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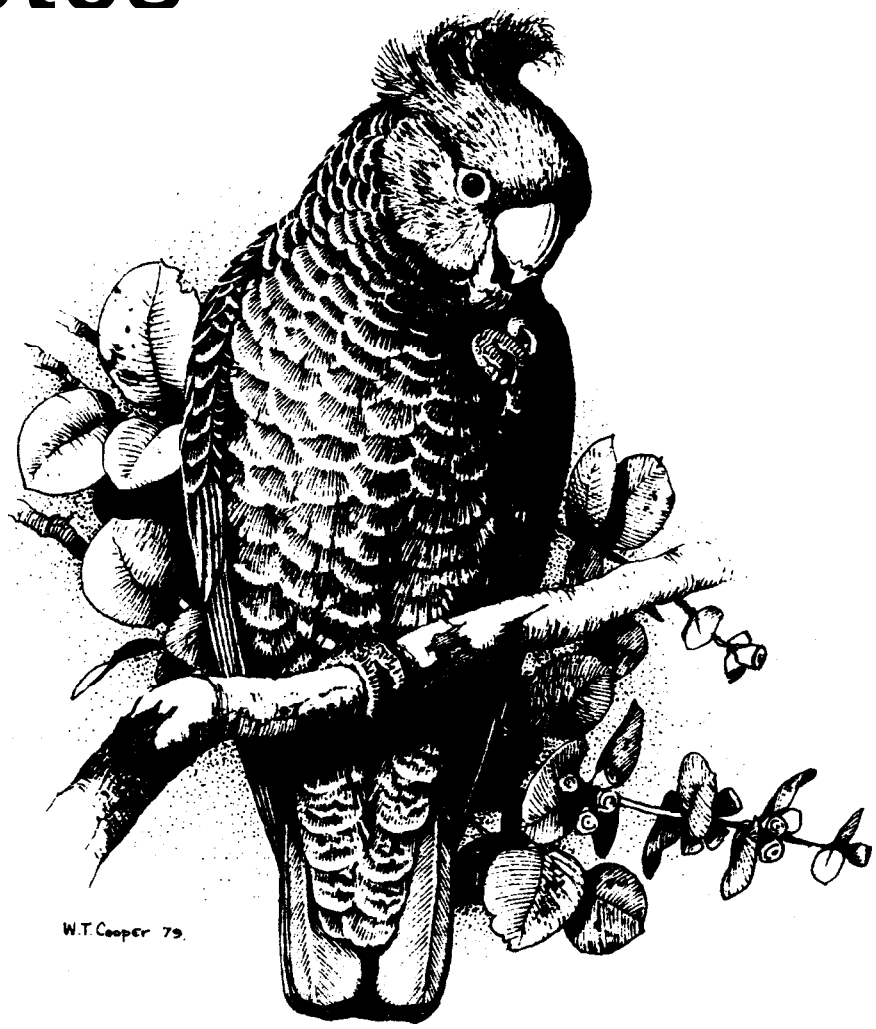

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THE AUSTRALIAN BIRD COUNT SURVEYS AT CASTLE HILL, ACT, 1989-1995

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Abstract

Monthly 20-minute counts of birds were made in three contiguous two-hectare sites at Castle Hill, Australian Capital Territory, from November 1989 to December 1995, This is an area of Yellow Box/Red Gum grassy woodland. The monitoring was undertaken as part of the RAOU's national Australian Bird Count project and used its area search survey method. In all, 9,797 birds were counted, representing 86 species including 18 species that bred in the search area. Some evidence exists for a decline over the six-year period in the abundance of small birds that glean in the foliage, and it is suggested that this is linked to eucalyptus dieback in the area.

Background

It is well known that the Yellow Box/Red Gum grassy woodland areas of south-eastern Australia are particularly threatened. Many years of tree clearing, pasture establishment and sheep grazing in much of the remaining woodland blocks have contributed t o this process. Remaining woodland areas are generally small and fragmented. The birds of the grassy woodlands have been severely affected, with both species diversity and abundance of many species declining sharply.

The Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) has a long history of contributing to our understanding of the nature and causes of the threats facing woodland birds through a number of monitoring projects conducted in Canberra, elsewhere in the Australian Capital Territory and in nearby localities in New South Wales. While some have been short-term, others have been studies conducted over a number of years, facilitating the drawing of conclusions as to trends. The atlas of the birds of the ACT (Taylor and COG, 1992) records the results of one of these projects, and COG maintains a comprehensive database of records from diverse data collection activities.

In 1988 the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU; now Birds Australia) developed a national project to monitor birds throughout Australia, It built on the achievements of the first national bird atlas project the findings of which were published in 1984 (Blakers et al., 1984). The new national project, data collection for which was undertaken from January 1989 to August 1995, had two particularly significant features that differentiated it from the national atlas project. These were, first, having observers undertaking *repeated* observations over some years in defined sites and, secondly, collecting data on the *abundance* of birds, rather than simply presence/absence data as was the national atlas approach (Clarke et al., 2000). The project was called the Australian Bird Count (ABC). Its field work phase was coordinated

nationally by Dr Stephen Ambrose of RAOU and within the Canberra region by Chris Davey (on a voluntary basis), and was supported financially by BP Australia and Environment Australia.

This paper reports the findings from the ABC site I established at Castle Hill, ACT.

Methods

An Australian Bird Count study site was established at Castle Hill (35°29'S; 149° 02'E) at an altitude of about 650 m. The site is part of a pastoral lease; the lessees granted me permission t o undertake the project on their property over the six-year period. It is contiguous with the Lanyon-Lambrigg Landscape Conservation Reserve; is ca. 2 km from the Murrumbidgee River and is in the general vicinity of large areas of bushland reserved as Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park (McGuiness 1999).

The study site was Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora,* Blakely's Red Gum *E. blakelyi* grassy woodland at the south-eastern corner of Castle Hill. Through most of the six-year study period it was only lightly grazed, mostly by sheep and Eastern Grey Kangaroos *Macropus giganteus,* and had no 'pasture improvement', i,e. native grasses remained the dominant ground cover. The Yellow Box is the dominant tree species but Blakely's Red Gum is also present and Apple Box *E. bridgesiana* is found in some of the creek lines. Virtually no exotic trees are found at the study site, though some exotic woody shrubs, primarily blackberry *Rubus fruticosus* and sweet briar *Rosa rubiginosa,* are present in some quite large clumps.

During the study period some trees were felled, apparently for fence posts, and some dead timber was removed from the ground, probably for firewood. Otherwise the environment was little disturbed by pastoral or other human activity, except by the actions of sheep which were generally stocked there at low levels.

Data were collected through monthly visits from November 1989 to December 1995, inclusive, with the exceptions of February 1992 and November 1994. The study used the area search method which was the standard method used nationally in the ABC. RAOU selected the area search method based on the trade-offs needed between scientific excellence and the practical considerations inherent in a national project in which field work was undertaken by many different volunteers of varying degrees of enthusiasm and skill. A considerable amount of research was undertaken t o arrive at this decision, including field trials of four survey methods, namely area searches, transect counts, station-ary counts and rolling bird surveys. The processes and findings of this developmental work were published by the RAOU (Newish and Loyn, 1989).

Three contiguous sites of approx. 2 ha were selected and their boundaries identified and mapped. The vegetation was similar in each of the three sites. The use of triplicate contiguous search areas, together with great care taken by the observer, was expected to mitigate the main limitations of the area search method such as double-counting, missing cryptic species or individuals, and scaring away or attracting individuals or certain species (Pyke and Recher, 1984, p.58). On each monthly

visit each search area was covered 'at random' for a period of 20 minutes.

Birds observed by either sight or hearing were counted. The variables recorded for each visit to each search area were as follows:

- observer name and ID number;
- date and time;
- species name and atlas number;
- number of birds of each species observed within the search area;
- number of birds of each species observed outside the search area;
- weather;
- factors that may have affected detection of birds;
- changes to the area since the previous count;
- bird breeding activity;
- migrating birds: species, flock sizes and direction of movements; and
- other comments,

The observer forwarded completed data sheets to the regional coordinator who checked them and sent them to RAOU Melbourne for further checking and data entry, Some time after data collection for the ABC ended, COG received from RAOU the data in unit record form to be used locally in conjunction with COG's own bird observations data base. The RAOU data were checked and cleaned, and analysed using SPSS for Windows (Release 9) and Microsoft Excel.

Results

As mentioned above, data were collected through monthly counts from November 1989 to December 1995, inclusive, with the exceptions of February 1992 and November 1994, Two counts were made in November 1993. This meant that, over the six-year period, 73 counts were undertaken covering all seasons. In all, 9,797 birds were counted, representing 86 species. A complete list is given in Table 1.

The data do not reveal any clear relationship between the weather at the time the observations were undertaken and bird abundance. This is because almost all of the counts were undertaken - and most of the birds observed - when the weather was classified as 'little or no cloud cover; temperate to warm; no or light breeze' (35% of the birds counted); 'little or no cloud cover; cool or very cold; light t o strong breeze' (21%); or 'other weather conditions' (29%). The large proportion in the residual category reflects the fact that the weather coding system was not sufficiently specific to describe the Canberra region weather pattern.

Abundance and species diversity

The total number of birds counted was 9,797, with a monthly mean of 134 and a median of 124, The number observed on each count was highly variable, with a standard deviation of the mean of 55 and monthly abundance varying from a minimum of 55 to a maximum of 433.

Figure 1 shows the number of birds observed by date of observation. The four exceptionally high counts evident in this chart (April and May 1993; September 1994 and June 1995) were all due to large migrating flocks of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters.

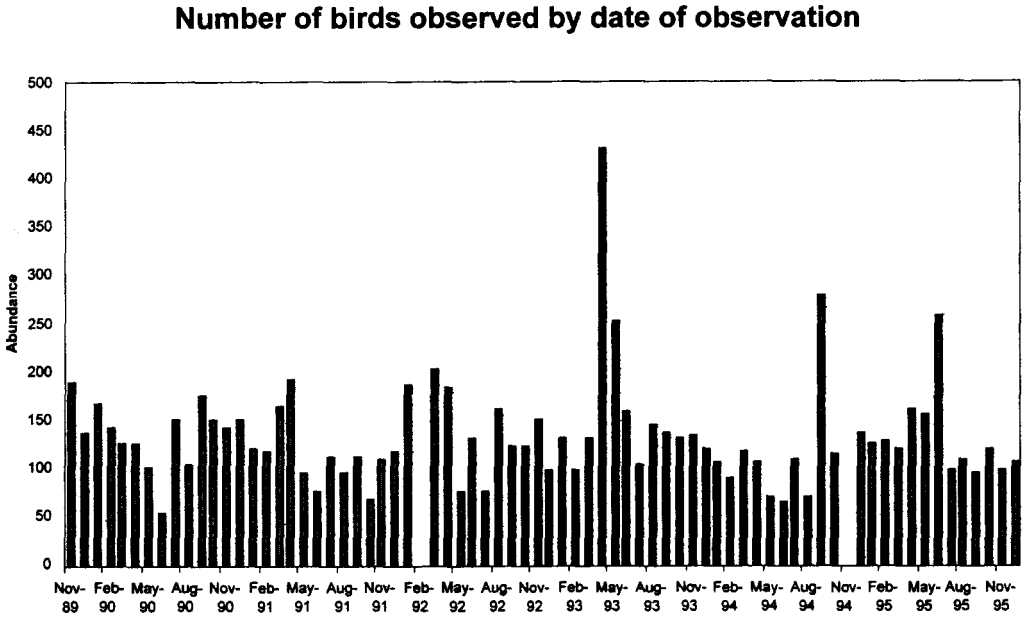
Table 1: List of species ranked in descending order of abundance

Abundance (A) = total number of birds observed over the 6 year period.

