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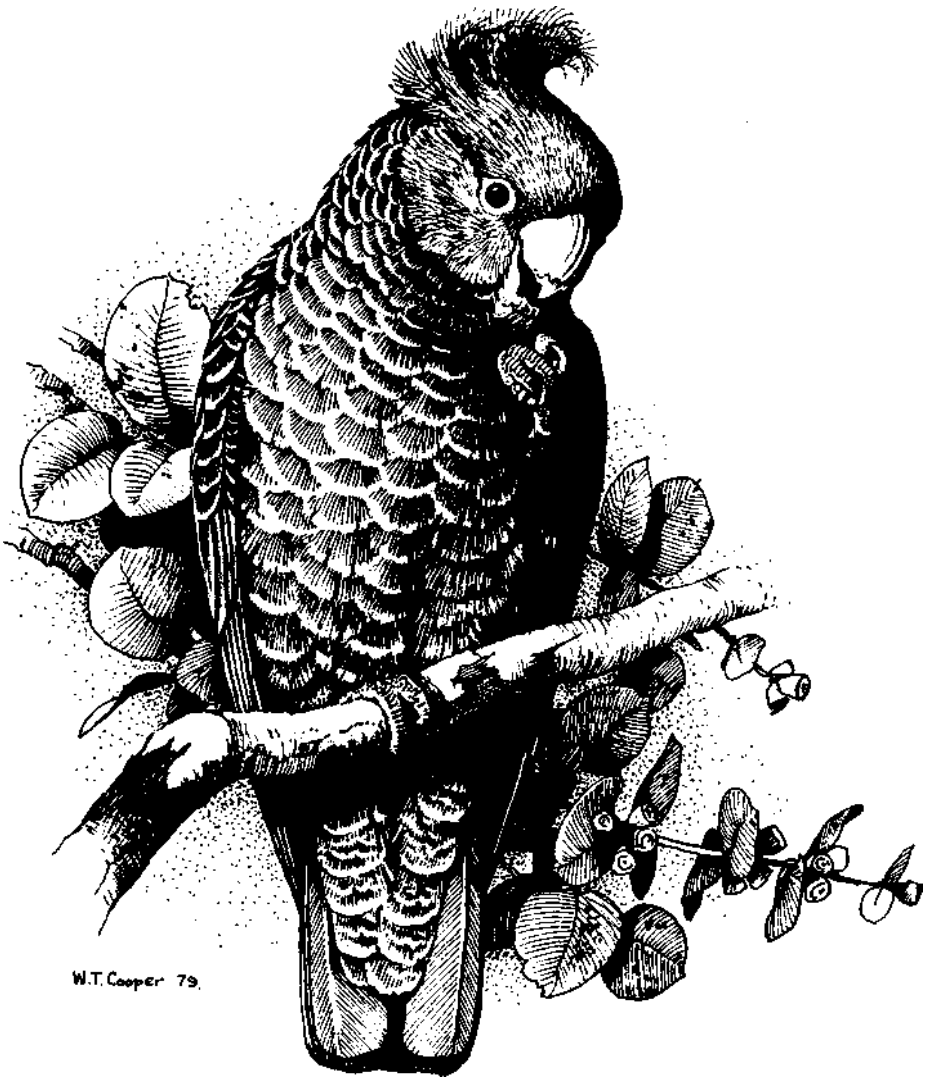

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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ALTITUDINAL MIGRATION OF GOLDEN WHISTLERS IN THE ACT

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The Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis* is known to be an altitudinal migrant in the Australian Capital Territory (Wilson 1984). In higher altitudes (e.g. the Brindabella Range *c*. 25 km to the west of Canberra) numbers increase in summer and decrease in winter. In lower altitudes (e.g. the suburbs of Canberra) the reverse occurs. Some information on the extent of the seasonal change in distribution between the higher and lower altitudes was gained from data collected during the 1986 to 1989 ACT Avifauna Database Project (bird atlas) and is illustrated in two maps (September-April and May-August) in Taylor and COG (1992).

In this paper we present more information on this phenomenon. The information is obtained from two sources: a 26-year study of the birds of a suburban garden and its environs in Melba, and a 21-year bird-banding study of the birds at two sites in the Brindabella Range. The two study periods are not entirely contemporaneous, but do overlap by nine years.

Study sites

Melba

The first houses in the suburb of Melba, at an altitude of 580 m, were occupied in 1972. One of us (DP) moved into a house there in April 1973. At the time the area was largely exposed grassland with few trees. However, a great deal of construction activity was in progress as the area was rapidly being transformed from a grassland to a suburban landscape.

Details of the birds occurring in the garden and surrounding area have been recorded since April 1973, but were not collected in a systematic way until February 1976. From that time every species seen or heard each day, in or from the garden, was recorded. A note was made as to whether the species was seen in or out of the garden. The largest number of individuals of each species observed at any one time during the day was also recorded. For days when no observations were made because of holidays etc., an average figure was calculated based on the totals for the relevant month, so that comparisons made would not be unduly perturbed by missing data. This was done for 361 (4.3%) of the 8412 days of the study (up to 28 February 1999). Most absences were less than 4 days in duration in any one month, the longest being 15 days.

Melba is now a well-vegetated suburb with a mixture of native and exotic trees and shrubs. The study site and its environs have become relatively sheltered and some of the eucalypts planted in 1973 are now *c*. 25 m in height. Originally on the outer edge of Canberra and largely surrounded by grassland, Melba has, over the years, gradually become an inner suburb as further development has taken place and

is now *c.* 2 km from the suburban fringe at its closest point.

The first Golden Whistler was recorded at this site in March 1974 when an adult female hit a window of the house.

Brindabella Range

Since March 1961 mist nets have been used by the second author (SW) and others to capture birds for banding at eight sites in the Brindabella Range (details of the sites are contained in Wilson (1995)). Only data from two sites, New Chums Road and Lees Creek Road, at which the majority of birds were banded, will be considered in this paper.

a) New Chums Road

New Chums Road (35° 24'S., 148° 50'E.) runs along the eastern side of the Brindabella Range, extending for about 3 km and roughly following the 1,050 m contour line through mainly wet sclerophyll forest, although it passes through dry sclerophyll forest on the exposed ridges (Tidemann et al. 1988). Nets were set along a stretch of about 2 km of the road. From April 1961 through to June 1982, 292 visits were made to this site.

b) Lees Creek Road'

The banding site on Lees Creek Road (35° 22'S., 148° 50'E.) is *c.* 3 km NE of New Chums Road in wet sclerophyll forest at an altitude of 840 m. The nets were set along about 0.5 km of the road and also along an old logging track beside Lees Creek itself which at this point runs close to the road. This is a more sheltered site than the New Chums Road site. From March 1961 through to May 1982, 126 visits were made to this site.

On early maps the name Lees Creek Road was given to the road which runs from Brindabella Road to the southern end of Blundells Creek Road. At this point it became Warks Road which continued through to Mount Franklin Road (crossing Bendora Road). On recent maps what was Lees Creek Road is shown as being a continuation of Warks Road. The name is retained here as it has been used to describe this site in previous papers.

Results

Melba

The totals (by calendar month) of the number of days that Golden Whistlers were recorded over the 23-year period of daily observations at the Melba site are shown in Figure 1. The figure shows occurrence only and takes no account of the number of individuals seen at any one time.

Golden Whistlers were recorded on a total of 742 days (8.8% of all observation-days). Of these, the number of individuals seen at the one time were recorded on 665 days. comprising : one of four birds (16 May 1982); two of three birds (2 April 1990 and 15 September 1994): 29 of two birds (nine in April, six in May. five in June, two in July, six in September, and one in October); and 633 of one bird. The remaining 77 observation-days, for which no number was recorded, were either of birds heard calling but not seen (59 records) or the result of averaging to correct for days when no observations were made (18 'records').

Brindabella Range

The total number of visits to the two sites in each calendar month over the 21-year study period is shown in Table 1. The number of nets used *(c.* 20) and the time spent *(c.* 6 hrs) at each site remained fairly constant throughout the study. However, as can be seen from

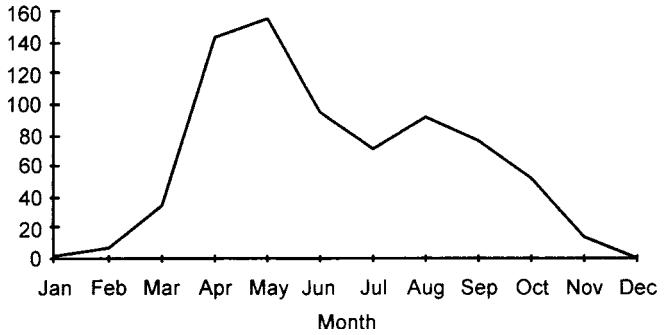

Figure 1. Total Number of days, by calendar month. on which Golden Whistlers were recorded in or from the garden of 5 Orchard Place, Melba, over the 26-year study period.

Table 1, the number of visits to the sites each month was established. These varied from month to month. Therefore, were used to prepare Figure 2, which an average figure for the number of shows, for each month, the average Golden Whistlers caught (bandings and number of Golden Whistlers caught on recaptures) at each site, on each visit, in each visit.

Table 1. Total number of visits (by calendar month) to New Chums Road and Lees Creek Road sites over the 21-year study period.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
New Chums Road	24	27	25	25	21	23	21	19	26	31	22	28	292
Lees Creek Road	15	11	13	14	9	8	4	6	6	16	14	10	126

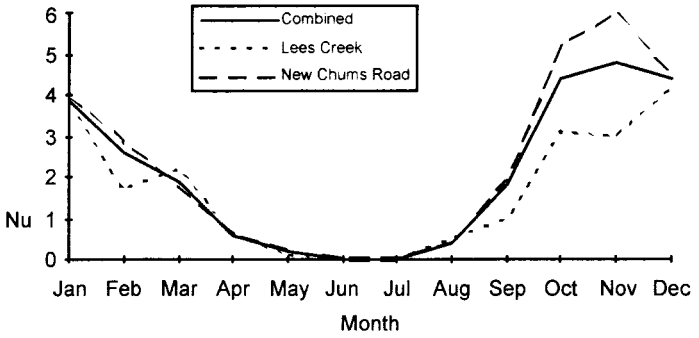

Figure 2. Averages (by calendar month) of the total number of Golden Whistlers caught at the Lees Creek and New Chums Road sites in the Brindabella Range. The combined monthly averages are also shown.

Discussion

Bearing in mind that only three sites are involved, a comparison of Figures 1 and 2 show the numbers of Golden Whistlers in higher altitudes increase in summer and decrease in winter with the reverse occurring at a lower altitude. Golden Whistlers are not completely absent from higher altitudes during winter as a few (mostly adult males) were seen during visual censuses at New Chums Road during the winter (Lamm and Wilson 1966). However, none has been caught there between 29 May and 2 August.

The distribution of sightings in Melba is similar to the distribution of abundance figures derived from data collected from the Garden Bird Survey, e.g. COG (1996, 1997), and as such is representative of Canberra generally. Although largely absent from Melba during the summer months, small numbers of Golden Whistlers are found throughout the year in Canberra.

It must be remembered that figures showing the days on which the species was recorded at the Melba site provide, at best, a poor indicator of the total number of Golden Whistlers which frequent the area. It is possible the same individual was being seen on successive days or, on the other hand, many individuals were passing through the site.

Although the exact requirements are unknown, it seems likely that the continuing development of Canberra will provide an ever-increasing amount of habitat suitable to sustain Golden Whistlers during the winter. Although visit Canberra is unknown (none of the Golden Whistlers banded in the Brindabella Range has been recovered away from the Range) it seems fairly safe to assume that many of them are from the Brindabella Range. If this is so, it is a matter of speculation as to where birds from the Brindabella Range wintered prior to the development of Canberra - did they travel further afield or did they simply spread themselves thinly over the area now occupied by Canberra? What effect, if any, has this relatively new and abundant source of winter food so close to the Brindabella Range had on the dynamics of the population of Golden Whistlers, and indeed other species. which breed in the range?

The number of days on which Golden Whistlers were seen at the Melba study site reached a peak in 1990 (Figure 3). The increase in numbers up to 1990 may reflect an increase in suitable habitat as vegetation in the study site and surrounding area matured. The decline after 1990 is not so easily explained. Has the site become less attractive to Golden Whistlers? Do Golden Whistlers prefer to winter in those suburbs which have attained suitable habitat along the edge of Canberra (with the development of more suburbs, Melba is getting further away from the edge of the suburban area - particularly the western edge which is closer to the Brindabella Range)? As the size of Canberra increases, is the wintering population of Golden Whistlers being spread more thinly over the available habitat and thus their occurrence in Melba has become less frequent? Has there been a reduction in the size of the breeding population of Golden Whistlers?

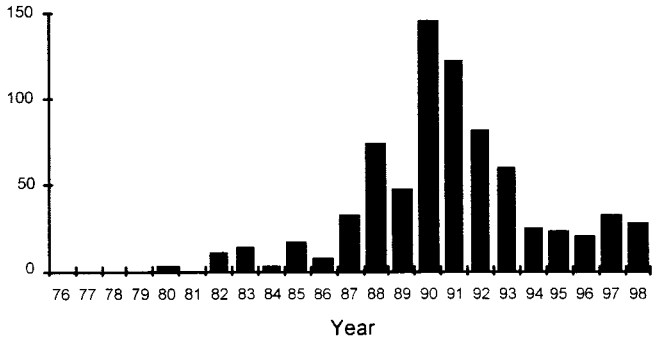

Figure 3. Number of days each year on which Golden Whistlers were recorded in, or from the garden of 5 Orchard Place, Melba.

