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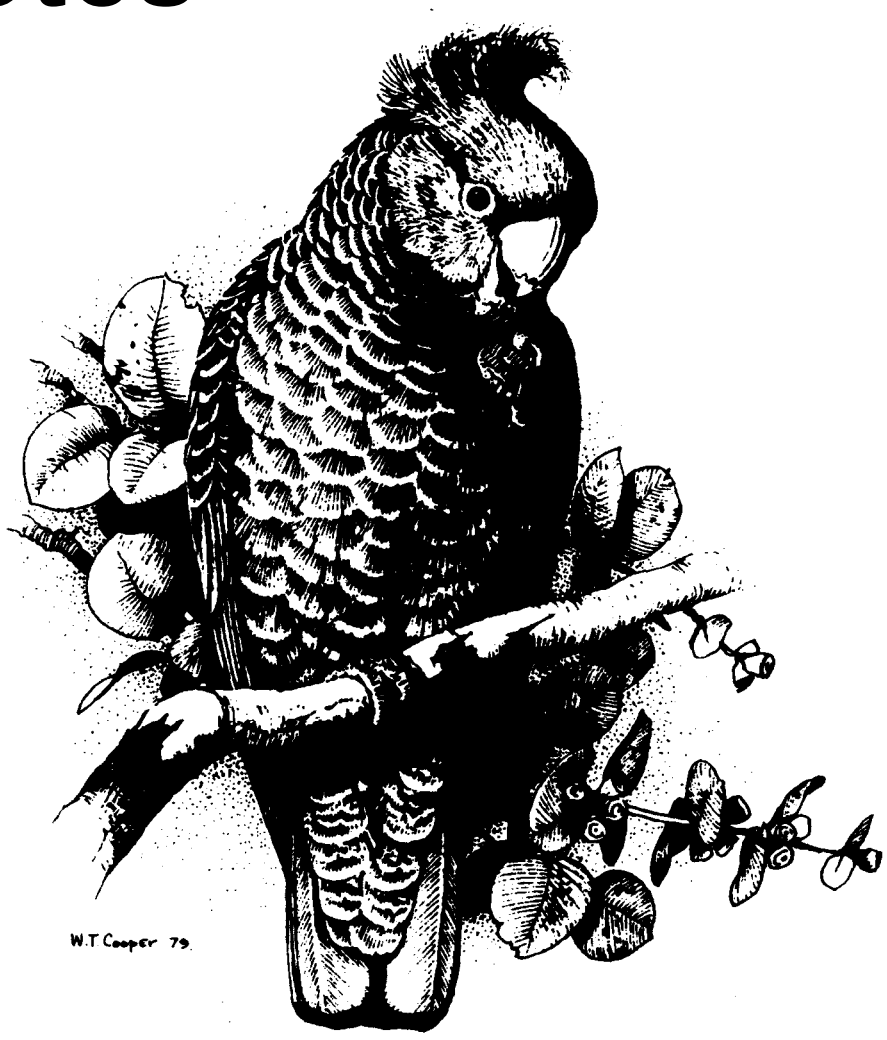

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PO Box 301 Civic Square ACT 2608

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THE KOSCIUSZKO BLITZ: A SURVEY OF BIRDS FROM THREDBO TO THE SUMMIT

Chris Davey
24 Bardsley Place, Holt, ACT 2615

Introduction

Over the weekend of 12-13 January 2002 the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) conducted Australia's first `Biodiversity Blitz'. The event was to celebrate the 'International Year of the Mountains'. The aim of the Blitz was to assemble as many biologists as possible to document the living organisms using a 27 square-kilometre area within the Kosciuszko National Park. The area stretched from the village of Thredbo, along the Thredbo River to Dead Horse Gap and up to the summit of Mt. Kosciuszko, Similar surveys had been conducted previously in the alpine regions of Germany and Switzerland.

The altitude of the survey area ranged from just below 1500 m along the Thredbo River to 2228 m at the summit and included the riverine habitat, the *Eucalyptus dalrympleana, E. pauciflora* forest of the Crackenback Range, and the alpine heathlands above the treeline at 1800 m. The alpine habitat is characterised by a continuous snow cover for at least four months of the year and six to eight months with minimum temperatures below freezing (Costin 1957).

Over 60 researchers were involved, including nine members of the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG). The survey started at 17:00 h on Saturday 12 January and finished 24 hours later, COG members set themselves the task of surveying eight 2-hectare sites in each of four habitats and three sites around the Thredbo village. The four habitats were the 'Riverine' habitat along the Thredbo River, the 'Forest' on the slopes of the Crackenback Range, the 'Alpine' heath, and the 'Treeline' ecotone 80 m each side of the interface between the Forest and the Alpine heath. The objective defined by NPWS was to survey the zones within the survey area above and below the treeline and below 1500 m. This requirement defined the Alpine, Forest and Riverine habitats. In addition, the aim of the survey was to set a benchmark before any changes in the flora and fauna of the area brought about by global warming, Changes are most likely to be observed at the treeline and this defined the need to survey the ecotone.

Methods

Thirty-five 2-ha sites were each surveyed for 20 minutes following the procedure set out for the Atlas of Australian Birds project conducted by Birds Australia. The abundance of each species using a site was also recorded. Wherever possible the sites were set 400 m apart and GPS coordinates were taken to record the location of each site (see Appendix I). In addition to species recorded within sites, the presence of species seen or heard in each habitat whilst teams moved from one site to another was also noted, thus increasing the chances of recording those species that have a restricted distribution or occur in low numbers.

Between 17:00 h and 19:45 h on 12 January, three teams of two surveyed two sites in the Alpine, Treeline and Forest habitats whilst one team of three surveyed three Riverine sites, The following day surveying started at around 7:00 h, by which time the fog had lifted, and finished by 13:00 h. Three teams of two surveyed six sites in the Alpine, Treeline and Forest habitats, one team of two surveyed five Riverine sites and one person surveyed three sites around the village. All members of a team surveyed for birds and care was taken to ensure there was no double-counting. Team members differed over the two days and each team member surveyed a different habitat each day, Birds flying over a site were recorded but not included in any analysis. All data were sent to Birds Australia for inclusion in the Australia-wide Atlas survey.

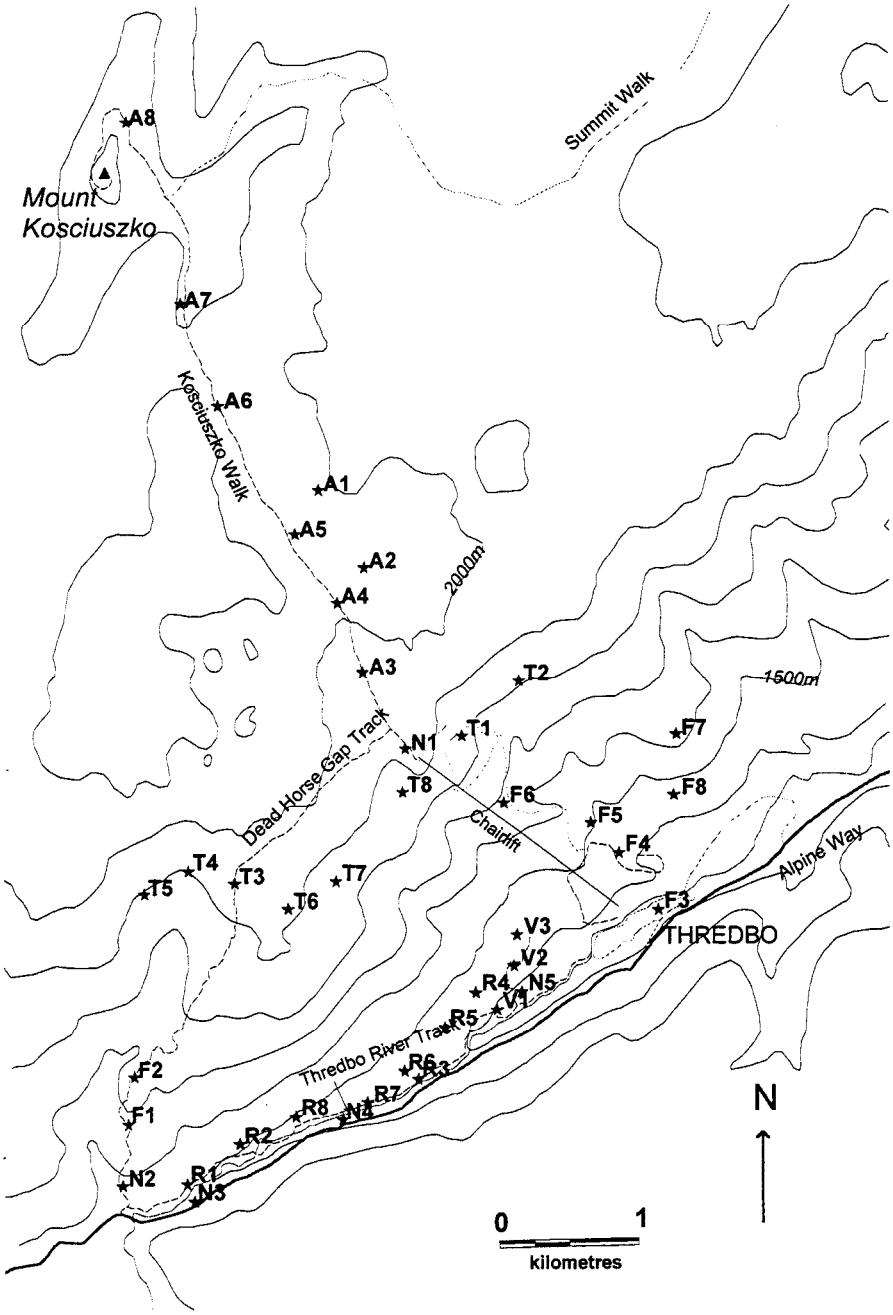
The Riverine sites were located along the Thredbo River Track running between the village and Dead Horse Gap. Of the Forest sites, two were located along the Dead Horse Gap Track, four along the Merritts Traverse Track and two along the Merritts Nature Track, The Alpine sites were located along the Kosciuszko Walk on the Rams Head Range. Two of the Treeline sites were located to the east of the Eagles Nest (top of the Crackenback Chairlift), one was located where the Dead Horse Gap Track emerges from the Forest, two were located to the west of the Track and three to the east of the Track. The village sites were located within the village environs and included the golf course,

In addition to the diurnal surveys, one site in the Alpine habitat, one in the Forest habitat and three in the Riverine habitat were surveyed for nocturnal birds. In the Forest and Riverine sites, calls of the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba*, Masked Owl *T. novaehollandiae*, Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae*, Barking Owl *N. connivens*, Powerful Owl *N. strenua*, Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* and White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis* were played, Due to time constraints, determined by the running of the Crackenback Chairlift, at the Alpine site the calls of the Barking Owl, Masked Owl and Southern Boobook only were played. The calls of the Australian Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus* were not played because it readily responds to any loud and unusual noise (C Davey pers. obs.). All calls were played for 5 to 10 minutes with a gap between calls of 5 minutes. Each team consisted of a minimum of two people and during the survey the replay operator was located at least 20 m from the other member(s) of the team. At the end of each survey the area was searched by torch light for birds. The night was clear, cool and calm with no moon. The surveys started at 21:45 h and were completed by midnight.

To compare the bird diversity of the area with diversity from other habitats, the number of species and the number of individuals were compared with three habitats in the ACT. Records from a single visit during the summer months were obtained from eight 2-ha sites for the 'Grassland' habitat and nine for each of the 'Open' and 'Closed' woodland habitats, All records were obtained from the COG database,

All bird names follow Christidis and Boles (1994) and are listed in Appendix

Figure 1. Location of the survey sites at Kosciuszko National Park, NSW. Diurnal sites are identified as A- alpine, F- forest, R- riverine, V- village and environs. N- nocturnal sites.



Results and Discussion

On average the diurnal surveys were set 550 m apart with 12 sites located less than 400 m apart (see Figure 1).

Over the 24-hour period 35 species were recorded from within the 27 square-kilometre area (see Table 1). In addition a Southern Boobook was heard in response to a taped call but its location was on a forested hillside on the southern side of the Alpine Way and so was just outside the survey area. None of the species is regarded as Threatened. Six species, the Laughing Kookaburra, Australian Magpie, Australian Wood Duck, Superb Fairy-wren, Superb Lyrebird and Welcome Swallow, were recorded within the habitats though not actually within any of the 35 2-ha sites, all being recorded only once except for the Laughing Kookaburra which was recorded on four occasions from three different habitats. There were signs of breeding from four species: ducklings were seen with the Australian Wood Duck, Brown Thornbill were observed with dependent young, Flame Robins were seen carrying food and with dependent young, and a Richard's Pipit gave a distraction display as it was disturbed but no nest was found.

Although all but six of the species were recorded from within the survey sites located within the specific habitats, many species were also recorded in other habitats as surveyors moved from one site to another (see Table 1). The greatest number of species was recorded within the Village habitat with a similar number recorded from the Riverine and Forest habitats. The Alpine habitat recorded the least number of species with the Treeline recording species from both Alpine and Forest habitats but surprisingly not recording three species from the Alpine or twelve species from the Forest habitats.

The relative abundance of individual species varied considerably between species (see Table 1). The most abundant were the Little Raven and the Brown Thornbill. The Little Raven was the most abundant in the Alpine and Village habitats whilst the Brown Thornbill was similarly abundant in all habitats apart from the Riverine. The White-browed Scrubwren was equally abundant in all habitats except the Alpine where it was not recorded. Both the Silvereye and the Yellow-faced Honeyeater appeared to favour the Village habitat. The Richard's Pipit was virtually restricted to the Alpine habitat but was also reported from the Treeline which, by definition, included species using the Alpine habitat. The Flame Robin preferred the lower habitats. The Pink Robin appeared to be restricted in its habitat requirements; observations during the survey period and during a week after the survey confirmed that the species was restricted to wet habitats with dense teatree *Leptospermum grandifolium* thickets (N Taws pers. obs.).

