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HONEYEATER MIGRATION IN THE ACT, AUTUMN 2003

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Abstract The autumn migration of honeyeaters out of the ACT is a well-known phenomenon. This paper reports on the 2003 migration at various points along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and compares the level of migration to previous years. Despite the extensive and catastrophic fires of 18 January, large numbers of honeyeaters were recorded moving through the region suggesting that many of the honeyeaters come from further afield than the local fire-affected ranges.

Introduction

The Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops* and White-naped Honeyeater *Melithreptus lunatus* are very common breeding migrants to the ACT found primarily in the forested mountains between September and April. Across their range, both species are partial migrants with the general movement in autumn north-east following the Great Dividing Range or coast (Higgins *et al* 2001),

The autumn departure of the honeyeaters is a well-documented spectacle in the ACT (Lamm and Calaby 1950, Wilson 1963a & b, Horey 1979, Davey 1986, Taylor 1987, Taws 1999) when thousands of honeyeaters can be seen in a few hours travelling through certain locations along the migration route in a general north-east to south-east direction,

The widespread and intensive bushfires of January 2003 burnt large areas of the ACT mountain ranges including almost 90% of Namadgi National Park and effectively all of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. In addition large tracts of the adjoining forests in NSW were burnt, including Kosciuszko National Park, Brindabella National Park, Scabby Nature Reserve, Burrinjuck Nature Reserve, State Forests and private lands.

Such extreme bushfire events are known to result in high mortality of wildlife, including birds (Pescott 1983, Wegener 1984). Indeed several landholders on the western edge of Canberra suburbs mentioned dead birds falling from the sky during the fires and finding many dead birds in the days following, For those birds that somehow survived the inferno, life would have been fairly grim in the burnt areas due to lack of food and shelter. They would have either been forced to move to unburnt habitat and face the competition there or stay and succumb to starvation, predation or injuries resulting from the fires.

Reports from the few visits to burnt areas in the three months post-fire indicated that very few birds could be found. Those species present were mostly larger carnivores (e.g. Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides)* or parrots (e,g. Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans)* with very few small insectivores or nectar-feeders.

Certainly honeyeaters of any species were notably absent,

As autumn 2003 approached, the question was raised — would there be a honeyeater migration this year? With such a large area of habitat burnt and apparently devoid of honeyeaters, were there any left to migrate or had any survivors already left the scene?

Survey method

It was decided to hold a honeyeater migration survey along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor (MRC), replicating the survey conducted in 1997 (Taws 1999). Counts were held on two Sundays in April 2003 (6th and 13th) rather than three as in 1997, as the third Sunday fell during Easter, The survey locations were the same as in 1997 where possible (see Map 1).

Angle Crossing *(same* as 1997 - Angle Crossing Road approx. 1 km north of the Crossing),

Gigerline (same as in 1997 - beside the Murrumbidgee River below Smiths Road, c, 500 m east of Gudgenby River bridge)

Point Hut Crossing (same as 1997 - approx 200 m north of the picnic area).

Pine Island (southern carpark.)

New Station Creek (new location near Kambah Pool, only surveyed 6 April)

Kambah Pool *(same* as 1997 - southern carpark, overlooking the gully running in from the east, only surveyed 13 April due to access difficulties),

Casuarina Sands (same as in 1997 - near the weir approximately 300 m

The survey teams consisted of two or more people at each site when volunteer numbers were sufficient. Twenty-six volunteers from COG took part on at least one day. The survey period ran from 8:00 h to 13:00 h to cover the expected time of peak movement between 9:00 h and 11:00 h. All honeyeaters migrating through the site were counted as accurately as possible in 20-minute periods. The different honeyeater species were identified, either visually or by call, but identification was not always possible when the birds were too far away. The main species which migrate are the Yellow-faced Honeyeater and White-naped Honeyeater, with lower numbers of Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata,* and occasional White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis,* Fuscous Honeyeater *Lichenostomus fuscous* and Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris.* Observers also recorded the numbers of other bird species seen or heard while at the site, however this activity took second priority to the counting of migrating honeyeaters.

Results: how many honeyeaters?

6 April 2003

The weather was fine and sunny with temperatures 8-23°C; ideal for migrating honeyeaters, In total, 13,714 honeyeaters were counted across the seven survey sites on 6 April, with more than half of them (61%) being recorded at the Angle Crossing site. The majority of honeyeaters were Yellow-faced (92%), with 7% White-naped Honeyeaters and almost no Red Wattlebirds. Counts from

Table 1. Number of migrating honeyeaters at survey sites on 6 April 2003

Site	Total	Y-f	W-n	RW
Angle X'ing	8,430	7511	906	13
Gigerline A	114	105	9	0
Point Hut	335	315	17	3
Pine Island	1,447	1,447	0	0
New Stn Ck	1,350	1,245	105	0
Casuarina S	1,273	1,268	5	0
Shepherd's	765	747	10	8
Total	**13,714**	**12,638**	**1,052**	**24**

The general direction of movement at nearly all sites was west to east across the MRC. This makes it likely that few birds were double-counted. Only at Pine Island were the honeyeaters flying roughly parallel to the river, however many of the birds were also noted to be flying through the young tree plantings on the east bank at an angle away from the river. Some may have travelled through to Point Hut and therefore been counted twice, however the lower numbers counted at this site indicate that, if this were the case, many were leaving the river between the two sites. General direction of movement at each site is shown in Map 1, When the numbers at all sites are summed, the time of greatest movement is seen to be between 10:40 h and 11:00 h (Figure 1).

13 *April 2003*

The inclement weather, overcast with periods of drizzle, meant that few honeyeaters were migrating. The majority were counted in the early part of the survey, then intermittent drizzle began after 9,30 and most observers gave up counting by 12:00, Across the seven sites only 952 honeyeaters were counted, with 54% of them flying through Angle Crossing, Counts from each site are summarised in Table 2, and the time of movement is shown in Figure 2.

Table 2. Number of migrating honeyeaters at survey sites on 13 April 2003

Site	Total	Y-f	W-n	RW
Angle Crossing	518	511	7	0
Gigerline A	10	10	0	0
Point Hut	83	83	0	0
Pine Island	81	81	0	0
Kambah Pool	12	12	0	0
Casuarina Sands	206	201	5	0
Shepherd's	42	42	0	0
Total	**952**	**940**	**12**	**0**

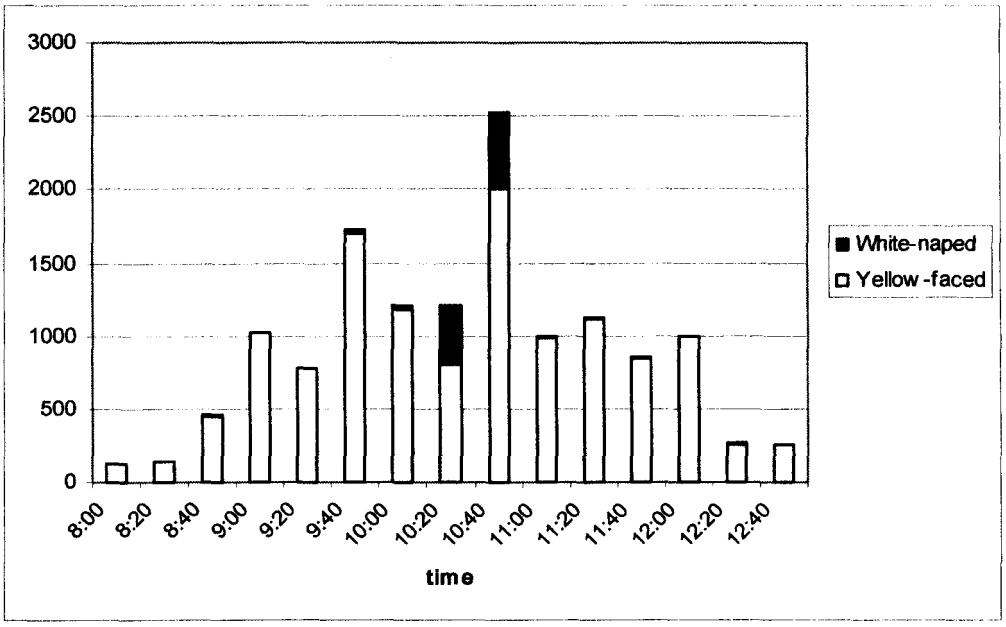

Figure 1. Total number of honeyeaters at all sites on 6 April 2003.

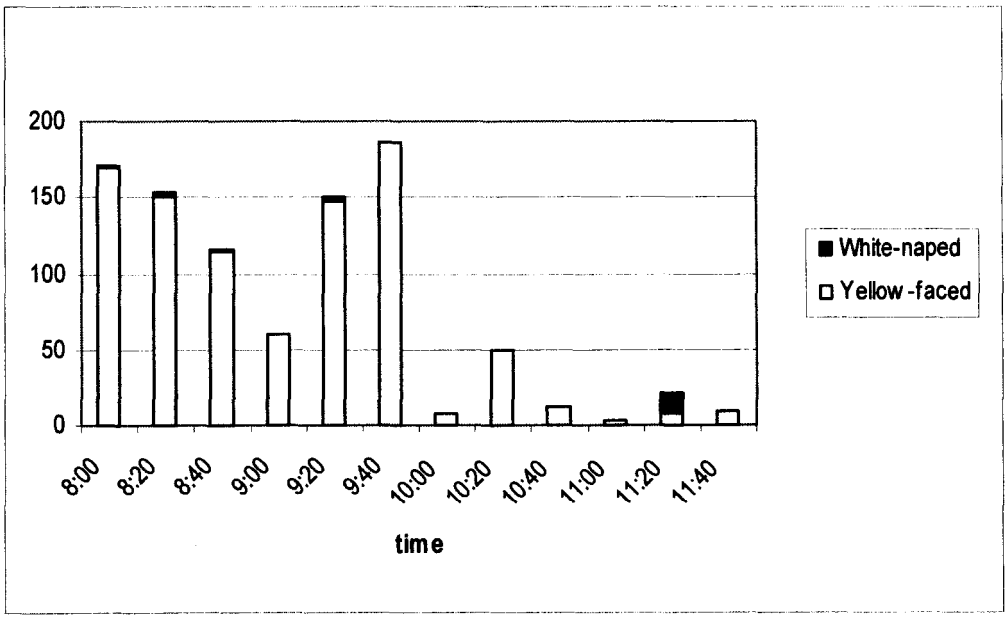

Figure 2. Total number of honeyeaters at all sites on 13 April 2003.

Discussion: what effect the fires?

The honeyeater survey in 2003 confirmed a number of well documented facts about the migration:

- greatest numbers migrate in good weather — fine sunny calm days after cool nights
- the main species migrating in early to mid April is the Yellow-faced Honeyeater.
- time of greatest movement on a day of good weather is mid-morning,

Optimum weather conditions occurred on 6 April, but 13 April was overcast and drizzling to raining. Consequently the results for both days are quite different, and the results from 6 April would seem to be indicative of what could be expected on a good migration day in 2003.

The total number of honeyeaters recorded on 6 April (13,714) is comparable to that of the count on 27 April 1997, when 14,471 were recorded from the same sites. Taken in isolation, the count on 6 April 2003 would therefore seem to indicate that the bushfires had little effect on the population of honeyeaters, What has never been done (for obvious logistical reasons) is a continuous census at one or more sites for the duration of the honeyeater migration. So it is difficult to know whether the migration on these days was typical or above or below average, or how many weeks the migration lasted. All that can be said is that there were many honeyeaters migrating in 2003, but whether this was less than usual could not be measured. However, it is hard to believe that the 2003 bushfires did not have some negative effect on the number of honeyeaters migrating, A rough estimate of honeyeater densities in the ACT mountains over summer was calculated using Atlas data from the COG database, The average number of Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters recorded in 2-ha surveys in the mountain areas from October to March 1998-2002 was calculated at 1,75/ha and 0,56/ha respectively. The 120,000 hectares of bushland that was burnt in the ACT could therefore be said (conservatively) to have sheltered 150,000-200,000 honeyeaters, which were absent after the fires.

Given that 13,714 honeyeaters were counted on just one morning, and there were many other mornings in early April when flocks were noted moving through the suburbs, the honeyeater migration did still pass through the ACT in 2003. However, the birds must have been coming from further afield, possibly from unburnt forests around Tumut or other areas of Kosciuszko National Park, or north-east Victoria, One of the tantalising mysteries of the honeyeater migration is exactly where the birds come from and where they go to.

An interesting comparison to be made between the counts on 27 April 1997 and 6 April 2003 is the difference in the sites at which most honeyeaters were recorded (Table 3), In 1997 one-third of the honeyeaters were counted at Angle Crossing, but a significant proportion were also counted at more northerly sites such as Kambah Pool. In 2003, the majority of honeyeaters (61%) were coming through Angle Crossing with the other sites to the north contributing only 1000-1500 honeyeaters (7-11%) each.

Table 3. Number of honeyeaters at different sites on 27 April 1997 and 6 April 2003

Site	27 April 1997		6 April 2003	
	No.	**% of total**	**No.**	**% of total**
Angle Crossing	5,107	35	8,430	61
Gigerline A	1,680	12	114	1
Point Hut	993	7	335	3
Pine Island	1,478	10	1,447	11
Kambah Pool	3,904	27	1,350	10
Casuarina Sands	1,293	9	1,273	9
Shepherd's Lookout/ Uriarra Crossing	16	0.1	765	5
Total	**14,471**		**13,714**	

This different pattern of migration could be a result of the fire with more honeyeaters skirting around the southern and eastern edges of the burnt area and funnelling through Angle Crossing, rather than flying through the extensive burnt areas to the west and south-west of the Canberra suburbs and coming along the routes that lead to the more northerly of the survey sites. A second possibility is that more of the honeyeaters that would normally migrate through the northern sites were killed by the fires or escaped and left the mountains before autumn,

What can we conclude?