Golden Whistlers in adult male plumage are rarely observed at the Melba study site. Of the 701 visual records of Golden Whistlers (from 665 observation-days), male-plumaged birds were seen only 17 times (2.4% of records). The majority of the sightings of male-plumaged birds was in late winter and early spring. It is possible, therefore, that some or all of these had recently moulted from immature to adult male plumage. Indeed, one sighting on 17 September 1993 was of an 'immature male' which may have been a moulting bird. The monthly distribution of the sighting of male-plumaged birds is: April 2; June 2; July 1; August 2; September 8; October 2. Three of the sightings recorded the male as being in company with an adult female, and three in company with a brown-plumaged bird (i.e. it was not known if it was an immature bird or an adult female). Two of the sightings of males in company with another bird were in April and four in September. Were these pairs travelling together?

There have been several comments in *Canberra Bird Notes* on the small number of Golden Whistlers in male plumage seen in Canberra during the non-breeding season compared with a greater number in brown or female plumage (e.g. Marchant 1973, Lenz 1982, Taylor 1984).

Male Golden Whistlers do not attain the distinctive adult plumage until at least their second, but mostly third years (S. Wilson's bird-banding records, Schodde and Tidemann 1986). They may also breed before attaining adult plumage (Schodde and Tidemann 1986). The delay in males achieving adult plumage would reduce the number of birds in this plumage in the population compared with the other plumage types. However, it is unlikely to be sufficient to explain the low number of male-plumaged birds seen in Canberra. We can also find no evidence from bird-banding records, or elsewhere, that suggests males may lose their adult male plumage during winter .

This dearth of sightings of adult male birds therefore raises the question as to where adult males spend the winter. Do they remain at or near their breeding sites? Providing food is available, it would seem advantageous for them to do so. This would enable them to retain contact with the breeding site and not be exposed to the hazards of migration. Some evidence that this may happen is provided by Lamm and Wilson (1966) who observed 'mostly adult males' during visual censuses at New Chums Road during the winter.

Wintering Golden Whistlers at Wollomombi, 42 km east of Armidale, NSW, re-occupy territories annually (Bell 1986). There was no indication that this occurred in Melba. Bell also reported that wintering Golden Whistlers, particularly females, frequently participated in mixed-species feeding flocks (see also Bell 1980). During the cooler months mixed-species feeding flocks frequently moved through the garden at Melba. However, as few details were recorded of their species composition, the extent to which Golden Whistlers participated in these flocks is unknown.

The landscape of the area occupied by Canberra is changing from largely grassland to what, in many cases, can be best described as 'urban forest'. Will this result in more Golden Whistlers breeding in Canberra? Although Golden Whistlers are reported to have bred at Lake Ginninderra (Taylor and COG 1992) and in the Australian National Botanic Gardens (Department of the Capital Territory 1974), the only detailed record of breeding in Canberra appears to be that of an incubating bird observed by Barbara Allan at Lake Ginninderra on 27 August 1988 (COG 1990). We assume this to be one of the three records referred to in Taylor and COG (1992).

In addition to providing some information on attitudinal migration, the results of this study, particularly in relation to the Melba site, have raised a number of questions. The answers to these questions are beyond the scope of the present study. Perhaps someone can provide them

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OBSERVATIONS ON THE INCREASE IN RECORDS OF THE SATIN BOWERBIRD IN THE CHAPMAN AREA

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The purpose of this article is to record the change in the status of the Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* in the Chapman area of Weston Creek in the ACT, and to make some observations on these changes. The expansion of this species into Weston Creek and beyond over the past 15 years seems to be well known but poorly documented. Apart from some comments in the COG Annual Bird Reports, there appear to be only two short articles specifically on this subject found in *Canberra Bird Notes* (Aston 1991 and Sexton 1997). The first was of an inactive bower in November 1990, following sightings only of female/immature male birds there from late July to mid September in 1989 and 1990. The second deals mainly with observations on birds and their behaviour around a number of bowers erected in a Duffy garden since 1993, following the first winter records in 1990.

The ACT Bird Atlas (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992) also notes that a small but growing number of Satin Bowerbirds were recorded in Weston Creek between April and November each year. This in no way reflects happenings here since August 1989, which has seen this species change from a rare 'passage migrant' through the garden to one of the, if not the, most common and conspicuous birds in my garden area, at least for a significant part of the year. It is hoped the following detailed notes will stimulate further publication on this phenomenon, which I propose to follow up with a second article recording the spread of this species into other Canberra suburbs, including an analysis of the records from the Garden Bird Survey.

Early observations (up to 1988)

We moved into our current house in Chapman in September 1975, joined COG shortly thereafter, and have participated in a number of surveys since that time. This includes keeping a Garden Bird Chart since the inception of the Garden Bird Survey in 1981. However, I had already been imbued with the value of keeping good records through participating in the RAOU Atlas Scheme and as a result **I** had good lists of the birds seen in my garden area between 1977 and 1981. This included one Satin Bowerbird record close to my home (about 400 metres away) of four female/immature male birds moving fairly rapidly through the small park between Burgan and Sollya Places in Rivett on 9 August 1980. Such female/immature male birds are referred to as `green' birds for the remainder of this article.

Following this, I became aware that the Satin Bowerbird occurred regularly in the neighbouring suburb of Duffy, initially through a work colleague (though at first **I** doubted his bird identification skills) and later through hearing about the bower in Barrie Pennefather's back yard. However, the first record in my actual Garden Bird Survey area was not until mid morning of 11 May 1985, when a group of eight green birds spent a number of minutes in my garden, including several making use of a water bath. This was followed by a further sighting of at least two, and possibly four, similar birds later that year on 15 September 1985. There

were no more sightings until four recordings of single birds between 15 August and 3 October 1987, and three birds on 21 September 1987. There were only three sightings of single birds in 1988, the last being about 500 metres away from the garden. This pattern continued through 1989, with three records of single birds seen in my garden area between September and November.

Numbers increase (1990-1992)

Records increased in 1990, with eleven records of single birds between 28 May and 8 October. Shortly after, neighbours informed me of a bower in their big and largely uncleared battle-axe block at 30 Chauvel Circle (about 200 metres from my garden), which I inspected and confirmed on 22 October.

Records increased again in 1991 with eleven sightings of single birds between the end of March and 16 September (plus heard only on 26 September), but with many more sightings of multiple birds, and one carrying blue material on 20 July. In addition five birds were seen on 3 August and 3 and 7 September on Cooleman Ridge, part of Canberra Nature Park, close to home.

However, records were again lower in number in 1992. There were three birds in my garden for approximately one hour on 26 April, then eight single birds between 6 June and 28 August, and two birds were seen on 12 July and 16 August. The above observations are summarised in Table 1. All of these were of green birds, usually present only for short periods.

Bowerbirds become common/first summer records (1993-5)

Numbers of Satin Bowerbirds increased sharply after the end of April 1993. A maximum of four birds was seen together in May, but this was easily surpassed the next month when a loose group of at least 15 birds, including for the first time one, or possibly two, males in full colour, was observed on 10 June. At least nine birds (all green) were also seen on 20 June, eating the red hawthorn berries from the tree in my garden. This tree has proven to be very popular in subsequent years. The birds seem to wait until the fruit is at a certain level of ripeness and then, between themselves and the blackbirds *Turdus merula* polish it off within a few days. Sightings continued to be very regular until the beginning of October, with maxima of between four or five birds each month: again all these were of green birds.

After a gap of a month a single bird was recorded on 11 November 1993, and then again on the 15th of the month and, surprisingly. two birds on 9 December. and single birds on 24 and 29 December. 1 and 20 January and 21 March 1994. These were the first recordings of Satin Bowerbirds in my garden area over the summer period (see Table 2). However, by comparison with 1993. numbers for the winter of 1994 were considerably lower. Though regular sightings of birds were made from mid-April to mid-October, they were mainly of one or occasionally two birds, with three seen on 3 July and 21 August. No birds were recorded over the 1994-5 summer period and the first records for 1995 were of single birds on 8 and 14 April. followed by a full male together with a green bird on 22 April.

Sightings were more regular over the 1995 winter and further single males were recorded on 17 June, 5 August and 8 September, though numbers of green birds were never more than three birds except for seven on 29 July and four on 25 June, 13 August and 24 September. Regular sightings of one to two birds also continued from the second half of

October, and between one to three birds over the period November 1995 to March 1996 culminating with a full male with a green bird on 18 March and alone on 7 and 8 April.

Table 1. Early sightings of green Satin Bowerbirds: 1985-1992

Year	Day/month	Numbers/ comments	Year	Day/month	Numbers/ comments
1985	11 May	8	1991	11 May	1
1985	15 Sep	2-4	1991	12 May	2
1987	15 Aug	1	1991	17 May	1
1987	22 Aug	1	1991	21 Jun	3
1987	21 Sep	3	1991	22 Jun	2
1987	27 Sep	1	1991	29 Jun	1
1987	03 Oct	1	1991	30 Jun	4
1988	23 Jun	1	1991	06 Jul	3
1988	05 Aug	1	1991	07 Jul	2
1988	25 Sep	1	1991	14 Jul	1
1989	03 Sep	1	1991	20 Jul	2
1989	18 Sep	1	1991	21 Jul	2
1989	13 Nov	1	1991	23 Jul	1
1990	28 May	1	1991	03 Aug	5 **
1990	03 Jun	1	1991	03 Sep	5 **
1990	10 Jul	1	1991	07 Sep	5 **
1990	31 Jul	1	1991	12 Sep	1
1990	01 Aug	1	1991	16 Sep	1
1990	19 Aug	1	1991	26 Sep	1
1990	24 Aug	1	1992	26 Apr	3
1990	26 Aug	1	1992	06 Jun	1
1990	23 Sep	1	1992	21 Jun	1
1990	28 Sep	1	1992	12 Jul	2
1990	8 Oct	1	1992	09 Aug	1
1990	22 Oct	bower*	1992	15 Aug	1
1991	29 Mar	1	1992	16 Aug	2
1991	28 Apr	1	1992	17 Aug	1
1991	04 May	1	1992	23 Aug	1
1991	05 May	1	1992	28 Aug	1

* In neighbour's garden

**On Cooleman Ridge

Table 2. First records of Satin Bowerbirds over Summer (November to March 1993-6)

Year	Day/Month	Numbers/ comments	I Year	Day/Month	Numbers/ comments
1993	11 Nov	1	1995	6 Nov	1
1993	15 Nov	1	1995	12 Nov	2
1993	09 Dec	2	1995	19 Nov	1
1993	24 Dec	1	1995	27 Nov	1
1993	29 Dec	1	1996	14 Jan	1
1994	01 Jan	1	1996	18 Feb	3
1994	20 Jan	1	1996	03 Mar	1
1994	21 Mar	1	1996	11 Mar	1
1995	04 Nov	1	1996	18 Mar	2 (1 male)

Bower in neighbour's garden

Birds were quite commonly recorded for the next three months till the end of June 1996, including seven on 28 May and five on 1 May (in the vegetable garden eating tomatoes) and five again on 26 May, all sightings being of green birds except for one full male on 22 May. This did not, however, give a real indication of what was to come. On 14 July 1996 we discovered a well-formed bower, roughly aligned NE/SW, with many blue items strewn around, among the bushes in our next door neighbour's garden at 10 Chauvel Circle. This was just over our back fence, and in easy view from our battle-axe driveway. It was attended by first one male and a green bird and later by two males. The discovery did not come as a complete surprise as I had been examining suspected bower sites where birds were most often gathered or where their chuffing call was most often heard, though its location was somewhat unexpected.

A male and four green birds were seen together at or around the bower on 20 July. While a single male was recorded nine times to the end of September (plus two males on one occasion), only two of these observations were actually at the bower. In this period a maximum of five green birds was recorded, though only occasionally near the bower. This pattern changed from mid-October to mid-January 1997 when up to four green birds were recorded at or in the vicinity of the bower on 12 occasions. A 'pair' was then seen there on 16 January, after which activity seemed to stop and, while male birds were recorded in my garden on four occasions up to the end of February 1997, there was only a single record of a green bird actually at the bower, on 2 February.

High activity in garden — March 1997 to May 1998

Activity round the bower increased again from March with a green bird being recorded on 1 and 8 March. Usually single, though up to four, birds were recorded during March, and generally away from the bower site, with single males on 17 and 24 March. However, on 29 March a pair was observed at the bower, which was noted to be fully formed and highly embellished with blue objects. A

further male was seen away from the bower the following day, but after this a green bird only was recorded there on a number of occasions until 17 April, where two such birds were seen at the bower, which had clearly been partly dismantled. Regular recordings of one or two green birds at the bower were made up to 1 June, during which period males were sighted only twice (25 April and 18 May), with a maximum of eight birds (in the vegetable garden) on 4 May.

