how well the birds are doing. Hopefully the evidence will show that they are doing well in areas which have been declared a threatened bio-community, the Yellow Box / Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands.

Hopefully the evidence will show that birds which have been declared as under threat in the ACT are growing in number, and increasing their ranges. These include the Hooded Robin, Brown Treecreeper, Regent Honeyeater, Superb Parrot and other species such as Jacky Winter and Speckled Warbler which at present may be in serious decline as a result of environmental degradation.

*The new Atlas of Australian Birds*

The last Atlas of Australian Birds collected data from 1977 to 1981. COG members were very much involved with that. Ten years ago COG was conducting an atlas survey of the ACT, and published its own atlas in 1992, funded by a considerable grant from the NCDC over three years.

It is time we did some more serious atlassing.

However, this time we have to do it on something less than a shoestring, and with a much greater area to cover. The COG area of interest is now much, much larger than the ACT. It stretches from Wee Jasper in the west to Majors Creek in the east, and from Gunning in the north to Adaminaby in the south. The ACT atlas had 166 grid squares each 3.5 by 4.5 km. Now the area COG has undertaken to atlas is 780 grid squares.

There are some hard issues to be addressed.

The first is to overcome pessimism, and reverse negative trends. Destruction and degradation of the environment continues. In the 15 years since the last Atlas of

Australian Birds, 10 million more hectares (which is equal to half of Victoria) of bushland have been cleared. This has been less of a problem in the ACT, since much of our bushland is in reserves, but there are other significant threats:

- removal of dead and fallen timber.
- invasion of feral animals - foxes, and uncontrolled cats, Common Mynas.
- poor management resulting in cleared understorey in woodland where grazing occurs.
- less than perfect government policy in the over-use of Nature Reserves - we have to be very careful with our natural heritage.

There is so much to do, we need to coordinate our resources so very well.

Birds Australia has received $1.2 million to coordinate the Atlas. COG gets none of this. However, Birds Australia has estimated that volunteers, such as COG, will contribute around $50 million in kind throughout the course of the Atlas. On a pro rata basis, the volunteers of the ACT are likely to contribute at least $1 million of this volunteer services. This is in addition to the contribution for the Woodland Survey, and all our other surveys.

COG is grateful for the $5,000 grant from the ACT Government to coordinate the Woodland Survey. The ACT Government, I am sure, is confident that it is getting the best possible value for money from the effort COG is putting into the Woodland Survey. I am also sure that the people of the ACT, as part of the nation, will get the best possible value from COG members with the new Atlas of Australian Birds.

I want also to say that COG members go out birdwatching because they like to do it. We also are environmentally aware and want, more than most people, to make our contribution to preserving that environment. But conducting scientific surveys and atlassing is not just a random ramble jotting down sightings of interest. There is a lot of work involved. We all know that. To stimulate such activity, to recruit people to undertake atlassing and surveying, and to maintain the required levels of activity, we need resources as well as good will and hard work by the organisers.

So today I am saying to the people and government of the ACT, please value the importance of what we are doing here, and provide COG, next time we come to you for support, with some more funding for this important activity. COG members enjoy getting out into the bush, and we expect to keep working at keeping the bush in the best possible state.

*Paul Fennell, President,*
*Canberra Ornithologists Group*

**ACT BIRDWATCHERS HOTLINE** **Telephone 6247 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.

## OUT AND ABOUT

*G. Tibicen*

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

A lot of work has been carried out on the movements of birds by attaching radio transmitters to them. A recent issue of *Corella* contained papers that reported on the use of transmitters on Cattle Egrets and Red-browed Finches. In both cases the transmitters equated to about 7% of the body weight. In Britain a writer has suggested that the weight of a transmitter not exceed 3% of the body weight. However one of the *Corella* authors has pointed out that some Australian studies have utilised transmitters weighing up to 10% of the body weight. It must be that Australian birds are much stronger than European ones! This all seemed academic to me until I realised that it equated to a 70 kg person carrying a 7 kg weight permanently attached to them. Think about it — especially as most wild birds are hard pressed to find enough food to keep themselves alive. The extra load could be the difference between life and death.

