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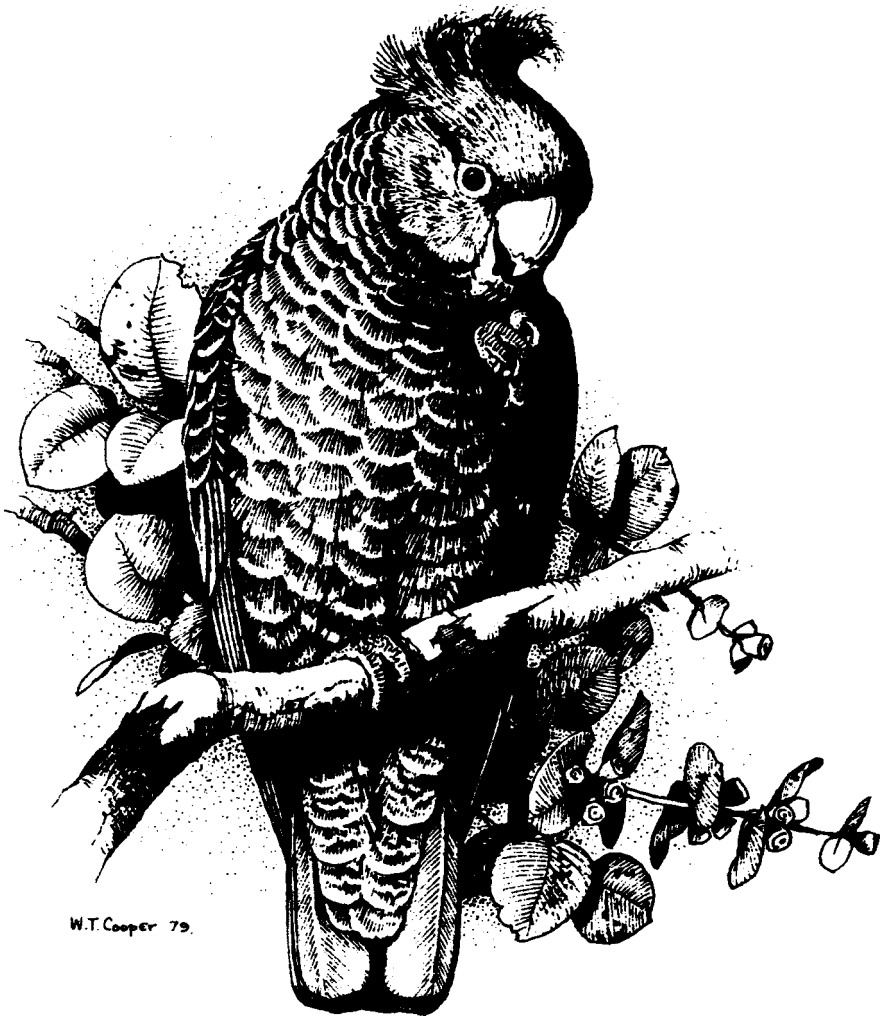

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A BIRD SURVEY OF EUCALYPT WOODLAND REMNANTS FROM AROUND CANBERRA IN 1994

Kenneth B. H Er[1] and Christopher R. Tidemann[2]

[1]Present address: Forest Resources Management, Faculty of Forestry, University of British Columbia, 2042-2045 Main Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6T 1Z4. Canada.
[2]Department of Forestry, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200.

Introduction

Nine Yellow Box - Blakely's Red Gum woodland remnants and a Yellow Box arboretum in the ACT were surveyed between March and December 1994, as part of an Honours thesis project at the Australian National University. The project hoped to identify landscape and habitat characteristics important to the maintenance of bird species diversity in woodland remnants (Er 1995). Some aspects of this study have been published (Er 1996, 1997; Er & Tidemann 1996; Er *et al.* 1998). This paper gives an account of the bird species and numbers that were observed during the study in 1994, with the aim of making the data from this study readily available to members of COG.

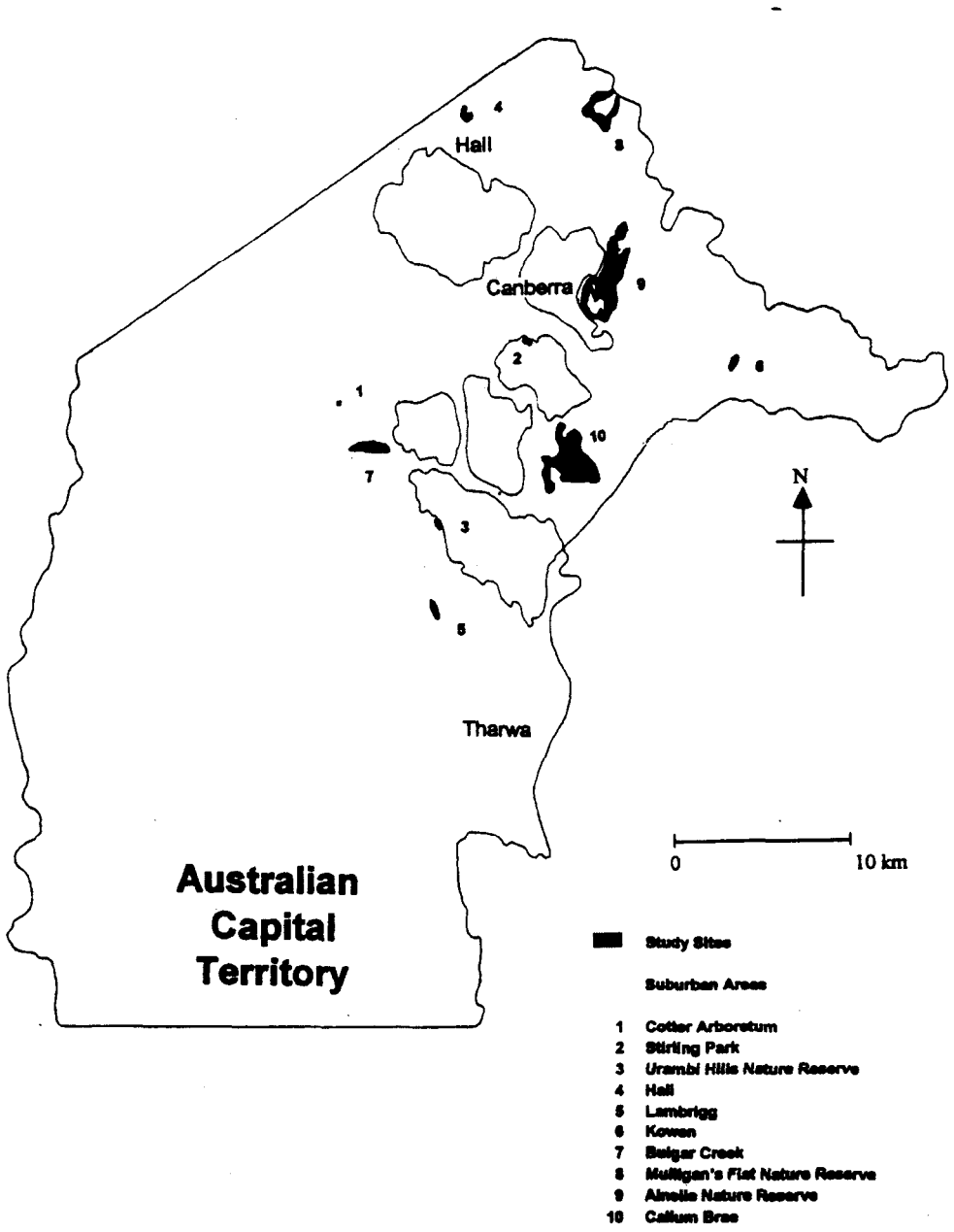
Study sites and methods

Using aerial photographs, nine Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum woodland remnants and a Yellow Box arboretum, ranging from 2 ha to 600 ha, were identified within the lowlands of the ACT. They are listed here in Table 1, and shown in Figure 1.

Table 1. Locations of study sites

Ainslie Nature Reserve	(Ainslie)	35° 17' 00" S, 149° 09' 00" E
Bulgar Creek	(Bulgar)	350 21' 30" S, 149° 00' 10" E
Callum Brae	(Callum)	35° 21' 50" S, 149° 07' 40" E
Cotter Arboretum	(Cotter)	350 20' 18" S, 148° 59' 05" E
Hall	(Hall)	350 10' 17" S, 149° 04' 08" E
Kowen	(Kowen)	35° 18' 42" S, 149° 14' 28" E
Lambrigg	(Lambrigg)	350 27' 40" S, 149° 02' 50" E
Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve	(Mulligans)	350 09' 47" S, 149° 10' 24" E
Stirling Park	(Stirling)	35° 18' 30" S, 149° 06' 00" E
Urambi Hills Nature Reserve	(Urambi)	35° 24' 13" S, 149° 03' 13" E

Figure 1. Location of study sites in the ACT in 1994.