Numbers during June 1997 appeared to be even higher with between five and seven birds recorded regularly but males only on three occasions (4, 8 and 15 June). This pattern continued in July, but with only one male recorded on 6 July and with limited activity around the bower, though four green birds were seen there on 27 July. From about the middle of July until the end of August birds seemed to favour the area around a feeding table in the garden of a neighbour across the public path from our garden at 54 Darwinia Terrace. Numbers of Satin Bowerbirds declined there over summer although they were still often there and I suspected a possible bower there from time to time, but inspection was hampered by a very high fence). A maximum of ten birds was seen in this area on 8 August, followed by eight and nine birds in the general garden area over the next two days and five to seven at other times during this month, but again only one male (on 31 August, as well as one in Rivett on 3 August) and with limited activity at the bower (two green birds on 30 August). While from my records activity at the bower seems to have been low during June to August, this may have been the result of a recording bias due to the abundance of birds seen elsewhere during this period.

Numbers declined slightly during the first half of September, though five to six green birds were still regularly recorded, and a male was seen at the bower on 3 September. Activity seemed to pick up in the bower area after this with four green birds there on 14 September, and two to three regularly thereafter, till a male and two green birds were seen there on 12 October. The bower was noted to be largely torn down and with no blue decorations on 18 October but it was quickly restored. Between one and three green birds were recorded displaying there up till 1 November, with varying amounts of blue adorning the bower. This pattern continued until the end of 1997, with between one to two green birds (three on 6 November, also the maximum number recorded during this period, but with no males) regularly at the bower, often displaying and carrying blue items, with lots of blue adorning the bower on a number of occasions.

It also continued into January and February 1998, with a maximum of three birds seen near the bower on 6 January, and bower building by a green bird was recorded on 31 January and 8 February. A highlight of this period was the brief observation of a green bird apparently feeding a fledgling late in the evening on 19 February before both birds flew away. Activity at the bower picked up in March and April, with up to three green birds regularly sighted there, including observations of birds carrying blue material and displaying and responding, and culminating in five birds, including a male, on 28 March. By 4 April it was clear that the bower was partly destroyed and even more so the following day when a male bird was observed in the general area. It had been substantially repaired by 10 April, even though a male was still noted around and four green birds were there on 12 April. Birds were observed after this either adding to the bower or

carrying material to it. Numbers in the garden area picked up significantly during May with a maximum of eight birds seen at the one time, but with a maximum of only three at the bower and no males until 30th of the month.

Bower destroyed

It is interesting to note that over the period July 1997 to March 1998 very few males were seen and activity at the bower was almost exclusively that of green birds. In fact over this period and from April 1998 the presence of male birds was only associated with the partial destruction of the bower. This was most graphically illustrated on Saturday 30 May 1998 when I discovered the bower completely destroyed, with only a mat of bower material about 75 cm in diameter and perhaps 10 cm high remaining. The bower has not been rebuilt over the past 10 months, despite quite a lot of birds initially remaining in the area and also being present around the bower site or on the former bower mound.

Birds seemed to be particularly plentiful soon after the destroyed bower was discovered, with a full male and three green birds seen on the day of discovery, and six of the latter the following day. Of these only one bird was actually at the bower site. A maximum of eight birds was seen early on 6 June in the tree above the feeding table at 54 Darwinia Terrace, followed by a full male and three green birds during the day, though none was at the bower site, which was bare of blue objects. One and then two birds were observed displaying at the bower site on 7 and 8 June, including one with a blue peg in its bill. A male was observed in the garden area later in the day, but not near the bower site. This general pattern was repeated over the next weekend (13-14 June) but on at least one occasion a bird was seen carrying something yellow in its bill. Use of this different colour has been observed only recently. On the Saturday of the following weekend a male was observed, carrying blue material and displaying, along with several green birds, and a male was seen there briefly on the (wet) Sunday. Birds were inconspicuous on the next Saturday, 27 June, but there was lots of blue on or around the bower site on the Sunday. In the afternoon a male bird was seen taking away the objects and a green bird returning them from the nearby bushes shortly thereafter.

This pattern continued through July 1998, with a maximum of ten green birds seen on or around the feeding table on 5 July. A single male bird was consistently in the area and was sighted on at least seven occasions, with observations largely at weekends. There was some activity near the bower site in this period, including birds carrying blue or yellow objects. A similar pattern continued during August, with a maximum of 14 green birds seen just after 7 am on 1 August in the gum tree above the feeding table (before dispersing - see below) and up to three birds at or near the bower site. The only real difference was the lack of any sightings of full male birds. Towards the end of August and into early September, sometimes birds were seen gathering in several large flowering wattles, in particular the large silver wattle *Acacia dealbata* near my vegetable garden, with up to seven birds seen there on 8 September. They appeared to be feeding on the flowers and also at times on the profusely flowering ironbarks in the garden area.

Numbers lower — spring/summer 1998-9

It was very noticeable that as soon as the wattles ceased flowering, and mornings quickly became lighter, Satin

Bowerbird numbers in the garden area dropped rapidly, with a maximum of three birds seen after 10 September, and very few by the end of the month. Activity near the bower site was also low. Two birds were seen near the bower on 13 September and early on 15 September one bird was observed removing a blue bottle top and taking it several metres away (it was soon back), and a 'pair' of green birds was seen displaying and responding on top of the old bower material. By this time the bower site had become much harder to distinguish and there was grass starting to grow through it. Numbers were very low for the final week of September (one sighting of a single bird only), and I reluctantly came to accept that this might have been the end of activity at this site.

This was validated through October and November, with only a single green bird recorded making its churring call in the tree above the former bower site on 3 October. Sightings were also restricted to at most one or two per week, usually of a single green bird, though two such birds were seen on 24 October by which time the bower site had become indistinguishable from the remainder of the garden bed floor beneath the shrubs.

There were very few records during December 1998, January and February and into early March 1999, and none around the former bower site. This applied not only in my garden but also in Chapman, Duffy and Narrabundah Hill opposite Eucumbene Drive. In fact the species was heard only between 6 and 12 December, and single green birds were sighted in my garden on 17, 18 and 23 January as well as on 6 March. One very exciting record was that of a semi-adult male on 7 February, appearing to be in moult with lots of dark blue-purple feathers sticking out almost comically, but with a largely green head.

Birds return — autumn 1999

Single full males were recorded on 13, 21 and 27 March, followed by up to three green birds on 28 and 31 March. This appeared to be the time of return, as confirmed by neighbours with Satin Bowerbirds in their gardens. That this was the case became clearer over the Easter break (2-5 April), with a male and between one and three green birds seen on each day. Up to six green birds were also seen in the laneway behind 28 Chauvel Circle early on the morning of 2 April. While the following weekend (10-11 April) was somewhat quieter, a male and up to three green birds were still recorded, and birds were either seen or heard around the known bower sites except for the former one next door which they seemed to ignore completely. In fact no bowerbirds had been seen within 15 metres of that site since early October 1998.

This changed the following weekend (17-18 April) with a green bird seen within a metre or two of the former bower site at about 9 am on the Saturday shortly after a 'pair' had been seen flying towards the area and later two greens birds were heard churring and briefly seen under the bushes close by. On the Sunday afternoon a green bird was around the former bower site for at least one hour, with at one time three others within about 15 metres. All birds seemed particularly wary. Early the following morning (6.25 am) at least four green birds were in the vicinity of the feeding table, disputing ownership with the Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen.*

Hopes were activated for renewed bower building activity on the morning of 26 April when a green bird was observed carrying a piece of blue tape,

which was left on the old bower site for more than 30 minutes before it was removed. However, nothing more happened and for the most part until the present (mid-May) activity there has been low, except for two green birds displaying on 9 May. A 'pair' of birds was also seen near there for some time on 16 May, but there has been no real sign of the rebuilding of the bower since its destruction a year ago. Compared with previous years, bird numbers have also been relatively low, with a male and up to three green birds regularly recorded. The exception was up to nine green birds on the afternoon of 9 May, with activity everywhere and often around the hawthorn bush with its ripe berries that they seemed to have suddenly re-discovered. Surprisingly, much of the fruit was still there the next weekend, when again only a male and two green birds were recorded. One of the latter was seen carrying blue material both towards and away from the bower site.

Discussion/Summary

I have described above in some detail the changes in abundance of this species over time, and in the summary below I wish to discuss these changes further and make additional observations, some of which challenge the accepted facts about Satin Bowerbirds in Canberra gardens.

1. It is clear that changes in numbers were relatively gradual, with an initial period of few or no records (1975-1985), though they were known to be present in the adjacent suburb of Duffy; then of intermittent records of variable numbers generally passing through the area until the first bower was located close to my garden area after the winter of 1990. Following this there was a general increase until the end of 1992, with birds inclined to stay in the area for longer, though up till this time the maximum number, except for the original record of eight in 1985, was four birds. All records up to this time were of green birds. This contrasts with the ACT Bird Atlas (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992) which noted that there were only some rare summer records in Weston Creek over the period 1 September 1986 to 31 August 1989.

2. Numbers increased significantly from April 1993, with the first recording of a full male in June (though none further until April-June of 1995) and the first records of one to two birds over the 1993-4 summer period. Surprisingly numbers over the 1994 winter were significantly down and there were no records over the 1994-5 summer. Numbers were higher again over the 1995 winter and certainly so for the 1995-6 summer period, but it was not until the discovery of the bower in my neighbour's garden in July 1996 that numbers of birds really took off and stayed at that level till September 1998. Though numbers were down over the summer period, particularly over 1996-7 and 1997-8 between one and three birds were regularly recorded throughout this period.

3. Satin Bowerbirds in our area are readily attracted to the various water baths in our garden, and are often observed bathing. They are also attracted to feeding tables, particularly during the winter months, and quite early in the day. For example at 7.15 am on Saturday 18 July 1998 I observed three green birds at the feeding table at 54 Darwinia Terrace, devouring what appeared to be bread, and at the same time keeping the Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* and magpies at bay. 1 thought at one time they might roost nearby as they are in our garden area from an early hour, and can be heard almost as soon as it starts to get light during winter. However, I now believe

they fly in like the Pied Currawongs do, though much less conspicuously, from the Narrabundah Hill/Mt Stromlo area very early in the morning. I paid much closer attention to this aspect last winter, observing in the gum tree above the feeding table, for example, just after 7 am on 1 August 1998, up to 14 green birds which over a five minute period clearly appeared to be dispersing. There is support in the literature for this kind of behaviour, with Marchant (1992) describing from observations at the NSW South Coast how birds arrive in large numbers soon after dawn to an accustomed source of food over winter, and then move off to forage elsewhere by 9 am. In the evenings birds also appear to move generally in the reverse direction, though numbers are usually lower. This too can be quite late, for example three green birds were recorded moving through after the sun had gone down at 5.50 pm on 10 April 1999.

4. The vast majority of records have been of green (female or immature male) birds. Despite the close attention I have paid to them (particularly recently), my relatively practiced eye, and the detailed description in the literature (i.e. initially green chin and throat/breast with fine white spots and streaks plus paler bill from about year 4 - Vellenga 1980a and Pizzey 1980), I am still not able to tell green birds apart with any confidence. Apart from the one very recent record mentioned above, I have not observed any mottled blue birds or with partly blue feathers said to be characteristic of the final year of the transition plumage.

5. Activity over recent years made me suspect that there were additional bowers in the area, but apart from the one I inspected at 30 Chauvel Circle in 1990, I had only four records (mostly tentative) up to December 1998. Friends at 40 Chauvel Circle told me in about 1994 (unfortunately I don't have an accurate record) that they found the remains of a bower when cleaning up their garden. At about that time I also heard of a bower in Kathner Street, at least 400 metres from our garden. On 3 May 1998 I discovered a pair of birds near what appeared to be a rudimentary bower at the rear of 17 Percy Crescent, about 200 metres away from our garden as the bowerbird flies. Regular checking thereafter provided no evidence of birds, and no apparent bower. Further, on 11 July 1998 I saw a green bird picking up bower material from my neighbour's garden 20 metres from the bower site and flying off with it in the direction of 54 Darwinia Tce. Similar birds were noted on two other occasions, carrying what appeared to be bower material to two different locations on 16 August.

6. Just before Christmas 1998 I learned of an active bower in the garden on the border of 28 and 30 Chauvel Circle, close to the one I inspected in 1990, and where bowerbird activity was very noticeable last winter as I walked up the lane behind. I was informed that it had been there for a number of years and that a male bird was often in attendance. In addition I learnt that there had been bowers in the block of neighbours on the other side (22 Chauvel Circle), and that 34 Monkman Street had a very active bower in the garden. The latter was confirmed; apparently it has been there for about six years, and can be easily seen from a window. It has been attended by a full male who was said to be very adept at rebuilding it (it only took a couple of hours). Destruction was assumed by the owner to be the work of immature males, though this has not actually been observed. Activity was greatest in winter, though there was an occasional bird over summer. The owner also indicated that at one time she had dropped blue tape containing her phone

number around the bower, and that this had turned up at the nearby 28/30 Chauvel Circle bower. The location of all these bowers, and other areas noted in this paper such as the feeding table, may be found in Figure 1. I suspect many more bowers would be found with a more systematic search.