The White-browed Scrubwren was equally abundant in all habitats except the Alpine habitat where it was not recorded. Both the Silvereye and the Yellow-faced Honeyeater appeared to favour the Village habitat. The Richard's Pipit was virtually restricted to the Alpine habitat but was also reported from the Treeline which, by definition, included species using the Alpine habitat.

Table 1. Bird species recorded from the survey sites in Kosciuszko National Park, NSW. Numbers indicate relative density/Ha from within the 35 survey sites. * denotes presence but not recorded within survey sites. Species are ordered from highest to lowest relative density.

Species name	Alpine	Treeline	Forest	Riverine	Village	Overall
Little Raven	2.25	1.00	0.81	0.44	1.16	1.13
Brown Thornbill	*	1.63	2.13	0.63	1.50	1.13
Silvereye		0.44	0.38	0.81	1.50	0.50
White-browed Scrubwren		0.63	0.63	0.75	0.50	0.50
Yellow-faced Honeyeater		0.06	0.25	0.88	1.67	0.41
Richard's Pipit	1.25	0.13	*			0.31
Flame Robin		0.56	0.44	0.13	0.17	0.27
White-eared Honeyeater		*		0.94	0.67	0.27
Grey Fantail		*	0.31	0.69	0.33	0.26
Crimson Rosella	*	0.44	0.44	*	*	0.20
Striated Pardalote		0.38	0.19	0.13	0.33	0.19
Striated Thornbill			0.25	0.06	1.00	0.16
Pied Currawong		0.13	0.25	*	*	0.09
Red Wattlebird		0.06	0,25	*	0.17	0.09
Spotted Pardalote			*	0.19	0.50	0.09
Nankeen Kestrel	0.31					0.07
Olive Whistler			0.06	0.25		0.07
Eastern Spinebill			0.25		*	0.06
Crescent Honeyeater			0.13	0.06		0.04
Pacific Black Duck	0.19					0.04
Pink Robin			0.13		0.17	0.04
Common Starling		0.13				0.03
Eastern Whipbird			0.06	*	0.17	0.03
Satin Flycatcher				0.06	0.17	0.03
Fan-tailed Cuckoo				0.06		0.01
Gang-gang Cockatoo			0.06		*	0.01
Golden Whistler				0.06	*	0.01
Grey Shrike-thrush			0.06	*		0.01
White-throated Treecreeper			0.06		*	0,01
Laughing Kookaburra			*		*	
Australian Magpie						
Australian Wood Duck						
Superb Fairy-wren						
Superb Lyrebird				*		
Welcome Swallow					*	
Number of species	9	15	26	25	28	35
Number of sites	8	8	8	8	3	35
Number of site species observed in sites	4	12	20	16	15	29
Average number species/site	2.4	4.1	6.5	6.9	8.0	
Average abundance/site	8.0	11.1	14.3	12.3	20.0	

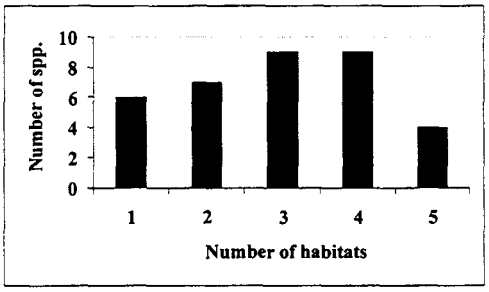
The relative abundance of individual species varied considerably between species (see Table 1), The most abundant were the Little Raven and the Brown Thornbill, The Little Raven was the most abundant in the Alpine and Village habitats whilst the Brown Thornbill was similarly abundant in all habitats apart from the Riverine. The Flame Robin preferred the lower habitats. The Pink Robin appeared to be restricted in its habitat requirements; observations from the survey and during a week after the survey confirmed that the species was restricted to wet habitats with dense tea-tree *Leptospermum grandifolium* thickets (N Taws pers. obs,).

For species recorded within the survey sites there were significantly fewer species in the Alpine than in the Forest, Riverine and Village habitats (Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, H=21.78, p=<0.001) and species-richness increased with a decrease in altitude. There was no statistical difference in the total number of individuals within the various habitats (see Table 1) probably due to the large number of Little Ravens found in the Alpine habitat.

The NPWS lists 62 species occurring over 1500 m within Kosciuszko National Park (see Appendix II). Of 26 non-passerine species listed, the COG survey recorded only six (23%), whilst of the 36 passerine species 25 (70%) were recorded. Given that the survey was conducted over only a 24-hour period, the passerine species were well represented, whilst the non-passerines, in particular the waterbirds and the diurnal raptors, were not. However, two non-passerine species not listed on the NPWS Checklist, the Southern Boobook and the Laughing Kookaburra, were recorded above 1500 m.

The Little Raven, Brown Thornbill, Crimson Rosella and Pied Currawong were the only species (11%) reported from all five habitats; a majority of species were reported in three to four of the habitats; whilst the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Australian Magpie, Australian Wood Duck, Superb Fairy-wren, Superb Lyrebird and Welcome Swallow were reported from a single habitat only (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Distribution of species within habitats in Kosciuszko National Park, NSW.



Apart from the Common Starling, all species were native and, apart from the granivorous Crimson Rosella and the herbivorous Australian Wood Duck, all were insectivorous or omnivorous. This species mix presumably reflects the lack of food resources apart from insects and small vertebrates in habitats subject to the climatic extremes of the area.

The number of species and the total number of individuals recorded over a 20-minute period from a 2-ha site are low when compared with sites from the ACT (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of sites (n) and mean number and abundance (+7- sd) of bird species for five Kosciuszko National Park habitats and three ACT habitats.

Kosciuszko Sites				ACT sites			
Habitat	n	No. of spp.	Abundance	Habitat	n	No. of spp.	Abundance
Alpine	8	2.3 (0.7)	8.0 (3.3)	Grassland	8	2.2 (1.7)	7.5 (6.6)
Treeline	8	4.1 (1,8)	11.1 (6.7)	Open wood	9	13.7 (4.1)	59.8 (34.6)
Forest	8	6.5 (2.0)	14.2 (6.2)	Closed wood	9	10.6 (4.3)	26.4 (10.7)
Riverine	8	6.8 (1.7)	12.2 (3,2)				
Village	3	8.0 (4.3)	20.0 (15.6)				

Although the habitats differ, the Grassland sites in the ACT are treeless as are the Alpine sites, whilst the canopy cover of the Closed woodland is similar to that of the Forest habitat, Although the Alpine habitat had a similar bird diversity to the Grassland, both the Open and Closed woodland habitat, on average, recorded nearly double the number of species and three times the abundance as the Kosciuszko sites,

Frith (1984) notes that the Alpine vegetation communities above the treeline are not 'of much importance to birds' and so it is not surprising that the least number of species were recorded within the Alpine habitat, Because of the similarity with Grassland this paucity is presumably due to vegetation structure combined with the lack of food resources during the winter months. The survey highlights the low species diversity of the area when compared with habitats at lower altitudes,

The results of this survey agree with the observations of Osborne and Green (1992): relative abundances of the common species are similar, insectivorous bird species dominate the area, and there is a decline in species richness with increased altitude, The survey reported by Osborne and Green was restricted to habitats above 1530 m and included the sub-alpine and alpine habitats only, The present survey recorded five species (Southern Boobook, Laughing Kookaburra, Eastern Whipbird, Superb Lyrebird and Superb Fairy-wren) not listed by Osborne and Green, This was probably due to the inclusion of habitat at the lower altitude,

The majority of species within the survey area were widespread and occurred in most habitats. Only six species were restricted to a single habitat but this may be a reflection of the small amount of time spent surveying, Many of the less abundant species were recorded as present in the habitat but not recorded within the 2-ha sites but, despite the survey's brevity, the relative density of the more common species was determined within the different habitats.

Gall and Longmore (1978) recorded birds in the Thredbo valley over a three year period. They noted that the maximum number of species was recorded in October, whilst over the

summer period the greatest number of species was in December, with a slight decrease by January.

In retrospect it appears that January is not the most appropriate month in which to obtain measures of summer abundance of bird species within the area, The timing of departure from the area of many individuals coincides with the end of flowering of *Grevillea victoriae* (Osborne and Green 1992) and, depending on the season, this appears to vary within the month of January. A survey on 10 January 2002 between 1350 and 1650 m recorded that *G. victoriae* had stopped flowering (K Green pers. comm.). It is probable that the bird survey was conducted as species were departing from the area and may not reflect the peak relative densities of species using the various habitats during the summer. To obtain a more accurate peak relative density estimate, surveys would need to be conducted during the *G. victoriae* flowering period.

Acknowledgments

The bird survey was initiated by Dr. Ken Green, NSW NPWS, and coordinated for COG by Malcolm Fyfe. Kathy Walters, Nicki Taws, Julie McGuiness, David McDonald, Bruce Lindenmayer, Jack Holland, John Goldie, Malcome Fyfe and Chris Davey climbed the hills, surveyed the birds and commented on a draft of the paper. Ederic Slater provided the nocturnal bird calls. Many thanks to all.

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Appendix I. Geocentric Datum of Australia (=WGS84) coordinates (degrees: minutes: seconds) of survey sites at Kosciuszko National Park, NSW.

Alpine	36:28:36 S	148:16:48 E	Forest	36:29:49 S	148:17:40 E
Alpine	36:28:54 S	148:17:01 E	Forest	36:29:34 S	148:18:30 E
Alpine	36:29:18 S	148:17:00E	Forest	36:29:48 S	148:18:29 E
Alpine	36:29:02 S	148:16:53 E	Riverine	36:31:15 S	148:16:07 E
Alpine	36:28:46 S	148:16:41 E	Riverine	36:31:06 S	148:16:22 E
Alpine	36:28:16 S	148:16:20 E	Riverine	36:30:52 S	148:17:14 E
Alpine	36:27:52 S	148:16:10E	Riverine	36:30:32 S	148:17:31 E
Alpine	36:27:10S	148:15:55E	Riverine	36:30:40S	148:17:22 E
Treeline	36:29:33 S	148:17:28 E	Riverine	36:30:50 S	148:17:10 E
Treeline	36:29:20 S	148:17:45 E	Riverine	36:30:57 S	148:16:59 E
Treeline	36:30:06 S	148:16:22 E	Riverine	36:31:00 S	148:16:38 E
Treeline	36:30:03 S	148:16:09 E	Village	36:30:36 S	148:17:37 E
Treeline	36:30:08 S	148:15:56 E	Village	36:30:26 S	148:17:42 E
Treeline	36:30:12 S	148:16:37 E	Village	36:30:19 S	148:17:43 E
Treeline	36:30:06 S	148:16:51 E			
Treeline	36:29:46 S	148:17:11 E	**Nocturnal sites**		
Forest	36:31:01S	148:15:50E	Alpine	36:29:32S	148:17:11 E
Forest	36:30:50S	148:15:52E	Forest	36:31:16S	148:15:48 E
Forest	36:30:14S	148:18:24E	Riverine	36:31:19S	148:16:09 E
Forest	36:30:01 S	148:18:13 E	Riverine	36:31:01 S	148:16:52 E
Forest	36:29:54 S	148:18:05 E	Riverine	36:30:32 S	148:17:44 E

Appendix II. NSW National parks and Wildlife Service Checklist of the bird fauna occurring above 1500 m in Kosciuszko National Park, NSW, with additions recorded during this survey.