Tree species composition and relative abundance differed considerably from one site to another. The dominant tree species included mainly Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* and Blakely's Red Gum *E. blakelyi* in most sites, but Yellow Box predominated in Hall, and Blakely's Red Gum predominated in Urambi. Associated tree species, if present, included Apple Box *E. bridgesiana,* Scribbly Gum *E. rossii,* Red Stringybark *E. macrorhyncha* and Brittle Gum *E. mannifera.* Exotic tree species, such as the White Poplar *Populus alba* and Velvet Ash *Fraxinus velutina,* were common at Stirling. Where livestock grazing had been excluded from some of the sites for a sufficiently long time (e.g. Ainslie, and some parts of Mulligans and Callum), a dense shrub cover of eucalypt regrowth and acacias predominated, interspersed with patches of Kangaroo Grass *Themeda australis.* However, where grazing still occurs (e.g. Kowen, Hall and Bulgar, and some parts of Callum), the ground cover tends to be dominated by exotic grass and herbaceous species, e.g., Phalaris *Phalaris aquatica* and rye grasses *Lolium* spp. Small patches of native grasses may still occur in these sites, but with Spear Grass *Austrostipa bigeniculata* and/or Wallaby Grass *Austrodanthonia* spp., and/or Red Grass *Bothriochloa macra* dominating instead of Kangaroo Grass. Exotic shrub species such as Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus,* Sweet Briar *Rosa rubiginosa,* pyracantha *Pyracantha* spp. and cotoneaster *Cotoneaster* spp. dominated the understorey at Stirling.

Fixed-width strip transects were systematically located at a minimum distance of 500 m apart from one another in each of the study sites. The number of strip transects ranged from one in sites less than 30 ha to six in those greater than 180 ha. A total of 28 strip transects were set up. The strip transects were 200 m in length and 60 m in width. They were set up in the field with a 50 m tape and a prismatic compass. Boundaries of the transects were flagged at approximately 50-m intervals.

I traversed the centre line of each strip transect at a steady rate of 50 m per 10 min, checking the time at 50-m intervals to achieve uniform speed. Bird species and numbers within the transect strip were recorded only when birds were seen. This excluded birds flying overhead, except those which were foraging or hunting in the air space within the strip. Bird calls were used only as an aid to the location and identification of birds. Further details of the methodology are described in Er *et al.* (1995).

The study was conducted from March 1994 to December 1994 inclusive. Each study site was sampled four times, once during autumn (March to May), winter (June to August), spring (September to November) and summer (December). Bird surveys were confined to the period 7:00 to 9:00 h on each day, and days without rain or strong wind.

Results and discussion

A total of 3210 detections of 94 bird species was made across the ten study

sites over the ten months (Table 3). Overall, mean bird density was approximately 22.8 birds/ha, peaking in winter (24.8 birds/ha) and spring (25.1 birds/ha). The observed peak in bird density in spring could be explained by the return of summer migrants, such as the Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus,* Dusky Woodswallow *Artamus cyanopterus,* Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris,* Western Gerygone *Gerygone fusca* and White-throated Gerygone *G. olivacea.*

On the other hand, the high bird density in winter was unexpected. This was the result of a surge in the numbers of thornbills (i.e. Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa,* Buff-rumped Thornbill *A. reguloides* and Striated Thornbill *A. lineata).* This suggests that woodland remnants may provide important food sources (such as lerps, manna and honeydew) and shelter against the cold winds for birds in winter, as compared to open pasture land or open fields that border many of these remnants (Er & Tidemann 1996).

The overall mean bird density is consistent with those observed by other authors in similar eucalypt woodland habitat in south-eastern Australia (e.g. 22.5 birds/ha in Armidale (Ford & Bell 1981), 17.5-25 birds/ha in Bombala (Shields & Recher 1984)).

The fragmentation of eucalypt woodlands in the ACT by pastoral land and urban development appears to favour ground-foraging bird species. Out of ten bird species with the highest number of detections in this survey, seven were ground foraging species (Table 2). This included the Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius,* Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen,* Superb Fairywren *Malurus cyaneus,* Buff-rumped Thornbill and White-winged Chough *Corcorax melanorhamphos.* This is perhaps the result of increased open spaces created by pastoral fields and lawns.

Another important observation is that of the ten species with the highest number of detections, three species are cavity nesters. These include the Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans,* the Eastern Rosella and the Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris,* an introduced species. At the same time, the Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus,* which is comparable in body size as the other rosellas, was less commonly detected. This echoes the concern that the lack of cavity resources and competition from introduced species (i.e. the Common Starling and the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis)* in existing woodland remnants may have an impact on the persistence of native cavity nesters (e.g. Er 1994; Er *et al.* 1998; Pell

Table 2. The ten bird species with the highest number of detections

Species	Foraging Height	Number of Detections (after Er 1995)
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Ground	454
Crimson Rosella	Canopy	294
Eastern Rosella	Ground	159
Australian Magpie	Ground	121
Superb Fairy-wren	Ground	124
Buff-rumped Thornbill	Ground	112
Common Starling	Ground	104
White-winged Chough	Ground	92
Weebill	Canopy	83
Striated Thornbill	Canopy	81

Notable rarities in this survey included the Diamond Firetail *Stagonopleura guttata*, Jacky Winter *Microeca fascinans*, Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata* and Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis*. The low numbers of these species in this survey reinforces the notion that these species are in decline (Taylor & COG 1992). The Diamond Firetail was observed on three occasions, twice in Callum and once in Urambi. These observations were made in habitat that was dominated by eucalypt regrowth (Er & Wong 1994). The Jacky Winter and Hooded Robin were observed on three occasions and once respectively in Callum, Mulligans and Bulgar. These observations were made within woodlands that were open and with little shrub cover. Last but not least, the Southern Whiteface was observed on two occasions in Callum where fallen woody debris could be found. The importance of maintaining fallen woody debris is further emphasized by the dependence of the Brown Treecreeper *Climacteris picumnus* on this substrate for nesting and foraging. In this survey, Brown Treecreepers were only observed in Ainslie, Callum and Mulligans, where coarse woody debris appears to be in greater abundance.

1994 was one of the dryest years on record. An annual rainfall of 383.4 mm was recorded for Canberra in 1994. This was almost half the mean annual rainfall of 632.8 mm recorded over a 55-year period since 1939. Hence, it is not surprising that several nomadic species were detected during the survey. This included the Masked Woodswallow *Artamus personatus*, Little Lorikeet *Glossopsitta pusilla* and Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii.*

From this survey, it is evident that some bird species were already rare. These species have a higher risk of local extinction. It is important that the conservation status of these species be determined so that appropriate management can be undertaken urgently, especially since woodland remnants around Canberra are under constant threat from urban expansion and development.

Table 3. List of Bird Species and Number of Detections in Study Sites

	Ainslie				**Bulgar**								**Cotter**				**Hall**			
	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su
Brown Quail																				
Australian Wood Duck		2	7	3	2	2	5		6	4	6	3								
Pacific Black Duck			2			2				2		2								
Little Pied Cormorant											1									
White-faced Heron												1								
Australian White Ibis								1												
Black-shouldered Kite																				
Whistling Kite																				
Brown Goshawk																			2	
Wedge-tailed Eagle										1										
Nankeen Kestrel										1										
Crested Pigeon	2				1	1	1	3	1	1										
Gang-gang Cockatoo		2	2																	
Galah	8	6	2	4	2	4	3	3	10	8	8	4		2		2			4	2
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo		2			2	2	2		15	4	2	8		2					2	3
Little Lorikeet										2										
Australian King-Parrot	1				2					2										
Crimson Rosella	26	28	34	19	3	8	6	7	16	14	20	13	2	2	1		2		6	6
Eastern Rosella	11	10	26	12	8	6	7	8	4	10	8	11			2		2	2	2	2
Red-rumped Parrot	2	2	2			4		2	10	8	4	2								
Pallid Cuckoo											1	1								
Fan-tailed Cuckoo			2				2					2								
Horsfield's Brnze-Cuckoo			1								1	1								
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo												1								
Laughing Kookaburra	1	6	1	4		1	1			2	1	2	1							
Dollarbird				1				1				1								
Wh-throated Treecreeper	2	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	2				1			1	
Brown Treecreeper		3	3							2	3									
Superb Fairy-wren	8	10	12	13					3	5	6	3						5		
Spotted Pardalote	3	3	1				1			7										
Striated Pardalote		3	3			2	3	3		2	6	8								2
White-browed Scrubwren	2	1	5	5													1	1		
Speckled Warbler	1	1	1	2																
Weebill	8	3	2	2	2				4	3	8	6	1	1	3		3	3	3	
Western Gerygone			1	1							1									2
White-throated Gerygone			5	5				2	2		6	2								1
Brown Thornbill	1	3	9	7							3	2								1
Buff-rumped Thornbill		8	3	5	3		3		7	9	3	3					6	9	3	6
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	14	33	9	10	12	24	9	4	10	22	15	16	3	6	3	3	25	16	9	12
Yellow Thornbill	3	1	2	2															3	3
Striated Thornbill	3	7	6	3						3						2	3	8		
Southern Whiteface											2	3								
Red Wattlebird	4																			
Noisy Friarbird			7	2				2			12	5								
Noisy Miner	5	3	3	7	2	4	4	8		4	3						3			2
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	10	3	2	3								2								
White-eared Honeyeater	7	8	1	3					3											2

