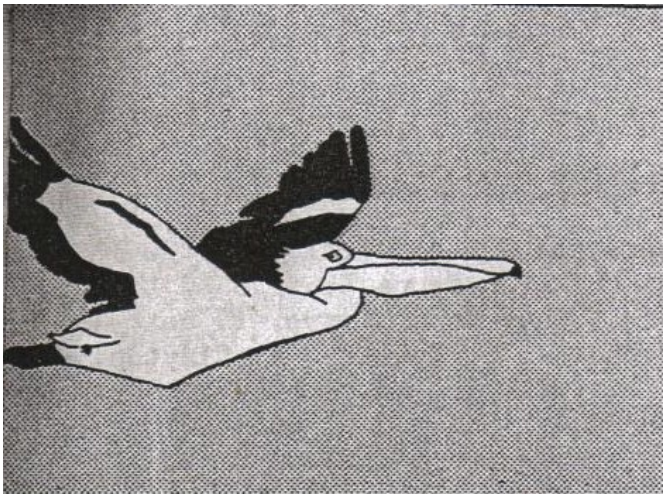

Canberra bird notes

Volume 3 Number 11 July 1977

EDITORIAL

As this is being read, work is already progressing on the major article for our next issue - the Bird Report, 1 July 1976 to 30 June 1977. These annual reports are the most important things we publish; we have an obligation to provide a continuing picture of the status of birds in the A.C.T. for the future.

Were do we get the necessary information? Much of it is based on the regularly reported notes in the Observations Book available at all meetings. We also rely greatly on those who do regular surveys in the suburbs or elsewhere.
Every member could and should add something to our knowledge in this area.

Please forward results of regular observations as well as individual species notes to Grahame Clark no later than the July meeting. The Editorial In CBN vol. 3 no. 8 also refers.

SOME COMMENTS ON SCIENTIFIC COLLECTION

H.J. Frith

The title of the October 1976 meeting 'Scientific collecting - good or bad' suggests that a clear-cut answer is being sought. The subject, collecting, is very broad and one in which strong and opposing views are to be expected. I do not think a simple answer is possible to the general question but, in response to an invitation from the Editor, I provide some views that might help some people to refine their own ideas.

In vol 3 no. 9 Drs Schodde and van Tets have described some of the reasons for collecting birds in taxonomic and phylogenetic studies but little has been said of the need for collected specimens in ecological research.

There have been many demonstrations that programs of conservation based on inadequate data on the species concerned are seldom successful. Conservation programs are most likely to succeed if they are based on a thorough knowledge of the species' living needs so that the factors that really control its numbers in the long term are identified. Such knowledge enables the authorities to preserve the essential elements of the animal's environment and if necessary in man-affected habitats to restore those that have declined or to remove harmful ones. If the species is one whose place in man's economy is obscure or misunderstood then the ecological study can provide the essential data needed to clarify the position and to provide a basis for more sensible regulations.

A few examples of advances in wildlife conservation as a result of ecological study include the removal of the Magpie Goose from the list of pests in the Northern Territory; the recognition of its vulnerability and the establishment of appropriate reserves; the recognition of the factors that control waterfowl populations in south-east Australia, a reappraisal of management plans by several States, removal of some species from game lists and more appropriate hunting regulations; the recognition that the Japanese Snipe should be further protected; recommendations on the conservation needs of several species of pigeons; recognition that ravens are not the problem to the sheep industry that was previously thought; and more

appropriate management plans for kangaroos. Important parts of all these studies depended on collecting. There are many other examples both for birds and mammals.

He who undertakes serious research on practical aspects of wildlife conservation usually finds that among the many data needed is accurate and reliable information on the animal's food preferences, its breeding season and the factors that regulate the breeding and the survival of the young. What is needed if measures later applied, often at considerable public expense, are to be effective are not superficial data or general impressions but substantial hard facts. Often these can only be secured from specimens collected for the purpose. The remainder of these notes is devoted to these aspects of biology, food and breeding though similar discussion could be produced for others.

Several approaches can be used in the determination of the food of birds. Some species, e.g. some fruit and nectar feeding species, can be watched feeding and the plants foraged in identified, and sometimes it is even possible to secure enough observations to give statistically valid results; some birds regurgitate pellets that can be examined and the food items identified from their residues; in studies at nests young birds can be forced to regurgitate food from their crops, they can be fitted with)collars to prevent them swallowing food brought by the parents until it has been identified by a nearby observer and there are photographic methods for identifying food brought to the nest in the bills of parents.