Checklist of species occurring above 1500 m		Recorded this survey
Emu	*Dromaius novaehollandiae*	No
Stubble Quail	*Coturnix pectoralis*	No
Australian Wood Duck	*Chenonetta jubata*	Yes
Pacific Black Duck	*Anas superciliosa*	Yes
Australasian Grebe	*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*	No
Little Pied Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*	No
Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	No
White-faced Heron	*Egretta novaehollandiae*	No
White-necked Heron	*Ardea pacifica*	No
Black-shouldered Kite	*Elanus axillaris*	No
Brown Goshawk	*Accipiter. fasciatus*	No
Wedge-tailed Eagle	*Aquila audax*	No
Brown Falcon	*Falco berigora*	No
Australian Hobby	*Falco longipennis*	No
Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	No
Nankeen Kestrel	*Falco cenchroides*	Yes
Latham's Snipe	*Gallinago hardwickii*	No
Masked Lapwing	*Vanellus miles*	No
Common Bronzewing	*Phaps chalcoptera*	No

Brush Bronzewing	*Phaps elegans*		No
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	*Calyptorhynchus funereus*		No
Gang-gang Cockatoo	*Callocephalon fimbriatum*	Yes	
Crimson Rosella	*Platycercus elegans*	Yes	
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	*Cacomantis flabelliformis*	Yes	
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	*Chrysococcyx lucidus*		No
White-throated Needletail	*Hirundapus caudacutus*		No
White-throated Treecreeper	*Cormobates leucophaeus*	Yes	
Spotted Pardalote	*Pardalotus punctatus*	Yes	
Striated Pardalote	*Pardalotus striatus*	Yes	
White-browed Scrubwren	*Sericornis frontalis*	Yes	
Brown Thornbill	*Acanthiza pusilla*	Yes	
Striated Thornbill	*Acanthiza lineata*	Yes	
Red Wattlebird	*Anthochaera carunculata*	Yes	
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus chrysops*	Yes	
White-eared Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus leucotis*	Yes	
Brown-headed Honeyeater	*Melithreptus brevirostris*		No
White-naped Honeyeater	*Melithreptus lunatus*		No
Crescent Honeyeater	*Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*	Yes	
Eastern Spinebill	*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*	Yes	
Flame Robin	*Petroica phoenicea*	Yes	
Pink Robin	*Petroica rodinogaster*	Yes	
Olive Whistler	*Pachycephala olivacea*	Yes	
Golden Whistler	*Pachycephala pectoralis*	Yes	
Rufous Whistler	*Pachycephala rufiventris*		No
Grey Shrike-thrush	*Colluricincla harmonica*	Yes	
Satin Flycatcher	*Myiagra cyanoleuca*	Yes	
Grey Fantail	*Rhipidura fuliginosa*	Yes	
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	*Coracina novaehollandiae*		No
Australian Magpie	*Gymnorhina tibicen*	Yes	
Pied Currawong	*Strepera graculina*	Yes	
Grey Currawong	*Strepera versicolor*		No
Australian Raven	*Corvus coronoides*		No
Little Raven	*Corvus mellori*	Yes	
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*		No
Richard's Pipit	*Anthus novaeseelandiae*	Yes	
Red-browed Finch	*Neochmia temporalis*		No
European Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*		No
Welcome Swallow	*Hirundo neoxena*	Yes	
Martins	*Hirundo* spp,		No
Silvereye	*Zosterops lateralis*	Yes	
Bassian Thrush	*Zoothera lunulata*		No
Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	Yes	
Added to list this survey			
Southern Boobook	*Ninox novaeseelandiae*	Yes	
Laughing Kookaburra	*Dacelo novaeguineae*	Yes	
Recorded below 1500 m			
Eastern Whipbird	*Psophodes olivaceus*	Yes	
Superb Lyrebird	*Menura novaehollandiae*	Yes	
Superb Fairy-wren	*Malurus cyaneus*	Yes	

MAGPIE-LARKS BREEDING IN AN OLD STICK NEST

Adam Leavesley[1] and Harvey Perkins[2]

[1] 10/7 Osborne Place, Belconnen, ACT 2617
[2] 42 Summerland Cct, Kambah, ACT 2902

Introduction

The Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca* is both common and widespread in Canberra, ranking as the fifth most common species in the Garden Bird Survey (GBS) (COG 2000, Veerman 2002), It is a year-round resident which breeds readily, being also the fifth most commonly recorded breeding species in the GBS. It has increased steadily in abundance over the past 18 years of the GBS, and it is also increasing throughout the NSW sheep-wheat belt (Reid 1999). It appears to be equally suited to suburban or rural environments and occurs wherever requirements for bare ground for foraging, and trees and mud for nesting, are met (Morcombe 2000),

The Magpie-lark builds a mud nest, typically on a horizontal branch well out from the main trunk of a suitable tree. Nests are often, but not necessarily, located near water. The nest is a deep bowl approximately 150 mm wide, made of mud reinforced with grass or other fibrous plant material, The lining usually consists of grass, fur and feathers. Nests, or nearby sites, may be re-used annually (Morcombe 2000),

In this article we report the unusual occurrence of a pair of Magpie-larks breeding in an old stick nest, most likely that of an Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen.*

Observations and nest details

Observations

Observations were made in the latter part of 2001 as part of the Garden Bird Survey at a site in Playfair Place in the suburb of Belconnen, ACT.

The site at Playfair Place supported two pairs of Magpie-larks during the 2001 breeding season, The more aggressive of the two pairs duetted from a large remnant Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora.* This pair showed signs of breeding behaviour in late August, regularly harassing nestling predators such as the Australian Magpie and the Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* which were also preparing to breed within 50 m of the large Yellow Box. By mid-October, the pair was still behaving aggressively but had not constructed a nest, although they were observed in what was believed to be an attempt to build one in the large Yellow Box.

In contrast, the other pair on the survey site began brooding on an orthodox mud nest in the first week of September, This nest was constructed in a sparsely-foliaged Blakely's Red Gum *Eucalyptus blakelyi* approximately 70 m from the large Yellow Box, A second nesting attempt by this pair was later observed in another Blakely's Red Gum about 100 m from the Yellow Box.

However, on the weekend of 26-27 October the female of the more aggressive pair was, for the first time, observed incubating on a stick nest approximately 12 m above the ground in the crown of an immature Brittle Gum *Eucalyptus mannifera*. Regular observations of this nest were made over the following weeks but views of the bird(s) were hampered due to the size of the nest which generally obscured them.

On 6 November begging calls were heard and the adults were observed carrying food to the nest. This continued until the morning of 13 November when the single chick is believed to have left the nest. The chick was downy, had a pink gape and short tail feathers with white tips. During the next four days it remained within 40 m of the nest making only short, weak and unsteady flights of less than 5 m. It was fed by both parents and was never observed to forage for itself, The last observation of the chick was on 21 November, and its ultimate fate is unknown, A Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrhocephalus* had been observed on 14 November within 30 m of the chick although it was repelled by the parents and about ten Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* (some of which were also breeding on the study *site).*

Nest details

The stick nest used by the Magpie-larks was already present at the site when observations were first made in May 2001, It was built into the fork of some branches about 12 m high in the upper outer canopy of the 15-m tree. These branches were relatively thin and were on a 45° incline. The nest is presumed to have been constructed during the spring of 2000, either by Australian Magpies or Pied Currawongs, Both species bred successfully on the site in 2001, In early 2002 the nest was removed from the tree for examination, and was found to have been modified, presumably by the Magpie-larks, with a lining of mud and fibres.

The main bulk of the stick nest measured approximately 250 mm in diameter, but with outer twigs contributing to a total diameter of 550 mm. The base-to-rim height was 150 mm. The shallow inner bowl was sub-circular with dimensions of 130 x 170 mm with an estimated bowl depth of 50 mm. The nest was composed predominantly of eucalypt and melaleuca twigs, with several short pieces of electrical wire and a length of audio cassette tape incorporated, The twigs used for the base structure were generally about 150-400 mm in length and mostly of 2-4 mm in diameter although several twigs were up to 6 mm. The bowl itself, as far as could be seen, was composed of finer (probably melaleuca) twigs of 1-2 mm diameter, flexible enough to have been shaped to produce the curved bowl. Any lining of the bowl was obscured by the mud nest built within it.

The mud nest was essentially a lining of the bowl of the original stick nest, and was either poorly constructed or somewhat dilapidated, Its outer dimensions were about 120 x 160 mm with inside dimensions of 100 x 120 mm, The inside depth of the bowl was only about 35 mm. Because the mud filled between the sticks it varied in thickness between 5 and 25 mm, The fibrous material used appeared to derive

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predominantly from the contents of a vacuum cleaner and included matted vacuum cleaner fluff, hair, and what looked like mint-flavoured dental floss. It is unclear whether several small (eucalypt) leaves in the nest were placed there by the Magpie-larks as part of the lining, or had simply fallen into the nest.

Discussion

Magpie-larks breeding in nests other than their own appears to be a very rare phenomenon. We could find no mention of such behaviour in any of the current field-guides or standard texts, and there is no mention of it in works such as North's *Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds* or Beruldsen's *Field Guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds.*

Eventually we found two relevant references in the draft text of the breeding section for the Magpie-lark for the forthcoming volume of HANZAB, One related to an observation of a pair of Magpie-larks breeding in a magpie's nest near Moree, in which there was 'no modification to the nest' (Morse 1918). The other listed the similar but larger mud nest of a White-winged Chough *Corcorax melanorhamphos* as being used by Magpie-larks on one occasion (Roberts 1955). This record, therefore, appears to be the first report of Magpie-larks modifying an existing non-Magpie-lark nest for their own purposes.

We find it difficult even to imagine why this pair of Magpie-larks chose to use an old stick nest. Presumably both birds had to 'agree' to the arrangement since both are involved in site-selection, nest building and brooding.

Despite a very dry season, availability of mud would not have been a problem in a well watered suburban location; indeed, the birds were able to make their mud inner nest, and the other pair of Magpie-larks had no difficulty in making two mud nests (one at least of which was unsuccessful).

Acknowledgments

David Mallinson skillfully climbed the tree and recovered the nest for examination. Dr Will Steele of Birds Australia very kindly provided us with the draft text of the breeding section for the Magpie-lark for the forthcoming volume 6 of HANZAB.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 1966 PROPOSAL FOR REFORM OF THE RAOU

Stephen Marchant

Foreward

This document was created by Stephen Marchant, with the assistance of Dr Libby Robin, as background to assist her in the writing of 'The Flight of the Emu'. Only brief excerpts were used in that work, so we have decided to publish it in its entirety, with Stephen's permission, as it provides such valuable background on the early years of birding in the ACT and on related topics.

The Canberra Ornithologists Group - beginnings

When in Australia during the war, I had little chance to get to know anything about Australian birds; I never met anyone who was in the least interested in birds: my knowledge remained about on the level of Cayley's *What Bird is That?* or even lower. When I came again to Australia (on 3 May 1963), I was surprised to find that there was still no field guide to Australian birds and very little attempt to encourage amateurs to take part in organized field work, In most other countries where I had been since the war I was accustomed to expect a fair range of literature, at least covering simple identification and distribution of the birds in the region, as well as active ornithological societies that encouraged recording and investigations in the field. Admittedly, mist-netting and banding had been taken up enthusiastically in Australia by a lot of people and was being encouraged officially by professionals, but it could be argued that this was a handicap or impediment to the development of other useful ornithological field work; it was tending to develop into a competition to see who could band the largest number of birds or, in other words, was becoming an end in itself and was not being regarded as a means of development and support for other sorts of field study.

In 1963, Canberra, where I was employed at the Bureau of Mineral Resources, was perhaps the best place in Australia to start and to develop an interest in its bird-life. There was a professional body of scientists at Gungahlin (CSIRO Division of Wildlife) studying faunal problems throughout the country, and a small but enthusiastic group of amateurs eager for organized and purposeful field-work, even if to a large extent it had got involved in bird-banding at the expense of all else. It did not take me long to become acquainted with most of the leading lights in the local ornithological coterie, First, as it happens, was Betty Temple-Watts, wife of one of the Assistant Directors of the BMR; most of my colleagues there knew that his wife was interested in birds so that it took me little time to find out from her what, who and where ornithological work was being undertaken. Naturally my first six months in the country was devoted to becoming acquainted with the birds of the ACT and nearby districts, chiefly by going out with other amateurs at weekends on ornithological excursions and the like. By November 1963 I had

probably met all or nearly all the most important professional and amateur ornithologists in the ACT of the time. I have no exact record of just whom I met or when, but I did record that I was going on mist-netting exercises with Steve Wilson by 14 July 1963. Other regular participants in their excursions were people like Don Lamm (of the USA legation), John McKean, Dr Gerry van Tets (CS1RO - at least after his arrival in August 1963 or thereabouts) and many others whom I can no longer place with certainty. During these six months I also met some older distinguished visitors like J.D. McDonald, Reg Moreau whom I had known in Britain and local leaders like Francis Ratcliffe, Robert Carrick, Harry Frith, John Calaby et al.

In those first six months I also had some or even many discussions with various others about developing and improving ornithological work in the country as a whole. I have no record of what was done or suggested; a detailed history of such casual conversations would hardly be illuminating now. However the first attempt to do something constructive was on 25 November 1963, Steve Wilson and Don Lamm convened a meeting in Wilson's home in Narrabundah at 20:00 hrs to consider whether it would be a good idea to apply to the RAOU to form an official Branch of the Union in the ACT. Every other State or mainland Territory except NT and ACT had such a branch; the local chairman automatically became a Council Member of the Union and there were probably other advantages (?and disadvantages) that I have now forgotten. The following people attended or were interested to come to the meeting in Narrabundah:

Warren Hitchcock;
Bob Evans (whom I can no longer identify);
Max Murn (Treasury official and keen bird-bander);
Graeme Chapman (Technical Officer, CS1RO Wildlife);
Dick Schodde (recent graduate in Botany; CSIRO Wildlife Official);
Don Lamm;
Steve Wilson;
myself, and one other whom I never identified.

I doubt whether minutes of this meeting were ever made. I no longer recall many details of the meeting but I am certain that we all agreed that a public inaugural meeting ought to be held; that we ought to approach the RAOU Council for approval before going further and that we ought to present the inaugural meeting with a set of tasks and a list of nominees for a local committee, I recall with complete clarity that, after discussions with regarding nominees for the local committee, Steve Wilson nominated me for the Chairmanship, and that this was accepted by all other people at the meeting, This surprised me because I thought that I was too recent an arrival in Australia or ACT to be acceptable as our RAOU branch leader.

The next certain record of this matter that I have is for 3 June 1964 when we held an 'RAOU Branch Meeting' at 20:00 hours at which I was elected to the Branch committee, It seems a long interval between our informal meeting of 25 November 1963 and this Branch meeting of 3 June 1964, I may have become muddled or not recorded other meetings during that gap or both; or we may have been delayed by the RAOU

Council taking a long time to approve our proposal. Anyway there was an RAOU Branch committee meeting on 23 June 1964, followed by an RAOU Branch Meeting on 8 July 1964 at which I was definitely 'in the chair; 55 people attended, which is such a large number of people for meetings during these earlier years that I suspect that the meeting may have been the inaugural effort and that I failed to record this fact in my diary.