Species		**A**	**% A**
Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	987	10.07
White-plumed Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus penicillatus*	820	8.37
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus chrysops*	787	8.03
Galah	*Cacatua roseicapilla*	656	6.70
Superb Fairy wren	*Malurus cyaneus*	630	6.43
Tree *Martin*	*Hirundo nigricans*	586	5.98
Red-rumped Parrot	*Psephotus haematonotus*	565	5.77
Eastern Rosella	*Platycercus eximius*	416	4.25
Dusky Woodswallow	*Artamus cyanopterus*	324	3.31
Willie Wagtail	*Rhipidura leucophrys*	286	2.92
Striated Pardalote	*Pardalotus striatus*	254	2,59
Australian Magpie	*Gymnorhina tibicen*	230	2.35
Rufous Whistler	*Pachycephala rufiventris*	221	2.26
Crimson Rosella	*Platycercus elegans*	194	1.98
Grey Fantail	*Rhipidura fuliginosa*	163	1.66
Australian Raven	*Corvus coronoides*	159	1.62
White-browed Woodswallow	*Artamus superciliosus*	151	1.54
Rufous Songlark	*Cincloramphus mathewsi*	138	1.41
Weebill	*Smicrornis brevirostris*	137	1,40
White-naped Honeyeater	*Melithreptus lunatus*	121	1.24
Striated Thornbill	*Acanthiza lineata*	119	1.21
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	*Cacatua galerita*	113	1.15
Brown Thornbill	*Acanthiza pusilla*	110	1.12
Grey Shrike-thrush	*Colluricincla harmonica*	110	1.12
Diamond Firetail	*Stagonopleura guttata*	107	1,09
Buff-rumped Thornbill	*Acanthiza reguloides*	99	1.01
White-throated Treecreeper	*Cormobates leucophaeus*	97	0.99
Magpie-lark	*Grallina cyanoleuca*	96	0.98
Laughing Kookaburra	*Dacelo novaeguineae*	95	0.97
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	*Coracina novaehollandiae*	76	0.78
Noisy Miner	*Manorina melanocephala*	76	0.78
Brown Treecreeper	*Climacteris picumnus*	75	0,77
Spotted Pardalote	*Pardalotus punctatus*	70	0,71
Welcome Swallow	*Hirundo neoxena*	70	0.71
White-throated Gerygone	*Gerygone olivacea*	68	0.69
Restless Flycatcher	*Myiagra inquieta*	64	0.65
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*	52	0.53
Pied Currawong	*Strepera graculina*	49	0.50
Scarlet Robin	*Petroica multicolor*	41	0.42
Silvereye	*Zosterops lateralis*	33	0.34
Hooded Robin	*Melanodryas cucullata*	23	0.23
Red Wattlebird	*Anthochaera carunculata*	22	0.22
Noisy Friarbird	*Philemon corniculatus*	20	0.20

Species		A	% A
Rainbow Bee-eater	*Merops ornatus*	*18*	0,18
Western Gerygone	*Gerygone fusca*	*18*	0.18
Double-barred Finch	*Taeniopygia bichenovii*	*17*	0.17
Gang-gang Cockatoo	*Callocephalon fimbriatum*	*16*	0.16
Sacred Kingfisher	*Todiramphus sanctus*	14	0.14
Speckled Warbler	*Chthonicola sagittata*	14	0.14
Little Raven	*Corvus mellori*	12	0.12
Red-browed Finch	*Neochmia temporalis*	*11*	0.11
Crested Shrike-tit	*Falcunculus frontatus*	*11*	0.11
White-eared Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus leucotis*	*11*	0.11
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	*Cacomantis flabelliformis*	*10*	0.10
Little Lorikeet	*Glossopsitta pusilla*	*10*	0.10
Olive-backed Oriole	*Oriolus sagittatus*	9	0.09
Richard's Pipit	*Anthus novaeseelandiae*	9	0.09
Dollarbird	*Eurystomus orientalis*	8	0.08
Mistletoebird	*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*	8	0.08
White-winged Triller	*Lalage sueurii*	8	0,08
European Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	7	0.07
Golden Whistler	*Pachycephala pectoralis*	6	0.06
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	*Chrysococcyx lucidus*	6	0,06
Wedge-tailed Eagle	*Aquila audax*	6	0.06
Brown Goshawk	*Accipiter fasciatus*	5	0.05
Crested Pigeon	*Ocyphaps lophotes*	*5*	0,05
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	*Chrysococcyx basalis*	5	0.05
Varied Sittella	*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*	5	0.05
Leaden Flycatcher	*Myiagra rubecula*	4	0.04
New Holland Honeyeater	*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*	4	0.04
Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo	*Calyptorhynchus funereus*	4	0.04
Nankeen Kestrel	*Falco cenchroides*	3	0.03
Rose Robin	*Petroica rosea*	3	0,03
Stubble Quail	*Coturnix pectoralis*	3	0,03
White-browed Scrubwren	*Sericornis frontalis*	3	0.03
Little Eagle	*Hieraaetus morphnoides*	2	0.02
Regent Honeyeater	*Xanthomyza phrygia*	2	0,02
Yellow Thornbill	*Acanthiza nana*	2	0,02
Australian Hobby	*Falco longipennis*	*1*	0.01
Brown Falcon	*Falco berigora*	*1*	0.01
Brown-headed Honeyeater	*Melithreptus brevirostris*	*1*	0,01
Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	*1*	0,01
Flame Robin	*Petroica phoenicea*	*1*	0.01
Fuscous Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus fuscus*	*1*	0.01
Pallid Cuckoo	*Cuculus pallidus*	*1*	0.01
Satin Flycatcher	*Myiagra cyanoleuca*	*1*	0,01
Total: 86		**9,797**	**100**

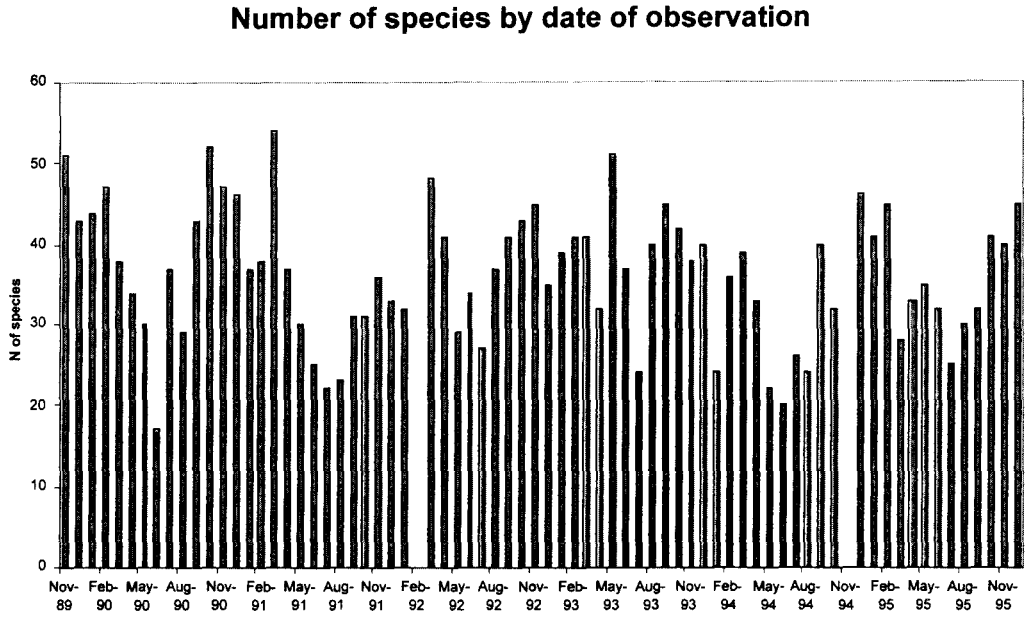
Figure 1



It is disappointing to report that the most abundant species was an introduced one, the Common Starling. They foraged mainly in the adjoining farmland during the day, but used the large trees in the area for roosting and breeding. The other common species were all natives, representing a variety of foraging guilds. The White-plumed Honeyeater was the second most common species, being a resident breeding species observed singly or in small groups, and relatively easy t o detect owing to its frequent, rapid movements and frequent, distinctive calling. The third most abundant species was the Yellow-faced Honey-eater mentioned above,

In all, 86 bird species were observed. The mean number per monthly count was 36 species (standard deviation 8) with a median of 37 and a range of 17 to 54, Of the 13 months in which the species diversity was highest (i.e, when the number of species observed was greater than one standard deviation above the mean) all but three were in spring or summer. This marked seasonal distribution is detailed in Figure 2, and Table 2 provides further information on abundance and species diversity for the four seasons, aggregated across the full data collection period.

Figure 2.



Lines across the graph are at the mean (36) and mean +1standard deviation (44)

Table 2. Seasonal distribution of species abundance, species diversity and breeding.

Season	Abundance	No of species	No of breeding events	No of species breeding
Spring	2,581	67	3 6	14
Summer	2,299	72	13	10
Autumn	2,825	62	3	2
Winter	2,092	57	0	0

Breeding

The grassy woodlands of Castle Hill are important breeding habitat for both migratory and resident species. During the study period, 52 breeding events were observed involving 18 different species. However, breeding was not observed evenly throughout the survey period. The number of breeding events observed for each September to May breeding period follow: 1989/90: 4; 1990/91: 13; 1991/92: 1; 1992/93: 12; 1993/94: 15; 1994/95: 0; 1995/96: 9. Details are in Table 3.

Table 3. Breeding species: number of breeding events and year(s) in which they were observed

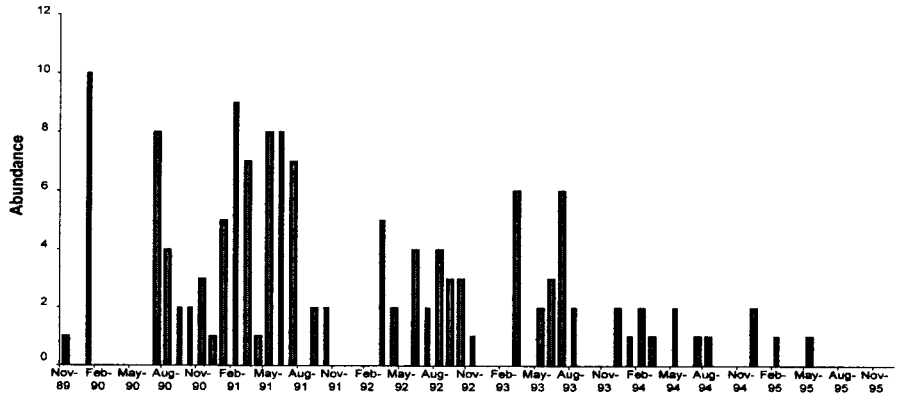
Species	N	Years (Sept to May breeding seasons)
Common Starling	11	1989/90, 1990/91, 1992/93, 1993/94, 1995/96
Tree Martin	9	1990/91, 1992/93, 1993/94, 1995/96
White-plumed Honeyeater	6	1989/90, 1990/91, 1992/93, 1993/94
Willie Wagtail	5	1990/91, 1992/93, 1993/94, 1995/96
Australian Magpie	3	1990/91
Red-rumped Parrot	2	1993/94, 1995/96
Dusky Woodswallow	2	1990/91, 1993/94
Grey Fantail	2	1992/93, 1995/96
Restless Flycatcher	2	1990/91, 1993/94
Olive-backed Oriole	2	1992/93, 1995/96
Galah	1	1993/94
Striated Pardalote	1	1993/94
White-browed Woodswallow	1	1991/92
Rufous Songlark	1	1990/91
Weebill	1	1993/94
Diamond Firetail	1	1989/90
Noisy Friarbird	1	1995/96
Red-browed Finch	1	1995/96

Again, the Common Starling leads the frequency table, with 11 breeding events being observed. This species competed with Tree Martins (a summer migrant and the second most frequently observed breeder) for nesting holes in the large eucalyptus trees on the site, Indeed, 5 of the 18 breeding species (Common Starling; Tree Martin; Red-rumped Parrot; Galah; and Striated Pardalote) relied on the old standing trees, living and dead, for nesting holes. Other frequent breeders were White-plumed Honey-eaters and Willie Wagtails, both resident species. Attention is drawn to the single breeding record of the Diamond Firetail, a threatened wood-land species in our area, and the Rufous Songlark, an uncommon summer migrant for which we have relatively few local breeding records.