Perhaps surprisingly there was still a significant migration of Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters in autumn 2003, only three months after extensive bushfires burned through much of the honeyeaters' habitat, This probably indicates that honeyeaters passing through the MRC come not only from the mountain ranges immediately to the west and south-west of Canberra, but also from further afield.

However, whether overall numbers were lower due to the bushfires could not be ascertained without a continuous census at one or more sites for the duration of migration.

Lower numbers passing through the northern survey sites could be due to honeyeaters using a different migration route to avoid the burnt areas, or due to higher mortality of honeyeaters in areas that would normally feed these northern routes.

Acknowledgments

The honeyeater survey would not be possible without the COG volunteers contributing their time and expertise, Thank you to Lia Battisson, Alistair Bestow, Jenny Bounds, D Camacho, Ian Carmody, Joe Carmody, Chris Davey, Ian Fraser, Phyl Goddard, Paula Harwood, Chris Hastir, Jack Holland, Shirley Kral, Adam Leavesley, Joan and Trevor Lipscombe, Noel Luff, Sylvia Matthews, David McDonald, Julie McGuiness, Martyn Moffat, Ruth Parker, Harvey Perkins, Alison Rowell, Bob

Rusk and Philip Veerman. Chris Davey also kindly shared some of his unpublished count data.

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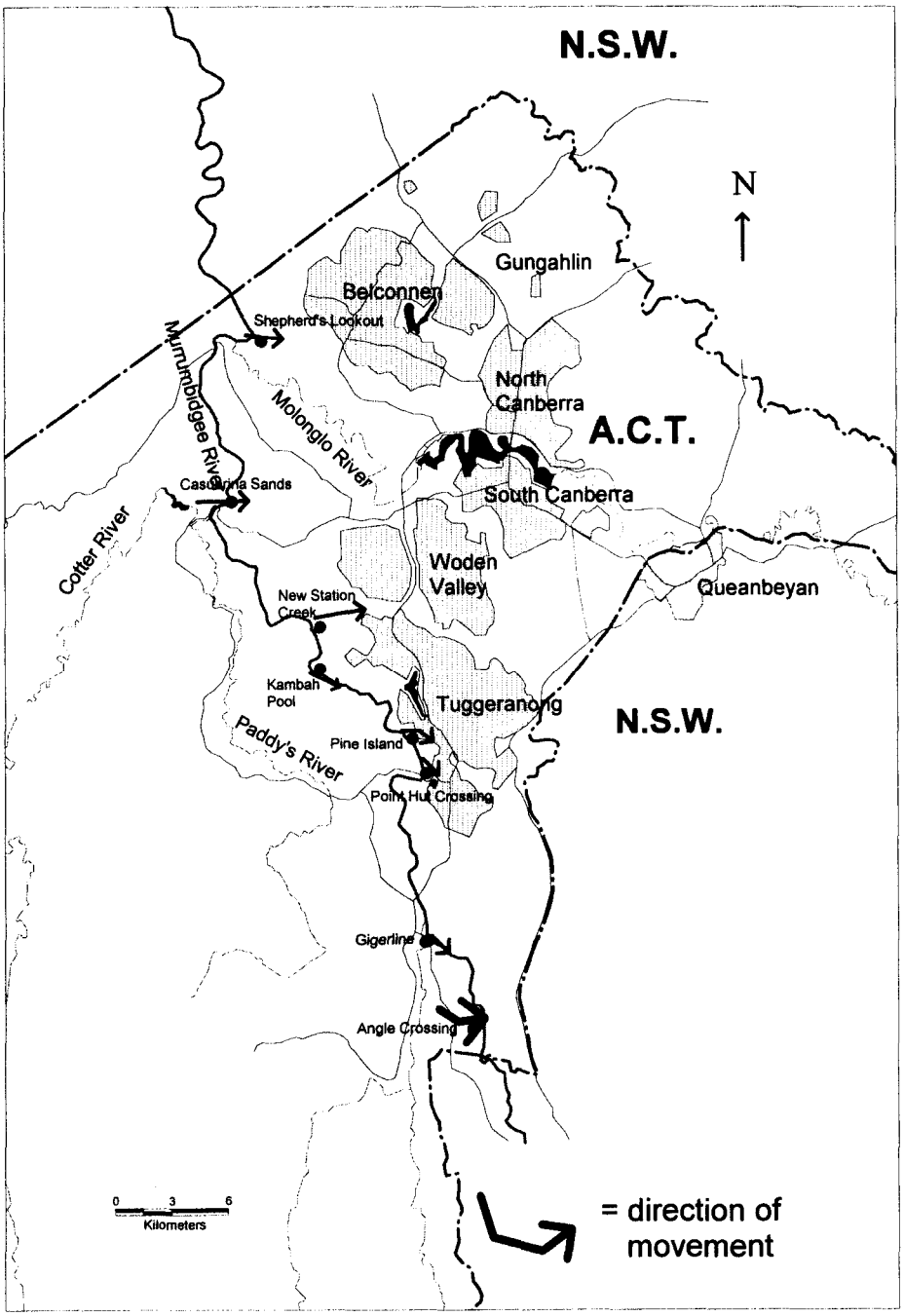
Map 1. Location of the survey sites for the honeyeater count 2003 and direction of honeyeater movement



SILVER GULLS BREEDING ON MOORED BOATS ON LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN

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Abstract *Since the first filling of Lake Burley Griffin it had been expected that Silver Gulls should breed around the lake or its associated wetlands, but despite anecdotal evidence, no published records have ever appeared. This paper finally documents an extended period of breeding by this species, from July to March, with more than thirty nests built on boats moored in various bays of Lake Burley Griffin. Survival rates were fairly low, with clearance of nests by boat owners being a factor.*

While at Lake Burley Griffin on 31 August 2003, I happened to notice about seven or eight Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* sitting on nests on the deck and superstructure of a moored yacht in Orana Bay, Yarralumla, There were several incomplete nests as well.

I didn't realise the significance of this observation until I checked the literature on returning home. After the lake first filled in 1964, it was predicted 'it is likely that a breeding colony may start in the near future on islands in Lake Burley Griffin' (van Tets 1976). However, Wilson (1999) noted that successful breeding on Lake Burley Griffin still had not been reported.

From the response I received after posting this observation on the COG email discussion list, it was clear that Silver Gull breeding on moored boats on Lake Burley Griffin was a well known though poorly (if at all) documented event. The yachting fraternity considers them a real pest, and Peter Fullagar told me that they have been nesting on boats near the yacht club for at least ten years.

This prompted me to have a closer look at other boats in other bays the next day. Of four boats moored in Lotus Bay (where the Canberra Yacht Club is situated), one had two nests with birds sitting, two had single nests with birds on, and the fourth had netting on it, obviously to prevent nesting, There were also several half-completed nests.

Yarralumla Bay is probably the busiest of the three bays, with sailors, rowers, the water police and the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA). Of the seven boats moored there, two had single nests with birds on and again there appeared to be some half-completed nests, To my surprise, another boat had a nest with two downy chicks on it. Actually, they were more often seen running around the deck than on the nest, looking like small chickens or ducklings. I wasn't aware that Silver Gull chicks are semi-precocious, but *HANZAB* (Vol 3, p. 537) states that they are able to leave the nest on the second day after hatching.

Closer inspection of Orana Bay revealed two nests on another boat moored close by. The original boat seemed very

neglected, it appeared forgotten or abandoned and seemed to be a good one on which to watch progress over spring/summer, as I expected most of the other nests to be casualties once the yachting season began, However, this turned out not to be the case, as many of these boats, including those from ADFA, were little used, if at all, over the summer period.

During the season other boats were moored in both Lotus and Yarralumla Bays, which over time had nests built on them, I may have missed some nests in Lotus Bay as late in the season I discovered some other moored boats hidden from view which had not been there early in September. There may also have been other nests at other locations about the lake, for example, early in January, Rod MacKay reported on the COG email discussion list an active nest on a work pontoon moored near Yarramundi Reach.

Weekly inspections revealed that nesting continued in all three bays. Further nests were built, and chicks were seen on the decks and superstructures of boats in all three bays. A summary of the activity in Lotus, Yarralumla and Orana Bays over the period 1 September 2003 to April 2004 is presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Some additional comments follow.

Length of breeding season

Since small chicks were seen on 1 September, and assuming a 4-5 week nest building, egg laying and incubation period, the breeding season appears to have spanned from at least mid-July to early March, a period of about eight months. I'm fairly confident that the first chicks I saw were among the earliest hatched, as the peak of activity was from mid-September to the end of January (see Tables 1-3) with over 30 nests at the beginning of November and a maximum of 7 chicks on 15 December.

The last nest built at Lotus Bay was constructed toward the end of this period, though one late nest was still being built in Yarralumla Bay as late as 17 February. These late nests were not successful. Birds appeared to be sitting on several of them for much longer than the 19-26 day incubation period, and the last newly hatched chicks were seen in Yarralumla Bay on 17 February. *HANZAB* (Vol 3, p. 537) notes that adults will incubate non-viable eggs for up to 76 days. From this time old nesting material was typically left lying around, whereas previously it was usually quickly scavenged and recycled by other birds for use in building new nests. This was particularly so in peak season, with the exception of the original boat in Orana Bay which was generally cluttered with nesting material.

Success rate

Success rates for nesting and chick survival were difficult to assess based on intermittent monitoring during weekly visits. It is apparent from Tables 1-3, however, that many did not survive and the attrition rate was clearly high. The only good evidence of progression from small to large chicks was for two chicks in Orana Bay in September, a single chick in Lotus Bay in October, and two chicks in Yarralumla Bay in February-March, Nevertheless, especially towards the end of the season, a number of young birds were to be seen on shore,

Contrary to my expectations, I saw little evidence of any aggression or predation of chicks by other gulls. This was despite there being generally in excess of 30 gulls at each bay, many of them often on the boats in close proximity to the nests and chicks. In fact, they were generally more aggressive towards the observer, and I suspect human interference had a much greater impact on survival,

Other observations

As indicated in Tables 1-3, I often saw birds carrying nest material (large pieces of grass or straw) in their bills, and various other nest-building activities. Construction of nests was often very efficient. As an example, four nests were rebuilt between 17 and 24 November on boat in Yarralumla bay that had recently been cleared of previous nests.

I was also able to observe the feeding of chicks and the interchange of parents on the nest a number of times. Harvey Perkins (pers, comm.) also witnessed a change—over of parents at a nest on one of the boats in Lotus Bay on 10 September, The change-over was efficient and without fuss, the newly-arrived parent relieving the sitting bird which promptly flew off, Harvey also reported seeing a single sitting bird get off a nearby nest, which contained two clearly visible eggs, and wander around the deck within a metre or so of the nest for several minutes before returning to the nest — perhaps the other parent was somewhat neglectful in its duty! Harvey also mentioned a half-sized brown fluffy chick, on the foredeck of an adjacent boat, which was completely ignored by two adult birds less than a metre away and a nearby sitting bird.

Human interference

Interference by humans was clearly a large factor in the breeding success of the gulls and may have been partially responsible for a curtailing of the season. Though there seemed to be little direct interference from the general public (the only event **I** witnessed being of a teenage girl at Yarralumla Bay with a very small chick in her hand that she claimed had fallen from a boat) the clearance of nests from boats and attempts to dissuade birds from re-nesting clearly had a large effect,

When checked on 17 November, and again on 30 November, several boats in all three bays had obviously been cleaned up. The main boat in Orana Bay had had two largish outlines of black cats with very luminous eyes installed in an attempt to keep birds away. Other boats had been covered with nets, but at least several nests were subsequently built on top of these (see Tables 1 and 2).

In mid January discouraging activity by the boating community increased and I had the impression there had been a directive from the relevant authorities to clean up the boats. On 20 January I observed the main nesting boat (the one first seen) in Orana Bay being hauled out of the water on to a trailer, A conversation with the owners revealed that the installation of the cat outlines had been ineffectual and three chicks had been cleared from the deck that morning (there had been four chicks present when the cats had been put in place nearly two months earlier), On 26 January one of the main boats in Yarralumla Bay was being cleaned up, This boat had been relatively recently moored there but had

quickly become popular as a nesting site. Despite being covered with canvas in the shape of an older-style peaked tent, there was sufficient space around the edges to make it attractive as a nesting site and there had been five nests on it the previous week, After being cleaned up, no renewed nesting attempts were made prior to it being removed from the water a month later.

A clean-up had also been conducted at Lotus Bay on 20 January with all three boats, which had supported eight nests and two small chicks the week before, cleared of all material. Though chicks were seen on a boat moored further away that hadn't been checked prior to 20 January, the only nest subsequently built on the cleared boats was unsuccessful.

It is my understanding that six clutches, the first from the ACT, were taken from these boats and given to the Australian National Wildlife Collection housed at CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems in Gungahlin (Mark Clayton, pers. comm,).