A Nest Record Scheme for Australia

Meanwhile since early (4/5) December 1963, and well before the formation of the RAOU Branch, I had been working away at an attempt to set up a 'Nest Record Scheme for Australia' (NRS). First, I tried for the support of the people I was meeting in the ACT. Support was a bit guarded except for Warren Hitchcock who was a great helper from the start. By 24 March 1964 **I** had been sufficiently encouraged to write to RAOU Council proposing the Scheme as a regular part of RAOU activities. Official approval was sent by Roy Wheeler (RAOU President 1964-5) on or soon after 10 May; cards, instructions and other necessities were printed and an announcement made in *Emu* so that a start could be made in August in time for that year's nesting season.

The NRS was something of a personal side-show while I was operating it from 1964 to 1968. I ran the whole thing from my house in Canberra: sending out recording cards, instructions and a quarterly newsletter to participants, receipt of completed cards and their storage, correspondence with anyone who found difficulties in filling-in details on the cards, and so on — i,e. all the quite routine work that grew up with my wish to expand the Scheme. All the same, I got much help, chiefly from the biologists at CSIRO Gungahlin: van Tets, Ed Slater, Warren Hitchcock, Ken Simpson, N. d'Andria, Peter Fullagar are only some of the people who helped out by getting newsletters copied, distributing cards, etc, Generally speaking, support for the scheme was at best lukewarm, and especially away from Canberra. I had the impression that it was received with bewildered scepticism. Of course it was launched at a time when many amateurs thought that it was a bad thing to go within coo-ee of a bird's nest and a crime to go so far as inspecting nests as a standard practice. The BOC, firmly established in Victoria, was the source of much antipathy and the whole scheme might have suffered and even have been postponed for several years if W. Hitchcock , who was well-connected in SA and Victoria, had not been able to persuade or assure the senior RAOU and BOC officials that it ought to be accepted.

The management of the NRS or the correspondence leading up to it had one important result. D.G. Thomas had arrived in Tasmania from the UK as an employee of EZ Industries. He was a young Englishman who had been working in Central Africa (what was then the Rhodesian). He was perhaps 30 years old, well-equipped in the statistical methods of quantitative investigation; he admitted to me that he did not know all that much about birds because he had been introduced to ornithology only recently, but claimed to have read widely about birds and was acquainted with the sort of avian approach and ideas that the

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) was introducing and developing in the UK. He got in touch with me first by proposing to set up a NRS; but he did so well after I had already started the ball rolling and he had nothing specially novel to suggest. So he took up another project for individuals to make observations in the same defined area for long periods ─ a sort of Constant Effort Site (CES) scheme (also known as the Inland Observation Post scheme). However, he also supported our efforts in Canberra to improve or reform the RAOU, remained a keen participant of the NRS and generally kept in touch on ornithological matters.

I may conclude this digression by saying that when I left Canberra in 1969, I handed over the NRS to Thomas. Unfortunately he became seriously ill a year or two later and was unable to continue that responsibility. There was something of an interregnum in the NRS after that and Mrs Helen Young of Eltham managed it for a year or so; it then passed to RAOU HQ: but has never recovered from these breaks or been carried through as a scheme in its own right and one of the most powerful tools to be used in the study of the populations of birds (as it is now in the UK),

Mais, mon ami, revenons a nos moutons. After the inauguration of the ACT Branch of the RAOU in June or July 1964, we quickly got into the routine of monthly evening meetings, followed in a few days' time by a Branch committee meeting. There was no great difficulty in getting speakers for these meetings because there was a good body of professional biologists at Gungahlin and the ANU, but I believe that we organised only ten meetings a year because we believed that meetings in the Christmas and New Year period would not be well-attended. Our Committee meetings were mostly occupied with arranging speakers and entertainments for the monthly general meetings, but gradually we began to try other developments such as pocket charts of ACT birds. As I have said, it was to be remarked that till that time no such lists for public sale in tourist bureaux, book stalls and shops were available, No one at that time seemed in the least interested in such material, which is an invaluable way of rousing public support.

I have no special notes (diary entries) for events in 1965 to early 1966 in the ACT Branch of the RAOU. We held regular monthly meetings with Committee meetings about one to two weeks after full Branch meetings, I recall efforts to prepare and publish pocket lists of ACT birds. As others seemed to have little idea of what was wanted or possible, I undertook most of the preparation, drawing up our first annual chart of breeding, migration and the like for each species, We hoped to get this distributed or sold in book-shops and newsagencies, but it never attracted any attention among the general public; that had to wait for several years before the idea of pocket check-list for use in recording occurrences of species quantitatively caught on and became standard practice in the ACT, P.J. Fullagar followed with the first pocket list of all Australian species with space for recording occurrence and numbers. This has now been available for many years with one or two revisions,

Being in the chair for all committee meetings of the branch in this period, I conceived that I had the opportunity and the responsibility to propose changes and activities that ought to improve the scope and performance of the Branch and thus, perhaps, the RAOU as a whole in the long run. Knowing how easy it is to give offence and to become regarded as an interfering Englishman, I tried to keep out of the limelight. Unfortunately, though I got total support on the Committee from my colleagues, no-one came forward as a proponent of the reform - at least in the way that I had in mind - and by early January 1966 it seemed as though we were losing momentum and that our meetings were merely rehashing what had already been thoroughly aired; in short we needed to test our proposals in a wider field, for which the time was running out. As the rules of the RAOU at the time had it, motions for major changes covering policy, constitutional change and organization had to be submitted to Council about 3 months before annual general meetings so that they could be assessed, approved and formally presented and summarised at an AGM. As matters stood in January 1966, the next AGM was scheduled for 14-15 October in Brisbane, and proposals had to be presented at a Council meeting in early or mid-July, Worse still were my own prospects, because I was booked to go to New Guinea from *7* March to 30 April; detailed proposals for reform had not yet been drafted or agreed among ourselves, Therefore before I left for New Guinea, I wrote out a draft of our proposals, gave each of our Branch Committee members a copy with the request to study it carefully while I was away, so that we could come to agreement as soon as I came back and submit a formal version to RAOU Council for its meeting in early July. When I got back from New Guinea, I was surprised to find that our Branch Committee members had virtually no comments and very few alterations to my suggested draft, beyond some trivialities. We held a Special Branch Committee meeting on 1 June and accepted the proposed motion with very little change. I therefore prepared the following with requisite numbers of copies and posted it to the RAOU Council on 25 June.

AN APPEAL FOR A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE AFFAIRS OF THE UNION

During the past year RAOU members in the A.C.T. have been thinking about the performance and organisation of the Union, Originally, concern was expressed about the standards of the *Emu*, but it was realised that apparent short-comings in the journal merely reflected a deeper seated malaise in the organisation which in turn reflected a generally unsatisfactory position in non-professional ornithology in Australia, where it seems that the essentially amateur side of bird-study is not keeping pace with modern developments. Discussion has centred in the committee of the A.C.T. Branch and as a result we are now prepared to put forward an argument for reform, based on a few fundamental and general criticisms which we believe cannot be seriously refuted, Coupled with this is a proposal for action.

To introduce the argument, it is useful to give a historical sketch of the development of ornithology, since this will explain the easiest way how recent circumstances arose and enable those who perhaps have never seriously thought of bird-watching as a useful practical pursuit, to understand the need in Australia for a new approach to the subject. It will also make clear that no blame is attached to any individual or group of individuals for what we claim is a depressed state of affairs, Ornithologists, like everyone else, are the captives of their environment, especially of the environment in which they first developed an interest in birds. To break out of such shackles independently, needs talent and imagination of the sort which few people have: and the opportunity for change which comes from seeing what is done elsewhere or from personal discussion with overseas colleagues does not often occur because Australia is so isolated.

Historically, then, it is generally true that ornithology was in the hands of amateurs until three or four decades ago. Apart from occasional, eminent professionals, the chief contributors were rich and leisured men. It was the period of classification and description of birds because at the beginning it is essential for the advance of a science to have a comprehensive knowledge of the material. A great deal of invaluable work was done by these amateurs, in collecting and straightforward description, as is shown by innumerable faunistic and taxonomic papers throughout the literature. This necessary and fundamental work helped to set up the tradition of simple bird-watching and identification by non-professionals as an end in itself, It became enthusiastically supported by those of the public who were attracted aesthetically or sentimentally to birds: and many bird-watchers still find difficulty in breaking away from the tradition without example or instruction in the techniques and methods of more stimulating ornithological work, Anyway, it was gradually realised about 30-40 years ago that the period of classification and description was coming to an end and that the time was ripe for experiment, analysis and other similar investigation of birds. Thus bird-study developed into a respectable and respected branch of zoology for a variety of very good reasons and more people began to practice it professionally. Yet, owing to the nature of the subject (e.g. ease of observation, mobility, range and so on) it has always remained possible for the amateur to make valuable contributions and in the past 30 years, by organising amateur talent and enthusiasm especially in field studies, considerable advances have been made, some of which could have been made in no other way or only made at much greater expense.

As we see it at present, the RAOU has stood still during this blossoming of ornithology in the rest of the world. Taking 1930 as representative of the start of this change, we find that then the RAOU provided its members with a quarterly journal largely consisting of papers on faunistic of descriptive subjects, often written in an anecdotal fashion and without the sort of exact data required by modern research: it arranged an Annual Meeting and Camp-out with no more definite purpose than to record what birds were seen in an area: it also, as always, took some action on

preservation matters and maintained the library and the collections. Otherwise the business transacted was trivial — a recommendation for registering domestic cats, an approach to the P.M.G. about birds on postage stamps, etc. Dickison's account *(Emu* 51:244-5) mentions no active leadership in field studies, publicity and education, but one must admit that such a performance was up to the standard of the times in ornithology in most other countries and was reasonably well adapted to the era of classification an d description.

Comparing this record with the activity of the last year, even with as much charity as possible, there seems to have been little improvement. The *Emu* is still largely devoted to distributional and descriptive materials though written less anecdotally, there is often still a depressing absence of precision in the data. On the other hand there is one outstanding paper resulting from up-to-date population study. But generally there is no serious difference in material or style. The Annual Congress and Field Outing follow the traditional and unhappily, uninspiring pattern. The same watchful eye is kept on preservation, in what now seems to be a passive rather than an active role, With great credit to the Council, however, two important innovations have occurred — the sponsoring of the Inland Observation Post and Nest Record Schemes: but it must be admitted that both these schemes originated from the body of the kirk and are operated from somewhere outside the centre of affairs.

This seems to be a record of stagnation because now members receive very little better value for their subscription than they did 30 years ago. What is missing is dynamic leadership in organised field studies, critical publication of material which contributes usefully to the study of birds, publicity and education. An active program of worthwhile, organised fieldwork is vital in an ornithological society of national extent in order to retain the interest and support of the members, First class publication up to modern critical standards is equally vital to gain the respect of scientific ornithologists and there should also be stimulating publication of good quality to retain the interest of amateurs. The value of publicity lies in showing the public that bird-watching, properly managed, is a useful, practical and necessary pursuit in any civilised country today and not just the harmless hobby of the lunatic fringe. It would also increase membership, if based on a planned program of activity. Finally education is as important as the rest, especially among members, in order to achieve proper standards of field observation and to demonstrate that fieldwork can be vastly more exciting, challenging and valuable than simply mooning about with a pair of binoculars.

From the historical sketch already given it may be guessed that this state of stagnation is not peculiar to Australia. It has happened in many places before, but has been overcome by determination and courage. It is worthwhile outlining events in Britain in the late 1920s and 1930s, this being taken as an example merely because the facts happen to be known to us,

In the late 1920s ornithology in Britain was moribund; and there is no point in specifying the ailments because they

were much the same as stated already in connection with the RAOU at present. At that time two or three people of imagination and enthusiasm at Oxford determined to set about improvement and advance. They started bird census work in quite a modest way and that began to show exciting possibilities for organised field studies. In a year or two, helped by good luck and with the minimum of backing from established authorities, a paid permanent head of what was still an embryonic and not widely known undertaking was appointed. Within about five years of this small beginning the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology had been established as the professional core of the new regime, and more of less concurrently the British Trust for Ornithology had been started as its essentially amateur counterpart. The latter is the better parallel with the RAOU It started a programme of field research, publicity and education, all of which steadily increased till even before the war the organisation was well established. Now the organisation has a qualified staff, caters for nearly every interest of amateur and professional, keeps the purpose and value of bird study constantly before the public and is consulted about or even requested to do work by the Authorities.

This example is given only to show that with determination, a clear purpose and hard work it is possible to pull an organisation up by its boot-straps and from the depths of depression to achieve success in five or ten years. It is not suggested that the British pattern should be followed in Australia: and indeed the British model may not be at all suitable here, where there are very different problems of distance and population: but other models for reform have occurred in South Africa and North America. It is difficult in this country to arrange proper representation for all interests and areas, because of the distances which hamper meetings. Further, it may be that the population is not large enough or sufficiently enlightened to provide the sort of support need for a massive effort diversified to cater for many interests, The gravity of these problems is fully appreciated, but we think that they are there only to be overcome and that in any case it is a policy of defeat to say that they cannot be overcome before a serious attempt has been made to do so. We may point out that the Geological and Entomological Societies of Australia have adopted somewhat different organisations from that of the Union and that their methods seem more successful and better adapted to conditions of the country. As to support being provided for reform which can only be expensive we rely on faith and believe that a reasoned and definite policy of research and education, properly presented to the public will succeed, perhaps not immediately but certainly within a few years.

We can see no alternative to a reform of the Council and the appointment of a paid secretary, with some consequent amendments of a paid secretary, with some consequent amendment of the constitution of the Union, if what we suggest is to be achieved: but we do not intend now to go further than this or to present possible ides for a definite program of activities and detailed suggestions for reform, though we have discussed such matters at some length. It would seem inappropriate to do so

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FIRST MOTION

Because the RAOU in recent years has not apparently increased its activities to keep abreast of ornithological progress, it is proposed that definite and active policies for organising research, publicity and education should be adopted and put into action by Council on an Australia-wide basis.

