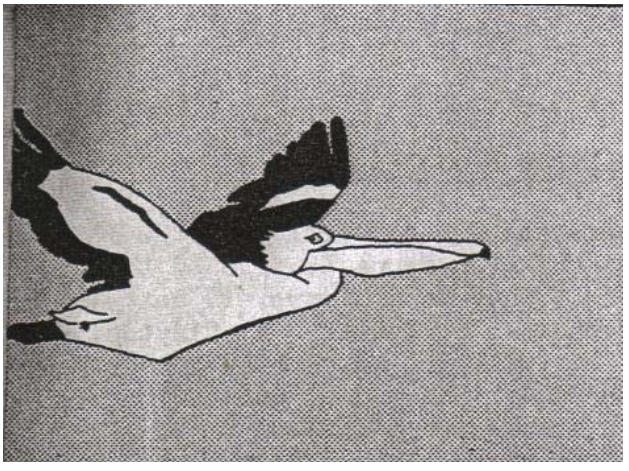

Canberra bird notes

Volume 3 Number 10 April 1977

EDITORIAL

Dr Mike Braysher, Wildlife Biologist with the Department of the Capital Territory, spoke to C.O.G. at the meeting on 10 November 1976. The talk posed a number of questions, and it behoves C.O.G. to interest itself in these. Additionally Dr Braysher would like individuals to write to him expressing views.

The welfare of the local avifauna is very much at stake; if the wrong actions are approved by the Department the effects could be disastrous. Informed comment is most valuable.

After reading the following paper it is hoped that many letters will be sent to Dr Braysher; some members may like also to express their views to the Editor.

LAND USE RESEARCH IN CANBERRA

ADDRESS TO CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS *Mike Braysher*

I would like to outline a few issues affecting the A.C.T. which I believe the Canberra Ornithologists Group should know about and into which they may have some input.

I will list these under four headings:

1. Jerrabomberra wetlands - Lake Burley Griffin (abbreviated hereafter to LBG)
2. Lake Ginninderra
3. Urban hills
4. Murrumbidgee corridor

1 Jerrabomberra wetlands - LBG

Most of you know the area well, but I would like to give a brief outline of my impressions of the area.

The water bird habitat around LBG can be divided into three regions:

(a) The lower reaches of the Molonglo below Dairy Flat Bridge and its banks containing willows and reeds.

(b) The open waters of the lake and the associated bays and inlets.

(c) The shallow swamps and reaches of the Jerrabomberra wetlands.

(a) The Molonglo River is a relatively deep water and mainly contains those birds which feed in deep water and/or require trees for nesting or roosting, e.g. Nankeen Night-heron Darter Cormorants Coot etc.

(b) The open waters of the lake are used by those birds which feed in deep water, e.g. Musk Duck, cormorants and grebes, and some which graze shore areas, e.g. Coot and Dusky Moorhen.

The birds on the lake itself are confined mainly to the lower third of the lake toward Scrivener Dam.

Refuge sites along the margin of the lake are limited.
(c) The most important water bird area on and around LBG is the Jerrabomberra wetlands. This represents the only shallow swamp land for a considerable distance. Lake George being the next closest. In the A.C.T. it is unique.

The wetland supports those birds which dabble or feed in the shallow water and mud. The area has a rich invertebrate population, a major food source for many of the water birds. The same richness of macro invertebrates is not found in the Molonglo or LBG.
The wetland is also an important refuge area for birds which are breeding or moulting. Loss of the wetland would greatly reduce the number and variety of birds which occur on LBG or which fly over the lake.
Although this is an ornithological group it is worth noting that the wetland and Molonglo River also carry a considerable number of Platypus and Water Rats.

Pressures on the Jerrabomberra wetlands - LBG

(a) Sand mining of the Molonglo below Dairy Flat Bridge and East Basin
It has been suggested that these areas contain significant deposits of sand which could be mined, particularly since good building sand close to Canberra is becoming scarce.

The major impact these operations could have on the waterfowl would be through:

(i) destabilisation of banks and creation of steep-sided banks;
(ii) use of the low ponds in the wetland as sedimentation ponds;
(iii) disturbance of the avifauna.

(b) Mining of the wetland area itself for sand and gravel

The extent of the deposits is not known accurately, but preliminary drilling suggests that there may be about $2,000,000 worth at current market prices.