7. It is also noticeable that the 10 Chauvel Circle bower was attended by green birds apart from the period immediately after its discovery and during March/April 1997 and 1998. In fact after the initial period, the presence of male birds was only characterised by the partial destruction of the bower. This is most graphically illustrated by the complete destruction of the bower about 30 May 1998 and the failure for it to be rebuilt since. Whether this implies it was (or became) a subsidiary or practice bower, as described by Vellenga (1980b) and Sexton (1997), is unclear. Since it was there for nearly two years it could not be deemed to be a rudimentary one. Further, I have on a number of occasions (particularly over the 1997-8 summer and the following autumn) seen one green bird displaying, sometimes with blue items in the bill, while a second bird augmented the bower with extra building material. It is quite likely that the main bower is at 34 Monkman St, or possibly 28/30 Chauvel Circle.

8. The rivalry between male birds and their bowers is well described by Vellenga (1970 and 1980b) and also in a more popular article by Green (1980). My observations are largely consistent with the literature that illustrates well the male's penchant for blue objects (and to a lesser extent brown and yellow) and the ferocity and rapidity with which bowers can be destroyed and rebuilt.

This paper details how the numbers of Satin Bowerbirds has increased in the suburb of Chapman over the past 20 years or so. It is an example of the valuable contribution a relatively committed amateur, through careful observation and good record keeping, can make to our knowledge about particular bird species, without having to visit exotic locations. In my view the increase in numbers of the Satin Bowerbird in my garden area, and the spread of the species into other Canberra suburbs. makes a fascinating story. I hope it stimulates other members to write similar articles for *Canberra Bird Notes*, perhaps on their experiences with this species, or on other species such as the Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*, which are similarly in the process of colonising Canberra's suburbs.

This article does not attempt to chronicle the spread of this species through the suburbs, starting from Duffy and through Weston Creek over this period. This will be the subject of a separate paper, largely based on records taken from the Garden Bird Survey, but also augmented with other available records.

Acknowledgements

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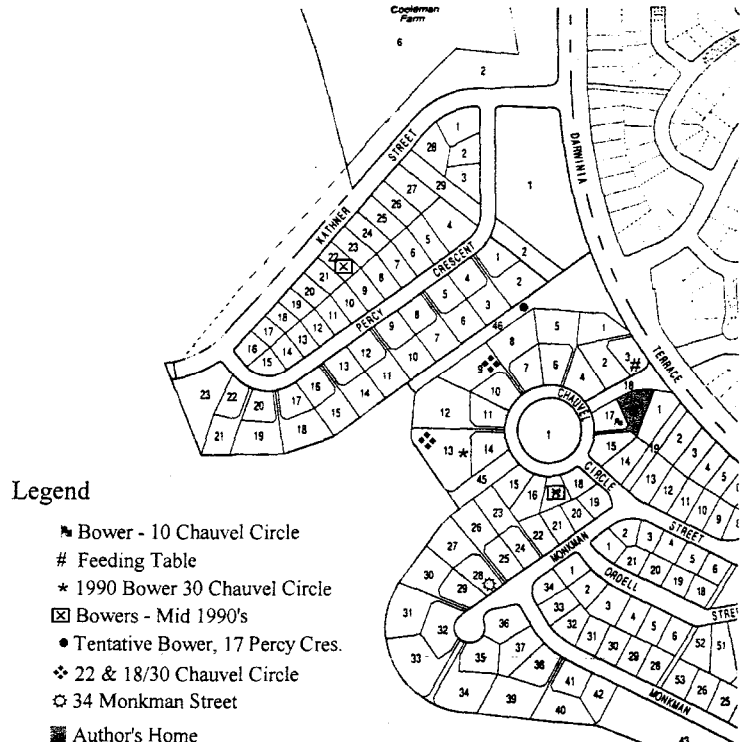
Jack Holland is a long standing member of COG and has kept a Garden Bird Chart for his garden area since the inception of this scheme in 1981. As he has noted previously he is a firm believer that some of your most rewarding bird watching can be done close to home, and the aboye article is proof of the valuable information that can be gathered with some careful observation and recording and without resorting to exotic locations.

Figure 1 - Location of Bowers etc
North West Chapman



OBSERVATIONS OF REGENT HONEYEATERS IN FAILED BREEDING ATTEMPTS AT MULLIGAN'S FLAT NATURE RESERVE AND GOOROO IN THE 1998/99 SUMMER

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Introduction

Records of the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) since 1964 show that Regent Honeyeaters *Xanthomyza phrygia* visit the ACT region in small numbers in the spring and summer months, usually coinciding with good flowering of Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora.* Only eight breeding events have been recorded, generally over the months of November, December and January (Allan 1989, COG database and other unpublished records). The most significant breeding event so far recorded was at North Watson in 1995 in the Mt Majura section of Canberra Nature Park, where four pairs successfully produced eight young from early November 1995 to late January 1996 (Bounds et al. 1996).

As part of COG's survey activities, Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve is surveyed on a regular basis (beginning three years ago) in order to obtain baseline data on bird species and abundance to enable comparisons with future data as urban settlement draws near to the Reserve boundaries. In the spring of 1998, COG also began surveying a number of sites in Yellow Box/Red Gum/grassy woodland habitat scattered throughout the ACT as a means of assessing the importance of these habitat types to a number of bird species, including the Regent Honeyeater, recently listed as threatened in the ACT.

This paper chronicles observations of Regent Honeyeaters and their breeding attempts in the ACT over the 1998-99 summer.

Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve

Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve is situated in the north of the ACT (see map). It is believed to be the largest intact remnant of lowland Yellow Box alliance woodland remaining in Australia. It is largely unmodified by human activity, remarkably free of exotic weeds, and representative of the Southern Tablelands before European settlement. The Reserve has a great diversity of bird species and several rare or threatened species of fauna, as well as features of historical and archeological significance to the region.

The main part of the Reserve (around 650 ha) on the south-eastern side of Gundaroo Road, is a gently sloping plain bounded by ridges to the west and north, with another ridge running NE to SW roughly through the centre of the Reserve. There is also a reef of quartz,

the Gungahlin Quartz Ridge, which runs NE to SW for a kilometre or so in the south-western part of the Reserve. Substantial stands of Yellow Box and Blakely's Red Gum *E. Blakelyi* woodland occur between the ridges, especially in the south western part (including around the shearing shed ruins where it occurs with some Candlebark *E. rubida* and Apple Box *E. bridgesiana),* and in the south east of the Reserve (in the area of the large dam) where Red Box *E. polyanthemos* also occurs.

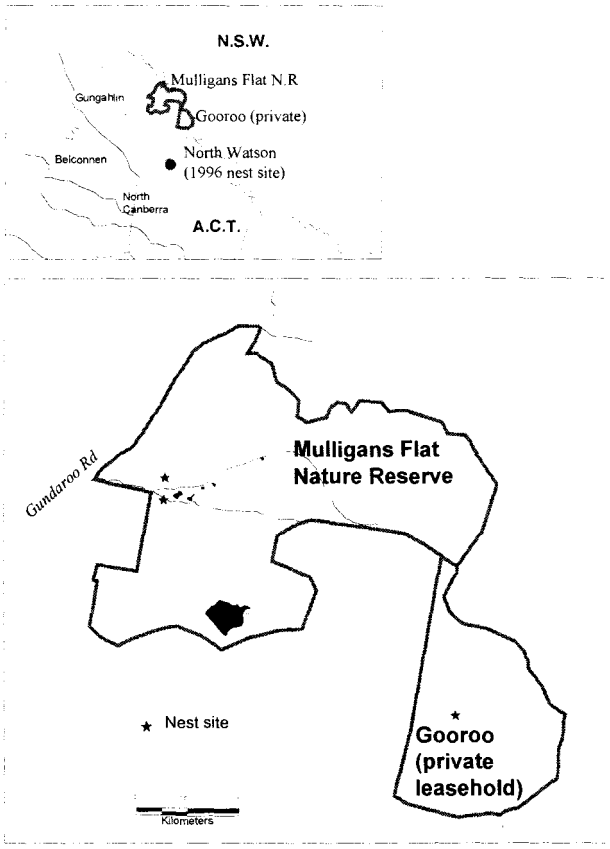
Mulligan's Flat is one of the areas in the ACT where Regent Honeyeaters have been recorded, however prior to 1998 there had only been two recorded sightings: a pair on 16 February 1987 and a single bird on 17 January 1993. Interestingly, both sightings were made in the same area north of the first small dam, about 150 m west of the shearing shed ruins, and on both occasions the birds were feeding in Candlebark (Bounds and Lepschi 1998, J. Bounds, pers. obs. & COG database records, unpublished).

By the spring of 1998, few Yellow Box in the reserve had produced buds or flowers. This followed 18 months of irregular seasonal conditions, with some very dry periods, including a very hot, dry summer and autumn in 1997/98. Records of COG's survey of Mulligan's Flat NR on 8 November 1998 indicate that budding Yellow Box trees were found near the first small dam, along the southern entrance track from the Gundaroo Road, as well as in grazed paddocks to the south-west of the reserve and along the Gundaroo Road (Mulligan's Flat Nature Reserve Survey Diary, unpublished). A diary of observations of Regent Honeyeaters in Mulligans Flat NR follows.

6 December 1998

During the course of the regular Mulligan's Flat survey, COG members (Jack Holland, Jonette McDonnell and Julie McGuiness) saw a pair of Regent Honeyeaters near the first small dam, between survey sites 1 and 2. (This location is 4-5 km from the Gooroo site where a pair of Regent Honeyeaters had been found a week earlier - see below.) One of these birds (the male) was already banded. It had a white band on the left leg which was obscuring the metal band (the plastic colour bands are slightly wider than metal bands and can slip over the metal band - David Geering pers. comm.). The white band on the left leg identifies this bird as one that was banded in North Watson, in the Mt Majura section of Canberra Nature Park, ACT, by Mark Clayton in December 1995. It had a red band on the right leg, but the other coloured band was missing (two coloured bands on the right leg individually identify a bird). The red band identifies this bird as one of three males that were banded at the time with a red band in the right leg combination.

Later in the day Jenny Bounds found the pair nest-building in a Blakely's Red Gum, in a fork about 15 m up. An Olive-backed Oriole *Oriolus sagittatus* was also nesting in this tree, and other birds including Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula,* Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis* and Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus* were nesting nearby. Numerous Yellow Box trees were flowering in the area.



MAP 1. Regent Honeyeater Nest Sites in the ACT, 1998

10 December 1998

The pair of Regent Honeyeaters with the red-banded male was observed for an hour, mostly feeding in flowering Candlebark. The female was twice observed carrying nesting material back to the nest.e.

17 December 1998

It was important to try to positively identify the male bird with one red band, as two of the three male birds banded at Mt Majura in 1995 had subsequently been observed (one in 1997 and one in 1998) in the Capertee Valley some 265 km north of Canberra *(Where the Regents Roam*, July 1998), and information on Regent Honeyeater movements is vital to the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Effort. So an attempt was made in the late afternoon and evening to net and band the birds, using a tape to call them in (paired Regent Honeyeaters in a breeding

territory will typically respond to a taped call). Unfortunately, however, the nest appeared to have been abandoned, and the male was only mildly interested in the taped call. Another previously unrecorded bird was caught though, and was colour-banded with orange over white on the right leg. Based on size and weight, it was identified as a male. It sat quietly in a nearby tree for some minutes after banding, preening its ruffled feathers. During this exercise, three unbanded birds and the newly-banded male were seen simultaneously, indicating there were at least five Regent Honeyeaters in the area. The three unbanded birds may have been attracted by the tape recording as it could be heard for several hundred metres, but it is also possible they simply aggregated at a good food source as they were seen feeding in clumps of leaves in a large Candlebark, possibly looking for insects or lerp.

20 December 1998

The male bird banded on 17 December (orange/white) was seen in company with an unbanded female feeding in flowering Candlebarks near the access road where it forks before the first dam. This was the last time that male was recorded. The original nest site (nest 1) of the pair with the red-banded male was still abandoned. A wide search of the area located the red-banded male and the female in an area about 250 m from nest site 1. Nets were put up, and the birds showed some interest in the tape, but the male was hesitant and did not come low enough to be caught in the net. An unbanded pair of Regent Honeyeaters was also seen together in the woodland nearby. On the basis of sightings over several weeks, it was concluded there were six (three pairs) of Regent Honeyeaters at this site.

23 December 1998

Nets were put up for several hours in the late afternoon and evening in the area where the pair with the red-banded male seemed to have established a new territory. The birds were again interested in the tape, but would not come down low. Just prior to leaving the site, a new nest (nest 2) was discovered when the female made a brief visit. This nest was in a Red Stringybark *E. macrorhyncha* in an upright fork about 4 m off the ground, set in bare limbs with no leaf cover. A Noisy Friarbird was nesting in a nearby tree. Another unbanded Regent Honeyeater (not the female of nest 2) was seen in the general area but, despite searching, no other nest sites were found.

30 December 1998

Nest 2 was found destroyed and abandoned, the bottom half on the ground. No Regent Honeyeaters were observed in the vicinity.

1 January 1999

Jenny Bounds and Mark Clayton systematically searched the Mulligan's Flat NR area where the Regent Honeyeaters had been seen over the previous weeks. The pair with the red-banded male was seen around the original territory where nest 1 had been built. At one point the female collected some nest material from a Red Stringybark and flew near to nest 1, where she perched for a while before flying off. The birds were seen bathing

in the dam at one point, but the remainder of the time was spent feeding in nearby eucalypts, and they did not appear to be behaving either territorially or in breeding mode. An unbanded pair of birds was also seen in the area, feeding mostly in Candlebarks, so four (two pairs) of Regent Honeyeaters were seen in the area on that day.