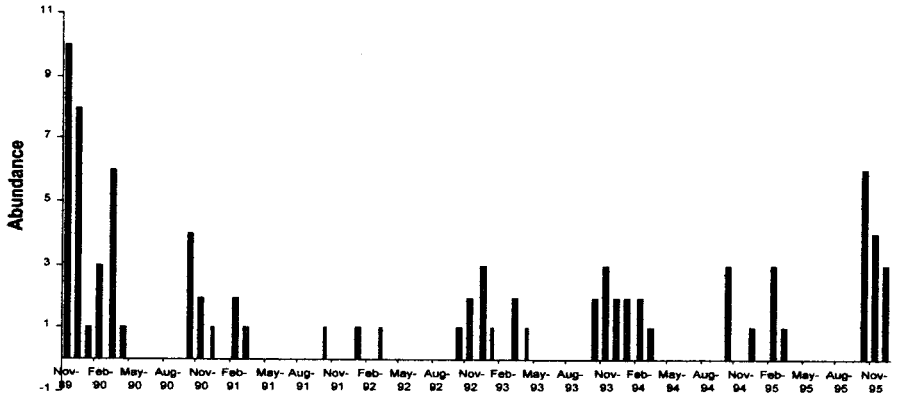
Trends

Figure 1, above, reveals that the total number of birds observed per month over the six years varied with the seasons but otherwise shows no particular temporal trend, especially when one removes the small number of species with unusually high abundance from the data. These aggregate data conceal, however, possible trends regarding individual species and foraging guilds, Of particular interest are the species that feed in the foliage of the eucalyptus trees, consuming lerp, insects, pollen and nectar, including the Weebill, gerygones and pardalotes. Graphs of the temporal distribution of abundance for these species are in Figure 3 on p.77.

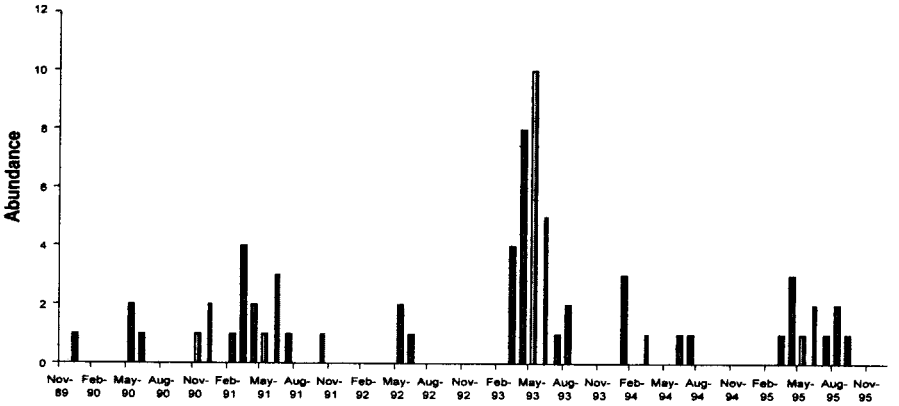
Weebill



White-throated & Western Gerygone



Spotted Pardalote



The abundance of the Weebill, a foliage gleaning species, fell noticeably over the 6-year period. Between November 1989 and August 1993, the mean monthly abundance was 2.7, but over the remaining period, September 1993 to December 1995, the mean monthly abundance was less than 0.5.

The White-throated Gerygone and Western Gerygone, also foliage gleaners, are found in the region primarily from September to April. During the first five months of the survey (December 1989 to April 1990) they were relatively abundant, being observed 28 times, giving a monthly mean of 5.6. They were observed somewhat less frequently during the subsequent five-and-a-half years, with the September-April monthly mean in the latter period being just 1.3.

The Spotted Pardalote, while being a member of the same foraging guild, had a quite different temporal distribution. Throughout the study period its mean monthly abundance was just 0.96, but it increased dramatically to 6.8 during one period in mid 1993: March (4 birds), April (8), May (10), June (5).

Vulnerable and endangered species

Five species of bird, the Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii,* Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor,* Brown Tree-creeper, Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta* and Hooded Robin, are currently listed as vulnerable in the ACT, and one, the Regent Honeyeater, is listed as endangered. Brown Treecreepers were observed 75 times, in all years of the survey; the Hooded Robin was recorded 23 times, in each year 1990 to 1995; and two Regent Honeyeaters were observed in January 1990. No breeding records were obtained for any of these species.

COG is currently preparing submissions for presentation to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee to have additional bird species protected. These are expected to be the Speckled Warbler, Southern Whiteface, Jacky Winter and Diamond Firetail. Two of these species were observed during the survey: the Speckled Warbler was observed each year between 1990 and 1995, with a total abundance of 14, and the Diamond Firetail in the same years, abundance 107. A breeding record for this species was obtained in April 1990.

Discussion

In their comprehensive report on the findings of the Australian Bird Count, Clarke et al. (2000) emphasised that one of the project's major strengths was that observers collected data from defined sites over an extended period - some six years. This was also the case at the Castle Hill site. In 1998 COG, with the support of Environment ACT, initiated a project to monitor the birds of the grassy woodlands in the ACT. The Castle Hill site reported upon here is now one of the COG Woodland Survey sites, meaning that a far longer series of data will become available. The longer that data are collected in a systematic manner, the more valuable those data will become.

Under the ACT Nature Conservation Act 1980, the ACT Government, on the recommendation of the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee, has declared the ACT's Yellow Box/Red Gum grassy woodlands to be an endangered eco-

logical community. The survey site at the base of Castle Hill is one of these communities. Three of the six bird species currently listed as vulnerable or endangered in the ACT were observed during the survey, along with two o f the four species that COG plans t o nominate for listing as vulnerable. This highlights the importance of the long-term monitoring of the grassy box woodlands being undertaken by COG members, with the support of the ACT Government. It also draws attention t o the importance of systematic and sensitive implementation of the Action Plans that the Conservator of Flora and Fauna has developed for each of the declared species and ecological communities.

Of particular importance to the conservation of the ACT's grassy box woodlands is that a number of the most significant remaining sites (including Castle Hill) are held under rural leaseholds. In the main, the lessees are effective stewards of these fragile ecological communities, managing them under Land Management Agreements entered into jointly with the ACT authorities. The Castle Hill landholders are to be commended for their achievements in balancing their responsibilities in caring for the land with the commercial aspects of operating their farm. On-going monitoring of the avifauna on pastoral leases remains, however, as important as in the ACT's reserved lands.

Dieback among the eucalyptus trees at the study site is an important issue. Although a detailed habitat assessment was made when the project commenced, it was not repeated throughout the study, As a result, no sound empirical data are available on any changes that may have occurred in tree health and other environmental modifications over the six years of observations reported upon here. In my judgement, though, tree health declined markedly over that period and can be referred to as dieback. Dieback is not just the dying of trees, as Heatwole and Lowman (1986) point out. 'Dieback does not inevitably lead to the death of the whole tree, as recovery sometimes occurs. However, with progressive or repeated stress from dieback, death eventually follows' (p.13), Over the six-year period I observed the trees in particular locations being regularly defoliated as a consequence of lerp infestation. Following successive defoliation and regeneration events, many clumps of saplings died. Mature trees were also affected, Blakely's Red Gums apparently being especially vulnerable.

The data presented above hint at a decline in the abundance of some small birds, such as Weebills and gerygones, that glean lerps and insects from foliage. I have no doubt that their decline in abundance is real and that it is directly linked to dieback among the trees in which these birds feed.

This raises the question: how long do we need to monitor the abundance and species diversity of woodland birds t o be able to conclude that real changes are occurring, rather than just natural cycles? Is six years long enough to draw conclusions? I do not have answers t o these questions, but mention them t o highlight the importance of longitudinal study designs.

Considerable efforts are being made in eastern Australia to preserve the remaining grassy box woodland habitats

and to regenerate or rejuvenate them where possible. This is commendable but highlights the limitations of our knowledge of the causes of dieback among the eucalypts and of the most effective and efficient preventive and remedial interventions. I wonder, especially, about lerp infestations and the defoliation associated with them. While this is a natural process that has probably been occurring in the Southern Tablelands for aeons, and the trees and lerp species have evolved here together, the additional stresses linked to land use and fragmentation of the remaining woodland blocks probably mean that lerp infestations will increasingly result in dieback, This will cause the death of the old eucalyptus trees and will be one of the factors that inhibit the growth of replacement trees. As a consequence, the woodland bird species that need these trees for food, shelter and nesting will become increasingly threatened,

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge with thanks the lessees of the land in which the study site was located; they generously permitted me to undertake monthly bird counts on their property, Dr Stephen Ambrose showed great enthusiasm and expertise in establishing and managing the field work phase of the Australian Bird Count project, and Chris Davey ably coordinated the survey in the Canberra region. RAOU provided the data in unit record form.

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INWARD MIGRATION OF HONEYEATERS ACROSS THE UPPER SHOALHAVEN VALLEY — SPRING 2001

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Introduction

The spectacular autumn migration of honeyeaters, particularly Yellow-faced Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus chrysops*, out of the Canberra region is well known and documented (see Taws, 1999, and references therein). Their return in spring, however, is usually much less obvious. In September 2000, a concerted mass movement of honeyeaters back into the region was observed and documented for the first time (Brookfield, 2000). These observations were made as the honeyeaters made their way across the upper Shoalhaven Valley in the vicinity of 'Warragandra', a property on Jerrabattgulla Creek, 5 km south of Toggannoggra and about 70 km south-east of Canberra. The honeyeaters were presumably returning from their over-wintering sites in the coastal forests and ranges,

This event raised many questions, most notably, whether the event was exceptional for that year or was a regular event that had been largely overlooked in the past, and, if not exceptional, whether this particular route across the valley was used on a regular basis. This latter question was partially answered by observations of mass outward honeyeater movements, from west to east, in April 2001 (Brookfield, 2001). In order to try to answer the former question, a survey to monitor the movement of honeyeaters in the valley was undertaken in September 2001.

Observations

Most of the observations reported here were made by Elizabeth and Bill Compston, over a two-week period from 10 to 20 September. They went not only to the upper Shoalhaven Valley, but also to areas to the west and east in an attempt to track the movements of the honeyeaters. A concerted effort was also made on Sunday 15 September, by nine COG members split into four groups, to cover as much of the valley as possible to assess how widespread the migration activity might be, and where the main routes were.