Although mining of the sand and gravel in this area could create additional waterfowl habitat, unless clear guidelines are given before the operations commence we may end up with steep-sided, straight channels with the

topsoil removed and no refuge islands.

(c) Fyshwick-Jerrabomberra Industrial Estate-urban run-off

The Jerrabomberra Creek feeds the wetland area, hence any degradation of the quality of the Jerrabomberra will adversely affect the wetland area.

There is considerable pressure on the water quality of the Jerrabomberra Creek. Stormwater from Fyshwick, urban areas in the Jerrabomberra catchment and from the proposed Jerrabomberra Industrial Estate on the Monaro Highway contains considerable quantities of pollutants.

At present there is no adequate legislation in the A.C.T. for controlling pollution of the stormwater system.

Role of C.O.G. in the wetland area:

(i) aid in education of the public to the presence and value of the area;

(ii) aid in the education of the planners and managers to the presence and value of the area.

A further point I would like to raise about LBG is the growing population of hybrid Mallards on the lake. In particular I would like to ask the opinion of C.O.G. about the potential danger these ducks pose to our native Black Duck through interspecies breeding.

2 Lake Ginninderra

Lake Ginninderra is an urban lake which is in the early stages of development. There is considerable potential for developing the lake for water birds and other avifauna, particularly at the head of the lake near the Defence Communication Station.

Has the C.O.G. any views on the most suitable way to develop the area for bird life?

3 Urban hills

It is proposed to manipulate the habitat of some of the urban hills, e.g. Mounts Taylor, Ainslie-Majura, Wanniassa, Urambi, Painter, Arawang-Neighbour. Manipulation may be as little as mowing grass and filling in dams to semi-large-scale revegetation programs. Thus there is considerable opportunity to develop these hills for recreation and to encourage birds.

We would seek information on how we could reasonably attract birds to the hills with relatively minor habitat manipulation and without destroying the vegetational continuity of the hills. For

example, should dry sclerophyll– grassland interfaces be encouraged, reduced or replaced with other interfaces?

4 Murrumbidgee

With the development of Tuggeranong, the river corridor from Tharwa to Kambah is likely to be modified considerably through the construction of swimming weirs, golf courses and through the inevitable urban run-off. I believe that the river corridor is an important migration route for many birds, particularly some of the honeyeaters. The proposed development of the corridor may be such that it will destroy the Murrumbidgee as a bird migration route.

Dr M. Braysher, Wildlife Biologist, Conservation and Agriculture, Department of the Capital Territory, Canberra.

A MASKED WOODSWALLOW RECORD

Steve Wilson

At 12.30 p.m. on 8 March 1976 at Narrabundah I was watching a group of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* in varying plumages when my attention was caught by the flashing white underparts of a wheeling bird high behind them. This proved to be a Masked Woodswallow *Artamus personatus* flying at approximately 100 m and obviously feeding as it passed rapidly in a general northerly direction.

The bird was in full sunshine and the white underparts were very conspicuous, while the black face and grey upper parts could be clearly noted.

Despite a wide search with 10 x 50 binoculars no other woodswallows were seen; it is unusual to see one migrating woodswallow of any species.

The *Field-list of the Birds of Canberra and District* gives this species as irregular in occurrence over the months of October to January inclusive, but it appears reasonable to see this species overhead in March.

S.J. Wilson, 2 Scott Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.

SCIENTIFIC COLLECTING - GOOD OR BAD?
(CONTINUED)
STATEMENT FOR MEETING OF C.O.G., 13 OCTOBER 1976

Alan Cowan

I must apologise most sincerely for my absence from the meeting, especially since the date was fixed to suit my arrangements. Unfortunately, however, I am obliged to be in Victoria, in training for my forthcoming year's stay in Antarctica. I suppose I can at least claim that that is evidence of a reasonably serious biological interest on my part.

My only claim to be one of the speakers tonight was, I suppose, that certain comments of mine at a previous meeting were the catalyst for this discussion being held. Those who know me will know that my absence is not due to reluctance to attend.