Conclusion

Nesting by Silver Gulls on moored boats on Lake Burley Griffin is clearly well established. The 2003-04 season was extended, spanning a period of about eight months from July to March. At its peak, over 30 nests were present, fairly equally distributed in each of the three bays. Despite the attention of the authorities and boat owners, it seems likely that this situation will continue,

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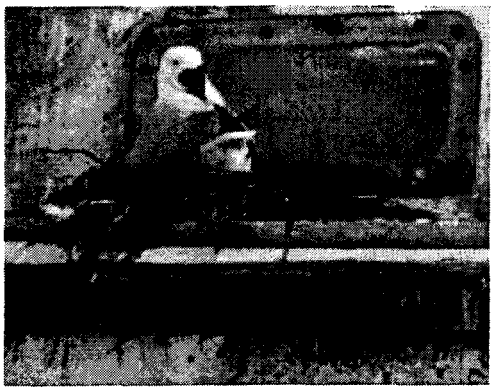
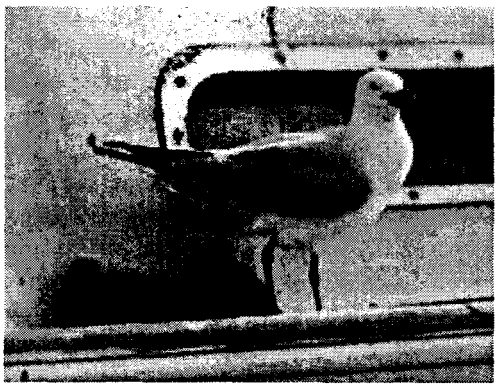


Silver Gull on nest



Silver Gull with two chicks

(photos by Alastair Smith)

Table 1. Summary of silver gull nesting activity in Lotus Bay

Date	boats with nests	No of nests (per boat)	No of chicks seen (S, M, L)	Comments
1 Sep	3	4 (2,1,1)	Nil	
7 Sep	3	8 (4,3,1)	1 (S)	Some nests being built
14 Sep	3	9 (5,3,1)	1 (L)	2 nests being built
22 Sep	2	11 (8,3)	3 (2S, 1L)	As above
29 Sep	2	8 (5,3)	2 (15, 1L)	1 nest being built
7 Oct	2	8 (5,3)	3 (S)	
13 Oct	2	9 (5,4)	4 (1S, 2M, 1L)	
20 Oct	2	10 (7,3)	1 (M)	2 old nests or being built
27 Oct	2	11 (8,3)	1 (L)	Interchange seen at 1 nest
3 Nov	2	12 (8,4)	Nil	Interchange seen at 1 nest
10 Nov	2	5 (1,4)	1 (S-M)	Boat with most nests to date cleaned up - only 1 nest plus some nesting material
17 Nov	2	7 (4,3)	l(M)	1 nest being built, and some nesting material present
24 Nov	2	9 (7,2)	3 (2S, 1M)	As above
30 Nov	2	3 (0,3)	Nil	Boat with most nests to date cleaned up - 1 nest being built.
8 Dec	2	6 (3,3)	Nil	Some old nest material on 1 boat; one brownish egg next to another nest
15 Dec	2	5 (3,2)	1 (S-M)	At least 4 nests being built
21 Dec	2	8 (5,3)	Nil	1 nest being built; some old nests
11 Jan	3	8 (4,3,1)	3 (S)	2 nests being built
20 Jan	1	1	Nil	Al1 3 boats cleared of nests; 1 bird on nest (on net) on a more distant boat
26 Jan	1	1	Nil	As above - lots of gulls on cleared boats but no nest building
1 Feb	2	3 (1,2)	1(M)	2 nests on distant boat and 1 chick. 1 new nest on cleared boat
10 Feb	2	3 (1,2)	2(L)	As above - no nesting activity on other boats - one being cleaned
17 Feb	2	3 (1,2)	Nil	No nesting activity on other boats. 1 immature bird swimming near boat
29 Feb	2	2 (1,1)	Nil	As above, though some remaining nest material on far boat — on nests for some time - eggs non-viable?
7 Mar	2	1 (1,0)	Nil	Nest on far boat gone, nest material remains - still 1 nest on other boat
21 Mar	0	0	0	Far boat clean, only old nesting material on other boat - few gulls on any boats
2 Apr	0	0	0	All boats clean .

S, small; M, medium; L, large.

Table 2. Summary of silver gull nesting activity in Yarralumla Bay

Date	boats with nests	No of nests (per boat)	No of chicks seen (S, M, L)	comments
1 Sep	3	3 (1,1,1)	2 (S)	Several half completed nests on 1 boat
7 Sep	2	2(1,1)	1 (M)	Nest material on several boats
14 Sep	3	3 (1,1,1)	Nil	1 nest being built
22 Sep	4	4(1,1,1,1)	Nil	As above
29 Sep	4	7 (4,1,1,1)	Nil	1 nest being built
7 Oct	3	6 (3,3)	Nil	As above
13 Oct	1	1 (1)	Nil	Nest-building on 3 boats
20 Oct	2	8 (5,3)	1 (L)	No nest-building
27 Oct	4	6 (3,1,1,1)	1 (L)	Nest-building on 2 boats
3 Nov	5	10 (4,3,1,1,1)	2 (L)	1 nest on net over boat
10 Nov	4	12 (6,4,1,1)	Nil	Nest on net gone
17 Nov		8 (6,0,1,1)	Nil	One boat cleared up, nest on net back
24 Nov	4	10 (4,4,1,1)	2 (S-M)	4 nests back on cleared boat, stil1 nest-building/nest material seen
30 Nov	5	9 (4,2,1,1,1)	4 (2S, 2M)	3 nests being built
8 Dec	5	12 (2,5,3,1,1)	4 (2S, 2M-L)	1 nest being built
15 Dec	6	11 (2,2,1,4,1,1)	4 (2S-M, 2L)	4 nests being built
21 Dec	3	9 (1,4,4)	3 (1S, 2M)	3 nests being built, some old nests and nesting material, nest on net empty
11 Jan	4	9 (3,3,2,1)	2 (S-M)	2 nests being built plus some old nesting material
20 Jan	4	13 (4,3,5,1)	2(S-M, M)	Nest on net again
26 Jan	4	5 (4,1,0,0)	1 (L onshore)	Boat with 5 nests being cleaned up (stil1 at least 3 nests 23 Jan), old nesting material on several boats
1 Feb	2	4 (3,1)	4 (3S, 1S-M)	Lots of gulls, some nesting material on cleared boat, canvas cover stil1 very dirty
10 Feb	1	2	3 (1S, 2M)	No new nesting - 1 chick on nest
17 Feb	0	0	3 (2S, 1 M-L)	Several old nests on 2 boats, new chicks being fed by parents, 1 nest being built
29 Feb	2	3 (1,2)	2 (1M-L, 1L)	Bird on nest one boat had chick very close by. Other nests quite small - are birds simply squatting?
7 Mar	2	1(0,1)	2 (2L)	Nesting material on one boat, reasonable size nest on another
21 Mar	0	0	0	Only some nesting material on 1 boat - few gulls
2 Apr	_ 0	0	0	Al1 boats clean

Table 3. Summary of silver gull nesting activity in Orana Bay

Date	boats with nests	No of nests (per boat)	No of chicks seen (S, M, L)	Comments
1 Sep	2	10 (8,2)	2 (S)	Half completed nests on several boats
7 Sep	2	6 (4,2)	5 (4S, 1M)	Nest material on 1 boat - chick seen being fed in 1 nest
14 Sep	2	4 (3,1)	5 (2M, 3L)	2 nests being built
22 Sep	2	6 (5,1)	3 (L)	Several nests being built
29 Sep	2	3 (3,0)	2 (L)	1 nest being built
7 Oct	2	9 (8,1)	1 (L)	No nest-building
13 Oct	2	8 (7,1)	1 (L)	As above
20 Oct	2	7 (6,1)	1 (L)	As above
27 Oct	2	9 (8,1)	Nil	As above
3 Nov	2	10 (7,3)	2 (S)	As above
10 Nov	2	7 (5,2)	4 (M)	As above
17 Nov	2	7 (6, 1)	Nil	Lots of untidy nesting material on one boat, smal1 amount on other
24 Nov	2	4 (2, 2)	Nil	As above, nest building on other
30 Nov	2	2 (0,2)	2 (S-M on nest being fed)	Main nesting boat clean except for 1 lot of nest material - 2 metal black cat outlines installed (see text)
8 Dec	2	1 (0,1)	2 (M)	Some nest-building/material on cleared boat, 7 gulls on
15 Dec	2	2 (1,1)	2 (M, 1 on nest)	5 gulls on cleared boat
21 Dec	2	2 (1,1)	2 (M-L)	5-6 gulls on cleared boat
11 Jan	1	1 (1,0)	2 (S)	1 nest being built, 5-6 gulls on cleared boat
20 Jan	1	0	see comments	Main boat being hauled out of water (see text)
26 Jan	1	0	0	Main boat gone
1 Feb	0	0	0	Other nesting boat being sailed!!
10 Feb 17 Feb 29 Feb 7 Mar 21 Mar	0	0	0	Other boat still present, clear though still dirty

A LOVERS' TRIANGLE

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Abstract The *tumultuous saga of love, death, war and sex in a small group of Australian Boobooks living in a patch of woodland on the edge of Canberra's suburbs is evocatively presented in this paper.*

For five years we watched how three pairs of Southern Boobooks *Ninox novaeseelandiae* in Aranda Bushland, the males in particular, battled with each other over land. An intruding male duelled with his two neighbours, using bouts of hooting along their common borders and taking a little more land from one or another of his neighbours each year. Then, at the end of December 1997, the male who was most under siege from the intruder disappeared, Much of the vocal conflict during 1996 and 1997 occurred on this border, between the intruding male pushing east into the territory of the male who was now gone, the disappeared male probably defeated or dead after nesting and fighting on the same ground for at least six years, The intruding male now had Lebensraum.

This story is about the remaining three owls: the intruding male we called Alex, and two females, Frieda and Sara, The victorious Alex shifted into the vacated territory and into the nest of the disappeared male, He roosted where the previous male had, in a high limb slanting over the nest, and during the day, his face stared down under the limb. At night he would emerge from his roost and call,

Although the defeated male had disappeared, his mate Sara remained. She floated around her invaded territory and one night in August of 1998, when the conquering Alex sat calling from the old nest tree, Sara came in to him, He tried to mate with her but she flew off; perhaps she was less accustomed to being watched by humans, or maybe she was nervous of the new male.

The third owl in this triangle, the intruding male's original mate Frieda, hadn't travelled over the hill with him. She stayed in her wintering tree overlooking Bindubi Street on the west side of the ridge and foraged through suburban Wybalena Grove, Aranda, and Cook. Finally one night, she moved east over the hill, closer to Alex, her mate, on his new expanded territory.

The woods near Caswell Drive had two big Brittle Gums *Eucalyptus mannifera* — the nest tree, and a second high tree that the owls used for calling, After Frieda arrived, she sat and called loudly in a long bout from the second big tree in the

woods, but Alex sat next to the other female, Sara, and watched Frieda. The two females challenged each other in a vocal duel, then, surprisingly, Alex flew at his former mate, perhaps to mount her and show his preference, though perhaps not; it looked as though he meant to drive Frieda away, Frieda flew from the limb, and over the rushing creek into the forest, We waited, and as it was quiet, we decided to quit for the night and walk home, As mentioned, Sara, the un-attached female, was not so accustomed to us, so we left her alone with the victorious Alex to sort things out.

September 1, 1998, and the boobook threesome would have to make some decisions, move quickly to begin a breeding cycle that would produce chicks for that season. Alex now lived permanently on the shady east side of the ridge near Caswell Drive. We arrived and scanned the woods with the radio antennae, searching for his original mate, Frieda. She now roosted on top of the ridge looking down over Caswell Drive; Alex's newly won nest tree was some 500 metres downhill to the east. At times like these you try to place yourself at dusk where the action might happen, To us, it seemed likely that the action between the three owls would happen near the new (to Alex) nest tree, close to where Frieda and Sara had duelled. We waited for him to emerge, which he did at dusk. But he didn't call, and instead we heard another Boobook calling to the west, high on the side of the hill about 100 metres away from the radio-tagged female. Was it Sara, (she had no radio- tag) or was it another male? We didn't think it was another male because Alex sat and ignored the calling, He flew lazily away and drifted over the rushing creek, where sometimes we couldn't hear the calling boobooks above the croaking frogs. It seemed likely that Sara and Frieda were together on the hillside.

The Boobook calling from up the hill had stopped, and we tracked the radio- tagged Frieda as she drifted from the top of the hill down to the spot where the other owl had been calling, then to a shadowy place we called Big Tree Gully. Still no more calling. Alex stayed put, so we left him and walked up the hill to find the radio-tagged Frieda, According to the radio signal, she was still at the bottom of Big Tree Gully; because we couldn't see her we circled and tried to pinpoint the beeping signal, then stood for a minute among shadows with moonlight leaking through the canopy. Lacy black and white patterns spread over a gnarled Brittle Gum, the tree where she and Alex had roosted the previous winter, Then Sue pointed to a form on a branch visible against the night sky some ten metres in front of us, 'Is that her?' she whispered,

It seemed the wrong shape; it had a long thin tail hanging down. I fished into Sue's backpack for the red torch, and shone it on the form on the branch. The radio-tagged Frieda looked back at us and closed one eye as she often did. Probably she nursed some kind of injury. This biggest and most powerful female in our study lacked the agility to navigate through dense forest without hitting branches. Shaking my head I said, 'I don't understand this'.

Carrying a large body with what looked like a long, thin animal tail dangling under it, she flew ten metres to another branch. We stepped forward taking care not to break any sticks, I shone the light

on her again, and said, trying to make sense of the bundle, 'She's killed a glider'. As Sue held the yellow beam on her, I focused the binoculars and said, `It's a full grown owl. She's stripped the secondaries and most of the primaries from one wing, It's hanging down and looks like a tail.'

With binoculars Sue studied Frieda and the dead owl under her foot. Female Southern Boobooks carry larger and more dangerous weaponry than do males, and her black talons and heavy beak showed in the torchlight. We moved closer and she flew again. Because of the weight of the quarry, she landed on a platform where three dying trees leaned into each other, We studied the carcass, The head was gone, leaving a bloody stump poking out of the feathery body like a thin red chicken neck, the size of a pencil and curved,

We talked quietly, standing in pools of white moonlight. It seemed that Sara had called out from the hill in a challenge to other females, and Frieda had killed her. Should we retrieve the body and post-mortem it? If we harassed Frieda too much she wouldn't trust us, which might compromise our future study. Finally, we decided to shake her off the tripod of dead trees and surprise her into dropping the dead owl, I grabbed the thinnest tree and shook the perch; she tightened her grip on the bundle, flew down the hill, and landed heavily on the outer limb of a large tree. We followed and looked through binoculars at the dead owl, thought about what to do next, and decided to leave.