The last two summers have been ones I remember as `old-fashioned' summers similar to those of the late 1960s and early 1970s being fairly dry with constant temperatures in the mid to high 30s. They were also summers in which there appeared to me to be smaller numbers of Pied Currawongs hanging around the areas I frequent. This made me think that perhaps currawongs do not like the heat and retreat to the cooler areas when temperatures rise. If so it might be a factor in explaining why in some summers currawongs appear to invade Canberra whilst in others they are less conspicuous. I wonder if anybody has any relevant data, as it would be interesting to see if there is some relationship between the average summer temperatures in Canberra and variations in Pied Currawong numbers.

The mining industry has always had a bad press with conservationists and environmentalists. Some of their old methods caused havoc and long lasting harm to the environment and the miners did not seem to care. However, recently there does seem to have been a change in some miners approach and I have started to wonder whether if I owned a bit of land, would it be better to allow it be mined or use it for intensive agriculture? If the former and it was revegetated and restored at least there is a chance it might regain some of its original fauna and flora. If the latter then it might be ruined for ever with the application of herbicides, pesticides and the disappearance of the top soil. There are some issues like nuclear power and land ownership which affect the equation in some cases but for a plot of land, which will cause the most long term damage — mining or modern agriculture? What do readers think?

In 1834 Dr. George Bennett wrote a book titled *Wanderings in New South Wales* in which he recorded the Kookaburra as abounding on the Yass Plains and 'better known to the colonists and strangers by the appellation of Laughing or Feathered Jackass'. He goes on to say 'the natives at Yass call the bird Gogera or Gogobera, probably from its peculiar note, which has

some resemblance to the sound of the word'. Was this the first record of a Kookaburra in our area? Its also nice to consider the `native' name won out over the 'colonists and strangers name'.

In times of change it is salutary to remember that it has all happened before! This quote by James Thurber sums it up neatly for me: `In times of change learners shall inherit the earth, while the learned are beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists.'

## OBITUARY

John Henry Calaby

John died at his home in Yarralumla on 19 September 1998 after a long and debilitating illness. He was a foundation member of the ACT branch of the RAOU and maintained his membership (and subsequently that of COG) up to the time of his death.

He was born at Creswick, Vic. on 19 October 1922 and at an early age developed an interest in natural history. He was educated at the Junior Technical School in Ballarat and the Ballarat School of Mines from which he graduated in 1942 with a Diploma in Applied Chemistry. He was conscripted to the Munitions Supply Laboratory at Maribyrnong where he spent the next three years undertaking various tasks including analysing the explosive and pyrotechnic qualities of captured Japanese ammunition.

At the end of the war he joined the CSIRO Division of Entomology assisting Dr Doug Waterhouse in the field of insect biochemistry. While at the Division of Entomology he met and formed a close friendship with the great Australian naturalist Francis Ratcliffe. In 1950 Ratcliffe appointed him to the newly established Wildlife Survey Section of which he had been made officer-in-charge. The section's main focus in those days was to find means of controlling the burgeoning rabbit population in Australia. In 1952 John was transferred to Perth to investigate rabbit control in Western Australia. While in the west, as well as his work on rabbits, John undertook studies on a wide range of other subjects including num bats, kangaroo digestion, frogs and termites. He returned to Canberra in 1956 with his wife Jo and settled in a house in Schlich Street, Yarralumla where he remained until his death.

On his return John carried out a varied programme of research, with an emphasis on faunal surveys and mammalian taxonomy. The creation of the Australian National Wildlife Collection owed a great deal to John's work. He spent the remainder of his professional life with the section which grew in size to become what is now the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology, at times serving as its Acting Chief.

John was an avid bibliophile and was renowned for the size and subject breadth of his personal library which filled much of his home. The extent of John's knowledge was immense and he combined scientific research with deep scholarship. Although he was best known for his studies of Australian mammals, his interests ranged from entomology and zoogeography to anthropology and history. His knowledge was gladly shared, not only with colleagues

in CSIRO, but also with those in universities, museums and research institutions throughout the world. The extent to which he shared his knowledge with others, and provided encouragement, can be measured by seeing how frequently he is acknowledged in papers and other publications. All too often these acknowledgements are not able to reflect the true extent of John's contribution. In these days of competitive science and the 'publish or perish' syndrome, such generosity is a rare commodity. Science is the poorer for this lack of generosity.