Since I am concerned to be specific in my attack on 'collecting' of a particular kind, I must say that it was the recent account at a C.O.G. meeting of collecting of certain species of pigeon which provoked my reaction. The speaker described the collecting of very large numbers, running I believe into thousands, of Plumed (Spinifex) Pigeon and of White-quilled Rock Pigeon. Shortly afterwards there appeared an article (Emu, April 1976) by Dr H.J. Frith and others on fruit pigeons in New Guinea, which reported over five hundred birds were shot. It the course of this latter article it is stated that:

> Pigeons were collected by shooting. The forest was-visited ... with the intent of taking between five and ten specimens of each of Ptilinopus magnificus and P. iozonus. Notwithstanding the success or otherwise of these attempts *any other pigeon encountered was collected* (my emphasis).

I believe that such activities condemn themselves. They are characterised by the collecting of excessively large numbers of birds for reasons of what I consider to be insufficient importance. This is indeed unscientific collecting. It is lazy and it is unproductive. I should like here to quote from A. McGill's review

(*Australian Bird Bander*, vol. 14, no. 3, September 1976) of R. Schodde's Interim List of Australian Songbirds - Passerines. Whatever one may think of parts of this review it does contain the following valid point:

> Australian taxonomic work in recent years appears to so many ornithologists to be primarily over-zealous collecting in possible overlap zones ... whilst field behaviour and, more important, a real effort to ascertain all plumage characteristics ... is far more commendable.

One only has to consider the recent discovery of a second species of Wedgebill, based almost entirely on calls and ecology differences (Julian Ford and S.A. Parker, 'A second species of Wedgebill?' Emu, vol. 73, part 3, July 1973), to be reminded that shooting is no substitute for patient field work.

The speaker's attitude at the meeting referred to is not shared by large numbers of scientists, biologists and people professionally engaged in ornithology and conservation whom I know. I have within the past few months discussed this matter with a number of such people in several States, both orally and by letter. I find that almost all of them feel as I do. Thus Dr Douglas Dow writes:

> I sympathise with your views on the large-scale slaughter of pigeons, as I and many professional ornithologists cannot always see the need for such masses of data. I must add that I ... have also on occasion found it necessary to collect specimens of birds but also have on occasion discarded research projects because they would require a collection of numbers that I felt unwilling to be responsible for.

I have been struck by the fact that these professionals and amateurs like myself have a similar attitude to bird study, and that the best scientist is the person who finds it easy to get on with amateurs, rather than resenting their interest in his subject. The notice of this meeting asks 'Scientific collecting - good or bad?' Of course this begs the question. Scientific collection is 'good'. The point is: what is scientific? One must try to define this. In the latest issue of *Polar Record,* May 1976, I noticed this statement in connection with antarctic research areas:

> Taking samples of the bird populations by killing, capture or taking of eggs should be done only for a

compelling scientific purpose ...

which I think is about right. Indeed this to me is the hallmark of responsible collecting. If the reason is not compelling, then I regard the 'scientist' as being no better than the New Australian weekend shooter, blasting away at everything that moves.

This whole question of 'collecting' has long been a source of animosity between people in the ornithological world, and for my part I am glad to see it out in the open for once, rather than being the subject of rumours, hints and allegations. Strong, sometimes violent views are held on both sides, and it is an emotive subject. I guess I have done my share of overreacting myself. But I do believe there is a middle way, which I have tried to define.

In the last analysis, I believe that the taxpayer has some right to know what is being done by those whose salaries he pays, and that he should, if necessary, be able to control their activities. The days are surely long past when the scientist was above the law.

Dr Alan N. Cowan, Vancouver Street, Red Hill, A.C.T. 2603.

REASONS FOR COLLECTING BIRD BONES

Jerry van Tets

Classification and identification of birds depend to a large extent, as with other biological material, on reference collections in museums. Avian collections consist mainly of study skins and to a lesser extent of whole birds in spirits, mounted and disarticulated skeletons, drawings, paintings and photographs. All of these are as important to the study of ornithology as are library holdings of books, journals and manuscripts on birds.

Skeletons are essential for the study of prehistoric birds and the identification of bird remains in the food of predators, and in archaeological, cave, dune, beach and glacial deposits. Skeletons are also used to solve problems of avian systematics and comparative anatomy. Unfortunately there are only two major collections of skeletal material of Australian birds, and neither of them has anywhere near a complete representation of all

the Australian species, let alone related species that occur overseas. A third large collection is stored in a warehouse, and is not available for study.