The following day I searched for the severed head, and Sue searched for another two hours in the afternoon. We had no luck. Moreover, the radio told us that Frieda now roosted in a different tree hollow, down the east side and much closer to Alex. She must have stashed Sara's remains in a tree hollow, or maybe dropped them to the local fox. That night we followed Frieda, but she didn't lead us to the head or the body.

Over the next few days we found Alex and Frieda crammed together in a tree hollow, shoulders touching, or sometimes cosy in a Native Cherry *Exocarpus cupressiformis.* At night they emerged, sat close to each other on a branch and preened each other's faces, like lovers. We tended to anthropo-morphise, not only about the affection they showed towards each other, but about the danger. For some weeks after September 1, we expected Alex to glance nervously over his shoulder when Frieda arrived. We assumed that little Alex had seen what we had seen and knew the precariousness of life, but he appeared comfortable enough in her presence, preening her face, and hooting in low tones. During the day he rested in a tree hollow or Native Cherry with his wing pressed against the wing of an owl-killer.

At any rate, September 1, 1998 marked the end of a six-year battle over land in the forest, and the place since then has been relatively quiet.

Further Reading

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THE NANDALO STREET HECTARE: THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF EAST O'MALLEY

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Abstract *The recent sale for residential development of an area of woodland on the eastern edge of the suburb of O'Malley has been highly controversial. This paper documents the intense breeding activity by a wide variety of birds that occurred in the spring of 2003 in a one-hectare patch of this site. The value of this and similar woodland areas for habitat conservation is discussed both specifically and in the wider context of the conflicting requirements for conservation and development.*

Introduction

I have a Canberra street directory dated 1983 that shows half a dozen established streets in O'Malley and others marked as future streets. The latter extend over the area now known for convenience as `East O'Malley', although they clearly form part of the original proposed suburb.

I did not take a close interest in the area until about 1990, and there was little interest in it then, I believe, by other birdwatchers, When the COG Woodland Survey began in 1998, the area had been heavily grazed for many years and was still subject to a rural leasing arrangement.

Of the woodland sites I surveyed, and other south Canberra spots I visited regularly, this was initially the one of least interest from a bird point of view, That view tended to be shared by others. On the drier slopes leading up to the Isaacs/O'Malley ridge where there was short grass and briars, outside the designated 'Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora I* Blakely's Red Gum *E. blakelyi'* areas, Southern Whitefaces *Aphelocephala leucopsis* and Diamond Firetails *Stagonopleura guttata* could occasionally be found, but the lower area where the large old trees remained had very poor ground cover and was the domain of Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis,* Noisy Miners *Man or in a melanocephala,* Crested Pigeons *Ocyphaps lophotes* and a few parrots and cockatoos.

It would have been difficult to demonstrate, then, that the area was of any particular significance for birds,

However, over the last three years a small section of the area has attracted an increasing concentration of bird life in spring and summer. This seems to be due to natural revegetation since sheep grazing ceased in, I think, about 1998. Grasses, weeds (mainly various thistles and Patterson's Curse *Echium plantagineum)* and eucalypt regrowth have sprung up as a result of the good, deep soil and strong natural seepage creating, together with a few remaining *large trees, a remarkable area of about* one hectare.

Ironically, this area lies on the map athwart a proposed suburban thoroughfare designated 'Nandalo Street', It has blossomed only in a brief hiatus between heavy grazing and housing development.

The Nandalo Street hectare and its bird life

Late September 2003 showed promise of a lively spring, with nesting magpies and a pair of Collared Sparrowhawks on a nest. As the season progressed, I observed nesting activity by many more species (Table 1), the majority of which were concentrated within a small area of about half a hectare where the level of nesting activity was astonishing, Other species seen within the hectare were a pair of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus funereus,* a Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sanctus,* Speckled Warblers *Chthonicola sagittata* and Crested Shrike-tits *Falcunculus frontatus.* Noisy Miners nested outside but near the hectare. Other probable `outside but near' nesters were Olive-backed Orioles *Oriolus saittatus* and Grey Butcherbirds *Cracticus torquatus.*

Table 1. Birds exhibiting nesting activity within the Nandalo Street hectare

Species whose activity was centred within the intensive half hectare (see text) are asterisked, and a generalised indication of the nesting substrate is given.

Collared Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter cirrhocephalus*		
Little Eagle	*Hieraaetus morphnoides*	large tree	*
Galah	*Cacatua roseicapilla*	large tree	
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	*Cacatua galerita*	large tree	
Crimson Rosella	*Platycercus elegans*	large tree	
Weebil1	*Smicrornis brevirostris*	large tree	*
White throated Gerygone	*Gerygone olivacea*	shrub/sapling regrowth	
White plumed Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus penicillatus*	gathering material	
Brown-headed Honeyeater	*Melithreptus brevirostris*	shrub/sapling regrowth	*
Varied Sittella	*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*	large tree	*
Rufous Whistler	*Pachycephala rufiventris*	**medium tree**	*
Leaden Flycatcher	*Myiagra rubecula*	large tree	*
Grey Fantail	*Rhipidura fuliginosa*	2 nests, shrubs/regrowth	*
Willie Wagtail	*Rhipidura leucophrys*	large tree	*
Black faced Cuckoo shrike	*Coracina novaehollandiae*	large tree	
White-winged Triller	*Lalage sueurii*	3 nests, al1 in large trees	*
Dusky Woodswallow	*Artamus cyanopterus*	3 nests, al1 in large trees	*
Australian Magpie	*Gymnorhina tibicen*		
Double-barred Finch	*Taeniopygia bichenovii*	2, medium tree & dead shrub	*
Red-browed Finch	*Neochmia temporalis*	medium tree	*
Diamond Firetail	*Stagonopleura guttata*	shrub/sapling regrowth	*
Mistletoebird	*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*	2 nests, in shrubs/regrowth	*
Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	2 nests, both in large trees	*

These observed activities do not necessarily mean successful nesting, and I believe much of the activity in this nesting hothouse was aborted or otherwise nugatory. There was heavy nest predation, and the Diamond Firetails probably did not produce eggs. However, there were certainly some dependent young Rufous Whistlers, Dusky Woodswallows, Leaden Flycatchers and White-winged Trillers. That breeding activity represents extraordinarily concentrated use of a small area of woodland.

A view on what it means

Within the hectare is a range of good tree-cavities to appeal to the hollow-nesters. Given the seepage pattern, sufficient rain had fallen in late winter to promote a flush of new foliage growth, some dense, in the eucalypts, both in the regrowth and in some old trees, Nest-sites were chosen to take advantage of this by the Weebill, Mistletoebird, Brown-headed Honeyeater, White-winged Triller (2 nests), White-throated Gerygone and Diamond Firetail.

However, the main thing attracting the birds was surely the available food, The moisture, good soil and spring warmth produced flowers, seeds, and, at ground, shrub, and tree level, a host of invertebrate life. Regular ground-feeders included the Dusky Woodswallows (seen on two occasions wrestling with large centipedes), White-winged Trillers, Speckled Warblers and Common Mynas. Many other insect-eaters often foraged within one metre of the ground.

There are other woodland areas around Canberra with similar stands of large trees that do not attract a similar concentration of bird life, They lack good vegetation at the ground and understorey levels, perhaps because of heavy grazing or mowing, or because the ground is stony or dry or otherwise poor, Conversely, where there is a combination of large trees and rich and at least occasionally moist earth, *and new growth is allowed*, many birds will be found. Examples of such areas are the Newline paddock, and parts of the Campbell Park/Mount Ainslie reserve, Callum Brae, and the lower eastern slopes of the Isaacs/O'Malley ridge.

If, around Canberra, the reserving of bird-attractive areas was a serious aim, the most effective strategy would have been to identify and reserve such areas, where they were not reserved already, and manage them to create such conditions as have recently, if temporarily, come about at Nandalo Street. However, that was never a major official aim, The aim was and is to build suburbs, and suburbs have been built on what would have been the best places for birds simply because they are also the best places for houses. This has had another result: from a bird point of view, most of Canberra's nature reserves are in the wrong places.

Reserved areas like the mid- and upper-slopes of Black Mountain, Red Hill, Mount Ainslie and Mount Mugga are good for some species of birds (eg some honeyeaters), and perhaps acceptable to some others because they are the only available areas. However, they cannot support the concentration of species that can be found in the richer areas mentioned. Even in recent springs the `nature park' area adjacent to the

O'Malley development has been, and will probably remain, comparatively poor for birds. It may be that the hill slopes are the only areas now available for nature parks, but it should not be thought that merely because they retain, or have reacquired, tree growth they are high value areas that are necessarily the most important for birds.

The fact is that what has happened around Canberra is what has happened throughout New South Wales. The dry rocky hilltops, hillsides and slopes have become the nature parks and reserves because they were not wanted for agriculture and are now not in demand for anything else, That process is continuing, The following section occurs in the draft 'Spatial Plan'.

> **Principles for managing change**
> These planning principles will ensure that the existing landscape character of the city and its setting is maintained and enhanced:
>
> - retain the existing hills, ridges, waterways and gullies as landscape setting;
> - ensure no additional development generally occurs on high slope areas with a gradient greater than 15 per cent; (generally the top of hills and the gullies leading to water cources)
> - protect important nature conservation areas and habitats for threatened species;
> - conserve open space between urban areas as visual separation buffers; and
> - retain agricultural lands surrounding the city where not identified for future urban development.
>
> *Actions*
> - The areas shown on **Map 11** will be predominantly protected as the landscape setting for the City (hills, ridges and gullies) through amendment to the National Capital Plan and variations to the Territory Plan.
> - Broadacre areas also shown on **Map 11** will be protected from unsympathetic development as part of the landscape setting for the city,

If that 'plan' is followed it will, at best, do what it says and no more. I see nothing there about allowing the most bird-attractive areas to be preserved as such or, more significantly in view of the grazing history, to re-establish themselves. Suburbs and other development will occur where the planners decide. Most, or at least some, of the (dry, stony) hills and ridges will be left undeveloped. Grazing, mainly, will continue in the `broadacre' areas, until they are required for something else. As to threatened species, it is clear that some species retreat before even a small amount of development, even if some 'woodland' remains, if the food-rich areas needed for breeding activity are lost to them. Hooded Robins *Melanodryas cucullata*, Jacky Winters *Microeca fascinans* and Diamond Firetails will not be kept around Canberra by allowing them the upper parts of Black Mountain and Mount Ainslie. Therefore the promise to protect 'important nature conservation areas and habitats' hangs in the air rather hollowly. Interpreted officially, 'protect' and 'important' can be words of narrow meaning, and it is difficult to imagine that they could ever have been read, realistically, as calling for weedy Nandalo Street to be left to the birds.

ODD OBS

Great Egret eats rat

Mid-afternoon of 23 December 2003, we found ourselves coalesced in the 'Ardea' hide at Kellys Swamp, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, in order to watch and note the diagnostic differences between two Great Egrets *Ardea alba* and a recently sighted Intermediate Egret *A. intermedia* (a rare visitor to the ACT).

One of the Great Egrets was foraging quietly in the lush grass at the edge of the swamp outside the 'Bittern' hide when it stabbed down into the vegetation suddenly, To our surprise it came up with a small rat, The egret danced a few paces into the swamp and began a slow process of drowning the rat by repeated dunking into the water and manipulating the bedraggled animal in its bill. It took several minutes for the rat to be subdued to the point where it was (or at least seemed) lifeless and the egret then swallowed it head-first.

HANZAB (Vol I part 2, p. 970) states that the food of Great Egrets is 'Aquatic animals, principally fish but also frogs, insects and small birds'. Some of the larger items of prey specifically mentioned include Blue-bellied Black Snake *Pseudechis guttatus,* domestic fowl *Gallus gallus,* Australian Spotted Crake *Porzana fluminea,* Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla,* Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sanctus,* Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis,* and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. (I hope for the egret's sake that these were mostly the young of their kind!) There is, however, no mention of Great Egrets eating any kind of mammal.

Other references of world-wide scope (eg *Handbook of the Birds of the World)* do, however, include small mammals as items of prey for the Great Egret. The lack of such records for Australia may simply be a consequence of limited availability. Unfortunately we are not able to specifically identify the rat in question. It was about 90 mm (head-body length, based on comparison to egret's bill length which averages 112 mm for males and 103 mm for females according to *HANZAB)* and, unlike that of a Water Rat *Hydromys chrysogaster,* appeared to have a rather pointed face. (photo by MG).