10 January 1999

The red-banded male was observed in Candlebark, feeding and preening, but was unresponsive to taped calls. No other Regent Honeyeaters could be found in the area.

16 January 1999

A thorough search was made of the Mulligan's Flat NR site, including suitable habitats in other parts of the reserve, but no Regent Honeyeaters were seen. By this time, the Yellow Box had largely finished flowering, probably hastened by very hot weather in the first two weeks of January. It was concluded the birds had left the area.

Gooroo

In the spring of 1998, COG commenced bird surveys on a private leasehold property near Gooroo Hill, as part of the 'COG Woodland Survey'. The northern end of this property adjoins the far south-eastern edge of Mulligan's Flat NR and extends south along the border with NSW (see map). This area is known for survey purposes as Gooroo.

Site 5 at Gooroo is classified for Survey purposes as a site of 'low quality structure'. It is situated in a large paddock (mainly exotic grasses) with a number of widely-spaced mature Yellow Box and Blakely's Red Gum and patches of eucalypt regrowth. This paddock is surrounded on three sides by 'medium' to `high quality' woodland of Yellow Box, Blakely's Red Gum and Red Stringybark of mixed ages; and by more open grazing land on the western side. The Gooroo site is grazed by sheep, but appears to be grazed only lightly. Hooded Robins *Melanodryas cucullata* and Brown Treecreepers *Climacteris picumnus*, both listed as vulnerable under ACT legislation, are found at this site (COG database and survey records, unpublished). There were about five large mature Yellow Box in moderate flower scattered within 500 m of site 5 at the time of the first survey. A diary of observations of Regent Honeyeaters at the Gooroo site follows.

28 November 1998

A pair of Regent Honeyeaters was recorded by Jenny Bounds and Nicki Taws at site 5 in the Gooroo woodland. The birds were observed feeding quietly in a mature Yellow Box in moderate flower.

6 December 1998

For almost two hours in the morning, site 5 was monitored by Jenny Bounds and Nicki Taws without any Regent Honeyeaters being seen. Two birds were then heard calling and soon appeared together. After a few minutes a nest site was found in a mature Yellow Box, in a fork about 10 m high. Noisy Friarbirds were nesting lower down in the same tree, some 5 m away. The nest tree was not in flower and was about 30 m from

the flowering Yellow Box where the pair was first seen on 28 November. The female, with the male following, flew a number of times to an erosion gully nearby, where the female collected small twigs of *Cassinia sp*. for the nest. The male was seen displaying and calling while the female collected this material.

10 December 1998

The nest at site 5 was observed for two hours by Nicki Taws. The female was sitting, presumably incubating eggs, with occasional visits to the adjacent flowering Yellow Box to feed. The male bird was nearby, feeding on insects and occasionally chasing other birds such as Noisy Friarbird and Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* away.

19 December 1998

Over a period of an hour, the female sat on the nest for most of the time, with several short periods of two to three minutes off the nest to feed and preen. The male was observed close by, twice chasing Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala* from the nest tree.

20 December 1998

After a very quick response to a taped call, the two birds were caught in a mist net and colour-banded by Mark Clayton and Anthony Dyers. The male came down first, closely followed by the female who had been sitting on the nest. Both birds were banded with white and metal bands on the left legs; the female with two light green bands, and the male with a light green band over a yellow band on the right leg. When being handled, a very large brood patch was evident on the female, who returned to sitting on the nest a few minutes after banding.

Table 1. A chronology of Regent Honeyeater observations, summer 1998-99

Site	Date	Birds seen	Observations
Mulligan's Flat	6.12.98	2	Nest building
	10.12.98	2	Feeding; nest building
	17.12.98	5	Nest adandoned; one male banded
	20.12.98	6	Feeding
	23.12.98	3	Second nest found
	30.12.98	0	Second nest found destroyed
	1.1.99	4	Feeding; carrying nesting material
	10.1.99	1	Feeding; preening
	16.1.99	0	
Gooroo	28.11.98	2	Feeding
	6.12.98	2	Nest building
	10.12.98	2	Female incubating; male preening
	19.12.98	2	Female incubating; male defending territory
	20.12.98	2	Both birds banded
	6.1.99	2	Nest abandoned

6 January 1999

The Gooroo site was visited by Nicki Taws, but the nest had been abandoned and no Regent Honeyeaters could be found in the area. The Noisy Friarbird nest had been destroyed and abandoned, suggesting predation. The Gooroo site was searched subsequently, but it appeared the Regent Honeyeaters had left the area.

Other sites

There were sightings of Regent Honeyeaters at two other sites in the ACT region between November 1998 and January 1999. Rainer Rehwinkle, an officer with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, made several observations in the course of surveying a number of land reserves in the region. This included three birds seen south of Gunning, NSW, on 12 November (including a pair mating), and a pair with a single fledged young in early January at Nanima Travelling Stock Reserve No. 50, 9 km east of Murrumbateman, NSW (R Rehwinkle, pers. comm.).

Discussion

It is unfortunate that the red-banded male from Mulligan's Flat was never positively identified. If it was in fact one of the two birds seen in the Capertee Valley, it would have provided the first definitive evidence of some form of regular long distance movement by Regent Honeyeaters.

In the 1998-1999 season, Regent Honeyeaters appear to have had a very low breeding success rate across their entire range, particularly when compared with highly successful breeding in some of their major breeding areas in the previous few seasons *(Where the Regents Roam*, Feb 1999).

In addition to the record by Rainer Rehwinkle in the Canberra region, there was only a handful of successful breeding events, mostly late in the season, reported from other areas. Sue Newbery (pers. comm.) reported three fledged young with adults in the Yalwal State Forest near Nowra, NSW, on 1 January 1999; and there were reports of a pair of birds with fledglings in January at Glen Davis in the Capertee Valley, NSW; one young fledged from four nests in the Bundarra-Barraba region of NSW; and three records of fledged young at Chiltern and Glenburn in Victoria *(Where the Regents Roam*, Feb 1999).

As reported in this paper, two breeding attempts were observed at Mulligan's Flat NR, and one at Gooroo. None was successful. Nest predation appears to be the most likely cause of failure for one of the nests at Mulligan's Flat, but the reason for the other two nests being abandoned by the birds is not obvious. There are a number of possible explanations for the overall failure of breeding by Regent Honeyeaters in the area. They include an insufficient amount of food available from floweringYellow Box; the distance the birds had to travel for food, particularly the pair at Gooroo where flowering Yellow Box were scattered some distance away; or the very hot weather that prevailed in the first two weeks of January when one of the pairs was incubating eggs. It is also possible that the birds had bred elsewhere earlier in the season and were simply having

another go in less than optimal conditions.

The local 1998-1999 breeding events contrast sharply with the very successful breeding by four pairs of Regent Honeyeaters at Mt Majura in 1995. In that year, the birds arrived much earlier (in October) and conditions were ideal. in particular significant numbers of mature Yellow Box flowered profusely in a small area, and there was access to plantings of profusely flowering Mugga Ironbark *E. sideroxylon* over several months (Bounds et al. 1996).

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Where the Regents Roam, Newsletter of the National Regent Honeyeater Recovery

ODD OBS

Red-whiskered Bulbul at Lake George, NSW

On 13 February 1999 while participating in a forum on Lake George at 'Silver Wattle' ─ a convention centre located below the escarpment along Lake Road north of Bungendore ─ **I** heard the unmistakable calls of a Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus.* **I** was able to establish that the calls were coming from the old orchard to the north of the building, but **I** was not able to leave the small conference room without giving offense to the speaker. Calling sequences were repeated for twenty five minutes and then ceased some fifteen minutes before the morning-tea break released me for a search. Both this and a more thorough search during the lunch break were unsuccessful and no further calls were heard.

While visual confirmation was not obtained I am in no doubt that the bird calling was a Red-whiskered Bulbul ─ a species with which I am thoroughly familiar both in its native habitats in Asia as well as its occurrence as an introduced species both in Sydney and Melbourne as well as in Honolulu, Mauritius and Reunion. Because it is a popular cage bird in some cultures I did check whether this might have been the case at 'Silver Wattle' or on adjoining properties, but drew a blank on that possibility.

The first and only published report of the Red-whiskered Bulbul in the local region was of a single bird heard and then seen in a Canberra garden on 16 May, 1993 (S.J. Wilson, 1993). A sedentary species in its native habitat. most extensions of range and establishment of new populations have been attributed to deliberate releases and aviary escapes (Long, 1981). However, steady expansion of range following a variable, but often lengthy, period of initial establishment and consolidation is also well documented for many sedentary species. Where are the nearest established populations of the Red-whiskered Bulbul? Is the species present as a cage bird in the Canberra region? Documentation of the dispersal and establishment of exotic species is important, because without it our understanding of those processes will remain limited.

References

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Henry Nix, 22 Syme Crescent,

Little Corella Observations

Between mid-December 1997 and the end of February 1998 **I** observed on a number of occasions a flock of Little Corellas *Cacatua sanguinea* on the Kingston foreshores. Sometimes they were seen roosting with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *C. galerita* in large Monterey Pines *Pinus radiata* on Mundaring Drive opposite the old Kingston Power Station. From mid-January they were also seen feeding in the mornings on fruiting Manchurian Pears *Pyrus ussuriensis* in Bowen Park adjacent to the East Basin of Lake Burley Griffin, 100 m west of the exit of the drain which runs through Telopea Park.

When roosting or flying amongst the trees they were often in mixed flocks with the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. When feeding, or flying to or from feeding areas, they seemed to gather in tight packs and, if split up, called in an agitated manner until the group re-formed. I did not see them feeding on the ground with the cockatoos, which frequently did so.

When feeding on the Manchurian Pears, which are only 5 to 7 m high, the corellas were quite approachable, allowing close observation, and precise identification. The voice and flight patterns (fast, shallow wing-beats) made them easily distinguishable from Sulphur-crested Cockatoos in flight. When flying at close range, or perched less than 5 m away, the blue eye-skin patch, a small orange/red mark between the eye and the small white beak were clearly visible. These and the short erect crests, with no yellow, confirmed the distinction from the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. There were no red throat markings and the short beak allowed me to positively identify them as Little Corellas and not Long-billed Corellas *C. tenuirostris.*

My observations on four days in late February 1998 are shown in the table.

Denis Wilson, 39 Anzac Park, Reid,

Date	Time	Number	Feeding Activity
24 Feb 98	1000 hrs	6	Not feeding.
25 Feb 98	0930 hrs	20	Feeding in Manchurian Pears.
26 Feb 98	1300 hrs	16	Not feeding. Roosting low in poplars during high temperature (37 C.). Some allowed approach to 3 m.
28 Feb 98	1100 hrs	23	Feeding in Manchurian Pears. Then roosting high in tall eucalypts and pines near old power station. Roosting flock mixed with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, but feeding flock not mixed.

The Australian Brush Turkey - an ACT Record?

John Gale, who was the founder of the *Queanbeyan Age* and who lived in Queanbeyan from the 1850s for about 70 years, wrote a book entitled *Canberra — History of and legends relating to the Federal Capital Territory of Australia.* This was published in 1927 by Fallick and Sons, of Queanbeyan. In it Gale made reference on the first page to the Australian Brush-turkey *Alectura lathami* as a resident species in the ACT:

> Prior to the eighteenth century, the nine hundred miles of territory acquired by the Australian Commonwealth within New South Wales for a Federal Capital State formed part of a stretch of magnificent country populated by an aboriginal tribe, because of its abundance of natural food supply. Its perennial streams, large and small, teemed with fine fish, the surface of their deep pools swarmed with duck, teal and widgeon, over the plains roamed the emu and bustard (the plains turkey of the later European settlers) and the tallegalla (the shy brush turkey of the same later oncomers)

Later he gave further surprising details:

> such elevations as Black Mountain, Tidbinbilla and others of even higher altitude, were the habitat of another fine specimen of game. I allude to the tallegalla or brush turkey, which laid its eggs, layer upon layer, in a conical heap of decaying vegetable matter, the heat therefrom being the agency which hatched out its young.

He went on to comment that this species had disappeared. Judging from the text, his interest was in birds as food, rather than as creatures to observe. On page 127, Gale also commented, 'I have before me a task for which I am but a doubtful authority .' My attention was drawn to Gale's remarks during research on the species which comprise the list of birds of the ACT and thanks are due to David Purchase who brought this material to my attention.

John Gould used the name *Talegalla lathami* in his book, *The Birds of Australia,* but also used the different spelling of Wattled Tallegalla as the English name for the Australian Brush-turkey.

Gale's description of the nesting of the Australian Brush-turkey is quite convincing and suggests he must have been familiar with the species. His book, however, was published two years before he died in his late nineties. There is no way of knowing when the material was written but quite possibly it was in his later years. He may have been mistaken in placing this species in the area of the future ACT.

Caley (1931) gave the southern limit of the distribution of this species as the Illawarra district; the *Atlas of Australian Birds* (Blakers et al. 1984) recorded its southern limit as immediately north of Sydney. The latter authority described the Brush-turkey 's food as 'fruit, seeds, insects, snails and other invertebrates'. Dr Richard Schodde regards this species as a fruit-eating bird of rainforests (pers. comm). It has been recorded in dry rainforest country in central Queensland especially during the invasion of prickly pear *(Opuntia sp.)* of which the fruit provided food and the 'pads' part of the nesting material.