Nevertheless there are many species, probably the majority, in which these methods are not possible and in which accurate quantitative data on food preferences can only be had by the examination of the food actually in the bird's digestive system. For example many water birds feed underwater or with their heads submerged and the items eaten cannot be seen; many ground feeding species can be watched pecking at the ground and the numerous seeds found at that point- identified but that does not prove which of the species present were actually eaten; quail feed in long grass and are seldom even seen feeding let alone taking specific items; insectivorous birds can be seen searching foliage etc. but what insects are actually caught can seldom be seen.

There are similar problems in studying the breeding of birds. The ideal study is one where the breeding season is determined from nests examined. Unfortunately many of the species that need study are not subject to that method. For instance many waterfowl nest in inaccessible tree holes and often it is physically impossible to examine sufficient numbers

of nests; nests of quail and some pigeons are extremely difficult to find and there are many similar examples. The alternatives to the examination of nests include the examination of samples to show the 'proportion of juveniles in the population as a measure of breeding success and the examination of reproductive systems as a measure of sexual state. These frequently are the only available methods and demand the collection of samples of birds.

In ecological studies, if the results are to be meaningful in practical management, data need to be collected at intervals over several years in order to allow for seasonal and annual differences. Once such work is done it is of long-term value and does not need to be repeated.

No responsible biologist would undertake a study including substantial regular sampling unless he had sufficient knowledge of the bird's population and recovery powers to be sure that the sampling program would not deplete the population. One selfish reason for this is that depletion of the population would destroy the study and defeat the worker's own ends. Other reasons are that most professional biologists are very serious naturalists with at least as great an interest in conservation and concern for the well-being of the fauna as the average member of the public.

It seems from the papers in vol. 3 no. 9 and no. 10 that some of the contributors are not fully aware of the legal controls that exist over would-be collectors or of the availability of details of the collections in scientific publications. There is no need to be guided by rumour. Any person who wishes to collect a bird must apply for a permit to the fauna authority of the State involved. Several of these authorities will only accept applications from the scientist's director, or equivalent, so he must first convince his own organisation of the need for the collection. Most fauna authorities demand that the application for the permit will be specific on the numbers of animals to be taken, the locality and the details of the proposed work. If not satisfied as to the 'worth' of the work or the reputation of the worker etc. they can and do refuse permits. Once a permit is issued the authorities require a statement later on the exact number of animals that were actually taken; some examine them before they are removed from the State. Several States publish statistical details of permits in annual reports etc.

The public has its opportunity to scrutinise the research work later. The data are published and in that paper the number of animals taken and the reasons for the collection are given. The results are displayed for judgment.

No doubt there are some unscrupulous scientists who evade regulations, as there are black sheep in most sections of the community. In my experience these people seldom prosper; they find it increasingly difficult to secure permits, the collaboration of others or support from their own organisation. To return to the title - is collecting good or bad - I find that as expected I cannot generalise but can state my own policy. There must be a very compelling reason before a single specimen of a rare species or one of uncertain status is collected. I have only ever agreed to one such proposal. That involved a single bird from a population whose ecology and numbers had been studied for five years. The collection was preceded by three years' discussion on the need for it and how maximum use could be made of the specimen. Parts of it were distributed to half a dozen Australian and foreign specialists in various fields. On the other hand most of the species presented to this organisation for study have strong populations and are thought to be pests or in need of some conservation action. Usually enough is known of general biological principles for it to be certain that properly controlled collection will have no permanent effect on such birds' numbers. In these I usually agree to support proposals provided the work is properly planned with worthwhile and well-defined aims that seem possible to achieve, that the methods are appropriate, that the work is done totally within the State's laws and that the results are fully documented in the scientific literature.

The Australian fauna as a whole has not been thoroughly studied. In this age of increasing industrial and agricultural use of the land this is a tragedy. One of the important reasons why conservationists so often lose their battles with developers is the appalling ignorance that we have of our fauna. In such confrontations the developers always have done their research, have strong and documented cases and can prove the economic and, from their point of view, the social value of the development. Usually the conservationists have plenty of moral right and enthusiasm but few data that can substantiate their claims that the development will damage the fauna or to demonstrate how this will occur or can be avoided. Such a position does not influence governments and decision makers. In my view the collection of those data so that future conservation arguments can be supported is the most urgent task confronting wildlife biologists today. If some individual birds

are sacrificed in the process it is probably a small price to pay for the ultimate preservation of the population.