Monday 10 September 2001

Weather fine and sunny, temperature 10-15°C. Observations over a two-hour period from 11:00 h.

After driving south from Braidwood, the first honeyeaters were encountered about 2 km north of 'Warragandra'. A flock of

about 20 Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata* and numerous small flocks of mainly Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were seen moving through the trees along the road in a southerly direction towards 'Warragandra'. At 'Warragandra', where the road crosses Jerrabattgulla Creek, thousands of honeyeaters, mainly Yellow-faced but also Red Wattlebirds, perhaps 10% White-naped Honeyeaters *Melithreptus lunatus* and a few White-eared Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus leucotis* where seen arriving from the north and east in flocks of up to 100. They would gather in the tops of the trees, where they would mill about, often rising, circling around quite high and landing again, before eventually taking off, in flocks of 500 or more, in a westerly direction across open paddocks towards Round Mount and the Gourock Range. Some groups gathering slightly further to the north initially flew north and landed in some eucalypts before then turning west and making their way via clumps of trees in small valleys that lead up to the range,

No other flocks of honeyeaters were encountered further south along the road.

Saturday 15 September 2001

Elizabeth and Bill Compston, after their observations of the previous Monday, decided to travel down the South Forest Way to Round Mount to see if they could discover where the honeyeaters coming across from 'Warragandra' were going. Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were heard throughout the forest, and a few were seen, but no flocks were observed.

Seven other COG members split up into three groups in order to cover as much of the valley as possible. All observations were made between 10:30 h and 12:50 h on a mild, mostly calm, sunny day.

David McDonald, Charles Buer and Rachel Williams headed to Ballalaba Bridge (35°34'25"S 149°37'47"E) in the northern part of the valley. Between 10:30 and 10:50 h they witnessed about 750 honeyeaters moving through, approximately 80% White-naped, 10 Red Wattlebirds, a single White-eared Honeyeater and the remainder Yellow-faced. Flock size varied from 10 to 100 with most being 20 to 70. All were travelling from SE to NW in eucalypt forest and willows on the northern bank of the river until they reached the bridge. After this they headed generally west, apparently across the valley towards the range. No migrating honeyeaters were seen at Brick Kiln Creek.

Stuart Harris and Kimberley Roberts went to 'Warragandra' where an estimated 5000 honeyeaters per hour were moving through from east to west. They also witnessed the southerly movement of honeyeaters through roadside trees towards 'Warragandra'.

Harvey Perkins and Mary Argall headed to the southern part of the valley, going as far as Jinden Creek before turning around and beginning to survey. Four main sites were surveyed.

At Hillview. the southern-most site where the road crosses Jinden Creek (35°53'10"S 149°35'25"E), only a single Yellow-faced Honeyeater and a single Red Wattlebird were seen moving through trees along the creek in a

westerly direction in the 20-minute period from 11:07 to 11:27 h.

A little further north at the 'Lynnhaven' entrance on the saddle between Jinden Hill and Mount Italy (35°51'53"S 149°35'28"E), two Yellow-faced Honeyeaters flying into the top of a tall pine tree from the east and leaving again a few second later to the west, were the only honeyeaters seen between 11:33 and 11:43 h.

A 20-minute survey in roadside trees about 1 km south of the 'Khan Yunis' entrance (35°50'20"S 149°36'30"E) was more productive, A total of 110 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters in small flocks of 3 to 30 moved through the trees in a south-westerly direction. A single White-naped Honeyeater and three Red Wattlebirds were also recorded moving in the same direction, At the 'Khan Yunis' entrance itself, about 25 Red Wattlebirds were milling about in the leafless poplars, while 250 m to the north a flock of about 60 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were flying frenziedly about a large dense pine tree.

A little north of Gundillion, just north of the track leading to Wyanbene Cave (35°45'15"S 149°38'20"E), another 'corridor' of swarming honeyeaters was discovered, Small flocks of 10 to 30 or so Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were steadily making their way up through the scraggy low vegetation in a small gully leading up from the Shoalhaven River, and mustering in a couple of tall acacias. Here they seemed to gather their numbers and their courage before attempting a high flight to cross the open paddocks and road, a distance of about 1000 m, before they reached the forested hills of the Bombalawa Range to the west. While an almost steady stream of birds was arriving through the low vegetation of the gully, the birds leaving the acacias were usually in more defined flocks of 30 to 100. These flocks would frequently sortie out from the apparent safety of the acacias and travel for anything up to 400 m or so before wheeling around and retreating to the acacias. Eventually, though, they would be successful as they crossed the road high above our heads emitting much 'chip-chip-chipping'. Most flocks flew high and due west straight towards the wooded hills but occasional, usually smaller, flocks would fly a little lower and follow the line of the creek in a south-west direction. An estimated 300 honeyeaters made the crossing in the 30 minutes we watched from 12:20-12:50 h.

Other honeyeaters seen from the road on the way to Jinden Creek were noted as follows:

- ca. 25 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters flitting through large roadside eucalypts 100 m north of 'Laurievil le' (35°37'I 0"S 149°37'50E) at 10:34 h,
- 1 Yellow-faced Honeyeater flying across the road near 'Riverlea' (35°39'20"S 149°37'25E)
- ca. 15 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters flying south along roadside trees just south of the Stony Creek bridge (35°41'45"S 149°38'15E).
- ca. 10 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters in roadside eucalypt saplings 250 m north of Krawarree (35°49'20"S 149°37'45"E).

After meeting up with the other surveyors at the Big Hole picnic area for lunch and discussion of the morning's

discoveries, Harvey and Mary ventured across to the 'Warragandra' site to see the activity there before heading home. By 14:45 h the rate of movement had dropped to an estimated 850 honeyeaters per hour based on a 20-minute count, consisting of about 80% Yellow-faced, 10% White naped, and 10% Red Wattlebirds. Though the White-naped honeyeaters were mixed in with the Yellow-faced flocks, the Red Wattlebirds remained segregated. The Red Wattlebirds arrived in the poplars and then flew a little way to the north before turning west. The smaller honeyeaters, however, milled about in the willows along the creek before mainly heading off in a south-west direction following the line of a small creek across the paddocks.

Wednesday 19 September 2001

On a fine, sunny but moderately windy day, Elizabeth and Bill Compston again headed to the upper Shoalhaven valley to monitor the honeyeater migration. On the way, hundreds to thousands of honeyeaters were seen flying east to west at around 10:00 h near 'Pigbilla' about 9 km south of Captains Flat. They were not stopping much and were more spread out than at 'Warragandra'. A little further on, at Wild Cattle Flat Road, a more heavily wooded area than either 'Pigbilla' or 'Warragandra', honeyeaters were seen high in the eucalypts, landing and taking off again, all heading west,

Around 'Warragandra', around mid-day, the migration was still in full force. Honeyeaters were still heading south through the trees towards the homestead, but now many Red Wattlebirds in flocks of 50-100 were also present. At the homestead itself, thousands of honeyeaters were moving through, but this time many were heading south for a short distance before turning west. On the ridge uphill and to the east of the homestead, about 500 honeyeaters were counted in a 10-minute period as they flew over heading west.

At Stony Creek further to the east, hundreds of honeyeaters were seen at 14:15 h heading in the direction of 'Warragandra'. Several kilometres further south, near the old cemetery, a flock of Red Wattlebirds was seen.

Thursday 20 September 2001

On this occasion Elizabeth and Bill travelled south from Braidwood on the road to 'Neringla', At Neringla Creek, where it was calm and about 10-15°C at 8:15 h, hundreds to thousands of honeyeaters were seen coming in high from the south-east, and occasionally landing in trees in otherwise mainly cleared farm land. Uphill from 'Neringla' at 9:30 11, by which time it was warmer and windier, thousands of birds continued up along the creek in a north-westerly direction. Driving a further 4 km along the creek only a few birds were seen. Back at 'Neringla' at 11:15 h several smaller flocks of 20-50 birds were seen alighting in trees before heading in a generally westerly direction.

Overview and discussion

These combined observations provide us with a sketchy but overall picture of the honeyeater migration movements in the upper Shoalhaven Valley in the spring of 2001. General movements with a rough

suggestion of rates are indicated on the accompanying map by solid arrows. The specific courses of their flight-paths is no doubt linked to the topography and vegetation structure of the area but at this stage is far from clear or complete, let alone predictable. It is gratifying to note that the movements around 'Warragandra' this year closely mirror those of the previous spring (Brookfield, 2000),

One of the obvious conclusions from these observations is that the honeyeaters have a tendency to follow natural routes which offer some degree of cover or places to land and rest briefly. Many observations were of birds flying along belts of trees along creeks or roads in otherwise bare paddocks and open spaces, These tracts of vegetation appear to dictate to some extent the direction of travel of the honeyeaters, Even when tree cover was scarce or non-existent, birds were sometimes seen following creek lines rather than flying over open country with no distinguishing features.

It was obvious, without being too anthropomorphic, that the honeyeaters baulked at the prospect of having to cross wide expanses of open country, This was most noticeable at 'Warragandra' and at the site near Wyanbene Road. In both cases there was a distance of a kilometre or more to cross before reaching the next cover of forest. They would hesitate, swarm around restlessly, before finally mustering the numbers and courage to make the crossing. This behaviour presumably has something to do with maximising individual chances of survival in the event of attack by raptors.

This tendency to follow vegetation lines presumably has the effect of funnelling large numbers of birds into particular specific routes, exemplified in these observations by the movement of birds through 'Warragandra'.

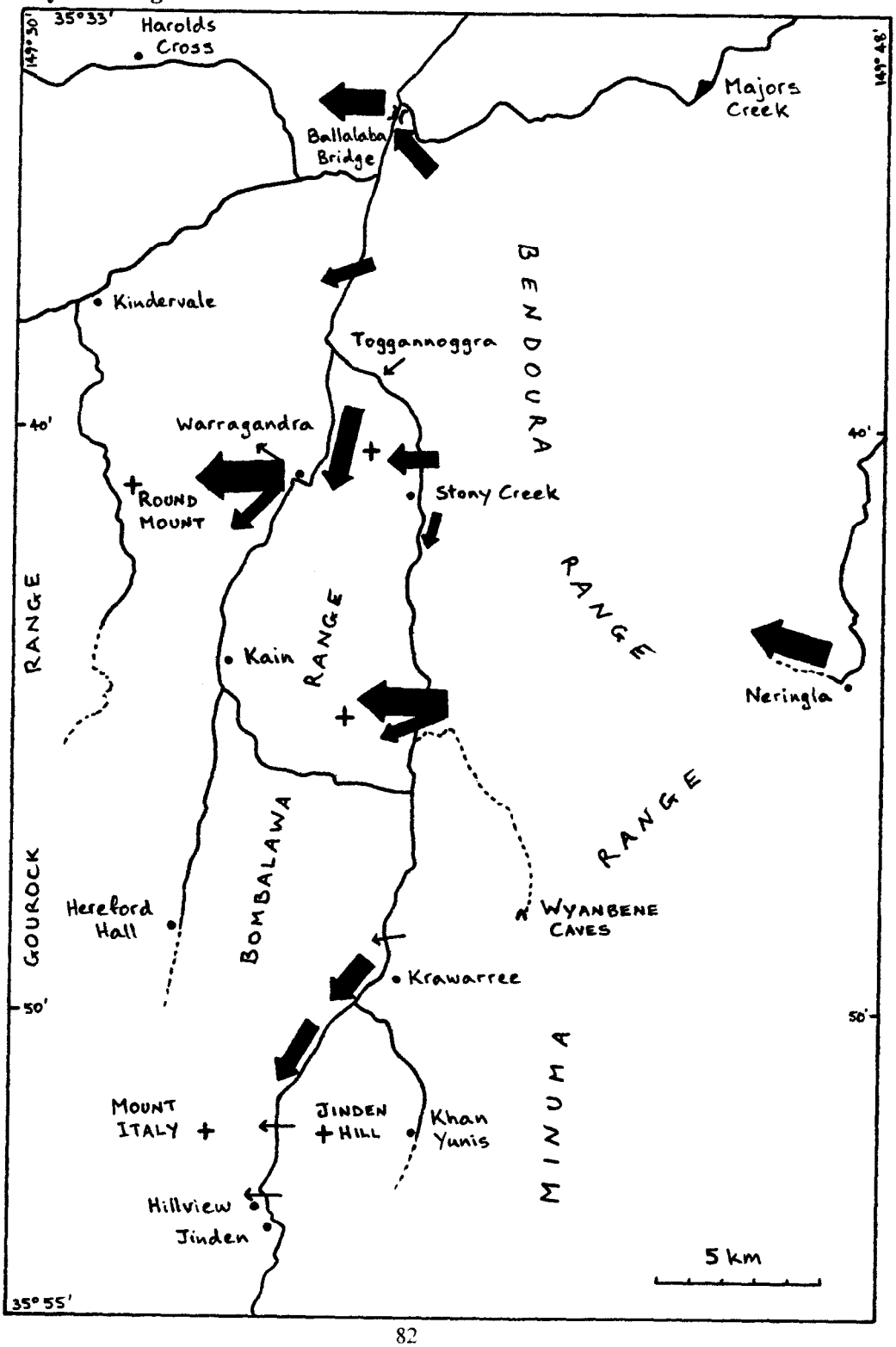
These arguments are not particularly new and are fairly self-evident, but they do bear on any interpretation of the honeyeater movements described here.