No other authority has recorded the Australian Brush-turkey in the area of the ACT and it would seem that eucalypt forest is not suitable habitat for it. **I** consider that this record is an error and should be disregarded.

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Steve Wilson, 56 Harrington Circuit, Kambah, ACT 2902

A breeding colony of White-browed Woodswallows in Canberra, 1997-98

During October 1997 there were reports on the local birdwatchers' telephone hotline of flocks of high-flying White-browed Woodswallows *Artamus superciliosus* around Canberra, for example over the Australian National Botanic Gardens where a flock of possibly 500 was reported.

According to the ACT Bird Atlas (Taylor and COG 1992), the White-browed Woodswallow is an uncommon breeding summer migrant in the ACT, with major irruptions resulting in breeding colonies of up to 50 pairs two or three times per decade. Such irruptions are usually associated with drought in western New South Wales and occurred in 1965, 1978, 1980 and 1988.

On 2 November I found a congregation of at least 50 White-browed Woodswallows at Callum Brae, a private sheep-grazing leasehold property adjoining Narrabundah Lane. The birds were actively feeding on and near the ground. mainly on small buff-coloured moths. They also seemed to be inspecting nest-sites. Over the next few weeks I visited the site at least weekly and noted widespread nesting activity.

At the height of the influx there was a loose colony of, I would estimate, 50 to 80 birds spread over an area of about 50 hectares. The habitat within this area varied from fairly close eucalypt woodland with mature trees, through patches of dense sapling regrowth, to open pasture with scattered and dead fallen trees. Initially all birds appeared to be adult and most to be paired, although there seemed to be some extra birds, chiefly males, making up groups of three or four. I noted about 15 nests at various stages, generally at heights ranging from 2.5 to 4 m in forks of saplings or in leaf-clumps on large branches of mature eucalypts. One nest was behind a piece of semi-detached bark against a main limb.

Many of the nests did not reach the egg-laying stage, however, from the number of dependent juveniles seen throughout the area during December, I would estimate there were at least ten successful nestings. Of these, I observed two in particular, one early, one late. The first was in a firethorn *(pyracantha* sp.) shrub on the side of an erosion gully. The nest was within arm's length of the top of the bank and only about a metre above it, and within two metres of a contemporaneous Willie Wagtail nest in the centre of the shrub. The adult male was seen sitting on this nest on 9 November and the two young fledged on or about 30 November.

The second nest was at a height of a little over two metres in the top of an upright limb of a dead fallen tree. This nest had eggs on 6 December and blind young on 20 December. When I next inspected the nest late in the afternoon of 29 December I was surprised to find it vacant, and suspected predation, until I noticed three young in frozen posture in the lower branches of a small eucalypt about 50 m away. From their appearance it was quite likely they had fledged earlier that day. When approached, the young remained immobile. The parents would not tolerate a closer approach to the young than about 20 m. When I ventured nearer, the young were induced by insistent parental calling to flutter and hop across open ground to be fed at a new location. The three young were kept together over the next two weeks and developed rapidly, with all indications of 100% survival.

The observed numbers of white-browed dwindled gradually, but quite large numbers were seen on 4 and 11 January, mainly feeding at some height.

Over the area. several Dusky Woodswallows *A. cyanopterus* nested at the same time; I would estimate 20-30 individuals with 5-10 breeding pairs. There was some squabbling and other interaction between white-broweds and duskies, but no more than between individual white-broweds. Both species fed together in high-flying mixed flocks.

On 2 November there was at least one pair of Masked Woodswallows *A. personatus* within the main concentration of white-broweds. One pair of masked remained until 8 December but, apart from some nuzzling and apparent nest-site inspecting, no breeding activity was observed.

Reference

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Geoffrey Dabb, 24 Brockman Street, Narrabundah. ACT. 2604

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 1998

Paul Fennell

It has been a very busy and successful year for COG.

Committee

Special thanks to retiring committee members, Malcolm Fyfe, David Landon and particularly John Avery (Treasurer) and Sue Newbery (Secretary). They have done a very good job and are a hard act to follow. It is reassuring to know that COG is in a sound financial position; John and COG auditor Noel Luff have done well to provide the financial statements so promptly.

Woodland Surveys

A grant of $5000 was obtained; Anthony Overs has been appointed Project Officer, and the Site Coordinators are Jenny Bounds, Nicki Taws, Geoff Dabb, Harvey Perkins, David McDonald and Paul Fennell. The project was designed by Chris Davey and Jenny Bounds with support from Professor Henry Nix and Dr Ross Cunningham. Special thanks go to the leaseholders of properties at Castle Hill, Gooroo and Callum Brae for permission to survey on their properties.

Atlas

Atlas work is gaining momentum. Malcolm Fyfe and Alistair Bestow are now coordinating Atlas activities and there has been a steady increase in Atlas records. Two successful Atlas familiarisation bus trips were led by Jenny Bounds and Paul Fennell; consultation with Birds Australia on format of data is complete; and special thanks are due to Malcolm Fyfe for his continuing performance as Records Officer, and to Tony Harding for creating an input program for Atlas data. There is, however, still much room for increased effort in gathering Atlas data.

Garden Bird Surveys

Data input is completely up to date, including breeding records. There has been an encouraging rise in the number of charts being completed, after some decline over the years. Let's hope the upward trend continues. Thanks to Philip Veerman, and to Chris Davey, Nicki Taws, Mick Donaghue, Kay Hahne and others who have assisted.

Water Bird Surveys

These surveys are still going strong, led by Michael Lenz and Malcolm Fyfe.

Annual Bird Reports

The backlog on Annual Bird Reports is well on the way to being eliminated with the 1993-4 and 1994-5 reports published in October 1998. With the compilation of the next double edition (1995-6 and 1996-7) almost complete, we are getting as close to being up to date as possible. Many thanks are due to the work of Malcolm Fyfe, David Purchase and the team of Grahame Clark, Bob Digan, Brendan Lepschi and Ian McMahon.

Rarities

The Rarities Panel of Jenny Bounds, Barry Baker, Mark Clayton, Grahame Clark and Dick Schodde, supported by Barbara Allan as secretary, have caught up on the backlog with Endorsed List No. 46 which was published in *Canberra Bird Notes* 23 (2) September 1998.

Field Trips

Jenny Bounds (regional, national and international) and Alistair Bestow (local) presented a great array of opportunities for serious birdwatching in 1998 and are continuing on in 1999. The reports in *Gang-gang* (repeated on the COG Website) with names such as Wallaga Lake, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Coongie Lakes, Paringa, Eugowra, Mt Stromlo, Barren Grounds, Lyrebirds at Tidbinbilla, Bunya Mountains, Oakey Hill, Monga Forest, Gigerline Sandwash, Ben Boyd National Park, Round Hill, Strike a Light, Buddigower, Plains Wanderers, indicate the amount of effort, enjoyment and support for this vital part of COG activities. In 1999 there is even more on offer! There are two tours to South Africa, and one to the Wet Tropics in Queensland. Most importantly, there is an extensive range of local tours with an emphasis on atlassing to ensure COG members get every opportunity to continue birdwatching with a purpose.

Bignet

COG has been an active member of the NSW/ACT Bird Interest Group Network (Bignet) since its inception.

COG Meetings

Barbara Allan has again organised a year of the most interesting and entertaining presentations at Forestry House. The reports in *Gang-gang* and on the COG website every month attest to the quality of our presentations. COG purchased a lapel microphone system in 1998 (approx $900) to improve the sound quality.

Publications

Gang-gang

Sue Mathews has been doing a wonderful job editing the new look, new format *Gang-gang*. She has had tremendous support from the many members whose contributions make it such informative and interesting reading.

Canberra Bird Notes

David Purchase edited his final *Canberra Bird Notes* with 23 (2) September 1998. This is a landmark in COG's publishing history, representing many years of unremitting and meticulous toil in publishing COG's journal of record. Congratulations and many thanks to David for this outstanding contribution to the knowledge of birds and birding in Canberra and the surrounding region.

Website

http://www.canberrabirds.dynamite.com.au
Mike O'Shaugnessy deserves all the credit for this premier website. The

presentations and field trips as reported in *Gang-gang*, together with other useful information about COG and its activities.

Revised Constitution

David McDonald led the charge to bring the rules of our association into line with current legislation and practice governing associations such as ours. Many thanks to David, to Geoff Dabb for his support, and to the COG Committee in wrestling with this onerous administrative task.

COG Administration

Many thanks to the Committee for its hard work throughout the year. Special thanks are due to Ann McKenzie for her continuing work in ensuring that COG publications are in the mail, and to Noel Luff (assisted by Sue Newbery) for processing memberships, and again to Cedric Bear in keeping our membership list up to date and providing the mailing labels. Special thanks also to Carol Macleay and Ann McKenzie for running the stall at COG meetings and to Maria Lucacs for her assistance with the monthly raffle.

The Natural History Centre

Many thanks to Wally Brown and shopfront volunteers (Pat Williams, Ann McKenzie, Chris Curry, Shirley Kral, Pauline Wicksteed and Paul Cooper) for their good work in keeping the shopfront operating this year. Following Grahame Clark's report on the shopfront, the Committee had decided to redirect the emphasis of the operation to maintaining a COG office to consolidate a lot of COG administration and storage. The COG office will, for 1999, continue to operate from the office in the Griffin Centre.

National Library Birds! Exhibition

Malcolm Fyfe provided professional assistance on behalf of COG to the National Library in preparation of this magnificent exhibition. Many thanks to Malcolm for this work which netted COG nearly $1000 in professional fees.

For 1999

Consolidation of COG Office

The appointment of an Office Manager should greatly assist in pulling together COG's administrative functions more efficiently and effectively.

GBS Book

COG has received a grant of $20,000 from ACT Urban Parks and Places (in Environment ACT) to publish a book on Canberra's Garden Birds, based on information derived from the Garden Bird Survey. The book is to be published before Christmas 1999. A writing group consisting of Paul Fennell (Chair), Philip Veerman, Chris Davey, Sue Mathews and Robin Brown are working on the project.

Definitive List of ACT Birds

Steve and Nonie Wilson have completed the mammoth task of compiling the first draft of an annotated definitive list of the birds of the ACT. They are being assisted by David Purchase, Malcolm Fyfe and Grahame Clark in preparing the

draft for publication. This is a milestone in Australia's ornithological history which COG will be publishing when the manuscript is finalised. Congratulations to all concerned.

New and Continuing Research

COG is applying for grants to continue and expand woodland monitoring activity ($10,000) and for a research project about Common Mynas in conjunction with Chris Tidemann of the ANU. Chris Davey will be working with other members to develop a proposal for the gradual reintroduction of the Superb Parrot into the ACT.

Conclusion

1998 was a busy year, and 1999 will be even more so when all the continuing activities outlined above are taken into consideration. Please give your local bird club as much support as you can in helping us to achieve our very worthy goals.

BOOK REVIEWS

Notes of a Provincial Wildfowler by Sergei Timofeevich Aksakov. Translated from the Russian, introduced and annotated by Kevin Windle (1998). Published by Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois. Pp. 304. 140 x 235 mm, hardcover. R.R.P. $59.30.

This is an unusual book to find on a publisher's list. The date of publication is 1998, but the original book first appeared in Russia in 1852, and gives a fascinating insight into the state of natural history in that country at that time. Aksakov (1791-1859) reveals in his writing a passion for observation of birds and their behaviour: his in-depth understanding of the life of birds would be hard for the present-day bird observer to equal. His was the first book of its kind in Russia and was very successful.

Kevin Windle has made a scholarly and sympathetic translation of the text. adding a thoughtful and informative introduction. The book can be read at several levels: as a compilation of the most exquisitely detailed description of water birds, wildfowl and migrating birds; as a picture of the sporting life. habits and mores of an estate owner at that time; or as a contribution to Aksakov's literary writings in other fields. He is known as one of nineteenth century Russia's finest prose sty lists.

The irony of the book, at least to the eye of the modern birder and conservationist. is that after the author's vivid and almost loving word pictures of the birds, he also gives full instructions on how to stalk and shoot them, on what size shot to use, and then on how to cook and serve them. Equal to his passion for observation was his passion for the chase: he was a man of his time.

Each section of the book is preceded by a full and evocative description of the particular terrain and habitats. Even more confronting is that Aksakov could see the need for conservation of natural resources. He writes of the woodlands as 'this jewel of nature' and remarks that they are 'treated by us with the utmost extravagance. We are rich in forests, but the very abundance makes us so wasteful that poverty is but a step away. ... In many places where forests once stood we now have open steppes and straw has replaced timber. This may yet be the fate of the province of Orenburg.'

Orenburg covered a large area west of the southern Urals and was part of a major migration corridor. Birds flying in or over would often number thousands. They are classified by Aksakov into four categories: marshland game; waterfowl; steppe and grassland game; and woodland game. Smaller birds that could not be eaten are ignored.

Marshland game, the first category, includes 21 species, ranging from snipe to moorhen and crake. Waterfowl are a small group of four: swan, Graylag Goose, duck (ten species, from Mallard to merganser) and coot. There are twelve steppe species described, such as bustard, plovers and quail. Woodland game includes grouse, pigeons, woodcock — and hares. Each species has its own chapter, usually with a woodcut

showing the bird in profile. Some, like the snipe, are instantly recognisable. Others, such as the shoveller, are not: the latter looking more like a dodo. The artist is anonymous.