	Kowen				**Lambrigg**				**Mulligans**				**Stirling**				**Urambi**			
	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su
Brown Quail																			2	
Australian Wood Duck												6								
Pacific Black Duck																				
Little Pied Cormorant																				
White-faced Heron												1								
Australian White Ibis																				
Black-shouldered Kite																		1		
Whistling Kite			1																	
Brown Goshawk																				
Wedge-tailed Eagle		1									1									
Nankeen Kestrel															1					
Crested Pigeon																				
Gang-gang Cockatoo																				
Galah	1		2			2		2	1	2							2		2	2
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo		4	3	6						4	4			2						
Little Lorikeet																				
Australian King-Parrot																				
Crimson Rosella	4	4	2	3	2	2	4	2	8	10	10	14	2	2	2			4	4	2
Eastern Rosella	2	2	2	2					4	6	4	4		2						
Red-rumped Parrot														2	2	2				
Pallid Cuckoo																			1	
Fan-tailed Cuckoo			1				1													
Horsfield's Brnze-Cuckoo																				
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo			1																	
Laughing Kookaburra			1	1		1		1	1	1	2	2								
Dollarbird																				
Wh-throated Treecreeper		1				1	1		5	2	4	7								
Brown Treecreeper									2	1	4									
Superb Fairy-wren				3	3	3	3	9		3			5	3	6	6	3	2	3	4
Spotted Pardalote										6	2									
Striated Pardalote												2			4	6			3	2
White-browed Scrubwren					2	2	2	2					1	1	2	3		1		
Speckled Warbler						1				1	2					2				
Weebill	**1**		4	3	3				9	2	4	1	3	1						
Western Gerygone							1				3									
White-throated Gerygone			1	1			2	2			6	4								
Brown Thornbill					2	3	7	5		7	3				3					
Buff-rumped Thornbill	3	3	3	3		2			6	12	9	3								
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	16	24	9	12	7	7	4	6	24	20	14	27	3	3	2		8	10	3	
Yellow Thornbill									6	8	3	1								
Striated Thornbill				1	6	16	6	3	2	8	4									
Southern Whiteface																				
Red Wattlebird																				
Noisy Friarbird											9	2								
Noisy Miner	2		1	2						2										
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	3	3	3	2	3			2	1		4						2			
White-eared Honeyeater	2		2	2	1	3		2	1			3								

	Ainslie				**Bulgar**				**Callum**				**Cotter**				**Hall**			
	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su
Fuscous Honeyeater										2		1								
Wh-plumed Honeyeater	1		1						3	9	3	5					1	I		
Brown-head Honeyeater		9	3	3																
White-naped Honeyeater	25		1	2		1						1	1							
Eastern Spinebill			1	2																
Jacky Winter						1				1										
Scarlet Robin		2	2				2		3	5	2			1				4		
Red-capped Robin																				
Flame Robin									4	6										
Hooded Robin																				
Varied Sittella		1	1															2		
Crested Shrike-tit	3																			
Golden Whistler		2								1		1						2		
Rufous Whistler			7	4			4	2	1		7	1							2	I
Grey Shrike-thrush	I		I	1			1	1		1		1					1	1		
Leaden Flycatcher			2																2	
Restless Flycatcher																				
Magpie-lark	2	1				1	3	4	2	1	4	7							5	3
Rufous Fantail																				
Grey Fantail		1	3	3		1	2	3		3	4	2			6			1	2	1
Willie Wagtail		1	1	1			2		2	1	1				1			1	I	
Blk-faced Cuckoo-shrike			I	3			1										1			1
White-winged Triller											2	1								
Olive-backed Oriole			1	1							1	2								
Masked Woodswallow											2	2								
Wh-browed Woodswallow			2								2	3								
Dusky Woodswallow			2	2			4				4	6								
Australian Magpie	10	7	9	4	3	2	1		6	7	7	8	2	1	1	1	5	4	4	4
Pied Currawong	18	9	4	5	1				1										2	2
Grey Currawong							1													
Australian Raven		2		2		2	4		4	1	9	4								2
White-winged Chough		5	6	8	3	13	3	4	9	7	6	6		4					3	
Skylark									1											
Richard's Pipit																				
House Sparrow																				
Double-barred Finch																				
Red-browed Finch	3		2		3					4								3		
Diamond Firetail									2		2									
European Goldfinch			3						4	2										
Mistletoebird																				
Welcome Swallow	1	1	2	3		1	2		4	2	2	4								
Tree Martin			2	2			7			2	5									
Fairy Martin											2									
Silvereye		2								3										
Common Blackbird		3								1										
Common Starling		3		14	25	3	3	11	7	2	4	3					2	2	6	I
Common Myna								3	1											

	Kowen				**Lambrigg**				**Mulligans**				**Stirling**				**Urambi**			
	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su	Au	Wi	Sp	Su
Fuscous Honeyeater																				
Wh-plumed Honeyeater									1		2						1			
Brown-head Honeyeater																				
White-naped Honeyeater																				
Eastern Spinebill																				
Jacky Winter									1											
Scarlet Robin	1	2							3	4										
Red-capped Robin														2						
Flame Robin										2										
Hooded Robin											2									
Varied Sittella																				
Crested Shrike-tit																				
Golden Whistler		1								1				1				1		
Rufous Whistler			2				1	4			6	7								
Grey Shrike-thrush	1	2	1			1			1	1	2	1	1							
Leaden Flycatcher											2	1								
Restless Flycatcher				1																
Magpie-lark		1		4								2								
Rufous Fantail																1				
Grey Fantail		1	3				4	1		2	6	3		1	2	2		1	1	
Willie Wagtail	1		3				1	1	1	2			2	1				1		
Blk-faced Cuckoo-shrike	1		1								1	2			2					1
White-winged Triller												1				4				
Olive-backed Oriole												2								
Masked Woodswallow																				
Wh-browed Woodswallow																				
Dusky Woodswallow							4	2			4	2								
Australian Magpie	2	4	5	3		2			3	5	6	7						1		
Pied Currawong	10	6		2									2							
Grey Currawong			1									2								
Australian Raven		2	4			1	2				4			2	2					
White-winged Chough		5								7	3									
Skylark																				
Richard's Pipit											1									
House Sparrow									1											
Double-barred Finch					4		4	2					4	2						
Red-browed Finch					2												5		2	2
Diamond Firetail									1											
European Goldfinch																				
Mistletoebird				1				1												
Welcome Swallow						1	2	3	4	1	2						1	1		
Tree Martin							2				2								2	
Fairy Martin																				
Silvereye					13	14	3	3	8				6	8	3	4	2	3		
Common Blackbird																				
Common Starling			5						2						3		2	1	4	1
Common Myna									4							5			3	

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RECENT SIGHTINGS OF THE WHITE-BROWED BABBLER IN THE ACT REGION

Nicki Taws
PO Box 348, Jamison Centre ACT 2614

On 12 January 2001 a White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus* subsp. *gilgandra* was recorded in a 10-year-old tree planting on private property adjoining the Yass River, 13 km north-west of Gundaroo. The bird was observed for about 20 minutes from a distance of between 5 and 20 metres. It was first noticed feeding around the base and lower trunk of a River Peppermint *Eucalyptus elata,* probing amongst the ribbons of loose bark hanging from the trunk. When approached it moved to a line of Wyalong Wattle *Acacia cardiophylla* and began foraging vigorously amongst the abundant litter beneath these shrubs, digging and flicking litter with its beak. It gave occasional chirring and chattering noises and a quiet mewing. After 10 minutes fossicking under the wattles it hopped into the low branches of a Ribbon Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis* and inspected the loose bark ribbons around the trunk. It then flew off along the line of tree planting in the direction of the Yass River and was not seen again. The bird was apparently on its own, a situation uncharacteristic of the species, and of babblers in general which usually live in groups of 3-15 (Pizzey 1983, Schodde and Tidemann 1988). The record was reported to COG's Rarities Panel and was endorsed (COG 2001).

The White-browed Babbler is distributed across southern Australia, and has recently been differentiated into four subspecies (Schodde and Mason 1999). The subspecies of the ACT region, *gilgandra,* occurs in northern Victoria, south-east Queensland and most of NSW, stretching from the Hay-Hillston plains to the Western Slopes of the Divide. The Yass River record is from the south-eastern edge of the species' documented range, however is of particular significance as there are no known records of the White-browed Babbler from COG's area of interest since the 1950s, and the species is now considered extinct in the ACT (Wilson 1999).

Early records indicate that the species was 'occasional' in the ACT. Barrett (1922) visited the Tuggeranong area in 1921 and mentioned 'the flocks of White-browed Babblers, which hopped from branch to branch of a tree almost within hand's reach'. In 1943 Mathews listed the species as 'occasional — country', and Lamm and White (1950) commented, 'today the Babblers are observed only occasionally'. John Calaby in the early 1950s wrote of the White-browed Babbler, 'Rare. Seen a few times on the road behind Mt Stromlo and the back road to Yass... No nesting records.' (Calaby 2000). And Harry Frith, probably referring to this same group wrote, 'until at least 1950 a group existed near Mount Stromlo..... perhaps the remnant of an earlier invasion' (Frith 1969).