In view of this it is surprising that there were so few honeyeaters moving across the southernmost parts of the valley. It was anticipated that Jinden Creek and the wooded/forested expanses of Jinden Hill and Mount Italy would provide routes of passage, but virtually no honeyeaters were observed using these routes. Perhaps there is too much open country further to the east around 'Khan Yunis'.

The southernmost incidence of reasonable numbers of honeyeaters was just south of the 'Khan Yunis' road. These birds, both Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Red Wattlebirds were obvious in their south-westerly movements along the road. It seems most likely that they originate from the hills to the east of 'Krawarree', making use of the vegetation around the homestead before moving along the belt of roadside trees. It is unclear at this stage just where they break to the west, as none was seen closer to Mount Italy.

It is also intriguing that the proportion of White-naped Honeyeaters passing through the Ballalaba Bridge area was so high — the opposite of the normal situation. And the further south one looked, the proportion seemed

Honeyeater migration routes



increasingly biased towards Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. At this stage there is no obvious explanation or even speculation on why this might be so.

On a larger scale, there is still a very big question mark over the breadth of the front of honeyeater movement in the forested ranges to the east and west. Do they move through the entire forested area or are they concentrated into more delineated routes even in the absence of intimidating stretches of open space? The fact that there were honeyeaters entering the valley from the east over the whole 35-odd kilometre length of the area surveyed suggests that in general terms the front is broad. So does the observation of widespread dispersed honeyeaters in the forested Gourock Range and near Wild Cattle Flat Road. On the other hand, concentrated movements around 'Neringla' and near 'Pigbilla' indicate at least some more specific route delineation. All these observations do, however, argue against speculation from last year's event that the honeyeaters might be following the Shoalhaven River itself from further north (Brookfield, 2000). Rather it appears more likely that the overall movement is from east to west, presumably beginning near the coast and continuing up and across the various ranges to the Canberra region, including the Brindabella Ranges, and beyond. No doubt, numbers of honeyeaters would be stopping off all along the way to fill appropriate summer habitat.

So is this the normal situation or was this year also somewhat unusual? Certainly there seemed to be a more obvious than usual spring influx of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters evident in Canberra again this year. Nevertheless, on the basis of this year's observations it seems unlikely that this event was out of the ordinary. Only continuing surveillance over the coming years will clarify the situation.

Acknowledgments

Those participants who contributed data from the 15 September survey in the Shoalhaven Valley (David McDonald, Mary Argall, Stuart Harris, Kimberley Roberts, Charles Buer and Rachel Williams) are appreciatively acknowledged. David McDonald was instrumental in making the 15 September survey happen.

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Postscript

As this September issue of CBN was delayed, later observations have been able to be included. On 21 October Muriel Brookfield observed honeyeaters still moving through 'Warragandra'. She reported smaller groups, mainly Yellow-faced Honeyeaters with a few groups of 5-6 Red Wattlebirds. They were still gathering in the (by then) leafy willows before taking off westward in larger groups.

FAILED GREY BUTCHERBIRD NESTING ATTEMPT IN CANBERRA SUBURB

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Between 4 October and 15 December 1998 I observed a pair of Grey Butcherbirds *Cracticus torquatus* in suburban Kambah. They resided in the Kambah Adventure Playground, an area of approximately three hectares of mature eucalypt trees, introduced trees and planted native trees, with a mown introduced grass understorey. This is an extensively utilised children's playground and barbecue area on Springbett Street in west Kambah. All the observations were undertaken in the early morning, for varying short periods between approximately 7:00 h and 9:30 h.

Melodious Grey Butcherbird calls initially drew me to a copse of planted *Casuarina cunninghamiana* on the edge of the park area. I saw one butcherbird carrying a narrow twig that it then placed across a shallow fork of one of the young casuarinas, about 2.5 m from the ground. When first observed the nest was at a very rudimentary stage, with less than half a dozen 7.5 to 10 cm twigs in place horizontally across the fork. The other bird of the pair perched nearby whilst the nest-builder continued to bring in twigs.

I visited the nest site briefly five times over the next week, but nest construction had not progressed. Whilst one bird was still seen on each occasion to be carrying and placing twigs and casuarina needles horizontally across the fork, only 5 to 10 twigs remained in place at any one time.

On 13 October, when I observed for a longer period than previously, I saw what had been happening. Again one bird (which I had by this time dubbed the female') was placing twigs in the fork. On two occasions the twigs fell to the ground, upon which the bird retrieved them and again attempted to place them in the fork. The female balanced herself on her outstretched wings, tips in the fork side branches and arranged the twig across the fork with her beak. All the while the other bird was within 10 m of the nest tree, either perched, pouncing and foraging on the ground or chasing off Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans*.

The female continued energetically to re-build the rudimentary nest until 20 October. Approximately one third of the time the placed twigs would fall immediately either lower down on the tree or onto the ground, and would be retrieved. In some cases, the bird would, in placing one twig, knock a number of others down with either the placed twig or her body. The frequency of delivery of new or retrieved twigs was about every one to three minutes.

Between 20 and 30 October the female paid less attention to the 'nest'. On my visits I was more likely to find one or both birds flying between perches or foraging on the ground. But occasional visits by a bird to the 'nest' still

occurred, either to place a couple of twigs or just to perch.

My last observation of any building activity at the failed nest was on 4 November. From that date until the last observation on 15 December, one or both birds were only ever seen flying between trees, perching or foraging.

These observations raise a number of issues. Grey Butcherbirds are widely distributed in the ACT, although in small numbers. Their status has been designated as 'uncommon breeding resident' (Wilson, 1999). Interestingly, they are not often recorded in the city or suburbs: the reporting rate in the entire Canberra urban area as documented in the ACT Atlas is less than one per cent (Taylor and COG, 1992). There were only 48 records of the species during the first 17 years of COG's Canberra Garden Bird Survey (Fennell, 2000). Their preferred habitat is woodland and open forest. As well, the only urban records reported in the ACT Atlas were from observations exclusively in autumn, the period of known post-breeding dispersal.

I had heard Grey Butcherbird calls in the Kambah park in mid-March 1998, although I didn't have time to search for the bird(s) at that time. As the species is known to be sedentary, with some post-breeding dispersal, it is likely that at least one of these two birds was resident from that time. This observation is therefore very unusual in Canberra's urban context.

This observation caused me to question why we don't see more Grey Butcherbirds in our urban area. After all, they are found commonly in suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. One suggestion is that there is a dearth of small lizards in the Canberra urban area (Roberts, 1989). Grey Butcherbirds are known to eat a wide range of food types, including seeds, fruit and other plant material, a wide range of invertebrate species (their main fare), and small reptiles and birds (Barker and Vestjens, 1990). Other than the reptiles, all the other food groups are well represented in the Canberra suburbs, at least over the warmer months. Indeed, one of the birds I observed was seen to be eating barbecue meat scraps, an extra food source which may have encouraged the pair to continue residence in the park.

One reason for the lack of butcherbird residency in urban Canberra may be competition from other resident Artamidae family members — Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* and Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* — larger, similarly aggressive species that share comparable food preferences. The butcherbird pair was seen to chase a Pied Currawong on one occasion. Schodde and Tidemann (1988, p. 609) comment that Grey Butcherbirds need exclusive control of their resources, and that no butcherbird overlaps the niche of any other. Perhaps they are also sensitive to competition from more distant relations.

As well, Grey Butcherbirds may suffer aggression from other resident territorial species such as Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala,* Red Wattle bird *Anthochaera carunculata* and Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*. A Noisy Miner was seen to chase the female from her nest building activity on one occasion. Although conversely, Grey Butcherbirds in the Sydney region are

often associated with Noisy Miner colonies (Hoskin, 1991).

So, perhaps a pair of Grey Butcherbirds, or a pair with last season's immatures (as they are no more communal than this), is no match in defending a feeding territory against these other more social species present across the Canberra suburbs and in much higher numbers.

In any event, neither of the butcherbirds appeared fazed by close proximity to human activity, despite a busy cycle and pedestrian path being within two to three metres of the nest tree.

The other interesting conundrum is why this pair made such a hash of their nesting attempt. Only the female Grey Butcherbird nest builds (Schodde and Mason, 2000) - hence, my presumption of sex in this case. As both Grey Butcherbird sexes have similar plumage and other field characteristics, I presumed the other bird to be male.

My first thought of course was that the female was immature, and may have been inexperienced in choosing a tree fork with enough structural 'depth' to provide a secure support for the coarse twigs that would form the nest base. An immature Grey Butcherbird is identified by its dusky brown upper parts, lighter, buff brow, brown-white underparts, and a dull grey bill (Schodde and Tidemann, 1988). Adult plumage is attained in the second year.

Alas, the female showed no signs of immature plumage. Although certainly not an immature, the female may possibly have been only a young adult.

Grey Butcherbirds are known to build their nests slowly over about a month (Disney, 1974), and nest from early August to early November in the ACT region (Taylor and COG, 1992). Although I may not have observed the actual commencement of the nest building episode, nest building behaviour was observed over exactly a month before it was abandoned. The female certainly showed plenty of futile perseverance, and it remains very perplexing as to why the obviously unsuitable nest site wasn't abandoned sooner.

All in all, these unusual observations of Grey Butcherbird location and behaviour have thrown up more questions than answers. Unfortunately, I was not able to follow the pair into the next breeding season. Although they were seen again during my quarterly Birds Australia Atlas surveys of the park over the following six months (and were last seen on 31 July 1999), they then disappeared and have not been seen since.