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Common Myna nesting and eggs II: Spring 2003

In the spring of 1999 Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* nested in a nest box on the south-west corner of my house in Kambah. The clutch was donated to the Australian National Wildlife Collection (ANWC) and I wrote a short article for *Canberra Bird Notes* about the nesting and the eggs (Perkins 2000), Since then little interest was shown in the nest box by any species until November 2003 when a pair of mynas again nested in it,

The first indication of nesting by the mynas was on 5 November when the birds were seen carrying nesting material and inspecting the eaves of the house two doors away. Over the following days their activity intensified, the pair was frequently seen in the vicinity of the nest box and I discovered that a number of feathers and bits of plastic had been placed in the box, When I checked the nest box at 19:40 h on 11 November two eggs had already been laid. A third egg was laid some time between 8:00 h and 15:50 h on the 12th, a fourth between 7:50 h and 8:30 h on the 13th, and the last egg was laid between 8:20 h and 8:37 h on the 14th. After a further two days there were still five eggs so I deemed the clutch to be complete and removed it. The mynas continued to show some interest in the box for the next day or so but then abandoned it completely,

The eggs were weighed, measured, and their colour determined before again being donated to the ANWC (registration number E14297). All eggs were similar in colour, being a light pastel bluish-green (somewhere between 3A and 4B of plate 25 and 4/5A of plate 24 of the Methuen Handbook of colour 1978). Eggs A to D (the first four eggs of the clutch but of unknown order of lay) were all oval shaped, smooth and glossy. The fifth egg, however, was more pyriform, and chalky at the wider end. The weights and dimensions of the eggs are given in the following table, together with their dimensional ratios (length/width), means and standard deviations, The means for the first four eggs only, i,e. omitting the atypical pyriform egg, are also provided.

egg	weight (g)	length (mm)	width (mm)	ratio
A	5,88	28.3	19.6	1,44
B	5.45	26,9	19.7	1,37
C	5,79	27.7	19.9	1,39
D	5.91	27.9	19.9	1.40
5	5,54	29.8	19.7	1.51
mean	5.71	28.12	19,76	1.42
SD	0,21	1,07	0.134	0.06
mean (A-D)	5.76	27,70	19,78	1.40

In most respects the eggs of the 2003 clutch are very similar to those of the 1999 clutch (which was only 4 eggs; 4-5 eggs to the clutch being standard according to most references), The colour of the 2003 eggs is slightly greener than the previous clutch, and they are slightly longer and narrower (mean of 28.1 x 19.8 mm compared to 26.7 x 20.4 mm). Nevertheless they are much closer in size to each other than they are to the 31 x 22 mm size invariably claimed by the various Australian field guides and other references (see Perkins 2000 for further discussion).

The time of lay (assuming the 2003 clutch was laid from 10-14 November) is

only very slightly later than in 1999 (7-10 November), and the pattern of laying in the morning at approximately 24-hour intervals concords with my observations from 1999.

I have no way of knowing, but I assume that the 2003 birds were a different pair to the 1999 birds.

References

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The ultimate payoff

We moved into our new house on a corner block in old O'Connor in late December 1969. The original monocrete house had been gutted by fire, but the overgrown *Pyracantha* hedges and exotic fruit trees remained, In fact, the whole area was known as 'Little Latvia' and northern European vegetation predominated. Fortunately for the native birds, Miller Street had well-grown Blakely's Red Gums *Eucalyptus blakelyi* and Syme Crescent had Argyle Apples *E. cinerea.* The transformation from a long-established European garden to a bird-attracting native garden began at once, but full development, complete with flowing stream and water gardens, took many years.

The very first plantings, early in 1970, included two Mugga Ironbarks *E. sideroxylon,* two Brittle Gums *E. mannifera maculosa* and two Yellow Gums *E. leucoxylon.* A third ironbark went to friends living nearby. I was aware of the importance of *E. sideroxylon as a* nectar source for honeyeaters in general and for the scarce Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* and Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta* in particular. These latter were my ultimate dream target but, by themselves, our three ironbarks were unlikely to be a drawcard. Still, not far away, in Koomarri Park, there was a well-established cluster of some 30 ironbarks. Year after year, during peak flowering, I monitored these ironbarks for any sign of avian rarities,

Over 33 years these trees have hosted a very long list of bird species, all of which have been recorded in my own garden ironbarks as well, Honeyeaters, of course, are predominant. Through the years the build-up of aggressive Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata* has tended to suppress bird diversity, Early in the day they are totally dominant but by mid to late morning smaller species build up in numbers. Peak flowering through October and November also attracts the migrant Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus.* Usually the flocks of Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops* and the White-naped Honeyeater *Melithreptus lunatus* have passed through to the ranges but this post-fire spring, they are still present in large numbers in late October 2003. The Eastern Spinebill *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris is* a resident. Winter visitors in most years are the White-plumed Honeyeater *Lichenostomus penicillatus,* the Fuscous Honeyeater *Lichenostomus*

fuscus and the White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis* with a small group of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus melanops* resident through a single winter. For all of these species the street trees, Argyle Apple *E. cinerea*, were the prime attraction. In late summer-autumn we get the occasional single New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* and the even more occasional Crescent Honeyeater *Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera*. Just once, in summer, the tinkling call revealed the momentary visit to the garden of a Scarlet Honeyeater *Myzomela sanguinolenta*, but I heard it in the neighbourhood for some days.

The red-letter day was 25 October 2003 when a subdued call among the clamour of Red Wattlebirds and Noisy Friarbirds alerted me to check the ironbarks. One tree, in full flower, was alive with Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters as well as the bigger bullies, but among them was a single Regent Honeyeater! At last, after 33 years! With Katherine, my wife, I watched it foraging among the blossoms and then do some aerial hawking for insects above the *E. cinerea* trees in the street, While watching this individual, I could hear another giving occasional subdued contact calls from the ironbark planted all those years ago by our near neighbours. No further observations have been made, despite frequent checking, both of our garden trees and the nearby cluster in Koomarri Park. Still, the Painted Honeyeater has to be next!

Henry Nix

22 Syme Crescent, O'Connor, ACT 2602

A Regent Honeyeater at Mount Ainslie

On 15 January 2004, at around 9:15 h, **I** was present on an educational tour of local eucalypt species for a group of botany students, on Mount Ainslie Drive. One of the most knowledgeable eucalyptus botanists was speaking about Apple Box *Eucalyptus bridgesiana*, whilst 25 people were gathered around an old tree of the species, when I saw a bird that caught my eye fly into the back of a tree. It seemed to be a fairly dark honeyeater, larger than most of the honeyeater species found around Canberra, I thought it was probably a New Holland *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*, or more hopefully a Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta*, but it looked too large for either of those species. While I was trying to exit from the talk discreetly for a closer look, a Noisy Friarbird *Philemon corniculatus* flew into the same foliage clump, only two metres from the bird, There was no interaction at all, and this also struck me as unusual. Normally the larger Noisy Friarbird would chase away a smaller honeyeater the size of a New Holland.

I eventually saw the bird well enough to realise it was a Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia*, a bird I had never seen before, I followed the bird for around 30 seconds as it slowly flew from tree to tree, until it disappeared across the road. I never had great views of it, but enough to be satisfied as to its identity. It was first seen around 300 m from Fairbairn Avenue, along Mount Ainslie Drive, on the left hand side, outside of the fence demarking Canberra Nature Park. The site is directly opposite the Canberra Pistol Club. The vegetation is grassy woodland, dominated by

Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora,* with some *E. bridgesiana* and Blakely's Red Gum *E. blakelyi*. There is a lot of mistletoe growing on the eucalypts in this patch, particularly in the *E. melliodora. Amyema miquelii* was the most common mistletoe, but there was also some *Muellerina eucalyptioides* present. The mistletoe was in full bud, but with little flowering. There are several *Acacia* species growing in the mid-storey. There is a sparse, scattered shrub layer, and a good cover of grasses and herbs,

I went out the next morning to try to get better views of the bird. After about an hour of searching the general area on both sides of the road, the bird was located again in the same large Apple Box, at around 8:15 h. The bird seemed to be gleaning the foliage of the tree. Scott Gilmore and I followed the bird for around a minute, until it eluded us, In that time it was seen gleaning the leaves of other eucalypts, perching in a couple of mistletoe clumps, perching in some mid-storey acacia, and wrestling with an insect on the ground. On both days it generally flew short distances, around 5-10 metres at a time.

Judging by emails posted to the COG email discussion list, the single bird was seen by many birdwatchers over the next two weeks, but it wasn't sighted in the two weeks prior to mid-February. Listers Anthony Overs and Carol Probets suggested it was a female in post-breeding moult. The mistletoe proceeded to full flower during late January and early February,

Lee Halasz

Juvenile Dollarbirds

In late January 2004 I was wandering through the Campbell Park woodland when there was a soft thud a few metres from me. This was caused by a fallen juvenile Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* that sat on the ground, apparently unable to flap away as I scooped it up with one hand (I was holding a camera in the other). I tried to put the bird on the top of a shrub, but it seemed unable or unwilling to cling to the limbs, so I left it sitting on the top of a stump instead. There were adult Dollarbirds around. I do not know what became of the fledgling but it was gone the next day, without any sign of feathery remains.

Following my mention of this incident on the COG email discussion list, Elizabeth Compston reported that a few days later she had seen a young bird, possibly the same one, perched low in a briar in the same general area and that the previous summer she had also seen low in a dead briar a young Dollarbird that made no attempt to fly away. Philip Veerman added that three or four years ago he found two or three young Dollarbirds sitting on the ground at the end of the car-park at Uriarra Crossing picnic area.

HANZAB (Vol 4, p. 1234) records for Dollarbirds: 'Juveniles sometimes seen on ground; possibly have fledged early or are unable to maintain flight ..,'. Those possibilities are not alternatives. It seems obvious that the grounded birds are unable to fly effectively. A relevant question is whether this is due to 'premature' departure from the nest or is

a regular occurrence when the birds are learning to fly.

If the former, why does it occur? If the latter, why are Dollarbirds unusual in that fledglings are not able to fly or flutter away from danger? On the latter point, it might be noted that Dollarbirds are relatively heavy, with weak feet in proportion to their weight, Being hollow-nesters, they probably lack the opportunity for wing-exercising before quitting the nest,

Perhaps a clue may be found in the discussion of the habits of the roller family in the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (vol, 6):

> When the oldest chick appears ready to fly, its siblings still have a varying number of days of maturation left, yet the young probably seldom fledge in the orderly sequence in which they hatched. Instead the whole brood seems to leave the nest over a period of a day or two, or even within a matter of hours.

If this happens with Dollarbirds, it would help to explain why 'fledglings' unable to fly are found with some frequency, The risk to the youngest birds may be balanced by the advantage of being able to feed the young in proximity to one another,

Geoffrey Dabb
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Birds, mammals and urban hollows

Towards the end of 2003, I observed two examples in urban Aranda of birds and mammals interacting in relation to a tree hollow.

On 15 October, at around 17:15 h, I saw a Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* with a dead Sugar Glider *Petaurus breviceps in* its beak. The currawong was trying to tear the glider apart and consume it, by catching the body in a forked branch. In the minute that I watched the event, the currawong hadn't consumed any flesh. The currawong was able to fly short distances with the glider in its beak. Given the time of day, and the fact that the glider looked fresh, I assume that it had been plucked out of its day resting spot, presumably a nearby hollow, There are many remnant trees in the surrounding urban area,

On 13 December at around 18:30 h, I observed two Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* calling loudly for a greater duration that normal. They were interacting with a Common Brushtail Possum *Trichosurus vulpecula* in the hollow of a remnant Scribbly Gum *Eucalyptus rossii* in my Aranda backyard, The hollow occasionally attracts the attention of Gang-gang Cockatoos *Callocephalon fimbriatum*, Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla* and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. I believe a brushtail possum usually resides in the hollow during the daytime. Two Sulphur-crested Cockatoos took turns at screeching, seemingly directing the noise into the hollow. One bird would stand at the hollow entrance, making a racket, while the other bird would be perched in a tree around 40 metres away, After a minute or two, the birds would swap roles. They swapped at least five times, probably more, over about a ten-minute period, Every now and then a possum could be seen squirming in the hollow, possibly periodically lashing out at the cockatoo. I wondered if the fact that the

non-screeching cockatoo perched so far away meant that it couldn't handle the call of the other cockatoo at close range? I also wonder if this event just represents cockatoo fun, or if this was an attempt to evict the possum, so they could use the hollow for nesting?

Lee Halasz
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Spotless crake and cats

An unusual sight greeted me from my bathroom window at 7:30 h on the morning of Tuesday 3 February 2004 - a Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis* wandering in the open along the footpath which runs by my unit at Whitehaven Estate in Ngunnawal. The bird was being watched intently by a cat sitting just metres away. The crake seemed oblivious to the cat at first glance. I recalled the demise of the poor Lewin's Rail *Rallus pectoralis* some years ago at my doorstep and raced outside in the hope that I could save the crake from the inevitable, I managed to scare the cat away (but another two cats and an interested Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* were lurking nearby) and stood literally a metre from this beautiful bird. I can only assume it was in some state of shock and may already have been attacked by the cat, though there were no signs of injury. It walked around a bit but when I tried to get closer it ran into nearby low dense bushes beside the tennis court and I couldn't find it again, In my haste to save the poor bird I had forgotten to grab my camera, It would have made an ideal photo with the bright red of its eye and legs contrasting strongly with the dark body bathed in morning sunlight. It was a very surreal incident. I assume the crake must have travelled some 50 metres from the reed beds fringing the pond and Ginninderra Creek on the golf course, and may have been caught in the open by one of the local cats as the sun rose. It was the closest I have ever been to a live crake or rail of any kind. Unfortunately I couldn't find it again that afternoon when I arrived home from work or the next morning. I hope it escaped the clutches of the resident crake-eating *cats,..*

Marnix Zwankhuizen
21/46 Paul Coe Crescent, Ngunnawal, ACT 2913

Pelican deaths

Between January and March 2004 several dead or dying Australian Pelicans *Pelecanus conspicillatus* were reported around Canberra's wetland areas. At the end of March the total number was at least 11 dead, mainly at Kellys Swamp but also one at each end of Lake Burley Griffin, and two at Gordon in the Tuggeranong valley.

Rangers at the Parks Service were concerned about the pattern, but unable to explain it. It has been speculated that the cause might be starvation or a toxic agent. A few deceased ducks were also reported during the period, but not in numbers to suggest any exceptional cause at work, as with the pelicans,

The deaths might be related to an influx of pelicans in early January. On 1 January 2004, I saw an early-morning flock of about 60 birds very actively feeding at Kellys Swamp, with more

flying in. These were additional to the 20-30 birds that can usually be found around Lake Burley Griffin and the Jerrabomberra Wetlands. It is possible that all the deaths were of newly-arrived birds.

Geoffrey Dabb
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Water Rat diet

During a failed attempt to see the much-reported Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* at Warrina Inlet on the evening of 12 January 2003, I was entertained by the sight of a Water Rat *Hydromys chrysogaster* drowning and devouring an Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra.* [The inlet is part of Lake Burley Griffin adjacent to the grounds of Government House and the Royal Canberra Golf Club.]