The loss of this species from the ACT is mirrored across south-eastern NSW

where the White-browed Babbler is just one of a suite of woodland birds reported to be declining from agricultural landscapes (Reid 1999). The next nearest report of a White-browed Babbler is of interest because it is also very recent and only 4 km north of COG's area of interest. On 17 June 2001 four observers (Vicki Taws, Tony Saunders, Noelene Saunders and Cathy Goswell) found a party of 15 White-browed Babblers while surveying the property 'Dalton Park' near the town of Dalton and about 10 km north-west of Gunning. The birds were foraging at the edge of a large block of c. 50-year-old regenerating bushland of Red Stringybark *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha.* At this site large mature trees are scarce and most cover is provided by young stringybark, a few piles of logs and a fairly dense shrub layer of Sifton Bush or Chinese Scrub *Cassinia arcuata*. This native shrub is considered a woody weed in the region, colonising disturbed ground and neglected farmland, but it provides useful cover for birds requiring shrubby habitats.

In the late 1980s a party of White-browed Babblers was seen in the Blakney Creek area, 15 km north-west of Dalton and about 24 km north of Yass (Brendan Lepschi pers. comm.). Further afield, several groups are known to occur in the Boorowa Shire (Anthony Overs pers. comm.).

White-browed Babblers are generally considered to be sedentary and can usually be found with regularity at the same site over a number of years. However in some areas they are known to be nomadic in the non-breeding season (Baldwin 1975). The Yass River record of a single bird is unusual and may have been of a young male dispersing from the family party. If this was so, it is unlikely that the bird would be more than 20 km from the main group (Anthony Overs _pers. comm.). The location on the Yass River is only 4 km from some large (>100 hectare) remnants along the Mundoonen Range, and about 12 km from the Mundoonen Nature Reserve. This seems to be the most likely location for a family of White-browed Babblers from which the individual might have dispersed. 'Dalton Park' is 24 km in a direct line from the Yass River, but with mostly cleared farmland in between it seems improbable that a single White-browed Babbler would traverse so far across an inhospitable landscape.

Between Dalton and Blakney Creek and on to Boorowa the native vegetation is fragmented into remnants of varying size and quality, nearly all on private property. It is quite possible that other parties of White-browed Babblers exist through this area, but finding them could be problematic because of difficulties with obtaining access to suitable habitat. Within COG's area, permission can be obtained from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service to access Mundoonen Nature Reserve, and searches in the reserve may prove fruitful.

The single White-browed Babbler on the Yass River was discovered during a survey of revegetated sites as part of the Birdwatch project (Taws 2000). Birdwatch is a collaboration between Greening Australia, COG and CSIRO looking at the birdlife in revegetated sites of different age, size and shape in

the ACT and Southern Tablelands region. A major reason for the decline of the White-browed Babbler and many other woodland birds in the region is the loss and fragmentation of habitat (Ford *et al* 2001). To halt and reverse this decline, it is widely accepted that native vegetation cover needs to be restored to the landscape, however the scale, configuration and context of revegetation that will most benefit bird life is not known. The use by White-browed Babblers of a 10-year-old tree planting on the Yass River and 50-year-old regeneration at 'Dalton Park' is an encouraging sign that appropriate revegetation can benefit even the declining bird species.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the owners of the two properties for permission to conduct the surveys, and to Brendan Lepschi and Anthony Overs for comments on White-browed Babblers in the region.

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FINDING SOLUTIONS TO THE BIODIVERSITY CRISIS IN OUR TEMPERATE AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES

Julian Reid

Visiting Scientist, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems
GPO Box 284, Canberra ACT 2601

Introduction

Many studies are documenting the rapid decline of some of our once-common woodland bird species. These species are intermittently being added to Territory, State and National Lists of Threatened and Endangered Species, and the Hooded Robin is a prime local example. The conclusions I drew from a study I undertook for the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service last year are more depressing, however, than we first thought. I found that most of our woodland bird species show a significant decline in reporting rate as the level of habitat clearance increases, measured at the scale of ten-minute squares of latitude and longitude. The data I modelled derive from the original *Birds Australia* Field Atlas, which means they are 20 years out of date. These field data were being gathered (by you and me) in ignorance of what we now know to be a pervasive and very pressing issue, but what can society — individuals, landholders, landcare and local catchment groups, government agencies, bird conservation societies etc. — do to redress the problem? Some of my thoughts on this topic, extracted from my report, are presented below.

Recommendations for landscape reconstruction in the NSW Sheep-Wheat Belt

In landscapes where vegetation clearance for agricultural development continues, reasoned if inevitably arbitrary stopping rules need to be advanced from the biodiversity conservation perspective. Here I propose a set of clearance guidelines from this perspective. They have been formulated from the broader biodiversity perspective than birds alone. While outside the scope of this report it has to be acknowledged that the potential for land degradation (e.g. salinity hazard assessment) should also inform policy development and implementation in this regard. Nor should it need stating that appropriate and sympathetic financial mechanisms will need to be developed to allow the effective implementation of clearance regulations. From the biodiversity perspective, I assume that landscapes or districts are of the order of 300 km^2, and that a prior vegetation survey has been conducted for the entire landscape so that all patches (down to 1 ha) have been mapped and classified into broad vegetation communities.

Stopping Rule 1, Habitat Rarity Principle: Defined vegetation communities should not be cleared below 1% of the total landscape area (e.g. 3 km^2); this applies whether the community is naturally rare locally or if it has become rare through past clearance.

Stopping Rule 2, Habitat Conservation and Ecosystem Function Principle: Defined vegetation communities

should not be cleared below 30% of their original extent in that landscape.

Stopping Rule 3, Landscape and Regional Conservation Principle: In toto, all broad-acre clearance should cease if 50% or more of the landscape is cleared.

Landscape reconstruction in those landscapes where broad-acre land clearance is no longer an issue should focus on the protection and enhancement of existing natural vegetation. The major imperative is to prevent the deterioration in habitat quality of existing remnants, particularly remnants in the small to medium size class (15-250 ha). Principal threats facing these types of patches are firewood harvesting, cleaning up the understorey, over-heavy and continuous grazing, and insufficient regeneration.

In salinity-prone districts the protection of existing remnants may involve extensive revegetation efforts targeted at recharge zones. However, in most cases where biodiversity enhancement is the principal aim, the benefits from revegetation are likely to be greater from increasing the size of existing small remnants rather than growing new patches. The benefits should be even greater if existing patches that provide linkages in extensively cleared landscapes are expanded. Existing roadside and riparian corridor remnants provide the logical focus for these revegetation activities. The principle for adding onto existing remnants rather than starting from scratch can be extended to 'remnants' consisting only of scattered indigenous trees — these big old warhorses provide habitat resources that young trees cannot.

The most cost-effective rehabilitation, patch enlargement and patch enhancement procedures will be those where direct revegetation activities, necessarily expensive, can be minimised or eliminated altogether. Fencing off, reducing grazing pressure and frequency, encouraging natural regeneration with disturbances are examples of measures that can be applied in areas where some of the original vegetation diversity and soil seed stocks remain. These landscapes, where grazing of unimproved and natural pastures is the predominant land use, comprise a minority of agricultural lands, but they provide the greatest potential for broad-acre, relatively cheap restoration, provided they are taken out of intensive and continuous livestock production.

In medium- to medium-large sized remnants (e.g. 50-1000 ha), while management of grazing pressure remains an important issue, the opportunity exists to take a deliberate interventionist approach to management, and to enhance biodiversity through implementing patchy habitat disturbances. The aim here is to present a greater range of habitat stages, structural types and niches for a wide range of organisms. There are many examples on private (and public) land of large patches of open forest and woodland of a uniform composition and stand structure, presumably arising from a past disturbance or clearance. If the trees are closely spaced there is often little undergrowth present. The creation of open patches within these stands would undoubtedly allow them to support a greater diversity of species.

Large remnants are generally State-owned and managed for various uses.

e.g. protection of water quality, timber production, conservation. Management for the continuation of natural disturbance regimes and broad-scale ecological processes should be encouraged in these reserves, particularly in the largest of them. Again, a mix of habitat types distributed across a range of successional states should be the driving biodiversity objective. These larger blocks of near-natural and semi-natural vegetation bear the major responsibility for the continued persistence of many, probably most, of the declining bird species in the Sheep- Wheat Belt in the immediate and medium-term future.

A problem remains — where precisely and to what formula should rehabilitation and revegetation efforts take priority and be targeted? Should restoration funds and effort be expended evenly throughout the Sheep-Wheat Belt, or should a greater proportion be given to the most beleaguered landscapes, or to those in best condition? The only practical advice that can be tendered on these questions flows from the belief that increasing the area of 'habitat of some indeterminate threshold of quality' is the single most important action society can take. Therefore, the investment of funds in protecting and—enhancing the quality of existing remnants (e.g. fencing and grazing management) and in increasing the size of remnants through natural processes of regeneration where this is possible (again fencing, grazing management, with some site preparation as needed) might produce the biggest bang for the buck. In terms of social equity, however, an even expenditure across landscapes would be fairest. For practical reasons there are sound arguments for engaging, at the outset at least, with those rural communities which embrace the imperative for landscape reconstruction and demonstrate a high level commitment to achieving change.