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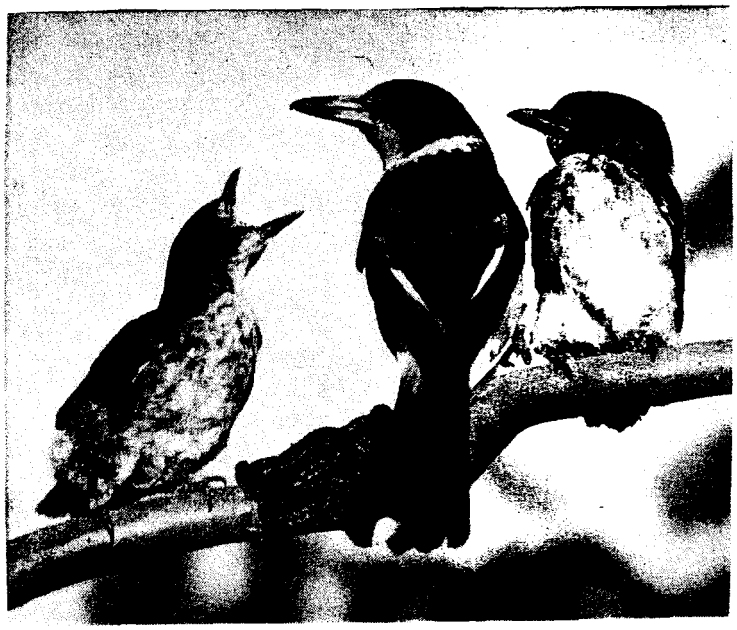

What might have been ...

ODD OBS

A kookaburra in suburbia

Looking back over my records which have been kept since the beginning of the Garden Bird Survey in 1981, I find that the Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae* has been an occasional visitor to our garden area and has been seen more often in the parkland opposite our home.

On 31 July 2001 a Laughing Kookaburra appeared in our garden and since then has been seen daily and has clearly adopted the area. Its favoured perches are the two gates, the bar of the bird feeder in the back yard, the clothes line and a deciduous tree near our bedroom. Most mornings we are awakened by its call: in the first two months this was merely the preliminary chuckle but since then it has been giving the full loud laugh. It is quite an experience to hear that call from about four metres from one's bedroom window at first light!

We are on a corner block with a large lawn at the front and side. An automatic watering system was installed earlier this year, resulting in the greenest lawn in the neighbourhood. The kookaburra has been seen to collect food from the lawn on many occasions.

I fully expected the bird to move off at the onset of warmer weather to find a mate for the breeding season but by mid-October it was still in residence.

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Noisy Friarbird spring headquarters

The Kambah Village Shopping Centre has many mature Red Ironbarks *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* mostly *var. rosea.* These trees flower each year about mid-September. Much of the year the area is populated by a small number of Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata* but as soon as the flowers appear, the area is taken over exclusively by Noisy Friarbirds *Philemon corniculatus.* The latter species does not appear to breed in the area but up to twenty birds are generally present while the flowering lasts, generally until the end of October. This is the greatest annual concentration of Noisy Friarbirds of which I am aware in the Canberra area.

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A hybrid rosella

At 8:20 h on the morning of 19 June 2001, two rosellas visited my garden in suburban Page. Both our local rosella species are regular garden visitors, as I grow fruit which the birds enjoy. I also have two very large eucalypts, *E. mannifera,* whose lerps are appreciated; the birdbath under the apple tree is also popular. At first glance, I assumed that the two visitors on this occasion were Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans;* closer inspection revealed that while one bird was, indeed, a 'common or garden' Crimson Rosella, its companion was not. The companion bird had the crimson-red head, blue cheek patch and red underparts of a Crimson Rosella but the

feathers of its back and upperwing coverts were black with yellow-green fringes like those of an Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius;* it also had a lime-yellow rump and yellow markings on the bend of the wing.

Presumably the same hybrid rosella has been observed revisiting the garden from time to time since, always on its own. Unlike the other rosella visitors, this bird has a penchant for perching on the roses and nipping off, but not eating, the new shoots. It displays a preference for hybrid teas, and 'Mr Lincoln' in particular, over David Austins or old-fashioned roses. 'Mr Lincoln' is in a relatively open, north-facing location in the centre of the rose bed and grows strongly but in leaf differs little from its fellows, so the reasons for the bird's marked preference are unclear.

Hybrid rosellas are not uncommon in our region, with the Garden Bird Survey coordinator estimating that about ten records have been received over the duration of the survey (Philip Veerman, pers. comm). One was sighted in a Melba garden on 18 April 1998, feeding on the seed of a *Callitris rhomboidea;* it was in the company of an adult Crimson Rosella and was described as having white cheeks with a strong bluish tinge, and the red on the head extended down the back and blended with the black back feathers (David Purchase, pers. comm).

The Australian National Wildlife Collection contains two Crimson/Eastern Rosella hybrids, both males. The dominant influence appears to come from the Eastern Rosella. Both birds have blue tinges to the cheek patches, lime-green rumps, and more red in the head, back, breast and belly than is usual in an Eastern Rosella (Mark Clayton, pers. comm).

Few descriptions of Crimson/Eastern Rosella hybrids in the wild appear to have been published. Wyndham (1979) described one such bird near Armidale, NSW: it had a blue and white cheek patch and yellow-green fringed back feathers. Interestingly, it was paired to an Eastern Rosella and laid a clutch of six eggs, which were broken before their fertility could be established.

COG does not at present record such hybrids separately in either the COG or the Garden Bird databases. Hence we have no empirical means of assessing the frequency with which they occur. Should we record them separately? What are our readers' views? And would those readers who have seen rosella hybrids in our region within, say, the last decade, please consider providing an account of their sighting to *Canberra Bird Notes.*

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Two Pink Robins

The Royalla Estate is a very large area, much of it mature eucalypt grassland, which is in the process of being broken up into small blocks. The area away from the Cooma Road is grassland with very few trees but the area nearer the road is quite well wooded. Access is

easy as there are main roads and many minor roads, all of which are sealed. The roads in the more distant areas are still under development and not open to the public.

On a visit to the Estate on 13 August 2001 I noticed a pair of robins on a fence. I stopped the car some eight metres from them in order to identify them. Both birds were in female plumage, rather dark on the upper parts and with no trace of white in the outer tail feathers. They were dropping from the fence to feed in the grass, then returning to their original positions on the fence, about two metres apart. When they flew, their rich buff-coloured wing bars were seen. I identified them as Pink Robins *Petroica rodinogaster*, a record endorsed by the COG Rarities Panel.

In the early 1960s I was the first to record this species in the ACT, banding one or two Pink Robins during most winters at New Chums Road in the Brindabella Ranges. All five of the pink/red robin species were banded at that site and also at Lee's Creek, the Australian National Botanic Gardens and at Lake Road, Lake George.

Steve Wilson
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OBITUARY

Richard Gregory-Smith, 1928-2001

Richard Gregory-Smith was a charming man, who travelled widely and contributed actively to Australian and South East Asian ornithological studies. His boyhood hobby of bird egg collecting developed into a lifelong love for birds and their habitats.

Richard was born in Bournemouth in the United Kingdom on 13 November 1928. He joined the Indian army in the UK as a young man and, when India gained its independence after the war, he transferred to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, for officer training in the British Army. He graduated from Sandhurst aged 20, and went on to do young officer training courses including a Royal Military College of Science degree course from 1950-52. It was then his travels began. He was posted to Egypt, and then later served in North Africa in Tripoli, Singapore, Thailand, Nepal, Germany, Canada and the United States of America, specialising mainly in the supervision of army vehicle performance tests.

He came to Australia as an exchange officer in 1976, and ended his military career in 1979. He then joined the Australian Development Assistance Bureau, working for them in Papua New Guinea from 1986-89. Always the explorer, when based in Papua New Guinea, he travelled to the Philippines and India. When I asked his wife Judyth, if the trips were a holiday, she laughed and replied, 'They were never holidays with Richard, they were always expeditions!'

Richard's fascination with birds drew him into a myriad of bird societies and projects. He was secretary of the British Army's Ornithological Society, president and founder of the Bird Study Group of the Malay Nature Society in Singapore, president of the Dharan, Nepal Natural History Club, vice-president of Papua New Guinea's Ornithological Society and president of the Orchid Society of Papua New Guinea.

From 1977 he contributed actively to the Canberra Ornithologists Group. He served on the COG committee from 1977 for six years and the Rarities Panel for five years from 1982. As editor of the COG newsletter in the mid-1980s he introduced its now distinctive Gang-gang letterhead and title. He contributed material to *Canberra Bird Notes* from October 1977, including articles of particular interest: in 1991, `Computers in Bird Studies (from Kedah)' and in 1992, 'Birds of North Araluen (Dec 84-May 86, July 89-March 1991)'.

Richard fell in love with out of the way pieces of land and bought blocks at '1770' near Rockhampton and at Araluen in New South Wales.

In the 1990s after his retirement, he accompanied his wife Judyth to universities in Kedah and Sarawak in Malaysia, where he devoted himself full time to ornithology,

eventually becoming a Research Fellow with the Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation at the University of Malaysia, Sarawak. His work in Sarawak helped to bring attention to the need for forest reserves to protect bird species. Richard contributed to numerous ornithological publications both as a writer and as a photographer.

In 1999 Richard and Judyth decided Brisbane was the place to end their nomadic wanderings. They bought a lovely large block of land at Karalee on the Brisbane River on the western outskirts of Brisbane. They immediately set about reinstating the native garden and establishing friendly relations with local birds. Richard continued work on bird-banding for the Australian Bird and Bat Banding database.

On a final visit to England in 2001 Richard travelled to Wales especially to see the Red Goshawk and add it to his world bird list. On his return to Australia he was admitted to Ipswich Hospital and died there on 23 July 2001, aged 72 years.

Richard is sadly missed by his fellow birdwatchers, who knew and enjoyed him as a birdwatching companion, an excellent cook, and a warm and welcoming host.

I am grateful for the help of Richard's widow Judyth, and that of Grahame Clark and Barry Baker, in the preparation of this obituary.

Joseph Bryan Fitzgerald
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LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Canberra open spaces

The question of building houses on open spaces in Canberra has been debated repeatedly in the media in recent months. Even when the open spaces in question have been designated as 'residential', cries of dismay go up from nearby residents who regard them as their private parks.

When I moved to Canberra with my family in 1959 we lived in Narrabundah. For a few days, ours was the southernmost occupied home in Canberra. Red Hill had not been built at that time and Lyneham, Downer and Hackett were all under construction. The population had not reached 50,000.

Today the Canberra population is about 330,000 and it stretches some 32 km from north to south. I understand it occupies an area larger than Rome. So where is Canberra going? Its continual expansion has destroyed much habitat of many species of birds which will not tolerate suburban development; and these are species which are in steady decline throughout their respective ranges largely due to habitat clearance.

Nothing will stop the development of the planned Gungahlin suburbs but at least Mulligan's Flat has been saved. And fortunately, Canberra is virtually surrounded by areas of Canberra Nature Park. From the viewpoint of conservation and indeed of reasonable planning, designated residential areas within present boundaries must be developed and there must be some reasonable closer density of housing without destroying the garden city concept. Finally, Canberra must go upwards and not outwards with higher rise redevelopment in appropriate areas, especially near shopping centres.

Steve Wilson, OAM

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BOOK REVIEWS

[Editors' note: Much interest was expressed in Penny Olsen's *Feather and Brush,* which caused the editors to seek out and include here several views from persons in different fields of expertise. Ian Warden's review of both *Feather and Brush* and HANZAB vol. 5 was first published in the *Canberra Times* on 21 April 2001 and is reproduced here with his permission.]

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume five. Various editors. Oxford University Press. 1269pp. $385.