SECOND MOTION

It is proposed that Council be directed to set up a small committee representative of various ornithological interests to implement the first motion.

Now this proposal was obviously a serious and important document. We expected at least to have an acknowledgement promptly, but nothing came until 25 July, to my consternation and worry, and in spite of enquiries written in early July. What actually caused the delay was never satisfactorily explained to me or to anyone in Canberra in spite of letters to the Secretary (T. Gellibrand) asking him what happened. The best that I ever heard was that *during the Council meeting of July, `letters' were found on shelves of the bookcase in the RAOU office* in Flinders Lane, among which was our submitted proposal. This 'discovery' filled the with Roy Wheeler and R.M.Cooper exchanging abuse.

This mystery was never solved or explained to myself or anyone in Canberra. I asked Gellibrand various questions that needed an answer:

1. Who had the keys to the RAOU room in Little Flinders Lane? In theory, only the Secretary held a key but it was said that R M Cooper also had one and used to visit the office.
2. Did he do so in this instance?
3. Had the letters 'found' on the bookshelf been opened?
4. In particular, had our draft proposal been opened?

6. Why were my letters not answered before 20 July?

On the face of it, it seemed that Cooper was the only person who could have opened the letters and hidden them in the bookshelves. We shall never know now, unless there is any record in Council Minutes of the meeting on 20 July.

Myself at this time, I went down with malaria on 28 July and while laid up had a letter from Roy Wheeler, written in a very disgruntled style and telling me to take over the RAOU establishing it in Canberra. I was in no condition to do anything about the matter but in any case should not have followed up this suggestion.

I cannot recall any useful or helpful suggestions from the RAOU Council during August and September 1966. The events of June and July (see above) seemed to create inertia in Council and to induce a feeling of impotence. However, there may have been a word from Council that a proposal for reform was acceptable at the Brisbane AGM in October, or I felt obliged to add some detail, In consequence I set about canvassing for a small reform committee and on 22-23 September recruited Keith Hindwood (Secretary), Harry Frith, Doug Dorwood and David Thomas. Perhaps Thomas was the only enthusiastic person in this group; at least he had a good knowledge of BTO methods in the UK. The professional attitude to reform was luke-warm at best and perhaps illustrated by Frith who told me that he would not have accepted the offer to serve if asked by anyone except Hindwood.

I attended the 1966 AGM in Brisbane on 14-15 October and spoke to our motion for the formation of a small reform committee to examine what could be done to enliven the RAOU and bring it into line with ornithological societies in other countries, Luckily I found that Ian Rowley was also attending and managed to persuade him to second the motion which he did without noted enthusiasm. I suppose that without his help our motion would have been lost on a technicality (for lack of a seconder). As it was, the motion was accepted. This first reform committee (Hindwood, Frith, Dorward and Thomas) was appointed; but no one had anything important to say in support or opposition. In fact it seemed as if the meeting was stunned by the proposal. Neither Cooper nor Wheeler made any contribution.

Once the reform committee had been set up by the authority of the 1966 AGM, it would have been the ultimate duty and responsibility of the Council of the Union to supervise the activity of the committee and to make sure that it was functioning as desired. In fact the formation and official acceptance of the First Reform Committee was a complete failure and apparently induced total inertia on the part of the Council, probably because none of its members considered that any response was needed or that scientific endeavours could be part of bird-watching; they preferred to 'moon about with field glasses' at the ready (J,Huxley). The First Reform Committee itself broke up some time about mid-1967 following the resignation of one member.

Postscript
[By Libby Robin]

In 1967, a second document entitled: `Review of RAOU Situation ─ at 30.9.67' was circulated to the RAOU Council. The document, drafted by Stephen Marchant, recorded the demise of the Review Committee, and sought to progress the reform of the RAOU despite its failure. The document summarised the historical basis for the call to reform, analysed its failure, and sought a way forward. It suggested a more general `appeal' to the membership, rather than a committee structure. Allen McEvey, the President, took up this matter, and in January 1968 formed a Committee of two ─ himself and Dominic Serventy, from Western Australia, arguably Australia's most distinguished ornithologist at this time. Through a series of long telephone calls (there are no minutes of formal meetings extant), McEvey drafted the 'Report of the Review Committee' a document over both their names which was presented to Council in March 1969, On 21 June 1969, an Extraordinary General Meeting ratified the report which led to a number of significant reforms, including the redrafting of the Constitution, a labour of love undertaken by the distinguished ornithologist-lawyers, Rosemary and Peter Balmford. A Field Investigation Committee was established at the Launceston Congress in October 1969, chaired by John Disney, Curator of Birds at the Australian Museum in Sydney. Another Australian Museum Curator, Harry Recher, was also important in the FIC, which was largely a NSW initiative.

Sources

Interviews (1998) by Libby Robin with Stephen Marchant, Peter Fullagar, Pauline Reilly and Norman Wettenhall

A. Graham Brown, 'President's Message', *Emu* 69(2), August 1969, p. 65

RAOU Archives, State Library of Victoria, !specially:

[S. Marchant] 'Review of RAOU Situation ─ at 30.9.67' (MS 11437, Box 18a, SLV)

A.R. McEvey and D.L. Serventy 'Report of the Review Committee', June 1969. (MS 11437, Box 12c, SLV)

ODD OBS

A Barn Owl in Tuggeranong

Until my recent career change, the office that I occupied was strategically positioned overlooking the pines at Pine Island. The office (part of the Tuggeranong Office Park complex on Athllon Drive) was in one of the flight paths of the autumn migration of honeyeaters, Window collisions of birds with the offices facing west, including mine, were frequent. The victims were usually Yellow-faced Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus chrysops* but the occasional Whitenaped Honeyeater *Melithreptus lunatus* was also seen, The only Crescent Honeyeater *Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera* I saw in the immediate vicinity of the office in four years was a collider. Unfortunately, like a number of its fellow victims, it became the meal of an Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides.* The likelihood of a free meal attracted a number of predatory birds during the season, including a Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* and an Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis;* the latter patrolling the trees around the office for the whole period of the 2001 migration.

However, collisions did not involve only honeyeaters. During the mid-morning hours of an August day in the year 2000, my attention was drawn to an erratically flying large whitish bird with two Australian Ravens in hot pursuit. The flight was from side to side and the wing beats slow and arhythmic. My curiosity was serviced by a wild flight diversion of the fleeing bird as it turned under the cover of my patio and crashed into my office window with a loud thump. It disappeared from view, The ravens landed on the railing and indicated that they had aggressive intentions towards the hapless victim.

I went to the window and looked down to see the crumpled form of a beautiful Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, It had spotted fawn dorsal plumage and a white face with pink around the bill (the picture of Barn Owl nestlings in the first edition of the Readers Digest *Complete Book of Australian Birds* gives a good depiction of the pink colouration around the bill). The ravens were looking menacing, so I went out onto the patio to chase them away, The owl's fear at my noisy presence overcame whatever injury or shock it had suffered. In a single action, it regained its feet and took off, with the two ravens resuming their hot pursuit. That was the last I saw of the owl.

From my reading, Barn Owls are clearly uncommon in this area and, when seen in daylight, are often pursued by other birds. Their abundance is related to food availability from mouse plagues. I have no knowledge of the relative abundance of mice in the Canberra region around the time of this observation.

David Rosalky
8 Northcote Cres, Deakin ACT 2600

Gang-gangs being harassed by other birds

On the morning of Sunday 10 March 2002, three Gang-gang Cockatoos *Callocephalon fimbriatum* were present in the eucalypts behind our house in Kambah for a period of about 15 minutes between 9:00 and 9:30 h. For the most

part they, two males and a female, were characteristically quiet and serene, calling only occasionally. But they were constantly harassed by a pair of obviously disturbed Magpie-larks *Grallina cyanoleuca,* which would fly around the trees they were in, perch agitatedly close by, either in the trees with the Gang-gangs or on nearby structures, and loudly call their territorial pee-wee call. The Gang-gangs were frequently caused to move from their perches by the attentions of the Magpie-larks: they would fly out of the tree, circle around and re-settle in the same or a nearby tree, Towards the end of the 15-minute period, a pair of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* also joined in the harassment, as did a Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina.* There was never a direct full-on aggressive confrontation, but the attentions of all three species eventually seemed too much for the Gang-gangs which flew off and were not seen again.

I was intrigued that the Gang-gangs should cause such concern to the other species. Although Gang-gangs are fairly common in Canberra's suburbs, they are only infrequent visitors to our garden area, I have recorded them only five times previously in the eight years I have been keeping Garden Bird Survey (GBS) records for this garden: 14 on 19.6.97, 11 on 14,2.98, 4 on 29.3.98, 3 on 23.5,99 and 1 on 19.4,00. In all these cases the birds were seen flying through rather than using the area, I am left wondering whether it was the 'novelty' of the Gang-gangs' presence that unnerved the other birds rather than any instinctive inter-species competitive aggression. Certainly, it seems that Gang-gangs do not normally invoke this kind of reaction. The only mention in HANZAB (Vol 4, p.99) of inter-species interactions is of one incidence of a group of Gang-gangs chasing, and being chased by, Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata.* This incident is also reported in *The Gang-gang Cockatoo in Field and Aviary.- a Literature Review* (Chambers, 1995) in which the original 1981 observation by Collins describes the battle between a small flock of Gang-gangs (1 male, I female and a juvenile) and the 'outraged' resident Red Wattlebirds that followed the arrival of the Gang-gangs to strip ripe catkins from a silver birch, It was noted that the Gang-gangs seemed more playful than serious. The only other interaction cited by Chambers is of a 1976 report by Fleming of Gang-gangs being chased off by Bell Miners *Manorina melanophrys* in the Yarra Valley.

Harvey Perkins
42 Summerland Cct, Kambah, ACT 2902

Immature Pallid Cuckoo fed by adult

In October 2000, in the Whipstick Forest north of Bendigo, central Victoria, we were attracted to an immature (first year) Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus* by an extraordinary harsh call, rather like the 'shaaah' of a riflebird *Ptiloris* sp. It was sitting out in the open and, while we watched it, it was approached and fed by an adult Pallid Cuckoo. This happened three times, though we couldn't see what it was being fed,

On 17 November 2001 we observed essentially the same behaviour in Campbell Park, a woodland remnant in suburban Canberra,

HANZAB (vol.4) has a few references to this behaviour, but does not speculate as to possible reasons. Is it possible that the adult could recognise its own chick after it had been reared by a host species? Is it at all possible that it had reared its own chick? If the chick is not its own, what possible evolutionary advantage could there be in such behaviour?

Ian Fraser
GPO Box 3268, Canberra, ACT 2601

King Parrot begging from Crimson Rosellas

On 30 December 2001 at 19:00 h at ANU campus, I was attracted by begging calls of a parrot. In some fine-leaved melaleucas was a pair of Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* and a young Australian King Parrot *Alisterus scapularis*. The latter was making plaintive but insistent begging calls and was making its way slowly down the branch it was on, head outstretched, towards one of the Crimson Rosellas.

The Crimson Rosella responded by climbing up towards the King Parrot, albeit more slowly, and making regurgitating movements with its throat, When separated by only about 10 cm, the rosella took fright and flew off noisily with its partner, which had been about 1 m distant from the other two. They were closely followed by the King Parrot still making insistent calls. They disappeared around the corner of the building and were not seen again. The whole incident, at least what I saw of it, lasted for only about a minute,

Harvey Perkins
42 Summerland Cct, Kambah, ACT 2902

Unusual food for King Parrots

On 30 December 2000 I observed a pair of Australian King Parrots *Alisterus scapularis* in our back yard in Turner, inner suburban Canberra. While they are common visitors in other seasons, King Parrots don't often visit this yard in summer. On this occasion they were feeding on the fruit of *Dodonaea viscosa* Sapindaceae, a plant native to much of drier Australia as well as southern Africa and the Pacific. The birds were perching on the small shrub, which was fruiting for the first time, and apparently selecting the green fruit. The fruit are winged and dry and were just starting to turn red. The HANZAB (vol. 4) entry for King Parrots lists five members of the family as known food sources, but these are all rainforest trees. No dodonea is listed, but this may be related to different habitat preferences, in general terms, of the plant genus and King Parrots.

Ian Fraser
GPO Box 3268, Canberra, ACT 2601

Red Wattlebirds feeding on feijoa petals and trumpet creeper nectar

On the side of our driveway is a feijoa *Feijoa sellowiana* bush (syn *Acca sellowiana* and also known as pineapple guava) which flowers fairly profusely in late spring. The feijoa belongs to the family Myrtaceae (the same family to which the eucalypts, paperbarks, callistemons, ti-trees etc belong), and, though native to South America, is fairly commonly planted in Canberra's gardens. The flowers are characterised by large showy tufts of long crimson stamens, the corolla being a rosette of five pale

pinkish or greenish petals, each about 10 mm in diameter, slightly fleshy and curled at the edges, They are supposedly edible *(Botanica,* Random House, Sydney, 1997)

On 4 December 2001 I watched a Red Wattlebird eating the petals of these feijoa flowers by going from blossom to blossom and decisively grasping and tugging or twisting off the petals, usually only a single petal from each flower, and swallowing them whole. I was reminded of a similar event about two seasons previously when I had watched a Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* do exactly the same thing.

Consultation of HANZAB (Vol 5, p.470) revealed only a single reference to Red Wattlebirds using feijoa as a food plant, erroneously listing the leaves as being the part eaten. The reference is to an observation by Otto Mueller of Perth, WA, who stated simply that 'Red Wattlebirds also take the white, fleshy, sweet petals of Guava, *Feijoa sellowiana,* which flowers for about six weeks in Spring.' (West Aust Nat 18: 234, 1991).