Dr H.J. Frith, CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research, P.O. Box 84, Lyneham, A.C.T. 2602.

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MALLEE FOWL SIGHTING

Jim McNaughton

The following is a report by two carloads of observers, per Mr L. Snell, of Mallee Fowl seen some 10-12 miles from West Wyalong, along the Talimba road.

Mr Snell and the other members of the two carloads have seen Mallee Fowl previously and are reliable. Most have spent their lives in the area. The two cars were 5-10 minutes apart and the time was shortly before dusk early in December 1975.

The first group sighted three birds and the second car's passengers saw two birds about 300 yards from- the first sighting. The two birds may have been part of the first group; it cannot be stated whether there were three or five birds.

The birds were busy feeding on the side of the road, apparently eating grain which had fallen from passing wheat trucks. The habitat is cleared paddocks with low vines and bushes, together with eucalypts, mallee-type trees and native pines 5'-10' high, along the sides of the road. There are low hills in the area and the soil is of a gravelly nature.

J. McNaughton, 30 Launceston Street, Lyons, A.C.T. 2606.

A locality map was supplied. Ed.

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ATTRACTING NATIVE BIRDS TO A CANBERRA GARDEN

David Purchase

During Easter 1973 the author moved into a house in the newly established suburb of Melba. Not long before, the area on which Melba stands was used for grazing and had few trees. There were no trees on the block on which the house was built – the nearest, two English Elms *Ulmus procera* and one Weeping Willow *Salix babylonica,* being about 300 metres away.

The bird population of the area was typical of that expected in open grassland interspersed with a few trees. The only birds recorded on the block (birds flying over the block are not included) during the first few months the house was occupied were a pair of Australian Magpie Larks *Grallina cyanoleuca,* a pair of Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen,* a pair (?) of Willie Wagtails *Rhipidura leucophrys* and, during the winter, small flocks of Richard's Pipits *Anthus novaeseelandiae.*

Since moving into the house, the endeavour has been to develop a garden attractive to native birds. This first attempt at designing and establishing a garden was followed by a number of mistakes from a horticultural point of view and from that of attracting birds. These mistakes included: not paying enough attention to the early establishment of trees; not developing a windbreak to protect the garden in its formative years from the effects of the strong westerly winds; and not allowing sufficient space for some of the shrubs to freely develop (e.g. some were planted too close to fences and paths). It is worth remembering that those tiny seedlings which one brings home from the nursery will indeed grow, in a very few years' time, to the size quoted on the-label or in gardening textbooks – proper allowance must be made for this growth. However, there is some advantage to be gained in over-planting (e.g. planting three plants where eventually only one or two will remain) as this will enable the plants to more quickly provide-each other with much needed protection from the sun and wind. As the plants grow in size the less desirable can be removed.

This article is based mainly on personal experiences in the hope that it may help other people who want to establish or redesign

gardens to attract native birds. Although the plants listed are suitable for planting in the Canberra district (e.g. they do not require protection frolm frost) the principles suggested for the establishment of the garden are probably applicable to most parts of Australia. The plants listed are frequently available from local plant nurseries and of' the 48 species native to Australia, 40 are growing in the author's garden.

PLANNING THE GARDEN

As with the establishment of any garden, the first step must be the preparation of a plan showing the proposed layout. When preparing this plan consider the following points:
(a) Do you wish to observe birds from particular places, e.g. from the windows of certain rooms; from verandahs, balconies or patios; or from certain lawns?
(b) Do you wish to avoid encouraging the assembly near bedroom windows of birds which are particularly vocal early in the morning, e.g. Noisy Friarbirds *Philemon corniculatus*, Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* etc. It may also be diplomatic to try and avoid causing the assembly of these birds near the bedroom windows of neighbours' houses - neighbours may not appreciate being woken at first light by these birds as much as you do!
(c) Ensure that trees are not planted where they eventually may: block drains with their roots; break paths, drive strips etc. With their roots; obstruct desirable views from the house or neighbour’s houses; foul overhead wires; or become a nuisance to your neighbours, e.g. by shedding leaves, bark or branches in their garden or on their houses. It would be a pity if, after a number of years, because of one of the above problems you had to remove or prune trees which were attracting birds to your garden. Removal or heavy pruning may also prove to be very expensive.
(d) It may be the intention to include, at a later date, other features in the garden, e.g. patio, fish pond, a child's cubby house etc. If this is so, then it is as well to bear this in mind when preparing the garden plan so that trees and large shrubs are not placed in areas to be redeveloped at a later date.