Extracted from:

Reid, J.R.W. (2000). *Threatened and declining birds in the New South Wales Sheep-Wheat Belt: II. Landscape relationships — modelling bird atlas data against vegetation cover.* Consultancy report to NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Canberra.

THE SWIFT PARROT RECOVERY PROJECT

Debbie Saunders
National Parks and Wildlife Service
PO Box 2115, Queanbeyan, NSW, 2620

The Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor is a* slim, medium-sized parrot with angular pointed wings and a slender pointed tail. It is mostly bright green in colour with a prominent red face, chin and throat, narrowly bordered with yellow; it has a patch of dark blue on the crown and red at the carpal joint and red patches on the tertials; and a dusky red uppertail. In flight, it shows prominent red underwing and tail coverts. The female is slightly duller than the male; juveniles have a pale orange bill and dark brown iris. In flight, it is superficially similar to the Musk Lorikeet which is also about 25 cm in length, but it can be distinguished by its mellow piping call (unlike the lorikeet screech), having red under both its tail and its wings when in flight, its slimmer build, and a distinctly longer finely pointed tail (Higgins 1999).

The Swift Parrot is endemic to south-eastern Australia; it breeds in Tasmania, and migrates to mainland Australia in autumn (see Fig. 1). The parrots are known to use the box-ironbark forests of the Victorian goldfields as well as the New South Wales Western Slopes and coast. In Victoria and the NSW Western Slopes, eucalypts provide a source of winter nectar and lerp. Red Ironbark *Eucalyptus tricarpa,* Mugga Ironbark *E. sideroxylon,* - Western Grey Box *E. microcarpa,* White Box *E. albens* and Yellow Gum *E. leucoxylon* are the main species that attract the Swift Parrots, along with an array of honeyeaters and lorikeets.

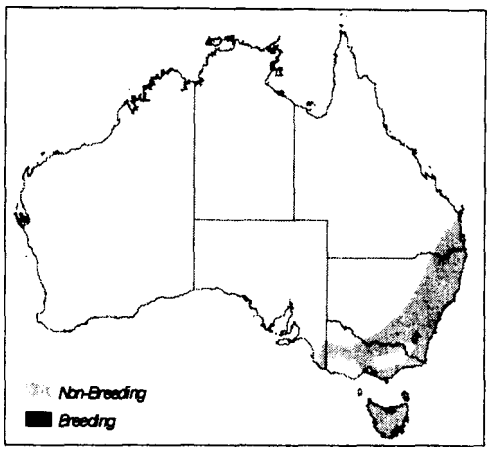

Fig. 1 Swift Parrot distribution

On the New South Wales coast, they use stands of Swamp Mahogany *E. robusta* and Spotted Gum *Corymbia maculata* which flower in winter, and attract many honeyeaters and lorikeets as well as Swift Parrots. Swift Parrots also feed among flowering Forest Redgum *E. tereticornis* in south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales, and in Red Bloodwood *Corymbia gummifera* stands in south-east New South Wales.

The species feeds largely on nectar and lerps. As a result, the distribution of the species varies from year to year, because many of the eucalypts on which it feeds flower with varying intensity from year to year. For example, surveys in the Capertee Valley have uncovered as many as 250 Swift Parrots, but on surveys at other times there have been no Swift Parrots recorded there.

A comprehensive knowledge base of sites used by Swift Parrots on the mainland is needed if we are to improve the management of the species overall. The last population estimate for Swift Parrots was 940 pairs in 1994/95 (Brereton 1996). The species is considered to be nationally endangered. It has lost a great deal of its habitat in both Tasmania and on the mainland, but it is not known whether habitat loss in Tasmania or on the mainland is the primary cause of the decline in numbers.

As a result, mainland surveys have been set up to improve our knowledge of where the parrots go in autumn and winter. Observers are asked to record any areas they survey on the designated survey weekends and report on the presence or absence of Swift Parrots. It is hoped that the information gained from the surveys will help detect patterns of movement, identify important foraging locations and determine how frequently they are used. This information can then be used to assist in the conservation of Swift Parrot habitat.

The surveys are becoming increasingly successful with a total of 1809 Swift Parrots recorded during the May 2001 survey. This is 562 records more than the previously most successful count in August 2000 (1247 Swift Parrots). The majority of records were from Victoria (1646) with the NSW records (163) being confined to the South Coast and Central/South West Slopes. There have been no records from Queensland or South Australia this year. In the May survey 2001 over 80 volunteers completed and submitted over 300 survey forms.

Victoria

The May 2001 survey resulted in a record total of 1646 Swift Parrots being recorded from Victoria. The region containing the largest number of Swift Parrots was the Rushworth area with 637 records. The North-East, St Arnaud and Maryborough/Dunolly regions each had over 280 Swift Parrots recorded and the Bendigo region had 147 records. No records were received from the Southern Victoria and Gippsland regions for this survey. The major food sources were nectar and lerps on Grey Box, Red Ironbark and Yellow Gum. Swift Parrots were also recorded before the May survey in the Rushworth, Bendigo and Maryborough/Dunnolly regions.

New South Wales

The May 2001 survey resulted in 163 Swift Parrots being recorded from NSW. The region containing the largest number of Swift Parrots was the South Coast with 107 records. Swift Parrots were also recorded from Boorowa (Gunnary Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR)) (50) and Tarcutta (Mates Gully TSR) (2) in the South West Slopes, and from the Capertee Valley (4) in the Central West Slopes. No records were received from any other regions of NSW for this survey. On the South Coast the major food source was Spotted Gum nectar and insects amongst the bark of the Broad-leaved Ironbark. On the Western Slopes the major food source was lerps on White Box, Yellow Box and Apple Box *E. bridgesiana.* There was a Swift Parrot recorded on the South Coast prior to the May survey and there have also been individual records from the North Coast (to be confirmed) and Sydney since the survey.

Queensland/South Australia

No records have been received for Queensland this year, however the Forest Redgum flowering is only just about to start.

Table 1. Number of Swift Parrots recorded during the May 2001 Survey

Record sites	**i Total Swift Parrots**
Victoria	
Maryborough-Dunolly	283
North-East	295
Bendigo	147
Rushworth	637
St. Arnaud	284
Southern Victoria	0
Gippsland	0
TOTAL	**1646**
New South Wales	
Central West Slopes	4
South West Slopes	52
South Coast	105
Central Coast	0
North Coast	0
Northern Tablelands	0
North West Slopes	0
Central Tablelands	0
TOTAL	**161**
Queensland	**0**
South Australia	**0**
Mainland Australia	**1807**

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The next Swift Parrot survey is to be held on the weekend of 4-5 August 2001, covering Victoria, New South Wales, the ACT and southern Queensland. Enquiries to: Debbie Saunders, Swift Parrot Project Officer, **if** *1800 66 57 66 (Freecall) or 02 6298 9733. Email:* debbie.saunders@npws.nsw.gov.au

ODD OBS

Raptor prey?

'Rocky Knob' is a small suburban reserve in Narrabundah featuring a bare rounded hilltop with 360 degree views of its immediate approaches, as well as more distant vistas. It is sometimes used as a feeding spot for raptors. Every few months I find there a recently part-eaten bird, generally a Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla* or Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca.*

At 7:30 h on 29 May 2001 **I** found the usual tell-tale downy breast feathers (pure white, this time) spread around a rough circle about 5-6 m across, and in the centre one bare pink leg and a piece of some unidentified internal organ. About 10 m away I found the rest of the body of the victim, with wings, tail, intact head and bony structure, but lacking flesh from breast, flanks and legs. It was an adult Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*, apparently eaten within the previous hour or so. I have no doubt that this was the work of a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, a species which can often be seen over the nearby Mount Mugga and Red Hill reserves. Although Australian Hobbies *Falco longipennis* are more frequent visitors to Narrabundah, a gull seems too large for a hobby to carry to the area. No cat or fox would have eaten in the manner indicated.

It can only be a matter for speculation where the gull was caught. Possibly it was one of a group that had roosted for the night near Lake Burley Griffin, or possibly on an Inner South playing field, where it was taken at first light. Over some 13 years observing in the area I have never seen a live gull near Rocky Knob except for the odd over-flyer in very windy weather.

Geoffrey Dabb
24 Brockman Street, Narrabundah ACT 2604

Autumn migration of honeyeaters across Shoalhaven Valley

In September 2000 (Brookfield 2000) I reported on the massed inward migration of honeyeaters to the Shoalhaven area southwest of Braidwood. The sight was so impressive that I was inspired to return there in the autumn, to see if I could locate the birds on their outward journey.

On Easter Monday 16 April 2001 I returned to the area, just south of Jerrabattgulla Creek, on the back road from Braidwood to Kain. And had another — for me — incredible sighting. Masses of honeyeaters were winging out along the same route as the incoming spring arrivals had used. We (self and doughty driver) counted 5000+ in the 45 minutes from 10:15 h. Just over half were Yellow-faced Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus chrysops*, most of the remainder were White-naped Honeyeaters *Melithreptus lunatus*, plus about 25 Red Wattlebirds *Acanthochaera carunculata.* They were flying fast in an ESE direction, among the trees along the ridge. Small groups made occasional brief stopovers, then joined the exodus again.