In general rare species are reasonably well represented while some common species are poorly represented or missing. A great deal of further collecting, preparation and curation is needed before the situation will be satisfactory, and be able to cope with the demands for osteological information.

Dr G.F. van Tets, 4 Tasman Place, Lyons, A.C.T. 2606.

This completes the publication of the four papers presented at the October 1976 C.O.G. meeting. Readers' comments on points raised are requested. Much more can be said on this involved subject.

Editor

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GALAHS AT LAKE CONJOLA, N.S.W.

P. Fielding

Lake Conjola is situated on the south coast of New South Wales, approximately 10 kilometres north of Ulladulla. On 26 December 1975 I observed a flock of 50+ Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla* in wet sclerophyll at Lake Conjola.

As records of the Galah on the south coast are not common inquiries were made among local residents as to the frequency of occurrence and numbers of Galahs in the area. It appeared that this was the first large flock seen in the area in living memory. However a pair of Galahs had appeared at Lake Conjola early in 1975 and had successfully nested, raising two young.

Although this is only one record it shows that the Galah may still be increasing its numbers and range on the south coast and regular observations of numbers in areas there might produce interesting data.

Also recorded at Lake Conjola were two King Parrots *Alisterus scapularis* feeding on ripe tomatoes. Forshaw (*Australian Parrots*, Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1969) mentions them attacking cultivated fruits such as apples, peaches and peas but not tomatoes.

P. Fielding, Flat 1, 29 Johnston Street, West Moonah, Tas. 7009.

EXCURSION TO BLACK MOUNTAIN

Kay Anway

Another successful excursion was held on Sunday 14 November 1976 at Black Mountain, along Caswell Drive. Barry Baker led a party of twenty interested members and friends, beginning at 8.00 a.m. in warm, clear, sunny weather. Twenty-six species were seen (or heard) along the Caswell Drive area. They included Little Black Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, White-necked Heron, Little Falcon, Common Bronzewing, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Pallid Cuckoo, Kookaburra, Dollar Bird, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Superb Blue Wren, White-throated Warbler, Western Warbler, Brown Thornbill, Grey Fantail, Rufous Whistler, White-throated Tree-creeper, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, Silver-eye, Noisy Friar-bird, Australian Magpie and Australian Raven. The Little Falcon was observed in flight, disappeared into a tree, and a few minutes later was seen perched on a limb making a meal of another bird (probably a young Sulphur-crested Cockatoo according to some feathers retrieved under the tree later).

At 11.00 a.m. the group drove to the Botanic Gardens on the other side of Black Mountain and picked up seven more species for their lists. These included Tawny Frogmouth, Blackbird, Eastern Spinebill, New Holland Honeyeater, Red-browed Finch, Olive-backed Oriole and Pied Currawong. The highlight of the day for almost everyone was shown to us by the Ranger: a Tawny Frogmouth sitting on a nest, quite close to the road and in full view!

K.L. Anway, 10 Gingana Place, Aranda, A.C.T. 2614.

DECEMBER CHRISTMAS BARBECUE

Kay Anway

C.O.G. held its annual December meeting as a family barbecue again. This year it was at Weston Park at 6.00 p.m. on Wednesday 8 December. Twenty-nine adults and children enjoyed good food and fine weather (without flies!).

FEEDING HABITS IN HERONS

Ian McRae

On a recent trip to Hattah Lakes National Park in north-western Victoria, approximately 70 km south-south-east of Mildura, on 2 July 1976 unusual feeding habits of the Large Egret Egretta alba and the White-necked Heron Ardea pacifica were observed.

(i) Both species throughout most of the day were seen to catch prey by the normal method of stalking the lake shores and stabbing at their prey with their bills.

(ii) In the late afternoon and dusk period of the day, while large numbers of fish were jumping, four Large Egrets were observed feeding on the wing (i.e. during flight). This method basically consisted of flying over the lake surface in a zigzag fashion, diving towards the water surface in areas where fish were jumping, plunging the head beneath the water surface whilst still flying, catching a fish, and returning to the shore to eat the catch.

(iii) While this was occurring, three White-necked Herons were also observed feeding whilst in flight, but they caught fish from the surface of the water with their feet, usually making one or two strikes before being successful, then returning quickly to the shore after a catch.