TREES

A garden without trees in or around it will attract few birds - far fewer than one with trees. As well as food, in the form of nectar,

seeds and insects, trees also provide birds with places to perch in safety from most predators. Birds will move to and from these perches to nearby sources of food or water. Many of the nectarivorous and insectivorous birds which migrate do so at treetop level and they frequently stop to feed on or around the trees through which they are passing. Trees also provide many species of birds with nest sites.

A block which already has one or two tall trees, especially eucalypts, has a major asset which will greatly aid the development of this type of garden. If you are not fortunate enough to have such a block, then every effort should be made to establish trees as quickly as possible. Indeed, after you have drawn up the plans for your garden, your first task should be to plant some quick-growing trees, the aim being to have trees of at least 6 metres in height on your block as quickly as possible. Canberra has an excellent climate for many trees and development of mature specimens is quite rapid.
Some of the trees suitable for Canberra are:

Species	Approx. Height (m)	Approx. Flowering period
Acacia baileyana	4-5	late winter
Acacia dealbata	7-10	late winter early spring
Acacia decurrens	5-8	late winter early spring
Acacia mearnsii	4-5	late spring
Acacia melanoxylon	10-30	spring
Eucalyptus cinerea	6-8	early summer
Eucalyptus globulus	45-55	late winter
E.leucoxylon var macrocarpa	5-10	late autumn - early winter
Eucalyptus linearis	10-15	late summer
E mannifera subsp. maculosa	6-20	late autumn
Eucalyptus nicholii	10-30	autumn
E. pauciflora	10-20	early summer
E. pulverulenta	3-7	late winter - early spring
Eucalyptus scoparia	8-12	summer
E. sideroxylon	10-20	winter
*E. st johnii (formerly * E. bicostata)*	30-40	early summer

All the above trees will grow quickly if the soil is kept moist but not waterlogged, and they are fertilised with blood and bone when they are first planted and again each successive August and February.

Wattles (Acacia spp.) grow very quickly, especially if they are given plenty of water and regularly fertilised. However, most have a fairly short life and may live only for ten to fifteen years. This needs to be remembered when planning and if possible avoid planting wattles where their death and removal will have an undesirable effect, e.g. wattles should not be used as screen plants unless they are being used for this purpose on a temporary basis. Nevertheless, wattles are important trees to have as many birds will visit them to feed on the insects and other invertebrates which occur on them. It should be noted that two of the eucalypts which I have listed, *E. globulus* and *E. st johnii*, grow to a great height and should be planted only in large gardens. Of the eucalypts, *E. leucoxylon var. macrocarpa* is particularly valuable as its red pendulous flowers will attract many birds. Another valuable eucalypt is *E. cinerea*. Its value as a food plant for birds lies not in its flowers but in the large number of insects and other invertebrates which find the tree attractive – these in turn attract birds.

SHRUBS

The term 'shrub' has been interpreted very loosely and is here applied to plants, such as some of the banksias, which are quite tall and are normally classed as trees.
In the type of garden under discussion shrubs play three important roles: sources of food; places of safety into which birds can dart if disturbed by a predator; and as places in which some species can nest. Some, such as *Melaleuca armillaris*, also make good quick-growing screen plants to hid an undesirable view. However, most *Melaleuca spp*. are brittle and prone to wind damage. Therefore they should not be planted where exposed to strong winds.

Some of the shrubs to be considered which are suitable for planting in Canberra are:

Species	Approx height (m)	Approx width (m)	Approx. Flowering period
Anigozanthos flavidus	1	1	Summer
Banksia collina	1.5	1.5	Late autumn
Banksia ericifolia	4	3	Winter
Banksia integri folia	8	4	Autumn and winter
Banksia marginata	5	3	Autumn and winter
Calathamnus rupestris	1.5	1.5	spring
Callistemon	2.5	3.5	Late summer
Callistemon citrinus	2.5	2.5	Spring and autumn
Correa manni	1	1	Autumn and winter
Correa reflexa	2	1	Autumn and winter
Epacris longiflora	1	1	Summer
Eremophila maculata	1.5	1	Winter and spring
Grevillea arenaria	1.5	1	Most of the year
Grevillea barklyana	5	2	Winter and spring
Grevillea baueri	1.5	1.5	Winter to summer
G.Canberra Gem	2	2	Winter to summer
G.Crosbie Morrison	1.5	3	Winter to spring
G.'Dargon Hill'	2	3	Winter to spring
Grevillea hookeriana	3	3	Spring
Grevillea juniperina	2.5	3	Winter to spring
G. Porinda Constance	3	2	Winter & spring
Grevillea punicea	1.5	1.5	Spring
Grevillea rosmarini	2.5	2.5	Winter & spring
Grevillea sericea	1.5	1	Most of the year
Grevillea victoriae	3	3	Spring to summer
Hakea sericea	3	1.5	winter
Melaleuca armillaris	5	3	Spring
Melaleuca decussata	3	2	Late spring
Melaleuca ericifolia	5	3	Spring
Melaleuca laterita	2.5	2	autumn
Melaleuca	5	2	summer
Melaleuca wilsonii	2.5	2.5	late spring

The flowering periods of many of the above shrubs extend beyond that which is shown. For example, correas, epacrids and grevilleas have a few flowers on them during most of the year. Although the main flowering period for most grevilleas is late winter and spring, many also produce a large number of flowers in early autumn.

When deciding which trees and shrubs to use it is worth trying to ensure that something will be in flower throughout the year, making it more attractive to both yourself and the birds.

EXOTIC TREES AND SHRUBS

It is often thought that to attract native birds a garden must be planted with native trees and shrubs only. This is far from the truth as many native birds, especially parrots, are attracted to some non-native trees and shrubs.

The following are notes regarding exotic trees and shrubs which are attractive to native birds.

Most trees and shrubs will have some attraction to one or more species of native birds. Probably the least attractive group from this point of view is the conifers. Many pines and cypresses are over large for the domestic block, but even the smaller conifers are not attractive to our birds.

With this exception it is difficult to think of any exotic tree or shrub group which is not of advantage. Especially attractive are those subjects which provide fruit, berries or nuts for the increasing numbers of individual native birds which flock into Canberra in the autumn, often remaining over winter. The following are some plants worthy of consideration.

Species or genus	Approx. height	Remarks
Maples (Acer)	various	Deciduous and therefore will not obstruct winter sun. They provide roosts and many species gather insects from them.
Strawberry Tree (Arbutus unedo)	3-4 m	Fruits are attractive.
Birches (Betula)	various	Deciduous (as maples)
Cotoneasters	various	Small birds find the berries attractive
Hawthorns (Cratageus)	shrubs	Some of the parrots use the berries.
Fuchsias	2m	Some of the older tubular flowered forms are visited by honeyeaters
Crab apples (Malus)	small tree to 5 m small trees	The ripe fruit are eaten by silvereyes and honey-eaters.
Rowan Tree and relatives (Sorbus)	Trees to 10 m	All bear crabapple-like fruit which are attractive to many birds. Deciduous.
Tamarisk (Tamarix)	small tree to 6 m	Mostly deciduous species. Insectivorous birds enjoy hunting in them.
Golden Elm (Ulmus procera vanhouttei)	12m	Deciduous. Can be too large for some gardens. Roselias find something attractive in the early spring growth.
Chinese Elm (Ulmus parvifolia)	10m	Deciduous. A most attractive tree. Excellent roosts and favoured at times by insectivorous birds.

Species or genus	Approx. height	Remarks
Pyracantha (many forms)	3m	Thorny. Various coloured berries. Pied currawongs and others enjoy these.
Pomegranate (Punica granatum)	3m	The fruit is enjoyed by many species

Fruit trees generally. Over-ripe fruit is eaten by silvereyes and honeyeaters. If fruit is left on for the birds be careful to remove any remains during winter pruning as mummified fruit is a reservoir of disease. Eastern Rosellas enjoy almonds. Blackberries, raspberries and similar berries are relished by many species but again only when over-ripe.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this article has been largely brought about by the sustained encouragement and advice given to me by Steve Wilson, who also prepared the material regarding exotic plants which attract birds. Grahame Clark and Richard Schodde made helpful comments on the draft.

FURTHER READING

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D. Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, A.C.T. 2615.

FURTHER NOTES ON ATTRACTING BIRDS TO SUBURBAN GARDENS

Steve Wilson

When first thinking of planning a garden remember what birds need for survival – food, nesting places, roosts, refuges from predators and water. Many like to forage for food in grasses. Another thought is that the greatest diversity of species is found in 'edge' country, i.e. where trees and shrubs meet grassland. This type of terrain can be duplicated in the garden.