I did not find whence they originated (it would take a team of us to do so), but did

going - and it was **not** down the Shoalhaven River valley.

The next day the migration was still in progress, so I walked along their route along the ridge for about three km with honeyeaters whirring over my head. They then flew down a spur and across the Braidwood-Cooma road just north of the Stoney Creek property, then on across the river. They appeared to be making for a notch in the distant hills which would have given them access to the Araluen and Deua valleys. Reports of hundreds arriving hourly in Moruya at that time might be indicative.

The GPS coordinates, for those who might like to help observe next season, are:

Warraganda Corner (right-angled bend on Braidwood-Kain Road)

35 ° 40' 54" S

149° 35' 54" E

Cross-over point on Braidwood-Cooma Road north of Stoney Creek

35 ° 41' 09" S

149 ° 37' 53" E

Map 1:25000 Kain 8826-IV-S

And here's an interesting point. If you draw the line of flight on the map and extrapolate backwards on the 1:100000 maps (Araluen and Michelago), the path cuts the Canberra-Cooma Road just south of Williamsdale — close to the

Reference

Brookfield, M. (2000). Spring migration of honeyeaters. *Canberra Bird Notes* 25: 113-115.

Muriel Brookfield

84 Wybalena Grove, Cook, ACT 2614

Silvereye caught in the web of a Garden Spider

Small birds are known to be caught occasionally in the webs of spiders, in particular the Golden Orb-weaver *Nephila* sp. (Main 1976). In addition to one personal observation, details of 16 published reports (14 of them from McKeown 1963) of birds caught in spiders' webs were provided by Bo ughtwood (1991). Boughtwood ' s paper and one by Debus (1991) were in response to two earlier ones by Maskell (1990) and Cooper (1990). In all cases where an identification was made, the spider proved to be either a Golden Orb-weaver or a Garden Spider *Eriophora biapicata* (another species which makes a large orb web).

Up to autumn 1982 the Garden Spider was a common feature of our garden in Melba, ACT. At one time I estimated there were between 80 and 100 webs suspended from every conceivable anchoring point, including trees, shrubs, powerlines, fences and the house. Walking into these webs, especially at night, was one of the hazards of our life, as it was for unsuspecting visitors.

Since 1982 Garden Spiders have become far less common in our garden. The reason for this decline is unknown, but the winter of 1982 was particularly cold

wholly or partly caused by predation from the increasing number of birds visiting the garden (author's unpublished records).

I have no record of when Garden Spiders first became abundant in the garden. We moved into the house in April 1973 at a time when the area was largely grassland with few trees. My recollection is that small numbers of these spiders were present shortly afterwards, using the house, fence and the growing plants as anchoring points, and their numbers increased as the trees and shrubs grew in size.

On 27 March 1979, at 8:45 h, I found a Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis* caught, *c.* 2 m above the ground, in the bottom of a Garden Spider's web suspended between a Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia* and a Yellow Gum *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*. The bird was wrapped in web, its wings folded against its body, and lying quite still. The spider was in the centre of the web and appeared to be paying no attention to the bird. It is not known whether the bird had been trussed by the spider (which seems unlikely in view of the comparative size and strength of the bird compared with the spider) or whether it had achieved this by its own struggles. It is also unknown how long it had been there, or if it had been bitten by the spider.

I removed the bird and spent about 20 minutes removing web from its wings and body. When released the bird flew off strongly and appeared little the worse for its encounter. It seems unlikely the bird would have freed itself without my intervention. What the spider made of this unexpected catch is anyone's guess.

I thank Ken Simpson and Zoe Wilson for locating details of the articles in *The Bird Observer*.

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David Purchase

5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615

OBITUARY

Gerald Mansell Horey, 1913-2000

Gerald Horey will be remembered in Australian ornithology as the person who organised the pilot study which examined some of the problems involved in undertaking an Australia-wide bird atlas. The study covered an area of 13 608 sq km on the south coast of New South Wales, extending from Jervis Bay in the north to Bermagui in the south and inland to a line running due south from Lake George. This was the first cooperative project using bird-watchers to survey the distribution of birds in Australia and was the precursor to the Atlas of Australian Birds which was undertaken from 1977 to 1981.

Gerald was born in London on 3 December 1913. He joined the Royal Navy in 1932, where he trained as an engineer. He left the navy in 1937 and married Elizabeth (Betty) Coates. Their first daughter, Caroline, was born in 1938 in Shanghai where Gerald was working for British American Tobacco. At the outbreak of war Gerald rejoined the navy but spent much of the war as a prisoner of the Japanese in Hong Kong. Meanwhile Betty gave birth to twins, Piers and Susan, in South Africa.

After the war the family was reunited in England and Gerald resumed his career with British American Tobacco. In 1950 Gerald and Betty moved to South Africa where they lived happily in Cape Town until 1953 when Caroline died of leukemia. Two years later their fourth child, Jeremy, was born in Johannesberg. In 1958, disgusted by apartheid, the family returned to England where Gerald started working as a patent engineer.

In 1964 Betty died suddenly. Three years later Gerald met Shirley Young, a fourth generation Australian. They were married in 1967 and migrated to Australia where Gerald took up a job with the Australian Patent Office in Canberra.

I first met Gerald and Shirley in July 1968 when they attended a meeting of the ACT Branch of the RAOU. Gerald expressed an interest in bird-banding and shortly afterwards began to assist Steve Wilson with his work at various sites in the Brindabella Range and elsewhere. In July 1969 Gerald and Shirley were issued with bird-banding authorities by the Australian Bird-Banding Scheme and in February 1970 Gerald took responsibility for the work at New Chums Road. In December 1971, with the cooperation of other local bird-banders, he began a study of the birds of the Caswell Drive area prior to the actual construction of the road.

Gerald served on the committee of the ACT Branch of the RAOU, and subsequently COG, from June 1969 through to June 1971. In 1972 the idea of an Australian bird atlas was discussed in the RAOU. It was decided to test the feasibility of the project by doing a pilot atlas on the south coast of New South Wales and Gerald was asked to organise this. Gerald managed the pilot atlas under the direction of the Field Investigation Committee of the RAOU

until ill health forced his resignation in October 1973.

Except for six months in Brazil in 1975 helping the Brazilian government to set up a patents system, Gerald and Shirley remained in Canberra until Gerald's retirement in 1977.

When he retired Gerald and Shirley moved to the block of land at Bingie near Moruya on the south coast of New South Wales where Gerald was building their house. To be on the spot they lived in a shed that Gerald had previously constructed on the block. To while away the evenings Gerald revived the ancient Greek he had learnt at school. When they moved into the house he went on to make a new translation of the 24 books of Homer's *Odyssey*. Gerald's translation as yet remains unpublished.

At Bingie, Gerald became involved in many local activities. He was secretary of the Eurobodalla Wood Turners Association, was involved with the group that established the first library in Moruya, and also helped to establish the local community radio station 2EARFM. He played the recorder and was secretary of the South Coast Music Society. He also maintained his interest in environmental matters and was active in the Coastwatchers Association and the Bingie Dune Care group.

Gerald joined the Transcendental Meditation movement in 1969. But by the time he retired he was more interested in Theravadan Buddhism although he continued to meditate regularly. His belief continued to evolve and by 1998 he was fully committed to Tibetan Buddhism.

The last years of Gerald's life were spent quietly indulging his love of reading and listening to music. He died on 11 August 2000.

I am grateful for the help which Shirley and Jeremy Horey gave in the preparation of this obituary.

David Purchase

5 Orchard Place, Melba ACT 2615

COLUMNISTS' CORNER

The editors offer the usual formal disclaimer: 'the views expressed by the columnists are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of COG'.

What Bird is That?: Towards friendlier third-level bird names

Hazocks and Tidings

I have a small book authored by a W. Percival Westell FLS MBOU and published in 1910. It is entitled *British Nesting Birds.* It gives lists, sometimes quite extensive ones, of the 'local names' of each species covered. For example, the following other names are given for the 'Hedge Sparrow':

> Billy, Black Wren, Blue Isaac, Blue Sparrow, Blue Tom, Bush Sparrow, Creepie, Cuddy, Dick Dunnock, Doney, Dunnock, Dykesmavier, Dykie, Field Sparrow, Foolish Sparrow, Grosbeak, Hatcher, Hazock, Hedge Accentor, Hedge Bettie, Hedge Chanter, Hedge Chat, Hedge Chicken, Hedge Creeper, Hedge Mike, Hedge Warbler, Hempie, Muffitie, Phip, Pinnock, Shuffle-Wing, Titling, Whin Sparrow, Winter Fauvette.

Of all those names, it might be noted that `Dunnock' has now triumphed over `Hedge Sparrow' and emerged as the most generally accepted (by, for example, the authoritative *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa* **— `BWP').**

Consider another example. Mr Westell's `Redbreast' *Erithacus rubecula* had the following other names:

> Bob, Bobbie, Bobrobin, Brow-Rhuddyn, Robin, Robin Redbreast, Robinet, Ruddock, Tommi-Liden.