Possibly the very large numbers of fish present in the lakes (Silver Perch and European Carp) and the fact that thousands were being killed by low oxygen levels were making such methods of feeding in flight possible. However the birds involved provided a most interesting display of aerobatics and executed their manoeuvres with great skill.

J. Mcrae, Corin House, Australian National University, Canberra, A.C.T. 2600.

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

One important recent change in Australian ornithology has been the alteration in name of the Bird Banders Association of Australia to the Australian Bird Study Association. This is to cope with the Association's change in objectives from purely banding to the scientific study of birds generally. At the same time the name of their journal was changed to the *Corella*. We wish them the best in the future.

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Apropos the last item one of the better known personages in the bird world on hearing the change of name said "Why are they studying Japanese cars?'

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On the question of bird banding and in particular the use of mist nets did you notice an apparent contradiction in the last Canberra Bird Notes? The first part was taken up by papers on the whys and wherefores, dos and don'ts of collecting. Then further on was an account of an official C.O.G. trip to the Cocoparra Ranges, during which mist nets were used to show the participants birds and to photograph them. In particular a nocturnal bird was photographed during daylight and later released. Presumably this could have been very distressing for the bird. Surely our ethics should also apply to trapping, handling and photography?

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By the way the B.O.C. publication *Australian Warblers* by Arnold McGill is almost out of print. If you want a copy you had better hurry. It is on sale at the sales table at meetings. There are fewer than 100 copies left in print.

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The Geelong Field Naturalists Club has published an extremely useful booklet called *The care of sick, injured and orphaned native birds and animals*. It has been prepared by Jack Wheeler and is well worth having. It is an extremely professional job and is obtainable from J.R. Wheeler, c/- Geelong Field Naturalists Club, 72 James Street, Belmont, Vic. 3216. Cheques and postal notes to be made payable to Geelong Field Naturalists Club. The booklet is free, although requests must include postage - 1 booklet 20c, 2-3 booklets 30c, 4-6 booklets 40c. Autographed copies are available for a donation any donations are used to publish further copies. This must be the best 20 cents worth around today!

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The RAOU camp-out will be held this year at Mt Serle station, 240 km north of Quorn, South Australia, from 29 August to 1 September 1977. Some members of C.O.G. are thinking of taking a trip up the Birdsville track after the camp-out (and possibly back down the Strzelecki). If anybody is interested, please contact G.S. Clarke at 24 Adair Street, Scullin, A.C.T. 2614 or telephone (062) 54 1279.

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Remember the RAOU Atlas project has now started. If you have not yet written for details write to Atlas, 119 Dryburgh Street, North Melbourne, Vic. 3051; telephone (03) 329 9881. Alternatively the local contact is G. Clark (address as above).

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The new printing of Birds in the Australian High Country has appeared. Some minor amendments and additions have been made. Daltons of Garema Place, City, have had it at a discount price.

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GREY CURRAWONGS NESTING *Delia Johnson*

A pair of Grey Currawongs Strepera versicolor were observed feeding two large chicks in a nest 7 metres up a tree near Mt Waniassa on 3 November 1976.

THE OLDEST INHABITANTS OF NEW CHUMS ROAD

Steve Wilson

It is probably not generally realised that the work at New Chums Road can be regarded as unique in the annals of ornithology in several respects.

In overseas places, for example the bird observatories in the British Isles, work has continued with banding as a chief technique for much longer than our work in the Ranges.

However the New Chums Road work is really notable. It can be claimed that this is the longest continuing mist netting survey of an area of natural mountain forest carried out on a regular basis by an amateur group. As a consequence longevity records should be excellent, and they are.

Certainly when the work started with nets in April 1961 it was not realised that individuals among our small passerines could live for such incredible life spans. As time goes on it is hoped to produce comparative figures for European and North American species but at this stage it may be of general interest merely to record the oldest birds among the populations of some of our regular species.