Obviously any garden of trees, shrubs and lawn will attract birds rather than a garden of shrubs, annuals and lawn.

One can be cunning in garden planning. Often several gardens are being planted at the same time and possibly neighbours might accept suggestions as to which trees and shrubs might be planted (or might accept a plant or two). The point is that if an area of several gardens is properly designed to provide birds with food, nesting places, roosts, refuges and water it will be vastly more successful than if the 'designed' area is merely one suburban block. Look what happens with the large area of the Botanic Gardens, which are an ideal habitat.

Confine spraying of the garden to the absolute minimum – don't worry about the odd insect pest.

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

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ODD OBS

MUSK DUCKS BREEDING

Doug Ross

There is some evidence that at least one pair of Musk Duck *Biziura lobata* bred near the Lake this year. On several occasions during the two weeks to 10 November 1976 I saw a bird that was distinctly smaller than the usual run, at the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek. Unless the Musk Duck throws an occasional dwarf, the small bird must have been of this spring's crop.

THE VERIFICATION OF RECORDS

Editor

The verification of unusual records is a most contentious issue at times in bird watching circles. In the RAOU Newsletter no. 24, August 1975, A.R. McEvey writes:

> It is to be realised, as a moment's reflection will make clear, that no Committee can possibly decide with certainty whether a particular species has or has not been seen by an observer even though it accepts the description received as one given in good faith. The fact that the observer genuinely believes he saw the markings he claims to have seen does not prove that he did see them. Nor is it practicable to draw a line between examples representing possible genuine mistakes and those that do not. Therefore all the Committee can appraise is whether the description received is a description truly appropriate for and sufficiently definitive of the species, taking all the circumstances of the observation into consideration. If it is the submission is accepted; if not, the submission is not accepted. The degree of probability attached to a 'not accepted' submission is another and separate matter.

In the light of experience the Record Appraisal Committee, RAOU, is now confining itself to first Australasian records. Other records will be considered under the Atlas scheme.

The important thing about unusual sightings is the failure of the observer to make adequate notes at the time, with the result that the submitted record is inadequately documented. That applies to first Australian records, unusual Australian records and unusual records on the local scene.

The RAOU requests that records submitted to the Record Appraisal
Committee be in the following form:

RECORD SUBMISSION FORM

Please address this form to: The Secretary, RAOU, 119 Dryburgh St, N. Melbourne, Vic. 3051.

Species: No. of birds:

Age/sex (if known):

Date of first sighting for *this* record:

Where seen (give latitude and longitude if convenient):

Habitat:

Observer's name and address:

Other observers present:

Repeat details above for later sightings:

Total time spent observing species:

Optical aids used (binoculars, telescope etc.):

Estimated distance of observer from bird(s) on the one or more occasions (include estimated height of observer above or below the bird(s), and the height of flight above sea, ground etc. as appropriate):

Sighting conditions (time of day, weather, light, visibility, state of the sea or lake etc.) on the one or more occasions:

What other species present, if any, was/were used for direct comparison?

How far was it/were they from the bird(s) in question?

What experience have you with:
(i) the species in question?
(ii) similar species with which it may be confused?
(iii) the species used for direct comparison?

Was/were the bird(s) (tick where applicable)s

netted?
or seen in the hand?
photographed?
was the bird's voice recorded on tape?
(state *when* in each case):

If you believe you have identified the species, what are the main features on which your identification is based?

What published references have you consulted?
How much confidence do you have in your identification (e.g. 75%, 100%)?

Do you know if any other observer(s) disagree with your identification? If so, who?

For how long have you been a serious observer of birds in the field?

Please attach a copy of the original notes, sketches, measurements etc. made at the time of first or later sightings.

If you add notes made on subsequent occasion(s) of observation, please distinguish these. Please sign each sheet of notes.

Note: If sending a photograph, please send 5 prints if possible, otherwise a single print must be sent backwards and forwards between five people throughout Australia, with resulting delay to appraisal.

You should include your full description of the bird(s), with notes on size, shape, proportions, plumage features, flight pattern, legs, feet, bill and eye details, voice, behaviour, interactions with other species etc. Attention should be drawn to features that you regard as field keys helpful in the identification of this species and, on this occasion, used.