Feather and Brush: Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art. By Penny Olsen.
CS1RO Publishing. 227pp. $69.95.

Imagine this. You are a keen ornithologist and a smoker, and suddenly the Superb Lyrebird you've been following and watching in the wild for some weeks begins to imitate, perfectly, your smoker's cough.

If we are to believe the latest, wholly believable, authoritative volume (volume five) of the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB), this really did happen. That famous mimic the male Superb Lyrebird, peering attentively out at us as though waiting for us to make a cough for it to imitate, makes a strikingly handsome cover for the gigantic new HANZAB volume. He is very handsome but his species is no role model for ours. 'Appears to be promiscuous,' HANZAB's typically detailed, 30-page account of the species advises, 'with male usually displaying from several mounds to attract and copulate with many females; apparently no pair-bonds formed; there is no parental care by males ... Mating system also appears to be a form of dispersed male-dominance polygyny, where males are visited by females solely for purposes of copulation ...'

In the space of three days last week this lucky journalist listened to a male Superb Lyrebird shrilling and gibbering his famously mimicry-enriched call from a mound in the bush at Tidbinbilla (the other Lyrebird species, Albert's Lyrebird, doesn't occur in the ACT) and then went to talk to Canberra ornithological illustrator Peter Marsack. It is Marsack's portrait of the male Superb Lyrebird that, on its cover, makes volume five of the already distinguished HANZAB look more distinguished still. And the same portrait, destined to be a classic of bird portraiture and perhaps the ornithological equivalent of Holbein's famous portrait of Henry V1II, gets a guernsey in another beautiful new book about birds, Penny Olsen's *Feather And Brush: Three Centuries of Australian Bird Art.* It is a sumptuously illustrated account of Australia's very special place in the history of the painting of birds. In Tidbinbilla and while the aforementioned bird was giving his libidinous recital my companion, with a better view, was able to watch him as well and to see him going about his display but without seeing, thank goodness, any of that blush-making copulation. It is a little early for that for we find in the HANZAB story of sexual behaviour in the species that the collected wisdom of observers has it that

while courtship begins about now, copulation happens in June and July and has been known to occur as late as September.

Marsack, suffering the loneliness of the long-distance wildlife illustrator in his bare little studio in the Canberra suburb of Dickson where he is at work on painstaking and perfect illustrations of yellow robins for the next volume of HANZAB, rather envied me my reports to him of gambols in the bush among live lyrebirds. His aforementioned portrait done for the cover of the latest HANZAB and decorating an inside page of *Feather and Brush* is an unusual work for him in that it was done especially for the HANZAB cover and so liberated him a little from his usual scientific/artistic work of illustrating birds in profile so as to describe them. His plates of lyrebirds (and of treecreepers, fairy-wrens and of all sorts of birds) are among the glories within the HANZAB volume. I asked him what special challenges lyrebirds posed for an illustrator who must, as every HANZAB illustrator must, get them utterly, scientifically right in every detail and still try to make them look live and not stuffed, mounted and posed. 'Well, they're big and they're complicated and they've got fascinating tails and they're also not overly colourful but they're very interesting and they've got patterns,' Marsack reflects. 'That means you really have to understand the way they're constructed and you have to think about colour changes depending on which angle you're looking at them Now the one for the cover is not strictly intended to be structural as a description of a lyrebird so it's much more strongly lit and you've got shadow and you haven't got it turned sideways to [visually] explain everything. You're trying to make it look more interesting. The ones inside [volume five of HANZAB], they're basically turned side on so that you can see the full structure of them and get an idea of the length of the tail relative to the body and of how the different subspecies differ in colour. So something like the cover illustration's a nice chance to loosen up a bit . . . and put a bit of light and shade into things and really make it pop and do it from a different angle.' The lyrebirds inside the book were painted from Marsack's past examination of the preserved bodies of birds and from photographs of birds he'd seen at the Healesville Sanctuary, 'and also to get the light and shade right I actually made little plasticene models of the head and stuck it up under the light on my drawing board to see where the shadows would fall.'

True to its attempts to summarise all that is known about the birds it describes, HANZAB includes in its entry on the Superb Lyrebird seven densely packed pages of information about the famous call with its repertoire of impersonations. Females, we find, do much less calling than males but do some mimicry. Between 70 per cent and 80 per cent of the species' calls are made up of mimicry (the one we heard in Tidbinbilla was doing wonderful currawong impersonations) and HANZAB catalogues that as well as smokers' coughs. Superb Lyrebirds have been heard to imitate (often in voices so loud that it will hurt the ears from 10 m and can be heard across a kilometre of woodland) a violin, piano, cornet, cross-cut saw, a pig being killed, a dog howling, a child crying, a man saying 'Gee up, Bess' to his horse, the motor

drive of a camera, the six blasts of a whistle used at a timber mill to announce accidents, chains rattling and an ambulance siren. There is, though, some controversy about some of these reports. HANZAB thinks that some are reliable but some sounds of the Superb Lyrebird (and imagined to be mimicry of axe blows, barking dogs, machinery and other things) may only be the birds' own funny repertoire of whirrs and clicks. And the lyrebird, described by one authority in HANZAB as 'a Shakespeare among birds', not only produces a complex song, but also produces so much song. HANZAB reports that at the height of the breeding season some males in the Sherbrooke Forest in Victoria spent 51 per cent of daylight in song. Some of the most garrulous lyrebirds ever written up in scholarly literature were males who gave long recitals in the ACT's Tidbinbilla in the breeding season. They began at dawn with songs where they had roosted (the equivalent of a human bursting into song before getting up) and then gave gigs from various bush stages throughout the day, sometimes singing from their roosts at dusk (the equivalent of a human singing himself to sleep). One of these birds spent four hours and 21 minutes of a day in song.

Feather and Brush contains a share of the sorts of scientific illustrations we find in HANZAB but also ranges from the very earliest illustrations of Australian birds (often unhappy and unrealistic-looking things because they were painted in Europe from stuffed specimens) to dazzling and exciting contemporary and sometimes impressionistic paintings. A very few of the latter in *Feather And Brush* are the kinds of illustrations one sees on cliched greeting cards, but most of the ones Olsen has chosen are paintings that catch the birds in action and startle and amaze, as mere photographs seldom can. So, for example, in Richard Weatherly's Emu (1990) two Emus in the foreground are framed against a bleak gibber plain that stretches away to infinity behind them, making the birds look strangely prehistoric or as though they have somehow survived a catastrophe that has wiped every other living thing off the Earth. In Jeremy Boot's White-bellied Sea-Eagle (1995), the great white and grey bird looks us straight in the eye as though thinking seriously of killing and eating us. In Lars Knudsen's impressionistic Australian King-Parrot (1994), four of these implausibly bright red, bright green and bright blue birds (painted by God during His own impressionistic period) are framed against the implausible blues and purples and pinks of a canyon in the Blue Mountains. In Knudsen's Pied Oystercatcher (1987) two of the birds seem to somehow both dance and gallop together along an idealised beach in front of an idealised headland, like a feathered Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. In Peter Trusler's Wedge-tailed Eagle (1981) a Wedge-tailed Eagle chick still manages despite its downy cuteness to radiate some of the menace and majesty it will have when it grows up.

Most of the paintings in *Feather And Brush* will be a revelation for those who are only used to seeing, in galleries and on greetings cards, rather bad paintings of just a few well-known dinky-di birds.

Ian Warden, c/- Canberra Times, PO Box 7155, Canberra Mail Centre, ACT 2610

Feather and Brush: three centuries of Australian bird art, by Penny Olsen. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Vic, 2001. 227 pages, ISBN 0 643 06547 4.

This lavishly illustrated book is a 'must have' for the bird watcher and ornithologist alike. The author has skillfully brought together those aspects of Australian history concerning birds and bird illustrators including contemporary workers in this field. The book concludes with a comprehensive bibliography to support the text.

Dr Penny Olsen has taken us back in time to the epic voyages of discovery - of William Dampier, James Cook, Joseph Banks and those of the great French navigators. The result was the publication of accounts of the voyages and were illustrated with the 'natural productions' of the 'new' countries visited, which of course included birds.

As is well known, at the suggestion of Banks a convict colony was established in New South Wales. Despite the hardships and the nature of the new settlement at Port Jackson (later known as Sydney) it is amazing how time was found to observe and record the bird life and other animals. One year after the colony was established, the surgeon, John White, published a book in 1789 which illustrated and described birds of the region. The controversial Lachlan Maquarie who arrived as late as December 1809 has been quoted as saying, 'There are only two kinds of people in this colony, those who have been convicted and those who ought to be'. I wonder how far we have advanced from our ignominious past? We have certainly made an impact on the habitats and knowledge of our bird life.

This book brings Australia and birdmen (or should I say bird persons in this modern political era?) together which is a fascinating subject in itself.

Feather and Brush has been well researched, despite the fact that we possess very few of those early works of 'art' in Australia today, with most residing in European institutions where I think they should remain. However we are fortunate to have in the National Library, Canberra, the vast Mathews collection of books and papers relating to the history and ornithology in Australia, including some extremely rare items. Mathews also offered his collection of some thousands of bird skins and was turned down by the Commonwealth. It ended up in the Natural History Museum, New York. It was our loss due to the lack of interest of the governments of the day. Nothing has changed!

It would be unusual indeed if ever a book is published without some criticism but Penny Olsen's painstaking research and the CSIRO publishing section have left little room for errors. I found only one omission, that of an editor of a rare work listed in the bibliography. Also this reviewer's name was omitted from the reference to a book which is not about birds (although the animal concerned does lay eggs) in which the 'artist' was listed but not the illustrator (photographer).

The bristlebird plate on p. vi caused me some concern, both relating to the species of bristlebird depicted and in its attribution to Neville William Caley. If

the date of 1895 is correct, then Neville William would have been about ten years old at the time. In my view it is more likely the work of his father, Neville Henry Cayley. The Museum of Victoria, where work in question resides, might like to explore this conundrum further at some stage.

Another comment I don't fully understand is the author's reference to Cayley's *What Bird is That?* as being 'meanly illustrated'. Neville William Cayley's book was a landmark at the time - 1931. It sold out two editions in one year. I remember as a young child my father taking me to a pre-publication exhibition of the original paintings for the book at the Education Department Gallery, Sydney. To me, they were overwhelming and remain in my memory to this day. I was introduced to Neville Cayley and come Christmas time I found a copy of *What Bird is That?* in my Christmas stocking. I still treasure it over the many editions that followed.

Bill Oddie of *Goodies* fame is also an avid bird enthusiast and has served on the trustees of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. He has made the comment, 'so many so-called bird books are written by people who know 'bugger all' about birds'. *Feather and Brush* is written by one who really knows her subject and it will take pride of place in my bird library. We look forward to further works by Penny Olsen and hopefully published by the CSIRO.

Ederic Slater

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Feather and Brush: three centuries of Australian bird art, by Penny Olsen. CS1RO Publishing, Collingwood, Vic, 2001. 227 pages, 1SBN 0 643 06547 4.

This book is well structured and written with an academic tilt. The table of contents, list of artists and references are good and the index is comprehensive. However, the book's coverage of Australian bird artists is spotty and incomplete. The book claims to cover the last 300 years of Australian bird artists. I was a little disappointed to see only two illustrations dated 1699 and 1697 and then nothing until 1769.

The inclusion of indigenous bird paintings, although not attractive to the western approach, would have both filled some historical gaps and extended the historical reach of the book. Their paintings of birds can be extremely accurate and scientifically informative - qualities that would suggest their inclusion in this Australian history.