The bird was swimming close to the bridge on the open lake side when it began to thrash and to attack something under the water. I thought it was a spat between two birds, except that a second bird did not appear. Then I saw the rat's head, at water level, holding on to the rear end of the coot, either wing, tail or leg, I could not see which, The coot made a number of attempts to shake off its tormentor, but one of the attempts was the action that the rat was waiting for, As the bird tried to attack it, the rat grabbed its neck and dragged the bird's head under. Now the rat was above the water and the coot's head submerged. It took about a minute and the rat then swam towards the shore towing its drowned catch, It lifted it onto a clump of reed roots right in front of me and other watchers. It spent several minutes taking care of ablutions and then proceeded to pluck the bird's breast feathers and commence its evening meal. When I left some 30 minutes or so later, tucker was still on. The action took place about 20:00 h.

A curious aspect of the event was the attention from nearby birds. A small party of coots, Pacific Black Ducks *Anas superciliosa* and a couple of Black Swans *Cygnus atratus* accompanied the rat as it took its catch to the shore and hung around close for several minutes before dispersing.

Of the books on mammals that I have, Strahan says that the Water Rat 'may' eat water birds, and Menkhorst and Knight include 'small birds' within the Water Rat's diet. **I** don't know how common this is, but it was an interesting first observation for me,

References

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David Rosalky

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Haunted by sparrowhawks

If I were superstitious, I would think that I was being haunted by Collared Sparrowhawks *Accipiter cirrhocephalus.* On 29 May 2003, a Collared Sparrowhawk, carrying a Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* bumped into the windshield of my utility while I was parked at Westfield Shopping Town, Belconnen (as recounted in *CBN* 28: 63),

At 9:00 h on 15 October 2003, I pulled into my driveway and noticed a Collared Sparrowhawk sitting on the lawn beneath a large flowering plum within two metres of the house. Surprised, I crept from my vehicle and approached the hawk, Then it gave me another surprise. It took flight carrying a limp male Common Blackbird *Turdus merula in* its talons. I hadn't noticed the blackbird while the hawk was sitting on the lawn because the grass was quite long.

The hawk flew across an adjacent front garden carrying its prey and maintaining an altitude of about a metre and a half, before turning toward the neighbour's back yard, I sprinted after it and searched for about ten minutes, but to no avail, I suspect the excited barking of the neighbour's dog - together with my pursuit - forced the little raptor to seek a more secluded location in which to enjoy its feast of exotic songbird flesh.

Then at 16:00 h on 7 November 2003, a neighbour phoned to say that a 'small falcon' was eating a little bird in a nearby street tree, I grabbed my binoculars and ran to investigate. The falcon turned out to be a Collared Sparrowhawk. It was perched four metres up in a scrawny wattle tree plucking a Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*, We watched for three minutes before the hawk flew off with its prey and disappeared into the thick foliage of a large gum tree some 50 metres away,

And at 18:30 h on 18 November 2003, I was transplanting tomato seedlings in the backyard, when I felt I was being watched. I looked up, and there was a sparrowhawk - a male, it was very small - perched atop a fence three metres *away*. I watched for about 90 seconds before it took wing and left the area.

Meanwhile, I am keeping my binoculars close to hand as I await another visitation from the haunting hawks of Holt.

John Layton

14 Beach Place, Holt, ACT 2615

Brown Snake swallowing Double-barred Finch

In mid-December 2003, there was a remarkable flurry of breeding activity in a section of the former pastureland known as East O'Malley. This included nesting attempts by three estrildid finches, in close proximity to one another. One component of the woodland was dead briar and pyracantha growth, following a poisoning program. A family of Double-barred Finches *Taeniopygia bichenovii* had built a nest in the centre of one dead briar at a height of about 1.2 m.

Steve Holliday and I were taking note of all the nesting activity, at about 11:00 h on a warm sunny day, when we noticed an Eastern Brown Snake *Pseudonaja textilis* looped over the Double-barred Finch nest, with a mixed group of complaining birds within a metre or two of it. The snake, about a metre in length, had a finch, probably an advanced nestling, in its mouth. The snake's head and about one quarter of its length had gone through the nest. It was engaged in swallowing its catch, a process which took about 30 minutes, during which period the snake, closely coiled to balance its body on the available support, gradually drew its whole length through the nest.

The complainant birds included three Double-barred Finches, Superb Fairy-wrens *Malurus cyaneus,* Speckled Warblers *Chthonicola sagittata,* Leaden Flycatchers *Myiagra rubecula,* and Grey Fantails *Rhipidura fuliginosa.*

Given the nature of the nest and its siting, it was not possible to find out whether it held any remaining young. However, two weeks later it was apparently still in use, with one Double-barred Finch flying out of it, and another perched on top of it.

About three weeks after the snake incident and 40 **m** away from where it took place, my attention was drawn to another brown snake, possibly the same one, by a group of scolding birds. On this occasion the main complainers were Varied Sittellas *Daphoenositta chrysoptera,* The snake glided off on my approach.

Geoffrey Dabb

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Feijoa feeders

Two years ago I wrote about Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata* and Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* eating the petals of feijoa *Feijoa* (syn *Acca) sellowiana* flowers *(CBN* 27: 27-28). In mid December of 2003 I again saw a Pied Currawong eating Feijoa petals; and at 6:00 h on Christmas morning I was awoken, not by my seven-year-old son as expected, but by the begging calls of a dependent Pied Currawong outside my bedroom window. It was being fed feijoa petals by its parent.

This would probably have had less significance to me had it not been for an interchange of emails on the Birding-Aus email list on 16 and 17 December. Lawrie Conole had originally asked, after observing in the Victorian Otway Ranges a Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* and Grey Currawong *Strepera versicolor eating* feijoa petals, whether other birders had ever seen these or other species behaving similarly.

Apart from my own response, there was a reply from John McLennan (NSW Central Coast) who wrote of Regent Bowerbirds *Sericulus chrysocephalus* and Rainbow Lorikeets *Trichoglossus haematodus* being attracted to feijoa flowers in his garden, and the ripe fruit attracting Green Catbirds *Ailuroedus crassirostris* and Australian King-Parrots *Alisterus scapularis.* And Doug Holly (Berri, SA) wrote of Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters *Acanthagenys rufogularis* and Singing Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus virescens* regularly feeding on feijoa flower petals. He also suspected yellow rosellas *Platycercus elegans flaveolus* of feeding on the flowers.

A response from New Zealand (narena@nzbirds.com) claimed that the Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* had 'made pollinating the feijoa one of its objects in life', It is well known that a variety of birds are responsible for pollinatiori of feijoa in its native South America, the sweet fleshy petals being the attractant. Clearly a range of birds in Australia and New Zealand have also learned of the palatability of its petals.

Harvey Perkins

42 Summerland Cct, Kambah, ACT 2902

Observations on a moulting male Satin Bowerbird in a Kambah garden

Over the past months we have been watching a green male Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* turn to blue-black in our garden in Kambah. We have been able to observe it quite closely as it has come each day to the water bowl on our terrace, and to eat figs from the tree which hangs over the terrace wall, The change began in late January 2004, with a few roughly rectangular patches of blue-black among the green, then the bird looked like a ragged patchwork quilt as more blue-black feathers appeared. By the second last week in March, after close to a two-month period, the transformation was complete, Previous records (Jack Holland, pers. comm,) indicate this process occurs in about February, but has been rarely recorded,

The bower described in Holland (2003) was completely removed not long after publication. All the bower material was taken away but a few blue objects were left. At about the same time that the mature bird began its transformation a new bower was built in exactly the same spot and this has proved to be one of the best we have had in our garden. It is well formed, almost meeting at the top and aligned north/south. It was decorated with about 12 blue Crimson Rosella feathers, six Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo crest feathers, a few yellow Snapdragon flowers, a few yellow leaves, two or three small clusters of Helichrysum flowers as well as the usual collection of blue pegs, string, drinking straws, small scraps of blue paper and plastic, a blue letter from a child's plastic alphabet and, most interestingly, a purple security ring from the plastic lid of a jar.

Over the moulting period, there were also at least two green birds in the same area and sometimes more, Early during the change, I may have seen another fully mature blue-black bird in the trees near the bower, However, on 5 April 2004 I saw two blue-black birds at the same time in the garden and noticed that many of the decorations described above had been removed, though a few have returned since.

The birds have finished the figs and have now moved on to our compost bin and other parts of our garden. I have constructed a timber lattice over my new broccoli plants and a wire mesh over the emerging broad bean seedlings, It has been well worth the effort; I feel very privileged to have had my garden chosen as a home by these wonderful birds.

References

Holland J (2003), A Further Update on Satin Bowerbird Behaviour and Dispersal in the ACT. *Canberra Bird Notes* 28: 87-95.

Mary Virr
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2002-03

It is a pleasure to once again provide a report on COG activities during the last year. In stark contrast to the major conservation achievements of the previous year, 2003 has been dominated by the worst wildfires seen in the ACT for a hundred years.

On 18 January 2003, high temperatures and strong winds combined with wildfires in the ranges to the south and west of Canberra to threaten not just the Canberra's surrounding bushland but also the city itself. By the end of the day, much of the bushland in the southern and western parts of the ACT had been destroyed, and 500 houses had been lost, indicating that no part of Australia could be considered safe from wildfire. Apart from the personal loss of property, with some COG members losing their homes and possessions, and almost their life in one case, the environmental damage was devastating, With nearly one third of the ACT severely impacted by the January fires, the birds of our region will feel the effect for some time to come.

The fires have posed a number of conservation problems. There are of course the immediate problems of loss and damage to the forest and woodlands of the Tidbinbilla and Brindabella Ranges. Much of this habitat will recover, but the continuing drought has delayed this process. Massive over-reaction by government officials has seen stands of remaining trees in parts of Canberra Nature Park cleared to protect property, with little to no consultation with the community, And there are plans to open up much of the land in the southern ACT, previously protected areas, to recreational use such as four-wheel drive activities and other forms of development, ostensibly to improve access and facilitate fire management in the future. Management of these proposals and provision of informed comment on the conservation implications of such action are likely to keep COG and other community groups busy for quite a while.

On a more positive note, in March, as part of COG's hosting of a meeting of BIGNET, a network of NSW bird interest groups, we ran an extremely successful seminar on woodland birds. This was a great success, attracting over 140 people. The seminar aimed to improve community awareness and focussed on the positive side of woodland conservation — what was being done to minimise the threats posed by woodland clearing, and the effectiveness of habitat re-construction, I would like to thank Jenny Bounds for organising this event, ably assisted by Tanya Rough, Nicki Taws and Shirley Kral, I would also like to thank all those who spoke at the event, including COG members David Lindenmayer and Julian Reid amongst others.

We also continued to run an excellent program of field trips. Jack Holland joined the committee this year and took up overall responsibility for management of the COG Field Trips program. Unfortunately the 2003 program as devised with assistance of the Field Trips Team (Alistair Bestow, Jenny Bounds and David McDonald) was severely affected by the 18 January bushfires,

which meant that a large number of proposed outings were no longer viable or accessible and had to be either cancelled or rescheduled. Nevertheless, after a slow start, with the strong support of members who suggested alternative venues and offered to lead them, a very active though somewhat flexible program was able to be run, with weekly outings being offered at the peak of the bird season.

These ranged from local half-day trips, including for beginners, to full day outings for the more experienced birdwatchers, through to weekend and longer camp-outs. Highlights included the Bournda and Round Hill camp-outs, walks at East O'Malley, the electric boat up the Molonglo River to see the nesting darters etc, and the swift parrot search around Boorowa. As can be seen the aim this year was arrange a wider range of opportunities, so that there would be at least some trips that appealed to each member.

Field trips are a very important part of COG's activities. Not only do they help members learn about birds and visit places that are otherwise hard to get to, but also there are important social and conservation aspects, Thanks to all those who helped lead and organise outings during the year, and we look forward to your continued assistance in a healthy field trips program.

Other issues

Committee

The Committee has worked effectively and I would like to thank all for the year, Most Committee members have signalled their intent to stand for Committee again, and I'm sure COG can look forward to their continuing support. I would like to especially thank those members who are retiring from committee — David Rosalky, who retired mid year; and Paul Fennell and Doug Laing, who have served on the committee for a number of years, including as president and secretary, respectively, for some of this time,

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 once again Joan for all you have done. And thank you also to Noel Luff, our Honorary Auditor.

Membership was 330 at 30 June 2003, 7 per cent up from the same time last year.

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 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.

Conservation

Once again COG received funding from the ACT Government for the third year of its threatened species woodland bird monitoring project, These funds continue to provide valuable support for our woodland work, which has been

running for eight years now, We again focussed on using existing data to identify and set up long term monitoring sites for listed threatened species (Hooded Robin and Brown Treecreeper), and to nominate additional birds for threatened species status. These submissions were managed by Nicki Taws and forwarded to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee for assessment. I understand the matter may be currently with the ACT Environment Minister for determination.

Julie McGuiness has continued to work as our Conservation Officer, ably assisted by Jenny Bounds. Jenny is also vice-President of the Conservation Council for the South-East Region and Canberra, and both represent COG's interests in that forum, participating in campaigns and various working groups of the Council, They have prepared submissions on a range of environmental issues of concern to COG, including the Draft Woodland Strategy (which incorporates the Action Plans for threatened birds), the proposed development of East O'Malley woodland, the future management and land use for the southern ACT following the January bushfires, the North Gungahlin Structure Plan (concerns about the expansive growth of Gungahlin and its encroachment on the borders of Mulligans Flat Reserve), and research into the control of Common Mynas, Through the Conservation Council, both Jenny and Julie had substantial input to an options paper to Government on the management of domestic cats in the proposed new suburbs of Forde and Bonner adjacent to Mulligans Flat, to better protect the biodiversity of Mulligans Flat and the new Gooroo reserve.