While looking through this section of HANZAB, I also noticed that the only species of the family Bignoniaceae listed as food plants are jacaranda *Jacaranda mimosaefolia* and cape honeysuckle *Tecomaria capensis* (syn *Tecoma capensis).* Throughout summer and into autumn our common trumpet creeper *Campsis radicans* (syn *Bignonia* or *Tecoma radicans) is* continuously occupied by one to two extremely possessive Red Wattlebirds. The flowers of this plant, which originates from the south-eastern USA, are large orange-red trumpets about 90 mm in length and about 70 mm across the flared corolla, borne in showy terminal panicles. Since they are too deep for the wattlebirds to reach the nectar through the throat of the flower, the birds instead pierce the upper surface of the base of the corolla tube, just above the sepals, in order to gain access. The flowers are clearly little affected by this treatment as they persist for about a week and apparently continue to produce nectar as the wattlebirds repeatedly probe previously breached flowers.

Harvey Perkins
42 Summerland Cct, Kambah, ACT 2902

Brown Goshawk preying on Sacred Kingfisher

In the evening of 22 January 2002 a Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* — apparently female, based on a quick size assessment — flew low over Clunies Ross Street from the Australian National Botanic Gardens to the Australian National University. It was carrying an indeterminate object, which it inexplicably dropped as it passed low over me as I was cycling.

On examining the object, I concluded that it was a headless and basically plucked Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sanctus.* This identification was based on size, syndactylous feet and the remnant bases of blue flight feathers. HANZAB (vol, 2) contains no reference to the Brown Goshawk preying on Sacred Kingfishers, or indeed any kingfisher other than the two kookaburra species *Dacelo* spp.

Ian Fraser
GPO Box 3268, Canberra, ACT 2601

Cormorant v. snake

On 16 November 2001, we saw a Little Pied Cormorant *(Phalacrocorax melanoleucos)* vigorously attacking a small snake in the Top Lake at Merimbula. The snake broke free and swam about 30 m before being caught again by the cormorant which grabbed it behind the head. A vigorous struggle ensued with the snake constantly wrapping its body around the cormorant's neck and twisting in an attempt to get free. The bird held its grip, frequently holding the snake's head beneath the water, and after about ten minutes the snake's struggles became significantly less and it was more or less subdued. The cormorant then swam away while still holding the snake and we did not see whether the snake was eaten or not. We suspect it must have been because of the single-mindedness of the pursuit. The identity of the snake is unknown. It was brown and about 25 — 30 cm long. It was definitely not an eel as it swam with the typical sinuous action of a swimming snake while holding its head well clear of the water.

David and Barbara Jones

White-faced Heron eating road-kill

At about 9:00 h on 5 November 2001, as I was driving along the Sutton Road, to the east of Canberra, **I** noticed a White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae* by the roadside just north of the Norton Road turnoff. The bird was perched on a dead kangaroo, pecking at it, apparently quite untroubled by the passing cars. It only flew off to a nearby tree when I came close to it, It was engaged in the same behaviour the following morning. While I have observed herons taking live fish before, I was quite unaware that carrion might form part of their diet.

Gutta Schoefl
1476 Sutton Rd, Sutton 2620

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR JANUARY-JUNE 2001
(as presented to the Annual General Meeting 14 November 2001)

As you all are no doubt aware, last year COG took the decision to change its yearly reporting arrangements from a financial year basis to a calendar year arrangement. As a result this 'year' has, in fact, only run for six months. As President, I am happy to report on COG's achievements during this shortened 'year'.

Highlights

For some time now the Committee has been working toward developing a Business Plan for COG, and I am pleased to advise that this is completed. The Business Plan is a management document which aims to determine COG's future directions and ensure we meet the objects of the group as defined in the Constitution. Whilst the Business Plan will shape our future, we see it as a dynamic document which should be updated regularly to reflect the ongoing challenges which face the group. Priorities from the Business Plan for the incoming committee include:

- bird conservation issues;
- education; and
- increasing membership

In June 2001, COG received renewed funding from the ACT Government to build on its woodland bird monitoring project of the past six years. While the current site monitoring will continue, the project will focus on analysing data collected to date to examine if the ACT land reserve system is effective in conserving the birds listed as threatened and providing recommendations for management, as well as establishing long term monitoring programs for listed threatened species. Other activities related to the woodland project were the development of a habitat assessment protocol for application across all sub-sites, and an analysis of the first six years of data collected at Mulligans Flat, which Chris Davey has undertaken.

The grant also includes some funding for a sub-project to consider and nominate additional birds for threatened species status. This is being managed by Nicki Taws, We have commenced a review of records in our database to determine if quantifiable declines in any species of birds can be detected. Where strong evidence of a decline exists for a particular species, it is intended that nominations to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee will be prepared recommending to list those species as threatened under the Nature Conservation Act 1980.

Records sheets for the Atlas continue to flow in, and we now have very good coverage of the ACT. Over 1000 sheets have been submitted this year, with the major contributors being John Goldie (116 sheets since 1/1/2001), Malcolm Fyfe (69), Alistair Bestow (67), Nicki Taws (51), Harvey Perkins (49), Muriel Brookfield (40), Jack Holland (37), Kay Hahne (34), Julie McGuiness (29), Brian Scales (27), Charles Buer (27), Ian Anderson (23), Dianne Deans (23), Adam Leavesley (21) and Jenny Bounds (20).

Other issues

Following the recent elections, we now have a new government in the ACT, and a new Minister for Urban and Community Services. Whilst not wishing for COG to be seen to be taking political sides, it would be remiss of me not to note with some appreciation the great support that COG received over the last seven years from the outgoing government and, in particular, from the Minister, Brendan Smyth, We have seen great progress in the conservation of the birds of the ACT and their habitats during this period with the listing of threatened communities and bird species. We have also been the recipients of a number of financial grants which have assisted us in conducting woodland surveys and producing important books such as the *Birds of Canberra Gardens* and Steve Wilson's *Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change,* Turning to the future, **I** am hopeful that COG can build an equally effective relationship with Bill Wood, the new Minister, and that we can continue to work well with the ACT Government to ensure effective conservation of the birds of Canberra.

Committee

The Committee has worked effectively and I would like to thank all for the support they have given me over the last `year'. Most Committee members have signalled their intent to stand for Committee again, and I look forward to their continuing support. I would like to especially thank those members who are retiring from committee. Charles Buer has reluctantly declined to stand because of his impending return to the US. He leaves a huge hole, and his sterling efforts in producing a top quality newsletter over the last few years will be missed, Kathy Walter, who has worked with Charles in producing *Ganggang,* has agreed to keep things going here until we can find someone else to carry out this important task. Alastair Smith stood down from the Committee during the year, but fortunately continues to maintain COG's membership records,

An organisation can only be effective if it is financially secure and has an active membership. As will be evident from her report, Joan Lipscombe continues to do a great job as Treasurer, and we have a healthy bank account. Thank you Joan for all you have done. And thank you also to Noel Luff, our Honorary Auditor.

We recently appointed Michelle Penders to the position of Office Manager, There has been a pressing need to create this position for some time to share the increasing amount of administrative work required to keep COG operational and to assist with the day to day operation of the group,

Membership has remained stable this year. We currently have 370 members. This is broken down as 112 family memberships, 238 individuals memberships, 2 life members, and 18 organisation memberships.

Other business

It is a unique feature of COG that much of our business is carried out by keen members and project organisers who are not members of the Committee, but who nevertheless make a huge contribution to the success of the organisation. Whilst it is not possible to thank them all

individually, I would like to mention some names of those who quietly work away in the background.

Communications and publications

Charles Buer continued as editor of *Gang-gang* and, with Kathy Walter, did a wonderful job editing and publishing our newsletter. Thanks also to Rosemary Ryan and her team of helpers for distributing *Gang-gang*, Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan continued to do a professional job in editing *Canberra Bird Notes*. Mike O'Shaughnessy maintained COG's web site http://www.canberrabirds,dynamite.com.au. The website presents information about COG presentations and field trips as reported in *Gang-gang*, together with other useful information about COG and its activities. Thank you Mike.

COG's email discussion list 'canberrabirds', managed by David McDonald, continued to operate effectively throughout the year. It has over 90 subscribers and averages about two messages per day, providing a useful forum for members and friends of COG to discuss topical issues relating to birds and birding in the Canberra region. It was recently characterised by Topica, the company that hosts the list, as being the most useful and informative of the 32 birding lists that Topica hosts.

The COG telephone hotline continues to be ably managed by Ian McMahon, and provides up-to-date information about bird sightings in the Canberra region. This service is valued by many members, although Ian has mentioned that the number of contributors to the hotline has declined since the e-mail discussion list has been established.

Outings and field trips

Alistair Bestow has continued to very capably organise field trips, with assistance from Jenny Bounds. Once again, we ran an extensive range of local tours, providing members with good opportunities to see birds with an experienced guide on hand to assist with identification problems. Thank to all those who led field trips during the year. We always need more volunteers to fill this role and if you are able to assist in this area, please contact Alistair Bestow.

Atlas, Woodland Survey, Garden Bird Survey, Waterbird Survey, databases

COG runs a number of bird monitoring projects, some of which have been operating for many years. Before referring to these projects individually, I would like to thank all those who have contributed data to these projects for a number of years, and continue to do so. The value of these projects relies upon sustained contributions from participants, and the level of support which we receive in this area is remarkable. Thank you to all those who contribute records so diligently.

Atlas work continued with enthusiastic support and management by Malcolm Fyfe and Nicki Taws. Jenny Bounds and Alistair Bestow incorporated atlassing into all our field trips and, with David McDonald, led a number of atlassing trips during the year. I also wish to thank all members who have taken up atlassing so enthusiastically, and particularly those who have adopted

regular two-hectare sites, It is these sites that form the backbone of much of our environmental monitoring, providing data capable of detecting future changes in bird abundance.

The other important component of COG's environmental monitoring program is the Woodland Survey. COG's surveys in grassy woodland habitats continued with further support from an ACT Government Environment Grant. Alison Rowell was employed to coordinate this survey work and extend the number of sites being monitored. Surveys have been conducted at ten locations in key areas with one further site to be set up ─ all in all a total of 115 sub-sites are monitored every three months. Thank you to the people involved in this project, which include Jenny Bounds, Paul Fennell, Chris Davey, Anthony Overs, Nicki Taws, David McDonald, Harvey Perkins, Julie McGuinness, Malcolm Fyfe and Geoffrey Dabb.

Thanks to Philip Veerman for his continuing work in managing the Garden Bird Survey, and to Kay Hahne for continuing to assist with entering the data, This project has now been in existence for 20 years and is our longest-running monitoring project. Another long-running project is the Waterbird Survey, Thanks to Michael Lenz, who not only conceived the idea for this work, but continues to manage the survey.

Paul Fennell continued to manage COG's databases, ensuring that data are effectively curated and files regularly backed-up, Special thanks to those members who assisted with data entry during the year, including Tony Harding, Malcolm Fyfe, Alan Ford, Milton Smith and Martyn Moffat, who contributed in getting record sheets into the database.

Annual Bird Reports

Many thanks to Malcolm Fyfe, David Purchase, Grahame Clark, Bob Digan, Brendan Lepschi, Ian McMahon and others who have managed to keep the Annual Bird Reports up to date.

Monthly meetings

Barbara Allan has again organised a year of the most interesting and entertaining presentations at Forestry House. The reports in *Gang-gang* and on the COG website every month attest to the quality of our presentations. Special thanks also to Carol Macleay, Ann McKenzie, Delia Johnson and Louise Muir for running the stall at COG meetings, and to Maria Lukacs for her assistance with the monthly raffle. Barbara Allan also organised the refreshments for the meetings.

COG administration & the COG office

Special thanks are due to Rosemary Ryan for her continuing work in ensuring that COG publications are in the mail, and to Alastair Smith for taking on the role of Membership Officer.

The COG Office continues to operate at the Griffin Centre, Gutta Schoefl and a small team of volunteers including Pat Williams, Margaret Boots, Shirley Kral, Kathleen Marshall, Elizabeth Compston and Pauline Wicksteed provide a great service to COG in organising the office and providing administrative assistance

with the mail, telephone messages and finances. Their hard work is greatly appreciated. Michelle Penders has worked diligently on coordinating Office administration, and her work in this area has greatly assisted the Committee. She has made a valuable contribution in ensuring the office runs efficiently and administrative matters are dealt with promptly.

One of the quiet achievers has been long-standing COG member Delia Johnson, who for many years stored COG's slide collection and served as an able curator. The collection is now housed at the office, but Delia continues to provide support to Michelle Penders in ensuring slides are appropriately labelled and available for members who wish to use them.

David McDonald, Joan Lipscombe and Geoffrey Dabb were always available to provide quality advice on COG's constitutional and organisational framework.

The Canberra Birds Conservation Fund is now operating. It is able to receive tax-deductible donations from COG members and the general public, and we will use the donated money on activities that help to achieve COG's environmental objectives, especially promoting the conservation of the Canberra region's native birds and their habitats. A fund management committee has been appointed, and has commenced work to identify the first projects to be supported. This year a grant was given to Mr Adrian Manning of the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, to assist in a study he is undertaking entitled 'A multi-scale study of the Superb Parrot'. This project aims to examine the impact agricultural practices are having on the survival of Superb Parrots, leading to the development of related conservation strategies. COG invites all members to make donations to the fund, and to encourage other people to do the same.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone else who has provided me with assistance this year when asked to do so, often at short notice. It is an easy task being President of an organisation with so many members committed to birds and their conservation, I look forward to another successful year for COG in 2001-02.