The omissions of more contemporary Australian artists are a little more serious. Although space in any book is limited, a bibliographic reference to them would have enhanced the completeness of the book. The bird artist Earlington Rosbray is not included. Painting in the early 1900s, he was a reclusive artist unwilling to sell his work while alive although some were given away. His numerous paintings were found after his death and occur mainly in private collections. What a missed opportunity for original research. Also missing are well known contemporary bird artists Paul Margocsy, Gordon Handley, Margaret Senior and Deidre Hunt.

It's difficult to make out Parkinson's sketch of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and was disappointing that the contrast was not enhanced.

It's a pity that a panel of current Australian bird artists was apparently not consulted (no mention is made of this approach in the acknowledgments) during the compilation of the book. The panel could have plugged some of the obvious omissions in the historical list of artists and works. The author seems to have compiled a classic academic library list of artists with the inevitable omissions.

Helen Fitzgerald
www.helenfitzgerald.com

COLUMNISTS' CORNER

Birding in cyberspace, Canberra style

While it is somewhat out of character for this column to quote from a non-birding web site, it is Spring so time to visit the Readers Paradise Forum's poems about this wonderful season at http://www.glyphs.com/forums/load/paradise/msg0512595719116.html. Perhaps most birders know the ditty found there:

> Spring is sprung, the grass is riz, 1 wonder where the birdies is? The little bird is on the wing, but that's absurd, the little wing is on the bird!

But I prefer the contribution from the Good Book:

> My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land (Song of Solomon 2: 10-12).

The 'turtle' mentioned here is rather confusing. Perhaps it refers to a species of Turtle-Dove? The editor would probably appreciate advice on this matter.

Seeing new species, and adding them to our life and regional lists, are Spring challenges, this being the time of year when the birds are on the move. As I write, reports are coming in on the Australian birders email list, *Birding-Aus*, about two hyper-rarities that have just been ticked: a Northern Shoveler at Werribee, Vic., and a Nordmann's (Spotted) Greenshank at Derby, WA. Probably all flights to these two places are at present booked out by birders keen to eyeball and tick these specialties.

From time to time *Birding Aus* contributors share their thoughts about the Rules of Ticking: which observations can legitimately be placed on which lists without artificially inflating them. Was the correspondent who called her/himself Fred tongue-in-cheek in writing:

> I am travelling to South America at the end of the year and I am looking to `bump' a few lists. That is, my 'world list', my '2001 list' and my 'Australia with political outliers' list. I'm gonna visit as many Aussie embassies as possible and any birds seen or heard will be added to my Aussie list. This is acceptable, isn't it?

Hmm. Doesn't fit my criteria for inclusion, but go ahead if you wish, Fred. You will have a unique Aussie list!

Lorne, a regular *BirdingAus* contributor, has also been travelling. He reported observations about interactions between other road users and Wedge-tailed Eagles:

> During my 6000km-plus road trip from Sydney to Alice I saw many Wedgetails, but none of them were dead. A bloke I met in a bookshop in Broken Hill told me of a truckie he knew, who hit a Wedgie and it came through his windscreen into his cabin! Apparently it was one

> thrashing mass of angry talon and beak. He had to brake, get out, and let the eagle, which was alright, fly out. The driver was uninjured, amazingly. Also, in one of the main pubs in The Alice, there's a mounted Wedgie, with wings spread, behind the bar. There's a plaque saying he had been hit on the highway, and that we all should slow down, remove roadkills from the road and look out for our eagles. I was touched!

Yes Lorne, it is good to see this positive attitude towards a species that was so severely harassed in earlier years.

Closer to home, have you been checking out the Silvereyes' calls? Remember that, in the winter, we have two subspecies here: the resident *Zosterops lateralis westernensis* and the dark-flanked nominate subspecies which is a migrant from Tasmania. In July, Canberra birder John Leonard referred to someone's suggestion that, in some bird species, the loudness of calls differs between subspecies. He observed that ' [yesterday] we had our first non-Tasmanian Silvereyes of the winter in our yard, and I gained the impression that their calls were softer than the migratory Tasmanian race's'. You may find it interesting to check this out if you have both subspecies in your yard, too.

Now back to Spring, the breeding season for most of the Canberra region birds. COG contributes significantly to research and policy development related to the preservation of the grassy box woodlands of our region. The relative absence of old woodland trees with nesting holes for parrots and other species is a great concern. Indeed, are we close to the end of the Superb Parrot's summer migration to our area owing to the declining availability of nesting trees? Perhaps a small part of the solution to this deepening problem is to shift old trees that are threatened with destruction to locations where they can serve as high-density housing for diverse types of insects, animals and birds. A *BirdingAus* correspondent gave an example of using this strategy:

> A good friend of mine, John Robinson, who lives in Strathfieldsaye south of Bendigo, has put a great deal of effort into relocating a dead tree on his 'Land for Wildlife' grassy woodland property. The tree was blown-over in a wind storm several years ago and fell over the creek running alongside his property. The tree was of no real habitat value where it fell so being slightly eccentric, John decided he would convert the fallen tree into an apartment block for local hollow-dependant fauna, raising a few of his neighbours' eye-brows in the process! At his own personal expense, he hired in some excavating equipment to dig a deep hole, hired a crane for half a day to remove the tree from the creek and place it in the hole, then ordered a truck of pre-mix to cement the thing in (that process totalled close to $3000). After erecting the tree, he used silicone and pieces of natural timber to alter the diameter of many of the natural hollow openings to specifically target different species. He also created new hollows using a chainsaw and a chisel.

Since completing the project, John has observed that nine species of birds, three species of bats, a glider and an antechinus have either nested in or sheltered in hollows in the 'habitat tree'. This example was an inspiration to some readers, whereas others wondered if the money involved would have been better spent manufacturing and installing a

large number of artificial nesting boxes in standing trees. It is a good question, one which lends itself to an empirical study.

Satin Bowerbirds build their bowers on the ground and sometimes have to rebuild them following damage by competitors. For some years Graham Cheetham had observed the bower of a Great Bowerbird in Townsville. It was in a very public spot next to a heavily-used path. One day it as gone; a mess of sticks remained. Soon afterwards, however, while passing the area he again noticed the bowerbird calling from a tree within a fenced yard adjacent to the former location of the bower. He advises that:

> On a closer look I could see the bower now located in a garden bed under a tree. Considering the location of the bird to the bower and the bird's collection of ornaments it seems that the bird has made its home here. But one thing I did notice was the lack of the mess of sticks etc. that normally surround a bower. It would appear that the bower has been picked up as a whole and relocated to a new location within the yard. A distance of about 10 metres from its original location. There is a clear contrast of newly woodchiped garden bed and the old weathered look of the bower. I am making the assumption that the bower was moved by 'persons unknown' and that the bowerbird has located it again and taken ownership.

I wonder if anyone has heard of a Satin Bowerbird's bower being 'relocated' by human intervention, resulting in the bird re-establishing possession and use of the bower?

Crested Pigeons are everyone's favourite, I think, and their expansion throughout Canberra is a delight to see. Nonetheless, we end this Spring message with a sad little tale of the experience of one Crested Pigeon. John Wren wrote to *BirdingAus* about how he, his wife and his daughter used to care for injured and orphaned birds. 'One morning', he wrote, an elderly gent appeared at our door with a very young, near naked pigeon chick that he had found. The state the bird was in didn't appear to give it very good odds for survival, but we still took it in our care.' As it turned out the young chick survived the ordeal and eventually was released a number of months later minus its crest. The young bird sported a nice little crest until one day the daughter (aged five or so) decided to try out her hairdressing skills and snipped the crest off with a pair of scissors. Poor bird!

Remember this column's motto: while birding is much more fun in the field than at the computer, it is also good to share your observations and thoughts with others on the national birders' email list *BirdingAus* and on the Canberra region list, *Canberrabirds*. Good birding!

Details on how to subscribe to *BirdingAus*, the Australian birding email discussion list, are on the web at http://www.shc.melb.catholic.edu.au/home/birding/index.html. To join the *Canberra Birding* email discussion list, send a blank email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@topica.com, or join online at http://www.topica.com/lists/canberrabirds.

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

The highlight of the following endorsed records is undoubtedly that of the Black-tailed Native-hen, first seen and reported by Bob Rusk on 23 September 2001. Informal reports were being received of the bird's presence in the same location to the end of September and beyond. The species is an inland bird, generally regarded as a vagrant in our area. Records from 1969 and 1970 were from the same part of what is now Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Park.

The Rarities Panel now accepts records submitted electronically. Forms can be downloaded from COG's web site and emailed to the Panel secretary, Barbara Allan, allanbm@ozemail. com.au. The Panel does not discriminate, however, against records submitted on any of the many and varied previous hard-copy report forms; nor does it object to the use of the Birds Australia form or even a plain letter, so long as the relevant details are included. Paper copies of the current form may be collected from the sales table or from the Records Officer at COG monthly meetings. When completed, they should be returned to the Records Officer at meetings or posted to him at the COG address so that they can be included as an unendorsed record in the COG database before being passed on to the Rarities Panel for consideration.

Generally speaking, the Panel secretary will only contact you about your record if the Panel wants some aspect of it clarified. Endorsed records are published in the next available issue of *Canberra Bird Notes*. If the Panel does not endorse your record, the secretary will contact you to explain why. Non-endorsement does NOT mean that the sighting in question was not what you reported it to be - it merely means that on the basis of the information provided to the Panel, it it is unable to endorse the record. If you find the wait for the next available *Canberra Bird Notes* too long, by all means call (6254 6520) or email the Panel secretary to check on progress.

To lessen the chance of your record being rejected, please pay attention to the description of the bird. The Panel receives a surprising number of records which fail to mention the size of the bird in question - at times, a highly relevant point in assisting the Panel's deliberations.

To encourage quality reports, the Panel will offer a good bottle of red - yes, wine! - to the submittor of what it deems to be the 'best' 2002 record - but no correspondence will be entered into concerning its choice!

It has been suggested to the Panel that brief reports of the more interesting 'unusuals' should be included in the endorsed lists. Would readers find this useful? Feedback please to the Panel secretary.

ENDORSED LIST 53, SEPTEMBER 2001

Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius*
1; 11,12,15 Aug, 1 Sep 01; John Bissett; Lake Tuggeranong (north)

Australasian Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilus*
1; 27 Jun 01; Marnix Zwankhuizen; Rose Lagoon

Spotted Harrier *Circus assimilis*
1; 1 May 01; Bob Rusk; Kelly's Swamp
1; 4 and 9 Sep 01; Bob Rusk; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds

Black-tailed Native-hen *Gallinula ventralis*
1; 23 Sep 01; Bob Rusk; Kelly's Swamp

White-headed Pigeon *Columba leucomela*
1; 30 Aug 01; Jennifer Scott; Aranda

Spotted Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
1; 2 Jun 01; Harvey Perkins; Kambah
2; 24 Jun 01; Marnix Zwankhuizen; Ngunnawal

Long-billed Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris*
1; 27 Aug and 7 Sep 01; John Bissett; Monash Ridge [escapee]

Major Mitchell's Cockatoo *Cacatua leadbeateri*
1; 26 Aug 01; David Mallinson; Gundaroo [escapee]

'Peachface' Lovebird *Agapornis sp.*
1; 1 Jan 01; Harvey Perkins; Kambah [escapee]

Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster*

1; 25 Apr and 17 May 01; Tony Daukus; Melba
2; 13 Aug 01; Steve Wilson; Royalla Estate

The COG office is located at Room 5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic. If you wish to visit, please call 6247 4996 to arrange a suitable time.

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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