Species	Date banded	Date Retrapped	No. of times netted	Known life span (y-m-d) NCR	All Aust.
Brown-headed Honeyeater 020-27396	8.10.61	9.5.65	3	3-7-1	7-5-23
Brown Thornbill 010-60051	10.2.63	18.9.76	8	13-7-7	13-7-7
Crescent Honeyeater 030-12094	23.11.65	23.2.72	5	6-4-0	6-4-0
Eastern Spinebill 010-38358	2.12.61	18.2.67	4	5-2-16	11-5-11

Species	Date banded	Date Retrapped	No. of times netted	Known life span (y-m-d) NCR	All Aust.
Eastern Yellow Robin 020-27423	28.10.61	8.3.70	3	8-4-11	11-8-9
Eastern Whipbird 050-25207	28.10.61	9.3.68	4	6-4-12	10-9-30
Fantail Cuckoo 040-31949	5.10.69	27.9.75	2	5-11-23	5-11-23
Flame Robin 012-44194	24.1.71	18-9-76	3	5-8-6	7-2-15
Golden Whistler 030-29409	15.10.61	17.10.69	5	8-0-2	8-10-0
Grey Fantail 010-94515	18.1.65	2.11.68	2	3-9-14	5-4-0
Grey Shrike-Thrush 060-25260	15.1.68	3.1.76	2	7-11-18	8-11-0
Olive Whistler 040-31947	30.8.69	19.1.75	2	5-4-11	5-4-11
Pilot Bird 040-22703	6.1.62	25.1.68	4	6-0-19	6-0-19
Pink Robin 010-46923	27.6.62	5.7.64	3	1-11-23	2-2-16
Red-browed Treecreeper 030-65706	29.6.68	18.9.76	2	8-2-19	8-2-19
Rose Robin 010-46167	1.4.62	10.12.66	3	4-8-9	4-8-9

Species	Date banded	Date Retrapped	No. of times netted	Known life span (y-m-d) NCR	All Aust.
Rufous Fantail 010-60050	10.2.63	11.1.69	2	5-11-0	9-1-4
Rufous Whistler 030-65398	14.11.65	4.10.70	3	4-10-10	11-10-5
*Scaly Thrush 060-49404	4.10.70	21.3.76	2	5-5-17	(7)5-5-17
Silvereye 010-71898	17.11.63	5.4.69	2	5-4-12	9-11-20
Striated Thornbill 010-93796 & 93797	12.3.66	1.6.74	5&6	8-2-22	11-7-24
*White-browed Scrub-wren 020-27422	29.10.61	23.3.76	18	14-4-6	14-4-6
White-eared Honeyeater 030-65531	18.2.67	14.2.71	3	1-11-26	4-1-24
White-naped Honeyeater 020-56060	19.10.63	31.1.72	6	8-3-12	10-11-17
White-throated Treecreeper 030-65595	3.12.67	3.1.76	5	8-1-0	8-6-0
Yellow-faced Honeyeater 020-27392	8.10.61	25.1.69	6	7-3-17	12-10-1

* = Probable species longevity record (from Banding Office and *Bird Bander* reports.

These figures indicate that there are ten species longevity records current from New Chums Road, and it is obvious that while some of the known life spans are very long already, most of these known life spans will increase progressively as the work proceeds.

S.J. Wilson, 2 Scott Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.

This article, originally published in Newsletter No. 7 of the Brindabella Banding Group, is republished by courtesy of the Editor of that publication, Mr A. Stokes - many thanks.

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MORE MUSK DUCK DISPLAYS

Doug Ross

When a male Musk Duck Biziura lobata displays, it is with the aim of attracting a female. A male displaying in mid afternoon, 3 July, at the junction of Jerrabomberra Creek and the Lake had no such luck.

He exhibited all the classic actions: neck feathers ruffled out, tail feathers brought over the back and fanned, vigorous kicking and whistling. A female nearby showed no reaction and continued feeding. One of a pair of other males close by was also unimpressed, but the second of these males did react. This other male constantly approached the displaying male, either head to head or head to tail. When the latter position was taken up, the displaying male would swing round to bring himself head to head. The birds were generally within half a metre of each other when this positioning occurred.

The displaying male showed annoyance at the presence, or position, of the other male - is there a display 'territory' or did the displaying male realise that something unnatural was occurring? - and exhibited this annoyance by chasing the other male, both birds 'running' across the surface of the water at considerable speed. The intervening male made no attempt to hold its ground; as soon as the displaying male went for it, the intervener turned tail. It was this aspect of the sighting that prompted the above question about territoriality.

A.D. Ross, 64 Sprent Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.