Barry Baker

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

The interest in, and importance of, recording bird observations

Malcolm Fyfe, in an excellent article in the February 2002 *Gang-gang*, pages 34, stated, 'We need to get out there and record the birds we see.' **I** agree entirely. The Garden Bird Survey (GBS) gives us an excellent picture of the birds in our neighbourhood and in Canberra generally. As a participant in the GBS since its inception, **I** have recorded 114 species from my home block, many of which are birds passing through. Participating in this survey provides great personal interest,

Canberra is noted for its large population of birds and while this is wonderful, it can create a totally wrong impression of the overall situation in the rest of the COG area of interest, The ornithological literature is full of references to the gradual decline in numbers of very many species which are seldom, if ever, found in the suburbs; and this is largely attributed to the alteration of habitat, especially the clearing of trees and shrubs. While tree planting is having a good effect in some areas, tree clearing is still going on very rapidly.

Most ornithologists agree that at least 40 species (and some put the figure much higher) are in decline, chiefly on the inland side of the Great Dividing Range. On a map this forms a wide, somewhat boomerang-shaped area extending from the latitude of Rockhampton, Queensland, down through New South Wales and Victoria to about the South Australian border.

This is alarming. But in order to address the problem properly, we need to have accurate data. That is why Malcolm's remarks must be heeded and Atlas records submitted regularly to update the COG database. It is only by regularly recording the situation over the whole COG area of interest and on a long-term basis that we can monitor what is going on.

Apart from being a valuable contribution to the monitoring of birds in our region, such records can be of great personal interest. Wherever **I** go, **I** make a list of the birds of the area and in this way keep a life list, a list of the birds seen in each State and Territory as well as an annual total.

So please take heed of Malcolm's appeal and provide your records for the COG database and enjoy yourself at the same time. Every member can do it.

Steve Wilson, GAM
56 Harrington Cct, Kambah 2902

Turtle-Doves

In *Canberra Bird Notes* 26(3) September 2001, columnist *T. alba* referred to the biblical reference to a 'turtle' which was assumed to be a turtle-dove, The reference simply to a 'turtle' is clearly a poor translation. All of my references use the term 'turtle-dove'.

The Old Testament refers to two distinct birds as 'doves': in Hebrew, 'yonah', being, for example, the bird that Noah freed from the ark to find land; and in Hebrew 'tor' being the turtle-

dove, the word that Solomon used to depict love and devotion.

The origin of the word 'tor' is interesting. Unlike the very large majority of words in the Hebrew bible, 'tor' does not emanate from a verbal root but seems to be unrelated to any Hebrew or Aramaic word. So what is its origin?

The English word 'turtle' attached to the description of this dove is said to come from an Old English form 'turtur' which, according to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, is echoic of the sound of the bird. The sound 'tur' and the sound 'tor' are structurally equivalent in Hebrew, So it seems a likely explanation that the Hebrew word, first used in extant literature in the book of Leviticus, believed traditionally to have been written about 1400 BCE, or three and a half millenia ago, was also derived from the sound that the bird made. It is also interesting ornithologically that that the dove and the turtle-dove were seen as quite distinct birds by the biblical authors.

David Rosalky
8 Northcote Cres, Deakin, ACT 2600

Breeding status of the Brush Bronzewing in the Australian National Botanic Gardens

This letter is to clarify the reported breeding status of the Brush Bronzewing *Phaps elegans* in the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) by adding information to that originally published (Green & McWhirter 1973) and confirm the suspicion of Bounds (2001) that the breeding records referred instead to the Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera.*

At the time Chris Green and Andy McWhirter prepared their table listing the breeding species in the 1971-72 breeding season I was operating a banding station in the ANBG and got to know Chris and Andy very well. They were the original rangers in the ANBG after its formal opening in 1970 and were both keen birdwatchers who had emigrated from the United Kingdom. Their field knowledge and their ability to find nests was excellent though they were still learning the local bird names from an old version of *What Bird is That?* by Neville Cayley.

The paper was prepared by them at my suggestion as there was very little published on specific breeding records in the local region at the time, Originally the idea was to produce an annotated table giving some of the more interesting observations at individual nests since all nests were followed to their conclusion. Due to time pressures Chris and Andy were not able to produce the annotations and submitted the table on its own. In preparing the table they had correctly identified the bronzewing as the Forest Bronzewing. However in submitting the table for publication they realised that the name Forest Bronzewing was not on the preferred list of English names and when the species name was changed, it was changed to 'Brush' rather than 'Common'.

Hence the table was published with the incorrect species name. After the table was published I discussed the matter with Chris and Andy who readily agreed they meant the Common Bronzewing.

Neither they nor I ever saw a Brush Bronzewing in the ANBG. The then CBN editor agreed to publish a correction in a later issue but it appears that this was overlooked.

The bronzewing referred to in the table in Green & McWhirter (1973) should therefore have been Common Bronzewing not Brush Bronzewing. Although the error was recognised at the time it was not corrected in writing as originally intended. These apparent breeding records were not used in the writing of the *Status of Canberra Birds* (COG 1974) as the panel of authors responsible for the Status (of which I was one) was aware both of the records and the error,

This confirms that Jenny Bounds was correct in her supposition that the records of Brush Bronzewing breeding in the Botanic Gardens were incorrect and the correct record was breeding of the Common Bronzewing.

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Grahame Clark
24 Adair Street, Scullin, ACT 2614

EDITORS' NOTE

Our astute readers will have noted that they have missed an issue of *Canberra Bird Notes*. Yes, we regret to inform you that CBN 26(4) December 2001, comprising the Annual Bird Reports for 1999-2000 and 2000-01, has not yet been published, through circumstances beyond our control. We are working assiduously to rectify this situation and, with the valued assistance of the many species writers and the two database managers, we hope to be able to publish complete and accurate Annual Bird Reports soon.

Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan

OBITUARY

Delia Margaret Johnson
1920-2002

Delia Johnson is memorable as the quintessential quiet achiever. She was also a good observer, both of birds and people, and had a down-to-earth sense of humour. Delia first became known to COG in the early 1970s after her move from Melbourne. It was not long before she served on the committee and became COG Vice-President. At the same time, she was the wife of an academic, mother of five children, had a teaching career (subject to the usual familial interruptions), and many other interests.

Her varied life began in England, where she grew up in Northallerton, Yorkshire. An excellent scholar, she went on to Oxford University to study French. Meantime Basil Johnson, her future husband, had arrived in Northallerton from New Zealand, and provided some academic competition, Their friendship was interrupted by WW1 1 and his army posting to India.

This small difficulty was overcome in 1943 on his brief return, when they married in Northallerton, Missing was the sound of church bells — these could be rung only to announce imminent invasion of the country by the enemy, The Johnsons remedied this later, at their 50th wedding anniversary back in Northallerton. They had a recording made, and this was played last week at the close of the celebratory service for her life.

Delia and the family migrated to Australia, and Monash University, in the 1960s: then moved to Canberra and the Australian National University in 1971. Birding was one of her great interests, and she could be relied upon to make a valuable contribution to each project as it arose: the first Atlas of Australian Birds, the COG Garden Bird Survey *Birds of the ACT: An Atlas*, and more recently, the second Atlas of Australian Birds.

COG slide librarian for many years, Delia also made a collection of feathers, wings and nests. The slide library is now housed in the Griffin Centre office. In addition, she was a valued member of the ANU's Women's Birding Group for many years, where her keen ear (allied perhaps to her participation in major choir groups?) was greatly appreciated, plus her ability to find a Weebill where no-one else could.

U3A was a field of activity where all of Delia's experience in bird observation came together, Many U3A people will remember her for her courses in Bird Recognition, both beginners and advanced, that she gave over eight years at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, She is also a well-known identity in Eurobodalla Shire, where she made regular input for over twenty years to the Eurobodalla Natural History Society from the Johnsons' coastal base at Durras, Tropical birds were another interest, both in Australia and Sri Lanka (1983), where she studied the communal behaviour of cormorants on the irrigation tanks.

Delia's courage and strength became visible to all when she was diagnosed with leukemia and had seven weeks to live. She methodically shared out her treasures with her family and donated her bird books to friends and to COG. With her husband, she mapped out her own celebratory service and chose Fauré's beautiful music. She wanted us to leave with happy memories, And she did.

All local societies need their Delias; generous with their time, reliable, organised and with integrity, Their worth is not always adequately appreciated. Vale Delia!

Muriel Brookfield
84 Wybalena Grove, Cook, ACT 2615

COLUMNISTS' CORNER

The views expressed by our columnists are personal views and do not necessarily represent the views of COG

Of honeyeaters, dabblers and mynas

Honeyeaters then and now

Further patrolling of the second-hand bookshops has brought Stentoreus a (yet another) little volume, this one entitled *Wildlife in the ACT,* The booklet was published by the then Department of the Interior in 1968, and lists all species of birds and animals known to occur naturally in the ACT. The text is attributed to officers of the Agricultural Branch of the Department, and acknowledges the help of officers of the Wildlife Division of CSIRO, who read the manuscript, and of members of the Canberra branch of RAOU, who provided records of local bird distribution and abundance.

This is not the place for a lengthy 'then and now' comparison, and in any event the field has been well-traversed by Steve Wilson in his *Birds of the ACT: Two Centuries of Change.* However, of the many species-status changes over 34 years a few points do strike the eye.

One concerns the Hooded Robin, currently designated an 'uncommon breeding species in declining numbers'. The 1968 booklet not only gives the Hooded Robin as 'common' in the table provided for passerines but the text notes that it is 'often found in suburban gardens'.

The 1968 list mentions 20 honeyeaters, With regard to this group, some things have been going on, either in occurrence or in observers' perceptions. The following gives status as assigned, respectively, in the 1943 Mathews list, the 1968 list and the current Wilson/McDonald list.

(Note that the Mathews list — discussed in Steve Wilson's book — was nearer in time to the 1968 list than the latter is to the present. Mathews differentiated 'city' (three miles from Parliament House) from 'country', and assigned five status levels, with 'occasional' taking the place of 'uncommon' between 'common' and `rare'.)

The fourth column gives the numerical species-records 'rank' (where relevant) in Philip Veerman's recent analysis of Canberra garden bird survey data over 18 years. The fifth gives (again where relevant) the status trend for Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve as based on reporting information 1986-2000, from Chris Davey's interpretation of COG survey data.

Species	**Mathews 1943**	**ACT 1968**	**Wilson/ McDonald**	**GBS rank**	**M/Flat trend**
Red Wattlebird	country, rare	uncommon	common breeding resident	8	increase
Little Wattlebird		rare	rare vagrant	177	
Regent Honeyeater	city, occasional	uncommon	rare visitor	138	
Noisy Friarbird	city, very common	common	common breeding migrant	13	no change
Noisy Miner	city, common	uncommon	common breeding resident	61	decline
Lewin's Honeyeater	city, occasional	rare	rare visitor	185	
Yellow-Faced Honeyeater	city, occasional	common	common breeding migrant	16	no change
Singing Honeyeater	city, occasional	rare	rare vagrant	not recorded	
White-eared Honeyeater	city, occasional	uncommon	breeding resident	31	no change
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater		uncommon	rare visitor	112	
Fuscous Honeyeater		uncommon	common breeding species	41	
White-plumed Honeyeater	city, common	uncommon	common breeding resident	35	decline
Brown-headed Honeyeater		uncommon	uncommon breeding resident	95	no change
White-naped Honeyeater	country, rare	common	common breeding migrant	30	no change
Painted Honeyeater		uncommon	rare migrant species	not recorded	

Crescent Honeyeater		uncommon	uncommon breeding migrant	69	
New Holland Honeyeater	country, common	uncommon	uncommon breeding resident	76	
Tawny-crowned Honeyeater		rare (single visit)	rare vagrant	not recorded	
Eastern Spinebill	country, rare	common	common altitudinal migrant	18	increase
Scarlet Honeyeater	country, rare	rare	rare non-breeding vagrant	156	

No honeyeater classified above 'rare' by Wilson/McDonald is missing from the 1968 list, except the Little Friarbird, recently designated as 'uncommon' as a result of many records in the 1990s,

What is 'dabbling'?

This recent summer provided the full range of water conditions in front of the hides- at Kellys Swamp (Jerrabomberra Wetlands). These ranged from expanses of bare mud with a few puddles and a general maximum depth of a few centimetres to a brimming deepish lake following the heavy rain, The ducks coped with these — or tried to — by deploying their range of feeding techniques. Conversations among the watching hide-users exposed some difference of perceptions as to what does or does not constitute 'dabbling'.

Consider these feeding methods on display:

(la) rapid straight-ahead swimming, head motionless in relation to the body, the bill using a pumping/sieving action;
(1 b) swimming, generally in meandering fashion, the head moving from side-to-side as the bill uses a pumping/sieving action;
(1c) as in (lb), but walking through watery mud rather than swimming;
(2) swimming, body horizontal, while the head is intermittently submerged completely (tempo either fast or slow); and
(3) 'up-ending'.

In (2) or (3) the underwater bill is not visible but it is reasonable to think that at least sometimes 'pumping/sieving' is employed,

When is the duck 'dabbling'? Stentoreus had always taken a rather broad view of dabbling, believing that it certainly included (3) (a belief possibly flowing from memories of a children's rhyme

containing references to 'ducks a-dabbling' and 'up-tails all').