Of those competitors it was 'Robin' that became generally accepted (including by BWP). However, that is not the end of the story. The 1998 *Concise* sequel to BWP noted that a provisional list of internationally proposed uniform English-language names would transform this into 'European Robin'. Similarly, many other 'British breeder' one-word names, taking examples from those favoured by Westell in 1910 and which have persisted to and since BWP, would be changed to longer names as follows:

Blackbird	Common Blackbird
Bullfinch	Eurasian Bullfinch
Chaffinch	Common Chaffinch
Chough	Red-billed Chough
Coot	Eurasian Coot
Cormorant	Great Cormorant
Cuckoo	Common Cuckoo
Dipper	White-throated Dipper
Dotterel	Eurasian Dotterel
Gannet	Northern Gannet
Goldfinch	European Goldfinch
Greenfinch	European Greenfinch
Goshawk	Northern Goshawk
Kestrel	Common Kestrel
Kingfisher	Common Kingfisher

Marsh Hawks and Northern Harriers

This, of course, is the price of international rationalisation. Will British birders accept these new names as the standard coinage? If some - or even most, outside of publishers and other official users - do not, two levels of

names (or three, with scientific names), would be a tolerable state of affairs.

I remember in the 1980s taking a guided small-boat tour of Okefenokee Swamp, Georgia, USA. The informative Afro-American guide complained pointedly, as he did routinely no doubt, about having to say 'Northern Harrier' instead of 'Marsh Hawk'. He had no choice in his job, of course. 'Marsh Hawk' would probably cause needless puzzlement to the foreign tickers and field-guide-consulters. I'd like to think he still said `Marsh Hawk' to his family and friends, though.

Let's now take a look at the relatively prescriptive development of Australian bird names. For present purposes it's not necessary to go back beyond the 1926 RAOU list of names, which built on earlier unifying efforts. (An indication of the *origin* of individual Australian bird names — nearly all of them - may be found in J.D. McDonald's *The Illustrated Dictionary of Australian Birds by Common Name.)* The 1926 list introduced a few new names, but its main contribution was the specification of a single 'official' name for each recognized species. Apart from their required use for RAOU purposes, these were widely popularised by their use `with few exceptions' in Neville Cayley's *What Bird Is That?,* first published in 1931.

The 1926 list was influential, but not universally followed. In 1969 the CSIRO published a catalogue of different names for each Australian species, being 'names considered as in reasonable current use in recent times'. It was intended mainly as a guide for government officers who were finding it difficult to interpret 'the varied nomenclature in use in different parts of the Commonwealth and by different categories of clients (professed ornithologists, aviculturists, lay observers), who might use different names for the one species'. The list gave 25 such names for the Laughing Kookaburra, 17 for the Grey-crowned Babbler, 11 for the Rufous Whistler.

In the 1970s, world lists of bird species, with English-language names, began to be published. Given an adequate system of scientific names, this was not strictly necessary for scientific purposes. The *Checklist of the Birds of the World* of J.L. Peters and others, which began publication in 1931, gave English names in only two of its many volumes, the editors later commenting on the controversy they generated by the attempt.

Professional ornithologists have shown themselves quite capable of — and even happier with — using scientific names exclusively. The customers for comprehensive lists of English names are birdwatchers of the non- or semi-scientific variety. Their hobby (or business) depends on having one species, one set of identifiers (however elusive) and an acceptable name. Hence in 1976 Edward Gruson published his complete world list of species with English names, and began with the words: 'This is a book for "listers" and "tickers"'.

Two years before that, James Clements published his own world list, now widely used in its updated versions, sometimes in a form adapted by others to computer use. He explained that his book, the first

such list, was the culmination of his own bird-watching experiences and of 'a 30-year struggle with bits and pieces of life lists scattered through a dozen major field guides and reference works of the world's birds'. (He gave as his main sources for Australia the Cayley and Slater field guides.)

It was inevitable that later generations of world lists would submit to pressure for rationality and consistency. Sibley and Monroe *(Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World* — `SM 1990') express the view that 'the main purpose of a standard English name is to provide a consistent alternate to the scientific name in English-speaking countries'. They explained that in the 1980s Burt Monroe Jr had organized a correspondence group of 15 persons in English-speaking parts of the world. The group helped establish guidelines, and its input led to the selection of the most 'appropriate names' for SM 1990.

Australia — post 1926

Meanwhile, in Australia the drive towards a national set of standard names was continuing steadily, if slowly. The 1978 RAOU *Recommended English Names for Australian Birds* (REN) was a solid achievement. Its compilers noted the possibility of devising

> a set of names for use throughout the English-speaking world that, once established by consensus, need not be changed. Such a standard could replace scientific names for non-taxonomists.

The purpose of REN was

> to recommend for use in ornithological literature a set of English names for Australian birds from the point of view of international usage. We emphasize 'use in ornithological literature' because ... it is important to distinguish between English names used in ornithological literature of all sorts and vernacular names (common) names that are used colloquially and are more often than not in a language other than English.

REN was a thoughtful, expert, and valuable piece of work. Some subsequent opinion-testing was undertaken by the RAOU and the resulting minor modifications incorporated into the Christidis-Boles list published by RAOU in 1994. This now contains the current official English names for Australian birds. If you wish to publish any material referring to an Australian species in an Australian publication with any pretensions to claiming the attention of the scientific community, you will probably find that you are obliged to use those official names.

Those responsible for the official names have done their difficult job carefully and well. It is not the purpose of this column to complain about any particular choice of name. However the 'official' or 'standard' name-selection process in Australia and elsewhere has not eliminated the need for other and more convenient names. Indeed, because of the kind of names that its 'guidelines' have called for, it has actually created a need for more convenient *names.*

The world's longest bird names

The truth is that many official - or

too long or too clumsy for comfortable use. The length of a name is best measured by the number of syllables rather than by centimetres. One might think that if names were selected on the basis of suitability for use in ordinary conversation four syllables would be a desirable limit and six a reasonable maximum. The following are examples of particularly long names from Monroe and Sibley's 1993 *A World Checklist of Birds* (based on SM 1990, and 'intended for anyone interested in birds'). There are many 8-syllable names, of which I give a sample (the number of syllables, where 8 is exceeded, is shown in brackets):

Rufous-vented Chachalaca;
Southern Yellow-bellied Hornbill;
Amethyst-throated Sunangel;
Heliotrope-throated Hummingbird (9);
Ochraceous-breasted Flycatcher;
Southern White-crowned Tapaculo;
Yellow-breasted Bird-of-Paradise (9);
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo; Yellow-vented Eremomela (9); Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker;
Greater Double-collared Sunbird; and
Chestnut-headed Oropendola (9).

Those names are long simply because of long combinations of descriptive words. This is partly true of the following names, where the length comes also from the coining of compound group-names:

Brown-headed Paradise-Kingfisher (9);
Cinnamon-bellied Imperial-Pigeon (11);
Chestnut-bellied Imperial-Pigeon (10);
Smoky-fronted Tody-Flycatcher (9);
Variegated Bristle-Tyrant (9); Sulphur-bellied Tyrant-Manakin (9); Guttulated Foliage-Gleaner (9); Ochre-breasted Foliage-Gleaner (9);
White-bellied Thicket-Fantail; Fulvous-crested Jungle-Flycatcher (9); Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush; Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager (9).

Dedicatory names are often quite short (Cassin's Finch; Lewin's Rail), but here are two exceptions:

Donaldson-Smith's Sparrow-Weaver; and
King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise (10)

A common cause of excessive length is the incorporation of geographical differentiators, thus:

Hispaniolan Woodpecker;
Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill;
Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher (9);
Caroline Islands Kingfisher;

New Caledonian Owlet-nightjar (10);
Maracaibo Tody-Flycatcher (9);
Greater Antillean Elaenia (10);
Amazonian Royal-Flycatcher (10);
Madagascar Paradise-Flycatcher (10);
Sulawesi Blue-Flycatcher;
Henderson Island Reed-Warbler;
Abyssinian Yellow-rumped Seed-Eater (11);

Abyssinian Grosbeak-Canary (10);
Patagonian Sierra-Finch (9).

Those examples are given at some length to show that, comparatively, Australian names are not all that bad. It might be noted that the longest name in the Australian list is a product of the geographical and compound-name factors, and can hold its own in world company: Christmas Island Imperial- Pigeon (10).

Beyond that, one might have some mild complaint about Black-breasted Button-

quail, Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher (9), Golden-headed Cisticola, and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater (among other 8-syllable honeyeaters). However, the compilers of the 1978 REN did make some effort to avoid inflicting on us unnecessarily awkward names. Moreover, most names in, or in nearly, their present form came in officially with the 1926 list and have been in use since then. The post-REN user-survey actually led to longer names in a few of the 17 instances (e.g. Australian Spotted Crake instead of Australian Crake; Major Mitchell's Cockatoo instead of Pink Cockatoo).

The Coot, the Cuckoo and the Strine Pelkin

The addition of 'Australian or `Australasian' to some names is the equivalent of 'European' or 'Northern' in the newer northern hemisphere labels. (This is not so difficult for Australians, who know how to treat inconvenient syllables. The Macquarie Dictionary's `Ostraylyun' is one syllable less than the Oxford's `Orstrayleean', and many `Ostraylyuns' are quite capable of reducing this to two, or even one — as in Pelkin'.)