CONSTANCY OF NEST SITE USE BY THE TAWNY FROGMOUTH

Tony Stokes

It is not unusual for many species of birds to reuse favoured nest sites over and over again with the coming and going of breeding seasons. Birds of prey and passerines such as the Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* and the Australian Magpie Lark *Grallina cyanoleuca* are common examples which spring to mind. In the past I have also given examples of the Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, White-throated Warbler *Gerygone olivacea* and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae* reusing nesting sites (Stokes, 1971).

Not all nests survive a year or so of non-use, but for those species where the nests do survive there is a benefit in not having to rebuild. Besides, the practice may have an adaptive value in that it is a proved safe spot to nest.

In the literature, the Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* has occasionally been noted as using the same nesting site for two years (Frauca, 1967, p. 71) and for four years (Morgan, 1965).

On 21 November 1970 I caught and banded the two adults and two chicks at a nest about 10 metres above the ground on the horizontal branch of a *Eucalyptus blakelyi* tree in *blakelyi-melliodora* woodland behind the Russell Offices in Canberra. Wilson (1962) relates a similar capture of a nesting bird for banding purposes and was of the opinion that 'handling adults in this manner will not normally cause desertion after the eggs have hatched, but notes from other banders would be of interest'.

It seems the longest the frogmouth has been definitely known to stay alive in the wild is 3 years 5 months (anonymous, 1971). Serventy (1969) states that 'records of longevity in the wild are scanty but some pet birds have been kept for twenty years ... [and there are indications] that wild birds may be equally long lived'.

On 21 November 1976 I banded another chick at a nest in exactly the same site. A second chick was too small to band. I also recaptured an adult, one of the two banded there in 1970, wearing band number 100-36515. I judged it to be a male by its darker mantle and nape plumage - a generally reliable sexing characteristic which Dr R. Schodde had pointed out to me on museum specimens a week

previously.

The bird was at least 6 years old and, whilst having little apparent effect on its nesting effort, the banding had contributed a lot to the known biology of the species.

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A. Stokes, 16 Badgery Street, Macguarie, A.C.T. 2614.

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A CONCRETE NEST

Peter Fielding

During 1948 when workmen were laying cement floors in vacant Army huts at Gowrie, Tasmania, Mrs G. Bullimore observed Welcome Swallows *Hirundo neoxena* scooping up wet cement. The birds were building a nest constructed entirely of cement in a nearby hut. When the cement hardened it made a permanent structure which the Swallows used for three consecutive years, each time successfully hatching a clutch of young. Mrs Bullimore visited Gowrie only once each year to attend a camp held in the huts. The last camp she attended was 1950.

Mr R. Bullimore advises that he has heard of several other cases of Welcome Swallows using cement as building material for nests over the last thirty years.

P. Fielding, 1/29 Johnston Street, West Moonah, Tas. 7009.

A MULTIPLE SIGHTING OF DARTERS

Doug Ross

There is no collective noun for a number of darters, *Anhinga rufa*, probably because the bird is usually seen (outside the nesting season) singly or at most in twos or threes.

Eight were seen together at midday on 9 May 1976 at the Dairy Flat sewage works. When I arrived one was 'sunning' on the bank of a pond and another was seeking food in the same pond; both birds had female/juvenile plumage. Subsequently six birds came in to settle on an adjacent bank. Five of these also had female/juvenile plumage; the sixth had full male plumage. The sextet simply stood around, heads up and well back.

The sextet and feeding bird took off after about ten minutes and were quickly followed by the sunning bird. All eight proceeded to tower, being joined by some pied cormorants, and circled in concert for about ten minutes, at a height estimated as in excess of 300 metres. They finally departed in the general direction of Jerrabomberra Creek. Eight birds deserve a collective noun - perhaps a submergence of darters.

A.D. Ross, 64 Sprent Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.

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INTERESTING BIRDS NORTH OF CANBERRA

The area bounded by Canberra, Collector, Gundaroo and Yass is usually an interesting one during summer as far as birds are concerned. The following records show what can be found there.