John himself was a skilled writer and wrote on many subjects. Characteristically, many of his publications appeared under a joint authorship.

John made several contributions to local ornithology.

In the late 1940s he met Don Lamm, an American diplomat, who had begun a survey of the birds along the east bank of the Murrumbidgee River from Uriarra Crossing to the Cotter River road. John joined in this survey and between September 1947 and September 1949, 37 traverses were made of this 10 km stretch of river. When Don was recalled to Washington in 1949, John wrote up the data for publication (Lamm, D.W. and Calaby, J.H. (1950). Seasonal variation in bird populations along the Murrumbidgee in the Australian Capital Territory. *Emu* 50: 114-122). This was the first methodical survey of birds to be undertaken in the ACT.

In about 1958, John, together with Robert Carrick, Warren Hitchcock and Betty Temple Watts prepared a list of the birds which had been recorded in the ACT together with some they thought might turn up. The aim was to prepare an illustrated book on the birds of the ACT. Robert Carrick, the instigator of the project, subsequently left Canberra and although the illustrations, painted by Betty Temple Watts, were largely completed, the book never eventuated until Harry Frith took over the project. The geographical area covered by the book was increased, as was the number of species to be included. It was published in 1969 as *Birds in the Australian High Country*. John Calaby's contribution included writing the introductory pages on the history of the region and the texts for the birds of prey. Following Harry Frith's heart attack in 1980 and death in 1982, John played the major role in steering a fully revised edition of *Birds in the Australian High Country* through to its publication in 1984.

In 1977 John was awarded a Doctor of Science degree *(honoris causa)* by the Australian National University. He received the Troughton Medal of the Australian Mammal Society in 1983, the Fellowship of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW in 1986, and the American Society of Mammalogists elected him an Honorary Member in 1993. In 1994 he was awarded an Order of Australia (AO). In John's opinion, his greatest professional reward came in 1998 when the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology named in his honour, the John Calaby Resources Centre.

With John's passing, I and many other people have lost not only a friend but also a generous and knowledgable colleague. He is survived by his wife Jo (`his best friend ever') and their sons Robert, Geoffrey, Matthew and David.

*David Purchase*

## RARITIES PANEL NEWS

This list brings up to date most of the outstanding observations. If you believe you have submitted a record that has not appeared or you have not heard about, please contact Barbara Allan whose details are given on the inside cover.

The most unusual records in this list are those of the White-headed Pigeon *Columba leucomela* in a suburban garden at Waramanga. This species is thought to be slowly increasing its range southwards and westwards. Will it become a more regular visitor to the Canberra district? A record of a bird that is probably under-recorded in our area is the Barking Owl *Ninox connivens* at Shepherds Lookout.

As usual an interesting list of unusual species at Lake Bathurst. This shows how regular recording at one site can turn up some interesting reports including observations of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* and Buff-breasted Sandpipers *C. subruficollis.*

The situation regarding corellas is rather confusing with mixtures of Little Corellas *Cacatua sanguinea* and Long-billed Corellas *C. tenuirostris* appearing and disappearing without pattern. The more records we have the more chance there is of understanding their movements and spread. So would you please record all the corellas you see together with numbers, the species and what other birds they are associated with.

## RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO. 46

Plumed Whistling-Duck
- 1; 9 Mar 98; D. Wilson; Kingston foreshores, Lake Burley Griffin.

Spotted Harrier
- 1; 31 Jan 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
- 1; 9 Oct 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst west.

Black Falcon
- 1; 9 Oct 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
- 1; 4 Nov 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst west.
- 1; 28 Dec 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.

Bar-tailed Godwit
- 2; 28 Oct 95; M. Lenz; Lake George south.
- 1; 26 Oct 96; M. Lenz and P. Milburn; Lake Bathurst east.

Little Curlew
- 5; 4 Nov 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
- 1; 27 Oct 97; M. Lenz; Morass.