Dictionaries are little help here, the Macquarie, for example, giving no relevant sense for 'dabble', the closest being 'splash', 'spatter', and 'to play in water, as with the hands or feet', Bird-book glossaries are similarly unhelpful; they're pretty quick to tell you about `crepuscular' and 'primaries', but not anxious to offer illumination on `dabbling'. An exception is the Madge/Burn *Waterfowl* volume, which says simply 'feeding on surface of the water',

However, many writers clearly have something more specific in mind. In relation to ducks, HANZAB (vol, 1) repeatedly refers to 'dabbling' and 'up-ending' as if they were separate things. In a general section on feeding by `dabbling ducks' it says:

> Many omnivorous, taking mainly seeds and invertebrates mainly from shallow water by dabbling at surface at the same time pumping water and mud through bill, using lamellae to sieve out food (Suzzling). Also filter-feed by dipping head and neck below water, and up-ending ...

And in relation to the Australasian Shoveler:

> Food obtained by dabbling in mud or at surface where lamellae on fringe of spatulate bill used to filter food from water. Usually swim fairly swiftly with head half or almost wholly submerged, bill moving rapidly.

This is really confusing. If 'dabbling at the surface' (a phrase also used elsewhere) is not a tautology, what is non-surface dabbling? Evidently pumping/sieving is not itself dabbling, nor necessarily part of it. What, then, can be the essential act involved in `dabbling'? Surely it is not a matter of head movement: compare (I a) and (1 b) above,

From the shoveler entry, it does not seem that putting one's (suzzling) head below water necessarily brings one's dabbling, whatever it is, to an end, provided, of course, that one is not also up-ending.

Stentoreus can only conclude that `dabbling' is a word best avoided, including particularly in children's verses, lest more confusion be created for the future.

Mynas and miners

According to JD McDonald's *Australian Birds* dictionary, the original English-language bird name was 'myna' or `mynah', This label was adopted by the British in India for certain tropical Asian starlings, coming originally from the Hindi 'maim', meaning an ability to speak back or mimic. In Australia, according to one theory, the names `mina' and 'miner' evolved as local corruptions of `myna(h)',

The rather confusing current spelling `miner', as in 'Noisy Miner', gave rise to a recent suggestion *(Bird Observer* No 815) that the name came from the face pattern of these birds, suggesting begrimed coal miners after a day's work. Moreover, *BO* 817 drew attention to the HANZAB explanation of the name 'Bell Miners' as the result of 'their tinkling

calls recalling distant miners hammering at the workface'.

However, to the contrary and favouring McDonald's theory, early spellings for the Australian birds (including the Bell Miner) included `minah', and there are certainly some obvious points of resemblance with the Asian starlings, such as size and yellow eye-patches.

If the application of the Asian `myna(h)' label (however spelt) to Australian honeyeaters seems a little odd, it is scarcely more so than the adoption of `bandicoot' from the Hindi `pandi-cotta', the name of an unrelated Indian rodent,

A, stentoreus

Birding in cyberspace, Canberra style

I'm not sure what is expanding faster, online birding or in-the-field-with-bins birding. Someone ought to do a survey. What I do know is that both the Canberra Birds email list and the national birding list Birding-Aus have been very active during this beautiful autumn season. It's great to see people going out to the field and then sharing their thoughts and observations with other birders with whom they connect locally, nationally and across the globe courtesy of the internet.

Trevor Hardaker from Cape Town, South Africa, reported to Birding-Aus (for example) a remarkable observation of what he described 'a Subantarctic Skua that had eaten some type of squid and then the squid ate the skua.,,from the inside out!' If you have the stomach for it (sorry about that but I couldn't resist!) you are welcome to view the photographic evidence at http://www,zestforbirds.co.za and read the full, gory details.

In response, Australian birder Graham Turner recalled something similar from when he worked for NSW Fisheries at Cronulla. He explained that one day in 1993:

> I was making my regular lunch time visit to the wharf when I saw something unusual on one of the pylons, about 1 metre below the water level. At first glance I thought it was a bit of rubbish caught in the oysters, but on closer inspection it turned out to be a huge octopus, probably a metre in length. This in itself was unusual, but what was really impressive was that it appeared to be eating a Little Pied Cormorant. I could only guess that the cormorant swam too close to the octopus and got caught as it swam past. Sounds like the worm that turned?

Ugh, again!

Autumn in Canberra is mushroom season. I love to go birding in the Grassy Creek area at the southern extremity of Namadgi National Park in this season, partly because the fairy-ring mushrooms are out, Delightful to see their rings (yes you may dance around in them if you are game, and no-one is watching) and to eat them. A delightful nutty flavour. But beware of the spotted red fungi found in the pine forests, Jill Dark told Birding-Aus subscribers about an incident involving them in the Blue Mountains of NSW this March:

> ... a WIRES rescuer in Katoomba picked up a group of 24 Red Wattlebirds which

had been eating *Amanita muscaria* (big red toadstools with white spots, usually found under pine trees). Most of the birds were in a really bad way, with severe diarrhoea and blood coming from the beak - a most distressing sight for the rescuer. 17 of the birds died before anything could be done for them, 1 had severe head injuries when bitten by a dog, and the remaining 6, after copious amounts of fluids, recovered completely and were released the next morning. I have worked with W1RES for many years and have never heard of any birds poisoned by these toadstools before.

Jill asks if anyone has any other records of this or any ideas on how the birds could be treated if it happens again, Sadly, the scourge of drug abuse seems to be extending into the most unexpected corners of both human and avian societies. Someone should tell the wattlebirds to 'Just Say No' to such temptations,

OK you say, but what's happening on our own doorstep here in the Canberra region? Well, what about home delivered Lewin's Rails? A particularly valued contributor to canberrabirds, Marnix Zwankhuizen, told us about a 'Surprise for a Sunday morning': a dead Lewin's Rail by his front door! This is what he surmised:

The local cat population on the golf course estate I live at probably dragged it in from the creek, but I'm not sure whether they actually killed it, as it was in good condition with just a small wound to the side of the head. I had a rough time prying it from one of the cats and wonder what the neighbours may have thought if they had seen me chasing cats through the bushes with a stick and cursing. The bird is now with CSIRO Wildlife & Ecology in Gungahlin. Two messages here. One is to stay at home and see what the cats bring in as a way of adding to your life list. The other is to remember to take well preserved, frozen dead birds to CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems at Gungahlin (formerly Wildlife and Ecology), phone 02 6242 1600,

Let's turn to a positive note, a great resource for Canberra birders visiting the Illawarra region of NSW, Chris Chafer from the Illawarra Bird Observers' Club (IBOC) has a valuable web site at http://www.ezy.net.au/users/cchafer/ called 'Birds of the Illawarra: An illustrated guide to the birds of the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Adjacent Tablelands'. It is based on the book he co-authored *Handbook of birds found in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and adjacent tablelands*. Among the resources provided are a list of the birds found in the greater Illawarra region and their relative abundance; annual Illawarra bird reports for 1999 and 2000; and links to other Illawarra region bird and vegetation data sites. A guide to the Illawarra's best birdwatching sites will be included soon, For each species found in the region Chris provides a photo, a range map and a discussion of the key points relating to that species, Highly recommended,

Why is bird species diversity so low in Australia's alpine regions in both summer and winter? Simple, you respond: it's too cold and there's nothing much for the birds to eat. Well, Victorian biologist and contributor to Birding-Aus Lawrie Conole argues that that is simplistic. Let's complexify the issue a little (yes your columnist is a post-modernist at heart!). Lawrie points out

that 'there are alpine specialist birds in most other alpine areas throughout the world' but not in Australia:

> Where serious mountains exist (3000-5000m), many bird species are involved in altitudinal migration to varying degrees, but some remain in true alpine and snowbound areas year-round. Numerous species come up from the lowlands to exploit resources in summer. The Australian alpine avifauna shows relatively few examples of any of these adaptations. Typical Australian alpine habitats (and to some extent sub-alpine as well) have summer avifaunas of 3-10 species of birds, which seems extraordinarily depauperate considering the apparent abundant/ephemeral niches and food resources available.

So next time you are in the alpine region and see nothing but ravens and pipits, you might care to reflect on this, Have a look at the potential food sources and, as Lawrie puts it, the ephemeral niches and think about why it is so,

Remember this column's motto: while you are less likely to be eaten from the inside out by a squid while birding at your computer than in the field, it's well worth the risks involved in getting out into the field, especially in this delightful autumn weather. Just look out for squids and red spotted fungi!

T *alba*

Details on how to subscribe to Birding-Aus, the Australian birding email discussion list, are on the web at http://www.shc.melb.catholic,edu.au/home/birding/index.html. A comprehensive searchable archive of the messages that have been posted to the list is maintained by Andrew Taylor at http://www,cse.unsw.edu,au/birding-aus.

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. At this site can also be found a searchable archive of messages posted to the canberrabirds list.

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

The following records were endorsed by COG's Rarities Panel at meetings in March and April 2002. Four records are still under consideration: more information is being sought about a White-throated Nightjar report; and three other records (of a Spotless Crake at Kellys Swamp, a Spotted Turtle-Dove at Mt Rogers, and a Black Kite at Belconnen tip) will be considered at the Panel's next meeting,

The most noteworthy record below is undoubtedly that of the Spangled Drongo. It represents only the fifth endorsed record for the ACT and is, typically, of an autumn observation. The drongo is a coastal species, rarely recorded south of Sydney and rarely so far inland. It presents few identification challenges, the combination of a deeply forked tail, a red eye and glossy black colouration associated with a bird of about 30 cm in size being diagnostic, The Channel-billed Cuckoo records from the south of the city are also of considerable interest. Again, this is a bird of the coastal areas which occasionally overshoots on its migratory path and may be sighted here in spring or autumn, Its large size (60 cm), large heavy pale bill and long tail are diagnostic, as are its dramatic calls.

Many thanks to the COG members who put in koel and turtle-dove records. While there has been considerable anecdotal evidence of the apparent increase in numbers of these species, the Panel cannot revise their status without firm evidence. Similarly the Panel was delighted to be able to endorse the final record from Delia Johnson, of a Spotted Harrier over Kellys Swamp. Again there have been many anecdotal records of this species but few records submitted. The Panel suggests the most useful diagnostic tip to look for in this species is the black tips to the dove-grey wings on the bird's upper surface,

Another noteworthy record was that of a Spotless Crake from a location other than Kellys Swamp. The bird's behaviour (swimming off the bank, into the water and straight into reeds) was consistent with that of a crake; the fact that the bird's back, seen in good light, was plain and dark (as opposed to the Baillon's mottled back or the Australian's spotted back) also assisted, as did the red eye.

And finally, given the paucity of Lewin's Rail records (probably thanks to the bird's preference for deep cover), even the record of a dead one was appreciated.

ENDORSED LIST No 54, MARCH 2002

Freckled Duck *Stictonetta naevosa*
2; 18 Dec 01; Harvey Perkins; Kellys Swamp

Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius*
5-9; 28 Nov 01, 17 Jan 02; Harvey Perkins; Lake Tuggeranong

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
1; 7 Jan 02; Philip Veerman; Kambah Pool

Spotted Harrier *Circus assimilis*
1; 23 Aug 01; Delia Johnson; Kellys Swamp

Lewin's Rail *Rallus pectoralis*
1(dead); 17 Feb 02; Marnix Zwankhuizen; Ngunnawal
Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis*
1; 31 Oct 01; Dianne Deans; 8 km n of Bungendore
Black-tailed Native-hen *Gallinula ventralis*
1; 12 Dec 01; David McDonald; Kellys Swamp
1; 16,18 Dec 01, 1 Jan 02; Harvey Perkins; Kellys Swamp
1; 24 Jan 02; Steve Wilson; Kellys Swamp
1; 27 Jan 02; Julie McGuiness; Kellys Swamp
White-headed Pigeon *Columba leucomela*
1; 3 Nov 01; Philip Veerman; Richardson
Spotted Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* 1-5; late 99 onwards; Maria Lukacs; Queanbeyan
1-3; Oct 00 to Jan 02; Kathy Walter; Queanbeyan
2-3; 17 Nov 00 to Mar 02; Fiona Johnson; Red Hill
2; 25 Nov 01; Bill Graham; Gilmore
2; 3 Jan 02; Julie McGuiness; Watson
1; 10 Feb 02; Jack Holland; Chapman
Princess Parrot *Polytelis alexandrae*
1; 25 Nov 01; Bill Graham; Gilmore **escapee**
2; 18 Jan 02; Bill Graham; Fadden **escapees**
Common Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*
1; 27 Nov 01; David McDonald; Kambah
1; 8-22 Dec 01; Jack Holland; Chapman
1; 15 Dec 01; Brendan Lepschi; O'Connor
1; 19 Dec 01; Bill Graham; Gilmore
1; 25 Dec 01; Jack Holland; Rivett
1; 25 Dec 01; Jack Holland; Stirling
Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae*
1; 2 Nov 01; Bill Graham; Gilmore
1; 10 Mar 02; Bill Graham; Enchanted Hill
Azure Kingfisher *Alcedo azurea*
1; 17 Jun 01; Muriel Brookfield; Shoalhaven River/Witts Creek
Chestnut-rumped Heathwren *Hylacola pyrrhopygia*
1; 3 Feb 02; Marnix Zwankhuizen; Tallaganda
Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis*
1; 26 Nov 01; Mary Ormay; Melba
1; 16 Dec 01; Nicki Taws; Gooroo
Scarlet Honeyeater *Myzomela sanguinolenta*
1; 15 Feb 02; Charles Buer; Namadgi
Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*
1; 9 Feb 01; Kathy and David Cook; Wamboin
Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*
1; 29 Nov 01; Malcolm Fyfe; Jerrawa to Yass Rd
2; 29 Nov 01; Malcolm Fyfe; Bango Lane, Yass

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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