During the year, the Government announced two new reserves at Gooroo in East Gungahlin and Callum Brae, which will protect a large area of important woodland for threatened birds. However, COG remains very concerned about the future of remaining Yellow Box/Red Gum woodlands in the ACT, and the two resident, threatened birds, the Brown Treecreeper and Hooded Robin that continue to decline. This is against a background of Government decisions to develop remaining areas containing woodlands such as East O'Malley, to continue with full scale development in Gungahlin which will destroy much remaining woodland there and impact on the reserves adjacent to housing, and plans to develop in the future the Molonglo Valley and Kowen Forest for greenfields housing as announced in the recent Draft Spatial Plan,

Communications and publications

During the year Tanya Rough did a wonderful job editing and publishing our newsletter. Thanks also to Rosemary Ryan and Lia Battison and the team of helpers for distributing *Ganggang*, Lia has now taken on the role of coordinating the mailing of *Ganggang*, and we thank her predecessor Rosemary for her contribution.

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 for much of the year. 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 for providing such a good service over the last few years. David Cook has now taken over and is doing a great job.

COG's email discussion list 'canberrabirds', managed by David McDonald, continued to operate effectively throughout the year. It has over 140 subscribers and averages about four 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, One role it has filled this year has been that of an unusual bird alerting service, facilitating the rapid spread of information about interested bird sightings in the region,

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,

As part of Birds Australia's Ongoing Atlas project, COG members are encouraged to collect records for COG's area of interest, especially at regular 2-hectare sites. It is very important to collect this data over time, Thank you to all members who continue to collect records, and particularly those who have adopted regular 2-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 Monitoring Project. COG's surveys in grassy woodland habitats continued with further support from an ACT Government Environment Grant. Jenny Bounds coordinates this project with Nicki Taws and myself forming the other members of the Management Team, Alison Rowell was contracted to coordinate the quarterly surveys and data collection. Surveys are now conducted at 11 Grassy Woodland locations in key areas; in all a total of 113 sub-sites are monitored every three months, Thank you to the people involved in this project, which include Jenny Bounds, Isobel Crawford, Geoffrey Dabb, Paul Fennell, Malcolm Fyfe, John Goldie, Michael Lenz, David McDonald, Julie McGuinness, Harvey Perkins, Nicki Taws and Kathy Walter. This year the data collected since 1995 was analysed by Ross Cunningham, an expert statistician in biodiversity projects, to guide future work on the project, A preliminary report on this analysis has been provided to interested members and is also available on the COG website.

An element of the Woodland and Atlas monitoring programs is to set up long-

term monitoring sites for threatened species, the Hooded Robin and Brown Treecreeper, using a selection of existing woodland and 2-hectare sites where these species have been recorded. COG has engaged Nicki Taws to work in consultation with Environment ACT (ACT Wildlife and Monitoring) to coordinate this work. Surveys of these sites are being conducted twice a year, in September and December using either the woodland or Atlas methodology as appropriate.

Thanks to Philip Veerman, and his successor Mark Clayton, for their 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 over 21 years and is our longest running monitoring project. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Philip, who ran this project for many years.

Another long-running project is the waterbird survey. Thanks to Michael Lenz, who not only conceived the idea for this work, but still continues to manage the survey. Unfortunately, because Lakes George and Bathurst are currently dry, there has been limited activity on this project over the last 12 months.

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 checking and entry during the year, including Chris Davey, Malcolm Fyfe, Tony Harding, Nicki Taws and Harvey Perkins. The efforts of Tony Harding, who left the ACT some time ago now but who continues to support our data entry, deserve a special mention.

Annual Bird Report

Many thanks to Barbara Allan, Grahame Clark, Bob Digan, Malcolm Fyfe, Ian McMahon, Harvey Perkins, David Purchase and Nicki Taws and others who have managed to keep the Annual Bird Reports up to date,

Monthly meetings

Barbara Allan has again organised an excellent program of presentations for our monthly meetings. The reports in *Gang-gang* and on the COG website every month attest to the quality of our meetings. Special thanks also to Carol Macleay and her numerous helpers for running the monthly stall and raffle at COG meetings. Barbara Allan also organised the refreshments for the meetings.

COG administration and the COG office

COG continued to hold its meetings at the Canberra Girls Grammar School theatrette, which is proving to be an excellent venue, We are very grateful to Sue Lashko for arranging this venue.

The COG Office is now a focal point for Committee administration and storage of COG equipment, data sheets, the COG computer and database and the COG slide collection. Barbara Allan took over the running of the office when our office manager resigned to have a baby and has kept things running smoothly. During the year John Lang provided assistance in the office as part of the Work for the

Dole scheme for a period of six months. I would like to record the committee's gratitude for the work that he did whilst working with COG,

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

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund

The Canberra Birds Conservation Fund is able to receive tax-deductible donations from COG members and the general public, and uses 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, Members continue to give generously to this fund. The Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES) provided a donation of $1500 in recognition of the valuable contribution made by COG volunteers in undertaking fieldwork for research projects being conducted by David Lindenmayer and his team.

The Fund's first grant was made last year to Mr Adrian Manning of the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, to assist in a study he is now close to completing: "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. The Fund's Management Committee has recently approved a second grant, details of which will be announced soon.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone else who has provided with me assistance, not just over the last year, but also over the last four years that I have been President. For those that aren't aware, I am leaving Canberra for Hobart where I will continue with my work on the conservation of seabirds. I have enjoyed my time in this position, and have only regretted the limited time that I have had to attend meetings during this time, because of extensive travel commitments with work. I am extremely grateful for the support given by so many of COG's members to ensure our group continued its good work promoting the birds of Canberra and their conservation, COG is a great organisation, and it has been an honour to serve as President. I wish the group and all its members well for the future.

Barry Baker
12 November 2003

COLUMNISTS' CORNER

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

Why 'Regent' Honeyeater?

Last summer, Stentoreus, along with some others, was delighted to see again the endangered Regent Honeyeater on one of its occasional appearances in Canberra. Seen at close range, the bird showed the warty 'turkey-skin' panels about the eyes. This visit was followed at the COG March meeting by a status report on the species, informative but depressing. It was by David Geering, who surely knows more about this honeyeater than anyone else.

But why, do you think, does it bear the label 'Regent', a good name for hotels and cinemas? From Lewin in 1808, through Gould, to Le Souef in 1911, the descriptive adjective 'Warty-faced' was, among writers, firmly attached to it. Then, in 1911, the first edition of Leach's popular bird book preferred 'Regent'. In 1913 the RAOU stipulated the same name, and this has stuck.

Some evidently believe that 'regent' signifies, of itself, a combination of black and yellow colours, In his little book *Australian Birds by Common Name,* **JD** Macdonald says that 'black and gold are colours traditionally worn by regent of monarch'. However, despite more than a few hours of research, Stentoreus is unable to find any verification of that proposition.

Macdonald also says that the 1913 adoption of 'regent' came from the specific name *phrygia,* meaning 'regal', However, *phrygia* does not mean 'regal', According to James Jobling's dictionary of scientific names (and *HANZAB)* the word denotes 'a country of Asia Minor whose inhabitants were skilled in embroidering with gold'.

What does seem clear is that the application of 'regent' to the honeyeater flowed, one way or another, from a perceived similarity of its colours to those of the Regent Bowerbird, Gould referred to the name 'Mock Regent-bird' as one that the colonists sometimes used for the Warty-faced Honeyeater.

The bowerbird

As it happens, there is solid documenting of how 'regent' came to be applied to the bowerbird, which is accepted by AJ Marshall, Tom Iredale and Tim Bonyhardy.

Thomas Skottowe was an army officer commanding the penal settlement at Newcastle from 1811 to 1814. In collaboration with a convict artist, Richard Browne, he created an illustrated manuscript describing among other things some of the birds of the district. One picture is captioned simply 'Regent', and the description reads, in part:

> [I]ts feathering or plumage is also remarkable nor can the richest Velvet vie with it for texture or elegance of appearance. ... [H]aving procur'd the specimen from which the drawing here

> given is taken on the same day that I receiv'd in this distant part of the World the News of the Regency Restrictions on His Royal Highness the Prince Regent having been taken off, as a small tribute from the Esteem I bear that exalted Character, I have named it as above.

As Iredale commented: 'This would thus take place as the first of many birds, here associated [i,e. bowerbirds and birds of paradise], to be named in honour of "exalted Characters" who outlived the noble epithets conveyed at the time of the nomination.'

Thomas Skottowe might have been one of a mere few who held the future George IV in such 'Esteem'. On his attaining the regency in 1811, HRH was well-advanced on the career of gambling, indebtedness, womanising and addiction to alcohol and laudanum for which he is remembered. However, Skottowe's commemorative naming was indelible, Although the manuscript was not published, Browne later painted for sale many watercolours of the Regent, 'all of which he carefully titled with Skottowe's name for it' (Bonyhardy).

The French naturalists Quoy and Gaimard, in Port Jackson in 1819, later stated that the bird was known there at that time as the 'Prince-Regent' (Iredale). The point, for present purposes, is that neither Skottowe himself, nor Marshall, Iredale or Bonyhardy, suggest that the name 'Regent' was given by reason of the bird's black and yellow colouring,

The honeyeater

Regarding the honeyeater, it seems most unlikely that 100 years later the substitution of 'Regent' for the well-established 'Warty-faced' was for the purpose of adding lustre to the memory of the long-departed and unvenerated Prince-Regent.

Rather, there seem to be two possibilities, each of which assumes that a name other than 'Warty-faced' was being sought. These are: (a) that there was, in 1913, sufficient *popular usage* along the lines of 'Mock Regentbird' or 'Regent Honey-eater' (as used by Leach) to justify 'Regent' being used in a new official name, or (b) that there was a belief, the basis for which remains elusive, that 'regent' connoted black and yellow colouration, leading to the choice of 'Regent' as a *descriptive name.*

It seems to me that (a) is more likely. The approach suggested in (b) would be helpful only to someone able to recognise, if it was indeed the case, that 'regent' was shorthand for black and yellow, like 'pied' is shorthand for black and white, However, perhaps that recognition has since developed as a result of the transfer of 'regent' to the honeyeater. This would explain, if not justify, the adoption of 'Regent Parrot' in 1926 for a bird that could hardly have been associated by observers within the parrot's range, unprompted, with the Regent Bowerbird.

The whistler

Allow me to go a little further afield to explain my complaint about this infectious 'regent' label, My skimming of a list of preferred common names for all the world's birds indicates that, unless I blinked (which is possible), only four have 'regent' as a descriptor, Three of

those, as noted above, refer to Australian birds, The fourth is the 'Regent Whistler' of the New Guinea highlands *Pachycephala schlegelii*, a bird common enough to appear in several New Guinea bird books, and widely known, to start with, as 'Schlegel's Whistler'. This is a bird of the Golden Whistler group, black, yellow, white and olive.

At some point in the 1970s, someone, presumably not the local inhabitants, decided that this bird would be better known as the Regent Whistler, and that name appears in the New Guinea Checklist published by the RAOU in 1985. One can only wonder whether this was seriously intended as a descriptive name to assist future New Guinean bird students. Perhaps 'Schlegel's' seemed as unattractive as 'Warty-faced' had been. (The name has been rendered as 'Regent's Whistler' in a later checklist of the PNG Bird Society!)

A note on references

A complete list of references consulted in the present connection would be disproportionately long. I offer a short annotated list for anyone who might wish to put a toe into the same waters.

Smith B & Wheeler A (eds) (1988). *The Art of the First Fleet.* OUP, Melbourne, The chapter on natural history by JH Calaby includes an early picture of the honeyeater which bears the inscription 'Black & yellow Bee eater'. This watercolour is attributed to the 'Port Jackson Painter', and Calaby notes that the original scientific description (in 1794, by George Shaw) was based on it. If so, the more ornate Sowerby picture (shown in Penny Olsen's *Feather and Brush* and used to accompany Shaw's description of the 'Embroidered Merops') would have been later.

Pearce B (1989). *Australian Artists, Australian Birds.* Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Contains a colour reproduction of Browne's drawing of the bowerbird and gives the text of Skottowe's note, Also reproduces the 'Port Jackson Painter' watercolour of the honeyeater.

Lewin JW (1808), *The Birds of New Holland with Their Natural History*. White & Bagster, London.
Lewin shows both the 'Warty-faced Honeysucker' and the 'Golden-crowned Honeysucker', The latter, with Lewin's notes (the first description of the bowerbird), shows that Skottowe was mistaken in his later belief that he was the first to obtain a specimen of the 'Regent'.

(1813) *The Birds of New Holland with Their Natural History*. Howe, Sydney.

In the 1813 and later editions the bowerbird is re-labelled 'King Honeysucker'. The French material cited by Iredale makes it clear enough that this competing name referred to Governor King — contrary to AJ Marshall's inference from the Skottowe text. 'King Honeysucker' would have been published by Lewin after Browne painted the 'Regent' (soon after July 1812 — Bonyhardy), and when Skottowe and Browne were presumably giving currency to that name. But for Skottowe, 'King Bowerbird' and 'King Honeyeater' might well have been today's favoured

Skottowe T ***(1988),*** *Select Specimens from Nature of the Birds, Animals, &c of New South Wales*. David Ell Press and Hordern House, Sydney.
This 2-volume limited edition contains a facsimile of the Skottowe MS and a commentary by Tim Bonyhardy, which summarises what was known about Skottowe and the convict artist Richard Browne.

Iredale T (1934). 'Thomas Skottowe; naturalist'. *Emu* 33: 276.

(1950) *Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds*, Georgian House, Melbourne.

In both places Iredale provides material and comment about the origin of 'Regent'.