But here is the real complaint: there are no permissible short alternative names for Australian birds. There are now two sets of prescribed names, and this should be enough for the standardisers. Room must be left for understandings on convenient abbreviated names. Otherwise we will be ruled by orthodoxy gone mad. In this regard, a real worry is the practice of some publications in calling for the use of *both* standard names at the one time, even in anecdotal writing, leading to this sort of turgid nonsense:

> 1 observed an Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis* carrying a Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops* and being chased by a pair of Pied *Currawongs Strepera graculina.*

There can be no other field of human knowledge where abbreviations or other convenient labels are regarded as simply `wrong'. This is particularly acute for Australians, where standardisation has been seen as calling for elimination of other names. In the UK, by contrast, the many one-word bird names cited at the beginning of this column (Toot', `Cuckoo', 'Goldfinch') are bound to continue as third-level alternatives in respectable use. The acceptance of permissible (not prescribed) short alternative names for Australian birds can only promote common practice with respect to short names and counter any tendency for a proliferation of confusing alternatives. In a later column, I will propose some permissible short names for birds on the Canberra list.

A. stentoreus

Birding in cyberspace, Canberra style

Online birding is more than swapping observations. Another important activity is accessing birding data bases. How does one find what birding resources are available online? Well, you probably use Google http://www.google.com, arguably the best search engine available at the moment. Alternatively, you may find it far more rewarding to visit one of the **birding portals,** jumping off places

to the world of internet birding. A number exist, but my favourites are the Denis Lepage/Bird Studies Canada *Bird Links to the World* http://www.bsc-eoc.org/links/index.html, and Jack Siler's *Birding on the Net*, now in revamped form at htfp://birdingonthe.net.

Another online resource category is bird lists. The Australian check list may be found at the Birds Australia web site http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/checklist/index.html, disappointingly listed alphabetically rather than in taxonomic order. Thinking globally? Australian email discussion list Birding-Aus member Steve Clark advises that he has made available for downloading from his web site http://www.ansonic.com.au/clarks/my_stuff.htm the Sibley and Monroe checklist of the birds of the world, nearly 10,000 species, modified to reflect the contemporary Australian list. I wonder if he typed them all in? Jack Siler has the world list online, classified by families, at http://birdingonthe.net/clements.

Everyone likes good news and Richard Johnson from Roma, Queensland, shared with Birding-Aus members his experience of a good deed rewarded. He visited a temporary wetland created by excavation work; apparently it fills with water after rain and has a little border of wetland grasses, sedges and the like. Richard wrote:

> After some lovely rain a few weeks ago, I'd noticed a couple of Black-winged Stilts lurking suspiciously. Sure enough, two young have been raised. Last Sunday, I got a GPS reading for Atlas purposes. Walking away, I noticed that the water that had collected in a show-jumping water obstacle was nearly dried out. Looking closer, I found some tadpoles and dragonfly nymphs in a few mm of water under a piece of bark. A softy of long standing, I collected them up and carried them to the 'stilt pond'. As I walked through the knee-high sedges, I flushed a truly wonderful bird - a bright and beautiful adult female Painted Snipe. She fluttered (an apt description, I think - these birds fly like butterflies) to the end of the pool and landed in shallow water. She then gave a lovely Threat Display with the wings extended and tilted forward. Only my third encounter ever with the species and a truly memorable moment. Oh yes, I remembered to put the taddies and nymphs in the water. I like to think I scored an immediate payout for some good karma there!

What impacts is modern communications technology having on birding? Well, the use of email and other internet resources like the world wide web is an obvious one. What about resources to use in the field, though? Perhaps some of those hot field discussions along the lines of 'was that the call of a Rose Robin we just heard?' can be resolved by taking to the field a portable CD player and Natural Learning's Simpson & Day's *Birds of Australia* CD; details at http://www.natlearn.com.au. More exciting, however, have been the discussions on Birding-Aus about the possibility of someone, perhaps CSIRO's Division of Wildlife & Ecology http://www.dwe.csiro.au, creating a library of Australian bird songs in MP3 (a highly compressed music file format): This would mean that we would download the calls we were interested in and carry them in the field, in digital form, in our tiny MP3 players, just as

music buffs do with their preferred music genre.

Another fantastic innovation has occurred in recording our field observations. No longer do we need to fill our notebooks in the field and, on arriving home, transcribe the information into our bird listing programs on desktop PCs. British company Wildlife Computing http://www.wildlife.co.uk has developed an application 'Pocket Bird Recorder' which works on handheld computers, including Palms. Just write in your observations as you go, then download them, when you get home, to your desktop machine's bird listing database!

`Decisions, decisions' was the subject line of a message to Birding-Aus posted by Laurence and Leanne Knight. Their message picked up an ongoing theme on the list about cannon netting of migratory waders: how the conservation benefits derived from research using this technique to capture birds for measurement, banding and release need to be balanced with the potential and occasional actual harm experienced by some netted birds. Laurence and Leanne wrote, however, about an awful dilemma faced recently by wildlife managers in Tasmania. The Hobart *Mercury* newspaper (25 Oct 2000) reported:

> Tasmanian rangers have shot a threatened Grey Goshawk — to save the even rarer Orange-Bellied Parrot.... There are only 100 to 200 migratory Orange-Bellied Parrots left in Australia, with another 120 in captivity for breeding. Parks and Wildlife Service threatened species unit manager Peter Brown last night confirmed the Grey Goshawk had been shot in South-West Tasmania after it threatened the release of 28 captive-bred birds earlier this month. Mr Brown described the decision as a horrible thing to have to do but said the Grey Goshawk posed a threat to all 28 parrots. The goshawk killed one parrot in front of rangers within minutes of its release into the wild. Efforts to trap and relocate the goshawk, from the remote Birchs Inlet site south-west of Macquarie Harbour, were unsuccessful.... Rangers obtained permits under state law to shoot the goshawk.... 'This was one of the worst decisions I have had to make but it could have threatened a significant number of the parrots,' he said. 'The parrots had been captive bred and didn't have any natural nous. Had it happened a couple of weeks later it might have been different.'

On a lighter note, birding on the internet occasionally becomes frivolous. Canberra birder John Penhallurick could not resist sharing with Australian birders this joke, called 'Travelling South', that he spotted on the American version of Birding-Aus, BirdChat:

> As migration approached, two elderly vultures doubted they could make the trip south, so they decided to go by aeroplane. When they checked their baggage, the attendant noticed that they were carrying two dead racoons. 'Do you wish to check the racoons through as luggage?' she asked. 'No, thanks', replied the vultures. 'They're carrion.'

Remember this column's motto: 'There's more to birding than the internet!'. So switch off that computer, grab your bins and get into some fine winter birding. Namadgi's lyrebirds are calling!

T. *alba*

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

The Panel has endorsed further records of the Little Friarbird and the Pied Butcherbird from areas to the north of the ACT. While these species are still 'unusual' in COG's area of concern and records of them warrant specific vetting by the Panel, they are possibly on the increase. In view of its current review of the status of species in COG's area of concern, the Panel is particularly keen to build up as complete information as is possible on the occurrence of birds currently listed as 'unusual' - so keep those reports flowing in, please. Forms are available from the Records Officer at COG meetings, from the COG website (which now also features the current 1998 list of 'unusual' birds in the COG area) and from the Rarities Panel secretary on (02) 6254 6520.

ENDORSED LIST 52, JUNE 2001

Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius*
1; 23 Feb 01; R Bell; Casuarina Sands

Intermediate Egret *Ardea intermedia*
1; 4 Mar 00; J Schmelefske; Jerrabomberra Wetlands

Spotted Harrier *Circus assimilis*
1; 20 Apr 01; M Johnson; Murrumbateman/Gundaroo Rd

Australian Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius* [escapees]
2; Oct 98; G Dabb; Campbell Park Offices

Longbilled Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris*
1; 18 Sep 00- 15 May 01; J Goldie; Downer

Common Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*
1; 25 Dec 00; T Daukus; Melba

Chestnutrumped Heathwren *Hylacola pyrrhopygia*
2; 7 Apr 01; N Taws; Shoalhaven River, w. of Braidwood

Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis*
1; 7 Dec 00; N Taws; vicinity Murrumbateman
2; 17 Feb 01; N Taws; Headwaters Sullivans Creek

Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*

1; 13, 29 Nov 00, 1, 5 Dec 00; N Taws; vicinity Murrumbateman

The COG office is located at Room 5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic. Opening hours depend on the availability of volunteers. Please call the office on 6247 4996 to confirm that it is open.

Canberra Bird Notes is published by the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc and is edited by Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan. Major articles of up to 5000 words are welcome on matters of the distribution, identification or behaviour of birds occurring in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding area. Contributions on these topics should be sent to Harvey Perkins, 42 Summerland Circuit, Kambah ACT 2902, or via email to harvey.perkins@anu.edu.au. Short notes, book reviews and other contributions should be sent to Barbara Allan, 47 Hannaford Street, Page ACT 2614 or via email to allanbm@ozemail.com.au. If you would like to discuss your proposed article in advance, please feel free to contact Harvey on 6231 8209 or Barbara on 6254 6520.

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