15 Superb Parrots *Polytelis swainsonii* near Murrumbateman, 26 November 1976 B. Baker

1 Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* on Gundaroo Road, 2 January 1977 J. Penhallurick

Flock of White-browed Woodswallows *Artamus superciliosus* on Gundaroo to Murrumbateman Road, 2 January 1977 J. Penhallurick

SIGHT RECOGNITION OF EGRETS

Jerry van Tets

Egrets are several species of white herons, including some which have also a coloured phase. A few have a rare intermediate phase including the Reef Heron in our area. The Little Blue Heron, *Egretta (Florida) caerulea*, has white immatures and coloured adults.

The Australian egrets are: Large Egret, *Egretta Alba;* Little Egret, *E. garzetta nigripes;* Plumed Egret, *E. intermedia;* Reef Heron, *E. sacra*; and Cattle Egret, *Ardeola ibis*. The Chinese Egret, *E. eulophotes*, may reach the northern shores of Australia as a rare migrant. A recent revision of the Ardeidae (Payne and Risley, 1976) includes the Cattle Egret in Egretta and transfers the Large Egret to Ardea. The differences between Egretta and Ardea as defined by Payne and Risley are so slight, however, that all of Egretta may well be lumped into Ardea, thus placing almost all the day herons in the same genus.

Clues to the field identification of egrets are: silhouette; extent of nuptial plumes; and colours of bill, face and legs (see *CBN* 1:3, pp.17-18).

Size is no help to identification when only one species is present. The Large is substantially and the Plumed is slightly larger than the other egrets in Australia. The neck of the Large is much longer and in other egrets about the same length as that of the body. The Cattle Egret is squat like a Night-heron, the Reef Heron is relatively stout with relatively short, fat legs, while the other egrets are sleek with long thin legs. The throat of the Cattle Egret has a characteristic bulge.

White nuptial plumes, when present, are confined to the back in the Large, to the back and breast in the Plumed, and to the back, breast and nape in the Little and Chinese Egrets and in the Reef Heron. The Chinese Egret and the Reef Heron may have a tuft of several nuptial plumes on the nape, while the Little Egret does not have more than two on the nape. The nuptial plumes of the Cattle Egret are orange-brown.

The bill is always black in the Little Egret. It is also black in non-breeding Large and breeding Chinese Egrets. The bill is yellow, but may turn red when courting, in Plumed and Cattle Egrets.

It is also yellow in the Reef Heron, breeding Large and non-breeding Chinese Egrets.

The legs are green in the Reef Heron and non-breeding Chinese Egret. In breeding birds the feet are yellow in the Chinese Egret and the African and Eurasian subspecies of the Little Egret. In the Australasian subspecies of the Little Egret in breeding birds only the soles of the toes are yellow. In breeding Plumed Egret the upper legs are red. The legs are red in breeding and dark greenish yellow in non-breeding Cattle Egret. Otherwise the legs of the Australian egrets are a nondescript dull dark brown.

With practice and good optics, additional clues may be found in the shape and colour of the face. In all egrets face and iris may turn red when courting.

For non-breeding egrets in Australia there are the following basic clues: Large Egret - neck longer than body; Cattle Egret -squat with throat bulge; Plumed Egret - light bill and dark legs; Little Egret - dark bill and legs; Chinese Egret - dark bill and green legs; Reef Heron - light bill and green legs.

Reference

Payne, R.B. and C.J. Risley (1976) *Systematics and Evolutionary Relationships among the Herons (Ardeidae),* Misc. Publ. Mus. of Zool., U. of Michigan, no. 150, 115 pp.

Dr G.F. van Tets, 4 Tasman Place, Lyons, A.C.T. 2606.

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ODD OBS

MALLEE FOWL NEST

Ian McRae and Michael Chuk

On 9 September 1976 we discovered an active nest of a Mallee Fowl *Leipoa ocellata* on private property about 500 metres west of Ingalba Nature Reserve. The mound was located in regrowth mallee in a paddock which had been allowed to regenerate after clearing. Ingalba Nature Reserve is situated between the Wagga and Griffith roads about 8 kilometres out of Temora. No birds were seen. Is this the present most eastern occurrence of this species?

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ODD OBS

TAWNY FROGMOUTH FEEDING *K. Thaler*

Two Tawny Frogmouths *Podargus strigoides* were seen apparently feeding on frogs in the Botanic Gardens on 19 September 1976. A pair later went on to nest in the Gardens during November and December, apparently raising at least one chick.

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