Hughes J (ed) (1989). *Australian Words and Their Origins*. OUP, Melbourne,
This is an abbreviated version of the Australian National Dictionary. It gives 'regent bird' as 'named in compliment to the Prince-Regent', quoting the Skottowe text. It refers to corresponding names of the honeyeater and parrot as 'transferred' (from the bowerbird), 'probably from the similarity in colouration'.

A. stentoreus

Birding in cyberspace, Canberra style

It is quite remarkable what birders will get up to when they are not in the field, bins in hand. Bob Forsyth of Mt Isa (himself no slouch in the field) sent to the national email discussion list Birding-aus a fascinating contribution titled **'Field guides and water'.** What is this about, you wonder? Here is what Bob said:

> Purely in the interests of science, I have tested how two Field Guides and the new Atlas stand up to a bit of water,
> The new Atlas and the Menkhorst 'Field Guide to Mammals of Australia' both become a solid homogeneous single sticky mass.
> On the other hand the 2001 edition of The Slater Field Guide can be put into a Microwave, heated in 1 minute bursts and will dry out successfully. This copy I have dried out successfully twice! Once Christmas 2003, after getting every crevice of my body at Lake Lewis (Nth Qld) thoroughly soaked, and secondly in the recent Mount Isa floods. (I have not yet had the opportunity to check out the recently revised & updated version.)
> Does anybody have feedback on how the other Field Guides suffer water? Perhaps our Pelagic specialists can advise.
> *ps When Lawrie Conole did his Field Guide survey.../ forgot to add water resistance as another reason for my preference for Slater!*

Two people responded. One said:

> In response to these wet field guide messages I tried all of the following in my microwave: sixth ed. Simpson & Day, the new Slater, the new Pizzey & Knight, Morcombe, the New Atlas, and just for luck, Hayman, and the old Enticott 'Seabirds'. They were each given one minute from dry and they ALL at least smoked - some actually going up in flames. Does anyone have any old copies they would care to send me as replacements for my failed research?

The other wag opined that it would be more useful to assess 'how long it takes for WET field guides to DRY in the microwave', The serious message underlying this is, of course, that we all

get irritated if we pay heaps for a new field guide and find that its design is such that it rapidly deteriorates from normal usage, Care to share your experiences of the environment's impacts on your field guides?

Many of us have love/hate relationships with our email: it is at once an essential part of daily life and a source of information overload. Well, one of the emails I look forward to each week is the latest bird photograph from Ian Montgomery, the maintainer of the **Birdway website** http://www.birdway.com.au. Ian is a Townsville-based professional photographer who makes his bird photographs available to us all, free of charge, at his web site — and naturally invites us to purchase them! The site includes an extensive bird photograph gallery, and Ian kindly invites us to 'feel free to copy any for personal use'. The extra service, though, is that clicking on 'Bird of the Week' shows just that (a great photo of a White-faced Robin from Cape York at the time of writing), along with an invitation to join his mailing list by emailing ian@birdway.com.au, People on his list receive a photo each week, by email, He keeps it small, below 100 kb, so it does not take too long to download over a slow dial-up internet connection.

Now to a more serious matter: GPS, the global positioning system that enables us to report, with accuracy to about five metres, where our New Atlas surveys are conducted. Many people own or have access to GPS receivers (COG has some to loan out on request) but know little about the GPS system as a whole and about the types of co-ordinates that GPS receivers display (most usefully for most of us UTM grid references and lat/long), The Internet Scout Project from the US National Science Foundation's National Science Digital Library (NSDL) http://scout.cs.wisc.edu recently advised us about the availability of a web site **A Practical Guide to GPS - UTM** http://www.dbartlett.com, in the following terms:

> Don Bartlett, in association with National Resources Canada, has developed an educational instruction manual addressing many key elements of GPS units. First he describes the basic features a buyer should consider when purchasing a handheld unit. Bartlett then discusses in detail the limitations and the accuracies of the readings collected by a GPS unit. Users can learn how GPS systems work and how the readings correspond to map coordinates. The site also discusses many features of a GPS unit such as storing points of interest (waypoints) and tracking routes. Because of the difficulty many people have in understanding UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator grid), Bartlett explains in detail the coordinate system. This site is extremely beneficial for 'hikers, fishermen, hunters and all persons who wish to traverse the wilderness in the full knowledge of where they are, where they have been and where they wish to go.'

It is, indeed, a valuable information resource. Surprisingly, it includes information only applicable prior to 1 May 2000 when the US Dept of Defence disabled selective availability, the process of intentionally degrading the GPS signals used by civilians.

If you want to be up with the latest in satellite navigation, you should monitor progress in the development of the **GALILEO satellite radio navigation system,** an initiative of the European

http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/energy_transport/galileo/index_en.htm. They advise that, within five to eight years or so, all our mobile phones will incorporate GPS. Fascinating privacy issues here, don't you think?

Most issues of 'Birding in cyberspace' report on a global web birding portal, and most portals claim to be the world's most comprehensive, one-stop-shop, I have made no attempt to compare them quantitatively, but am happy to rely on the judgment of The Birding Shop http://www.thebirdingshop.com/ that the UK based **Fatbirder web portal** http://www.fatbirder.com is particularly useful. The Birding Shop refers us, particularly, to the product reviews which can be accessed from a menu item of the same name. Beware, though: reading the reviews might precipitate behaviour that might, in turn, impact adversely on your credit card balance!

Recently I was googling for information on the Great Cormorant and Google,com suggested the Fact Sheet on this species found at the web site of the **Australian Museum** in Sydney. The Museum has a terrific collection of authoritative fact sheets. While not all species are covered, a fair number are, providing a valuable resource. The FAQs are also worth perusing, covering topics such as 'How can Magpies and humans co-exist safely together? What should **I** do about an extra-aggressive Magpie?' and 'How do I prevent birds colliding with my windows?' The site has lots of other material of interest to both students and birders, and is highly recommended: http://wvvw.amon Iine.net.au/birds.

We will, hopefully soon, receive from Birds Australia a new official Australian birds checklist, one that will have the Australian Pipit rather than Richard's Pipit and Australian Reed-Warbler rather than Clamorous Reed-Warbler. (One could go on ,..) A Birding-aus contributor, Colin Driscoll, has other suggestions for those **revising the English names of Australian birds.** His proposal arises from the increasing use by organisations and individuals of 'net nanny'-type software which aims to protect the tender from some of the net's less pleasant content. A thread on Birding-aus covered owls, including my favourite, the Southern Boobook. Sadly, Colin's email filter censored the message, modifying the bird's name to `Southern ****ook' with the explanatory message 'Rude words in text'! Perhaps Birds Australia will run a competition to identify all the offensive components of birds' names and to find alternatives acceptable to the wowsers who write the filtering software?

Avian flu explained at http://tasweb.com.au/awsg/whatsnew.htm. This is the web site of the Australasian Wader Studies Group. Dr Hugh A, Buck of Lakatamia, Cyprus has prepared an informative article for the AWSG's journal *The Tattler* and it has been placed on their web site owing to its currency. Your columnist was recently in North-western Bali and was advised there that large sections of the West Bali National Park were closed to visitors owing to the passage of migratory birds that may be carrying the avian flu. Overseas visitor enquiries at the highland village hotel where we stayed (in the village of Munduk) were adversely affected by concerns of foreigners that they might contract the flu from eating contaminated chickens.

foreigners that they might contract the flu from eating contaminated chickens. These personal observations highlight the importance of factual information on the flu and migratory birds, and we are indebted to Dr Buck and the editors of *Tattler* for providing this to us. Hugh Buck points out that the virus:

> is primarily found in waterfowl and waders and only rarely or never in other families. The presence of the virus does not mean that these birds suffer from Avian Influenza as they are hugely resistant, have obviously developed high degrees of immunity over the millennia and overt disease is rarely found. They are however carriers of the virus..,
>
> The influenza virus is highly mutagenic i.e. it can change in type and virulence very rapidly...
> The serotypes of virus so far isolated from wild birds including ducks have been almost invariably low pathogenic and do NOT immediately cause influenza in domestic birds. In modern day intensive poultry units the virus has however the distressingly rapid ability to mutate to high pathogenic forms and this is the crux of the problem...
>
> As birders we have to accept that Avian Influenza can spread from wild birds, especially dabbling ducks, into domestic poultry...
>
> Hysterical conclusions, statements and reactions such as the outbreak in Indonesia being caused by migratory birds from China in August [2003], Bramblings falling out of trees in Thailand etc are exactly that - hysterical and ill informed responses. Avian Influenza can be spread into poultry from wild birds and can mutate into a pathogenic form which can cause disease in both intensively reared poultry and humans. But the major transmission from farm to farm is unquestionably movement of infected poultry and poultry products and wild birds are only a scapegoat.

The rapid posting of this information on the web, well before it sees the light of day in hard copy form, highlights the value of the internet for keeping birders and others up-to-date with factual information on breaking news.

So .., enjoy your flu-free barbequed quail, and good birding!

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 Canberra Birding list.

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

A relatively predictable group of 'unusuals' on this occasion, The Pied Cormorants continue to be seen around the lakes in small numbers; the Common Sandpiper put in a summer appearance again at Uriarra Crossing; the Black Kite too paid us another summer visit; while Pond 6 at the sewage works again housed a Spotless Crake for patient watchers to observe. The by-now familiar escaped 'pink cocky' continues to be seen southside. Numbers of both corellas appear to be building up; the Panel encourages observers to report the presence of large flocks so that we can keep track of them, Summer again produced small numbers of Fork-tailed Swifts amongst the flocks of needletails: watch for the long thin curved wings which sweep back level with the pointed or forked, not stubby, tails,

More unusual were the Diamond Doves, seen at Tidbinbilla and then at 'Bibaringa' on the Cotter Road by many observers (note that the Panel encourages the 'finder' to put in an unusual bird report; subsequent observers may also do so, to hone their skills, but regular datasheet records will be accepted for records of the same species in much the same location within a similar time frame).

Kellys Swamp was graced by probably just the one Intermediate Egret, in breeding plumage, in the December-January period. Diagnostic notes for this species are the roughly equal length of head-neck to body; breast plumes; beak colour (variously described as pinkish or reddish-yellow or orange, an interesting reflection on how differently we see colour); gape line terminating just behind eye; pinkish or reddish tibia and dark tarsus.

Another much-observed 'unusual' was the Black-faced Monarch in the rainforest gully of the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG). Interestingly, an adult was seen in October, while an immature bird, lacking the characteristic black face, was seen in February-March, posing the question as to where 'our' birds breed, More to be expected was the monarch in Louden Forest Park, where they can be expected to be seen in the warmer months.

We have included the record of the White-throated Nightjar, although the location from which it was heard falls *just* outside COG's area of concern. The Panel's rationale for this is that, given the volume of the bird's call, had the observers stepped the 300 m east to be in our area, they would in all probability have still been hearing the bird! Again, this is a species which may be more common in our area than we realise. Maybe our orienteering birdwatchers can flush a few more next summer?

The Panel was unable to endorse a few reports on this occasion, not because it doubts that the observers saw the bird or identified it correctly, but because they made no attempt to describe it, or its call, or merely asserted that they were familiar with the species. This is not the object of the exercise, For our records, we want to be able to maintain complete descriptions, preferably from field notes, amplified if necessary from later research.

ENDORSED LIST NO. 60

Magpie Goose *Anseranas semipalmata* Probably from captive population
1; 25 Oct to 28 Nov 03; Brian Barlin; Brindabella Station, GrB16
Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius*
7; 19 Feb 04; Martin Butterfield; nr Aspen Island GrL14
I; 1 Apr 04; Martin Butterfield; nr Aspen Island GrL14
Intermediate Egret *Ardea intermedia*
1; 22 Dec 03; Mat Gilfedder & Cathy Robinson; Kellys Swamp, GrL14
1; 25 Dec 03 & 3 Jan 04; Rosemary Bell; Kellys Swamp, GrL14
1; 29 Dec 03; Julie McGuiness; Kellys Swamp, GrL14
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
1; 30 Jan 04; Steve Holliday; Pialligo Ave, GrM14
Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis*
1; 8 Mar 04; Steve Holliday; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds, GrL14
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
1; 29 Dec 03; Martin Butterfield; Uriarra Crossing, GrG12
1; 1 Jan 04; Julie McGuiness; Uriarra Crossing, GrG12 **Diamond Dove** *Geopelia cuneata*
May be wild birds,
2; 20 Jan 04; Tom Green; Tidbinbilla NR, GrG18
3; 14 Mar 04; Ian Fraser; "Bibaringa", Cotter Rd, GrH15
Long-billed Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris* Status uncertain.
1; 3 to 8 Jan 04; Mike Ogden; Pearce, GrJ15
2; 15 Mar 04; David Rosalky; Telopea Park,GrL14 **Major Mitchell's Cockatoo** *Cacatua leadbeateri* Escapee.
1; 15 Mar 04; Robin Mitchell; Fisher, GrJ15
White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis* 1?; 29 Nov 03 & 17 Jan 04; Paul Mahoney; Wee Jasper
Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*
2; 5 Dec 03; David Cook; Mulligans Flat, GrM13
30; 11 Feb 04; Nicki Taws; Cook, GrJ13
Black-faced Monarch *Monarcha melanopsis*
1; 19 Oct 03; Lindsay Hansch; Lowden Forest Park, GrW19
1; 26 Oct 03; Malcolm Fyfe; ANBG, GrKI3
1; 23 Feb 04; Tom Green; ANBG, GrK 13
1; 27 Feb 04; Steve Holliday; ANBG, GrK13
1; 2 Mar 04; Martyn Moffat; ANBG, GrKI3
White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*
1; 3 Apr 04; Steve Holliday; Gooroo NR, GrM13

The COG office is located at Room 5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic, Opening hours are Tuesdays from approximately 10:00 - 12:30; at other times by arrangement with the secretary. Please call the office on 6247 4996 to confirm that it is open or to leave a message.

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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Odd Obs

Columnists' Corner