Aksakov's descriptions are clear and often entertaining. The Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* was a favourite of his, 'its dark, slightly bulging eyes are quite large, with a hint of merriment'. To shoot it, 'fine-grade shot, known as snipe-shot, Number Nine or sometimes Ten, is used, but on their first arrival a larger shot such as Number Eight is needed'. Of the Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* he says that when roasted and basted in fat its flavor was surpassed only by that of the snipe family. The Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos* (now *Actitis hypoleucos)* was good in pâté and sauces. By contrast, the Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* had fat of 'a slightly fishy flavor ... When the bird is roasted the fat is a bright orange color. The taste is disagreeable.' But the large flocks of Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* were beautiful as they scurried 'nimbly about in meadows just beginning to turn green, their brilliant plumes with tints of gold glinting in the sun. It is as if a broad rainbow band were spread upon the ground and was running along it in rippling waves.'

One strength of the book is that Aksakov gives great detail of breeding behaviour, and the differences between the nesting and rearing techniques of different species. The manner and timing of moulting was also important to him, partly because it affected the condition and flavour of the game.

Kevin Windle has published a paper in Russian comparing Aksakov with the English country vicar Gilbert White (1720-1793), renowned for his close study of natural history in Selborne, a very small area. Comparisons have also been made with Thomas Coward, a recent British ornithologist. High praise came in Aksakov's own country from Turgenev `If a black grouse could tell its own story, I am quite sure it would have nothing to add to what Mr Aksakov has told us.'

The amount of information gathered may seem incredible to the present-day reader, since it was obtained without any visual aids. and with the minimum of equipment: his eyes, his dog, his gun, his four-wheeled open carriage, but more often on foot, under difficult conditions. The field notes he supplemented with data from his anatomical investigations of the specimens. The modern birder, restricted to binoculars, may well envy Aksakov's uninhibited hands on' achievement.

This book is a good read within its self-imposed limits, and gives us much to reflect on. Aksakov intended his *'Notes'* as a 'help' book for country wildfowlers, but it immediately won a wider audience and is still read in Russia. In translation it should appeal to bird-lovers internationally.

Muriel Brookfield
84 Wybalena Groye, Cook, ACT 2614

Birdwatching in Australia and New Zealand by Ken Simpson and Zoe Wilson (1998). Published by Reed New Holland: Sydney. Pp. 206, 104 colour plates, 240 x 165 mm, paperback. RRP $25.

In the introduction, the authors say they have written this book for new birdwatchers. They have the qualifications for writing such a book. Ken Simpson has been birdwatching since he was 9 years old and is the author/editor of Simpson and Day 's *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia.* He has extensive experience in leading birdwatching tours and in 1996 was elected President of the Bird Observers Club of Australia. Zoe Wilson is Manager of the Bird Observers Club of Australia and editor of *The Bird Obseryer*. She has been birdwatching for 20 years.

The book has 12 chapters grouped into four parts. There is a fifth part which contains a list of birdwatching societies. books for further reading, and an index. It is illustrated by 104 superb colour photographs, nearly all by Peter Rogers. Most illustrate particular points in the text.

Part one, 'Becoming a birdwatcher' contains one chapter 'Birdwatching at home' and is aimed at the 'new ly hatched' birdwatcher. It describes how to enjoy the pleasures of birdwatching in your garden and elsewhere close to home. This is where most people begin to take an interest in birds. It also provides information on how to make a garden more attractive to birds.

Part two, 'Looking at birds' contains four chapters, 'Habitats '; 'Fam ily likenesses'; 'Identification' and 'Light and shade'. This part introduces the reader to the basics of bird identification. It begins with where particular types of birds are found on the basis of their preferred habitat. It then describes families so the reader, when trying to identify a bird, will at least know which one of these it probably belongs to. After these generalisations, the final two chapters deal with the 'nitty-gritty' of bird identification by physical features, including the difficulties posed by various light conditions.

Part three. 'Bird behaviour' contains five chapters, 'Sound', Daily routines', 'F light '. 'Breeding behaviour' and 'Seasonal routines'. The chapter on sound is more aligned with the previous part as it emphasises the importance of listening to sounds when locating and identifying birds. The remainder discusses various aspects of bird behaviour, much of which would be useful information for the neophyte birdwatcher. The chapter on seasonal routines discusses migration but does not mention bird-banding which has contributed so much to the study and conservation of migratory birds. Although a detailed discussion on banding would be out of place in this book, it would have been helpful if readers were encouraged to contribute to this work by looking out for marked birds (particularly those with colour bands and wing tags) and told where to send the details of any they see or find. This omission is even more noticeable when, in a later chapter, readers are asked to contribute to the work of

museums by labelling and freezing dead birds they find.

Part four, 'Your birdwatching kit' contains two chapters, 'In the field' and `Keeping records'. The first chapter includes a discussion on binoculars and their use in the field, as well as other equipment such as field guides, notebooks and clothing. The second chapter suggests various types of written records that can be collected, e.g. counts and observations of behaviour. It also briefly discusses photographic and audio records.

Part five, 'Support' provides a list of birdwatching societies, further reading and the index. Only nine clubs are listed and no addresses are given except that of the Bird Observers Club of Australia (BOCA). The reader is told that the other clubs can be contacted through BOCA. This is not helpful for people living outside of Melbourne. Canberra Ornithologists Group is listed as Canberra Ornithological Society.

The book is written in a light-hearted but informative style which makes it easy to read but may irritate some readers. An example of this style is the authors' suggestion that to make the learning of the parts of a bird more enjoyable, the reader should buy a roasted chicken and use it as a sort of prompt 'Your typical roast chicken lies on its back (the dorsal surface) with its breast and belly (the ventral surface) in the air'. Having completed this and other lessons the reader is then free to eat the chicken. It would have been helpful if the book contained a diagram showing the topography of a bird. The omission appears deliberate as the authors assume that, as well as the roasted chicken, the reader has alongside a field guide with such a diagram opened at the appropriate page.

Despite my few grumbles, I consider the authors have successfully completed the task they set themselves and the book would be of benefit a person developing an interest in birdwatching.

Dayid Purchase
5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615

COLUMNISTS' CORNER

Out and About

In the last Out and About I asked for readers' opinions on landuse, mining and agriculture. Tony Daucus replied with the following comments which I repeat here for readers to consider and make up their own minds.

> A report by the CSIRO *Landcover Disturbance Over the Australian Continent* (Biodiversity Series, Paper No. 7, published by the Department of the Environment Sport and Territories. 1995) assesses landcover disturbance over Australia. The report divides the continent into two zones. The Intensive Landuse Zone (ILZ) comprises 39 per cent of the continent and includes areas of the highest productivity in the east and southeast of Australia. The principal landcover disturbance in this area is clearing for crops, pastures and forests. The Extensive Landuse Zone (ELZ) extends through central and western Australia and comprises 61 per cent of the continent. The principal landuse disturbance here is the result of grazing and burning. In the ILZ forests and woodlands have been cleared or thinned within 52 per cent of the zone (representing 20 per cent of the whole continent) and the degree of fragmentation of the remaining landcover is high. In the ELZ the situation is better but, overall, over 48 per cent of the Australian continent is either significantly or substantially disturbed. The report makes the point that clearing and grazing have been, and will continue to be, a significant driver of biodiversity loss. Habitat destruction by the clearing of natural vegetation and its replacement by crops and pastures is the most significant disturbance in terms of biotic erosion..As regards mining the report states: 'On a continental scale, the total area of mining is trivial and not considered in this study. While urbanisation is perhaps a hundred fold more extensive than mining, its total area is also not significant on a continental scale. Increasing urbanisation is almost always highly significant on a local scale; mining is usually much less so.

Thank you Tony for your comments. So why does the subject of mining cause such a reaction? Is it just Political Correctness?

Even the *Canberra Chronicle* has begun to realise that the burning of firewood for heating has a negative side in that box hardwood is obtained by removing old trees which have hollows that house native birds. In a recent article by Maria Taylor it likened the collection of box hardwood to the mining of a non-renewable resource and went on to nominate three firewood suppliers who have voluntarily signed on to a code of practice that involves obtaining hardwood from managed sources and then telling purchasers where their hardwood comes from. If you are still using hardwood to heat your house and want to minimise the environmental damage firewood collecting does you can check on who is complying with the voluntary code by ringing the ACT Helpline on 6207 9777. Remember more wood is harvested in Victoria as firewood than as woodchips.

Some time ago I mentioned that research had identified that the male Common

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* emitted an ultraviolet glow from its chest feathers. Now it appears that other species also glow in ultraviolet. The Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus,* a common small bird in Europe famous for the fact that it opens milk bottles for a drink by tearing off the silver foil tops, glows in ultraviolet. In the case of Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis* the male is more colourful than the female in normal light and the difference between the sexes is accentuated in ultraviolet, with the head of the male apparently glowing quite vividly. The throat spots of the male Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus* also glow in ultraviolet. How long will it be before somebody finds two species that look alike to our eyes but are quite different in ultraviolet?

I was recently looking at the September 1947 copy of *Wildlife - Australian Nature Magazine* and found another example of how views change over time as we gather more information and how first impressions are not always correct. My attention was drawn to a precis of an article by Edwin Schlesselmann , of the Department of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati.vshich stated:

> DDT should prove a boon to the aviculturalist not only because of its devastating results on those insects which make the life of the bird miserable, but also for its long lasting effectiveness.

The article went on in the same vein about how effective DDT was and finished by quoting an experiment in which ten canaries were unaffected by being sprayed with a heavy fog of 1% DDT in Kerosene and after three months they were still healthy whilst mites were killed within 48 hours. Looking back with the advantage of hindsight and seeing that in the long term the mites adjusted whilst the higher organisms really suffered. it is easy to wonder at the enthusiasm for the insecticide. However I wonder whether in 50 years time we or our descendants will be looking at some of our modern 'improvements 'and asking ourselves 'Flow could they have got it so wrong? •

G. tibicen

[The view expressed by G. tibicen are personal views and do not necessarily represent the views of COG]

Not so much a book review..... Handbooks, bird weights, and the Ostrich connection

`A title so unwieldy that it has almost never been used'... the title so vilified is the *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa: The Birds of the Western Palearctic* (better known as BWP), and the title-critics are the editors of the 1998 Concise Edition of **BWP,** for which the suggested acronym is `BWPC.

BWP was published in nine volumes from 1977. A point of interest for Australians is that it served as an acknowledged inspiration for our

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand, and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB). It is reasonable to expect that in due course a concise edition of HANZAB might be contemplated, so BWPC is worth a look from that viewpoint.

BWPC omits most of BWP's world distribution maps (a matter of some regret for those of us in the rest of the world), but the maps for the WP region are more attractive and easier to follow. There are more colour plates - 19 more than BWP's 594 - and of those 231 are new. The main compression has come from leaving out reams of non-compressible detailed information. An example of this is that the Skylark *Alauda aryensis* entry has shrunk from 17 pages to a mere three (still one of the longest), of which one page is map and illustrations - an indication of what the average BWPC owner does not really need to know about Skylarks.

Nonetheless, BWPC comes in a slip-case in two hefty volumes. The claim that this is a concise handbook (at about 1850 pages) does invite consideration of the meaning of the word 'handbook". The massive 9-volume BWP (a successor to Witherby 's 1938-1941 *Handbook of British Birds)* set something of a record for alleged handbooks, but will be dwarfed by Lynx Edicions" part-published *Handbook of the Birds of the World.* It seems that publishers groping for a modern alternative to `encyclopaedia' or 'complete home library' have simply fastened on `handbook' as the most seductive label to hand. One supposes that the definitions of 'handbook' given by the Oxford English Dictionary Ca compendious book or treatise') and Webster Ca concise reference book') will just have to be brought into line with this modern usage in their own future editions.

There was certainly no reaching for conciseness in the stated aim of BWP: to meet the need 'for a work which would incorporate the mass of new knowledge, now scattered and often difficult of access in the journals of many countries, to provide a work of reference both for the professional scientist and the overgrowing body of amateurs whose range of interest continues to widen'. All this does make even more baffling the curious choice by Simpson and Day of the label 'The Handbook" to describe the non-field-information section in successive editions of their excellent Australian field companion. Probably because of Simpson and Day's unilateral refashioning of the language, I was recently asked when discussing another recent edition of a field guide, `Ah, but does it have a handbook?'. The answer was 'yes" - the Pizzey and Knight 'Handbook' is at pp. 521-547 and is called 'Family Introductions'.

Even for their size, the two volumes of BWPC seem exceptionally weighty, checking in at the friendly post office scales at within a gram or two of 6 kg. This, of course, is much heavier than the great majority of the individual subject birds. In fact, it equals about the average weight of a Lammergeier or Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus.* Or, as we learn from the helpfully-provided multilingual names, Quebrantahuesos in Spanish. With a phrase-book, these are handy for foreign conversations, as 'Aqui esta el Quebrantahuesos que le he

comprado a Vd', or 'Here is the Lammergeier I have bought for you'.