Marsh Sandpiper
- 5; 26 Oct 93; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst west.
- 1; 30 Nov 93; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst west.
- 4; 9 Oct 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
- 1; 9 Oct 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst west.

7; 4 Nov 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
5; 4 Nov 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst west.
18; 28 Dec 94; M. Lenz and J. Leonard; Lake Bathurst east.
2; 30 Aug 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
3; 29 Dec 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 1 Jul 96; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
7; 24 Nov 96; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
14; 23 Dec 96; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
4; 27 Oct 97; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.

Ruddy Tumstone
1; 26 Oct 93; M. Lenz; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.

Great Knot
1; 29 Dec 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.

Red Knot
5; 28 Oct 95; M. Lenz; Lake George south.
3; 26 Oct 96; M. Lenz and P. Milburn; Lake Bathurst east.

Pectoral Sandpiper
2; 26 Oct 93; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 30 Nov 93; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
2; 2 Mar 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 1 Apr 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 9 Oct 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
2; 23 Jan 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
3; 28 Mar 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 28 Apr 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 9 Dec 95; M. Lenz; Lake George south.
1; 6 Jan 96; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
1; 23 Jan 96; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
1; 27 Apr 96; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
2; 6 Dec 96; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
1; 31 Dec 96; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
1; 27 Oct 97; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst north.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper
1; 26 Oct 93; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 21 Jan 96; M. Lenz and P. Milburn; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 25 Feb 96; M. Lenz and J. Leonard; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 31 Mar 96; M. Lenz; Lake George south.
1; 27 Apr 96; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 26 Oct 96; M. Lenz and P. Milburn; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 22 Sep 97 ; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.

Ruff
1 male; 7 Nov 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
1 male; 24 Nov 95; M. Lenz and P. Milburn; Lake Bathurst east.
1 male; 21 Jan 96; M. Lenz and P. Milburn; Lake Bathurst east.
1 male; 25 Feb 96; M. Lenz and J. Leonard; Lake Bathurst east.

Banded Stilt
2; 9 Oct 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
2; 4 Nov 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
2; 1 Dec 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.

2; 28 Dec 94; M. Lenz and J. Leonard; Lake Bathurst east.
1; 23 Jan 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.

Gull-billed Tern
1; 9 Oct 91; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.

White-headed Pigeon
1; 24 Apr 98; D. Laing; Waramanga.
2; 17 May 98; D. Laing; Waramanga.
2; 19 May 98; D. Laing; Waramanga.

Peaceful Dove
2; 2 Nov 97 et seq; G. Dabb; 'Callum Brae'.

Long-billed Corella
22; 11 Dec 94; M. Fyfe; Wollogorang Homestead, near Collector.

Little Corella
6; 24 Feb 98; D. Wilson; Bowen Park, Kingston.
20; 25 Feb 98; D. Wilson; Bowen Park, Kingston.
16; 26 Feb 98; D. Wilson; Bowen Park, Kingston.
23; 28 Feb 98; D. Wilson; Bowen Park, Kingston.

Superb Parrot
1; 16 Nov 97; C. Newman; Fraser.
7; 15 Dec 97; C. Newman; Fraser.
20; 16 Dec 97; C. Newman; Fraser.

Common Koel
1 male; 11 Jan 98; M. Fyfe; Weetangera.

Barking Owl
1; 5 Apr 98; G. Clark; Shepherds Lookout.

Red-capped Robin
1 male; 25 Jan 94; C. Davey; Brooklands Road, Hall.

Pied Butcherbird
2; 3 Oct 94; C. Davey; Travelling Stock Reserve No. 53, near Yass.
2; 12 Nov 94; C. Davey; Travelling Stock Reserve No. 53, near Yass.
2; 30 Nov 94; C. Davey; Travelling Stock Reserve No. 53, near Yass.
2; 16 Dec 94; C. Davey; Travelling Stock Reserve No. 53, near Yass.

Singing Bushlark
1; 30 Dec 93; M. Lenz and S. Pell; Lake Bathurst east.
1 male; 1 Dec 94; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
3 (2 males); 28 Dec 94; M. Lenz and J. Leonard; Lake Bathurst east.
7; 7 Nov 95; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.

(Continued from inside front ***cover)***

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