As a glance through the stated weights shows bird weights can be surprising. Who would have thought that a Great Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* reaches only 4.1 kilos, less than a brace of Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* (Great Cormorants to us) and considerably less than the brace of BWPC volumes? Perhaps a little preoccupied with pounds-per-species as a result of dropping the non-passerines volume a couple of times,

I checked in it for the super-heavyweights. Setting aside the Ostrich, the Western Palearctic gold-medallist appears to be your Mute Swan *Cygnus olor,* reaching 14 kg versus 12.5 kg for a Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus.*

It is quite likely that scientific conservatism is spoiling a good story here. According to that other currently-running 'Handbook', the Lynx Edicions one on birds of the world, the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* (averaging a mere 8.5 kg according to BWPC)

> has been known to reach 18 kg, and hunters have claimed 24 kg for the species, which would place it on a level with the Mute Swan ... as the heaviest flying bird in the world.

Speaking of Ostriches (up to 130 kg), that species, coincidentally, rates somewhat more than a marginal entry in both BWPC and HANZAB. In the latter case, the inclusion is based on a dwindling and localised population descended from birds introduced in South Australia. The Western Palearctic entry is based on some oldish reports for northern Mauritania and northern Mali (both areas that are just taken in by the south-western corner of the WP region as defined) and some new reports for the south of Egypt in the south-east corner of the WP region.

As a result of a glance through the BWPC species table for birds of possible interest to Canberrans. I select the following for mention.

(1) The 'Spur-winged Plover' *Vanellus spinosus*

Within the relevant WP limits, this species ranges from the Balkans to Egypt. The name recalls one of the more seriously disagreeable 1978 RAOU name-changes: the substitution of 'Masked Lapwing for our own familiar 'Spur-winged Plover. The rationale was the perceived international trend to 'Lapwing' for the Vanellus 'plovers', and a prior claim to 'Spur-winged' by *V. spinosus*. Although 'Australian Spur-winged Plover' was used in the 1926 checklist, 'Australian Spur-winged Lapwing' was regarded as too cumbersome. While BWPC follows BWP in using 'Plover', a shift to 'Lapwing', evidently here to stay, is foreshadowed in the BWPC appendixed list of IOC provisional changes. Incidentally. according to *The Oxford Dictionary of British Bird Names,* 'lapwing' in its origins had nothing to do with wings or flight. but referred to the crest of the original (European) Lapwing *V vanellus.*

(2) Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* This species is once again separated from our 'Australian White Ibis' *T. molucca,* although that change

Book of Australian Birds. Both the `Sacred' and the generic name refer to the sacred status of this bird in ancient Egypt. However, *aethiopicus,* essentially an African bird, is no longer found in Egypt; in fact the BWPC area appears to encompass roughly all those parts of Africa distinguished by the absence of the bird. The main European population is in France, where the bird is a feral breeder (280 pairs in 1994), having escaped from a zoo circa 1980. In view of the recent explosion of the local *Threskiornis* as an urban scavenger (try fighting it for elbow room at the kiosk in the Sydney Botanic Gardens), it will be interesting to see whether, given enough time, *aethiopicus* can repeat that performance in Europe.

(3) Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio*

This preferred English name for a bird that does not occur in the UK is maintained, despite gathering support for the distinctively Australian 'SIN amphen rather than `Gallinule'. (A belated move to `Swamphen' is foreshadowed in the appendixed list of IOC provisional names.) At least the European birds are purplish, unlike their blue and black Australian cousins. (Note the startling use of the most lurid of purples in some Australian publications, Simpson and Day in particular.) Although this species has to be fought back from the picnic lunch at some lakeside spots around Canberra, it remains a very rare and local species in the Western Palearctic. However, there are signs of some reversal of the previous 'marked decrease of restricted range ... in the 20th century'. BWPC reports a number expansions in the 1990s and a scattering of 'genuine vagrants' at other European sites further afield.

(4) Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* and Cotton Pygmy-goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*

The first is not quite a fully-accredited introduction, but a looming Australian representative in the European avifauna:

> Widely held in waterfowl collections throughout Europe and instances of escape frequent. Small breeding population in Slovenia said to be probably self-sustaining. In Netherlands, occasional feral breeder, but no stable population yet; mixed pairs with Mute Swan occur from time to time.

One of the two Australian Pygmy-geese, *coromandelianus* has a range that extends to Pakistan, and the most precarious of connections with the BWPC area:

> In West Palearctic, 2 live females seen in Basrah market (Iraq), November 1975. were said to have been captured in the nearby Hammar marshes the previous day, but their origins cannot be definitely known; the specimens are in the Basrah Natural History Museum.

BWPC on your bookshelf will impress your friends and is a great reference, if you want to pay for it. The latest published price is A$395.

A. stentoreus

[The view expressed by A. stentoreus are personal views and do not necessarily

EDITORIAL

Canberra Bird Notes was first published in July 1968, under the editorship of Graeme Chapman and David Purchase. In the thirty-one years since, there have been nine editors or editorial partnerships, each of which has made a substantial contribution to the journal and, through it, to the knowledge and understanding of birds of the Canberra region. In particular, we must acknowlege the ten years' sterling service performed by the editorial partnership of David Purchase and Grahame Clark, who stepped down after the December 1998 issue. We are honoured to follow in their footsteps.

The challenge of maintaining the fine standards of *Canberra Bird Notes* is a daunting one. We hope we can both do so but also add our own particular flavour to this important publication.

Canberra Bird Notes is a regional publication. It cannot and should not, in our view, endeavour to compete with *Emu* or other national journals. That is not to say that its content should not be scientifically rigorous, merely that its coverage is that of Canberra Ornithologists Group's area of concern.

We envisage the *Canberra Bird Notes* that we edit as containing one or two major articles per issue and we intend to continue to invite contributions to 'Odd Obs' of up to 500 words to cater for more informal yet invaluable observations of bird occurrence or behaviour and to encourage less experienced authors to contribute. We have persuaded *G. tibicen* to continue his contributions and, given the increasing popularity elsewhere of the columnist format, we are delighted to introduce in this issue a fellow columnist, with a third to follow in September. Rarities Panel endorsed lists w ill be included each issue, along with a commentary on the unusual birds seen or not seen for the period. We w ill solicit books, videos, audiotapes and CDs for review and would welcome expressions of interest from potential reviewers. And printable letters to the editors would be genuinely welcomed. especially those tackling the broader or more controversial birding-related issues of the day. Both editors stand ready to assist authors with their contributions, which may be provided in hard copy. on disk or via email to either.

For 1999. there will be two issues of *Canberra Bird Notes.* plus the Annual Bird Report supplement. With the concurrence of the COG Committee, and providing that sufficient articles are provided. *Canberra Bird Notes* may revert in 2000 to being a quarterly publication. with the fourth issue each year being the Annual Bird Report for the preceding year. It is produced to inform. to enlighten. to stimulate, to be thought-provoking. and to entertain. It is your journal. Canberra birdwatchers. Please let us know what you have enjoyed reading in it and what you would like to read in the future. And please start writing or keying!

Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

Endorsed List 47 contains records of sightings endorsed by the Rarities Panel for the period ending 30 April 1999. It also contains a few records which go back a long way. A number of records are still under consideration by the Panel. The list includes records of Peaceful Dove *Geopelia striata,* Little Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris,* Buff-banded Rail *gallirallus philippensis,* Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* and Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii.* species for which unusual bird reports are no longer required, but which are included in this record as at the time of sighting, reports were required.

The Panel issued a July 1998 revision of the COG list of unusual birds, dropping from the list Buff-banded Rail, Peaceful Dove, Little Corella, Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii,* Red-capped Robin and Regent Honeyeater and adding to it. or reinstating on it, Freckled Duck *stictonetta naevosa,* Banded Lapwing *Vanellus tricolor* and Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola.* The Panel's rationale for the changes reflects not so much a commentary on the 'rarity' or otherwise of the species concerned but a recognition that certain unusual species are particularly easy to identify and therefore will be reported on COG datasheets and will feature in the COG database in any event for ease in future tracking of their abundance or movements. The Panel elected also to drop from its unusual birds list those species which, while 'unusual' across the entire COG region of concern, are known to be established in small pockets. It has maintained on the list the majority of 'unusual' species which has been reported as occurring in COG's region of concern over the last 25 years, along with a few other species which it believes occur here but are overlooked. It has not specifically listed unusual waders which are from time to time seen on Lakes Bathurst and George; unusual bird reports are still required for those species, however, and for any species which does not feature on COG's updated datasheets.

Inevitably there will be no unanimity of views on the status of particular species. The Panel welcomes comment on its July 1998 revised list of unusual birds and indicates that it will review the status of the list every three years from henceforward. Another matter which has been raised with the Panel is the question of standardising place names for reports. Do readers have views on this matter?

The Panel is aware that sightings of a number of unusual birds in COG's area of concern have been reported on Internet chat lines and in other publications. We urge all COG members wherever possible to encourage non-COG members to submit unusual bird report forms to COG's Records Officer in the first instance. Forms are available at monthly meetings, from the COG Office or on request from Barbara Allan on (02) 6254 6520 (ah).

There are a number of noteworthy sightings in list 47, particularly the Chestnut-rumped Heathwren *Hylacola cauta,* which is occasionally recorded but may be more regular and overlooked. The overwintering Bell Miners *Manorina melanophrys* are highly

unusual, as was the 1997 visit of the Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster* to the National Gallery sculpture garden. The numerous Common Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* records beg the question as to how many birds were actually present: it seems that there was at least one northside and one southside bird in the summer of 1998-99.

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO. 47

Plumed Whistling-Duck
1; 21 Mar 98; D McDonald; Jerrabomberra Creek [possible escapee]

Freckled Duck
1; 4 Dec 97; N Montgomery; Jerrabomberra Seage Ponds
1; 12 Jul 98; J Bounds; Kellys Swamp

Australasian Bittern
1; 21 Sep 98; M Fyfe; Rose Lagoon

Spotted Harrier
1; 14 Apr 98; D Wilson; Kingston Foreshores

Spotless Crake
2; 25 Jan 98; B Rusk; Jerrabombera Wetlands

Spotted Turtle-dove
18 Jan 99; S Wilson; Harrington Cct, Kambah
20 Feb 99; D McDonald; Morant Cct, Kambah

Peaceful Dove
1; 22 Mar 98; D McDonald; Tharwa sandwash, Murrumbidgee River

Long-billed Corella
2; 24 Aug 98; D Wilson; Canberra Avenue, Griffith, ACT
1; 8 Nov 98; B Wilson; Allchin Cct, Kambah

Little Corella
2; 26 Jan 96; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
2; 20-21 Oct 96; B Wilson; Allchin Cct, Kambah
4; 9 Mar 98; S Wilson; Dalrymple St, Narrabundah
1; 10 Mar 98; D McDonald; Kingston Shopping Centre

Cockatiel
1; 22 Oct 98; R Bell; Parliament House [escapee]

Rose-ringed Parakeet

1; 6 Apr 99; P Veerman; Castley Cct, Kambah [escapee]

Common Koel

1; 18 Nov-7 Dec 96; N Montgomery; O'Connor
1; 5 Jan 98; J Bounds; Chevalier St, Weston

1; 28 Nov-3 Dec 98; N Montgomery; O'Connor
1; 4 Dec 98; D McDonald; Kambah

1; 10-11 Dec 98; B Allan; Page
1; 13 Dec 98; B Wilson; Kambah
1; 17 Dec 98; M Fyfe; Cook

Channel-billed Cuckoo

1; 18 Dec 97; N Taws; Mt Painter

Chestnut-rumped Heathwren

1; 28 Aug 98; N Taws; Googong Foreshores

Little Friarbird

2; 18 Sep 95; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
2; 2 Oct 95; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
1; 17 Oct 95; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
1; 27 Nov 95; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
1; 3 Dec 95; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
2; 30 Dec 95; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
1; 7 Jan 96; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
2; 15 Jan 96; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
2; 26 Jan 96; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
1; 3 Feb 96; N Montgomery; Mulligan's Flat
2; 8 Dec 96; J Bounds; Mulligan's Flat

Regent Honeyeater

2; 30 Sep, 1 Oct 95; M Brookfield; Antill St, Watson
1; 10 Oct 95; N Montgomery; Black Mountain peninsula

Bell Miner

2; 16 Jun to 1 Aug 98, regularly; R Parnell; National Gallery of Australia Sculpture Garden
2; 5 Jul 98; I McMahon; National Gallery of Australia Sculpture Garden

Scarlet Honeyeater
1; 12 Oct 91; P Goddard; Australian National Botanic Gardens
1; 15 Oct 93; H Stephinson; 'Paringa', Captains Flat
1; 12 Nov 94; N Montgomery; Red Rock Gorge

Red-capped Robin
2; 19 Oct 94; P Goddard; The Pinnacle
1; 1 Mar 98; P Goddard; Mulligans Flat

Pink Robin
I; 20 Aug 97; M Fyfe; Australian National Botanic Gardens
1; 22 Aug 97; P Goddard; Australian National Botanic Gardens

Black-faced Monarch
1 (imm.); 6 Mar 98; J Dearnaley; Tubb Place, Pearce
1; 5 Oct 98; M Fyfe; Tallaganda State Forest

1; 7 Nov 98; P O'Malley; Australian National Botanic Gardens

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
1; 20 Aug 97; M Fyfe; Kilby Cres, Weetangera

Singing Bushlark
1; 31 Dec 98; M Fyfe; NE corner, Lake George

Red-whiskered Bulbul
1; 13 Feb 99; H Nix; 'Silver Wattle', Lake George

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