Signed Date

Records of an unusual nature in our area are assessed by a C.O.G. subcommittee and it would be of tremendous assistance if new records for our area and records outside the periods indicated in the Field-list of the birds of Canberra and district could be reported in a similar manner.

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UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF A SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER

Jim McNaughton

On 19 September 1976 at Kelly's Swamp I observed one Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* - as far as I know the only one in the area. It was feeding on the flooded flat area near the creek, and with it was one Black-fronted Dotterel *Charadrius melanops* - there were seven of these at the swamp. I flushed the Sharptail and both it and the Dotterel flew to another part of the flooded area and started feeding. I repeated the flushing twice more with the same result. Each time the Sharptail and the one Dotterel flew together and landed together and immediately started feeding. At no time did they go near the other Dotterels.

SOME BLACK DUCK BROODS

Doug Ross

I noticed a brood of Black Duck *Anas superciliosa* – female and eleven ducklings – on the largest of the reflecting ponds in front of Parliament House, at 8.30 a.m., Monday 8 November 1976. Some Parks and Gardens people said the brood had been seen 'waddling across the lawns' (presumably from Camp Hill or Capital Hill) the week before.

The brood was seen daily up to the Thursday evening. On Friday morning the female and eight ducklings had gone, presumably to the Lake, leaving three ducklings behind. Parks and Gardens people said that on the Thursday most of the ducklings had been capable of jumping in and out of the pond, and that the three left behind were the runts. They very decently provided a plank as a ramp for the ducklings to make their separate way out. The three were not there at lunchtime on Friday – it was not possible to discover what had happened to them. When I saw them in the morning they were obviously in a state of distress and trying to hide under the overhang of the pool edge.

On the other hand, while the full brood was present it seemed quite unconcerned by the lack of shelter and the constant activity about it, which ranged from an F15 aircraft display to maintenance work on the adjacent fountains. The food supply in the pond was obviously sufficient in the short run: the ducklings made obvious growth over the four days while I was observing them.

A second Black Duck brood – female and nine ducklings – was seen at 8.30 a.m. on 10 November 1976 about 25 metres out from the Lake edge opposite the westernmost pontoon in Central Basin. The brood was heading up the Lake.

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

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MORE SUMMER RECORDS OF THE FUSCOUS HONEYEATER

Alastair Morrison

With reference to Barry Baker's notes on the Fuscous Honeyeater *Lichenostomus fuscus* in the A.C.T. (CBN vol. 3 no. 9, January 1977), during the period December 1976 to early February 1977 this species has been found in six localities in the Orroral, Nursery Creek, Gudgenby area and there was definite evidence of breeding.

The species was first seen in Nursery Creek in open woodland on the south-east side of the meadow facing the Bridle track entrance to the valley (map reference about 762512 on the A.C.T. 1:100 000 map). Here were several birds, all black-billed except for one with a yellow gape. On 28 January 1977 a nest with young was found and the parent birds were feeding the progeny. The nest was about 3 m up near the tip of a eucalypt branch and although the foliage was far from dense, the nest was remarkably difficult to see. It contained at least two fairly well-grown young.

The species was abundant in the woodland by the roadside to the east of the Orroral River (MR about 800515) and all were black-billed except one. It was also common in the locality recorded by Barry Baker, in the eucalypts fringing the start of the Gudgenby Road (MR 817537). All were black-billed except for one decidedly juvenile-looking bird which was being fed by a black-billed parent.

The species was common at a creek crossing on the old Boboyan Road (MR 776350). Again it was seen on the old Gudgenby Road just beyond a clearing (MR 826457) and all were black-billed except for one with a yellow gape. Finally at the Gudgenby end of the same track on 9 February on the western slope leading down to Dry Creek (MR 815433) there was a pair feeding three well-grown young. The nest, 5 m up a eucalypt sapling, was attached to such slender twigs that the young seemed in danger of being tipped out.

The impression is that the species is a summer resident living a semi-colonial existence in certain well-defined areas, but move away from these areas and the species is not seen. All these areas are open woodland and close to running water and except for Nursery Creek the Dusky *Woodswallow Artamus cyanopterus* was present in all places. The Honeyeaters were very active, rather familiar, and

were foraging for insects. They continually called to each other. It is inferred that more such colonies will be found in the southern parts of the A.C.T.

Most of the birds seen were black-billed but some had the yellow gape and eye ring. Seen at a distance the pale yellow neck marking is not always conspicuous. The birds have not been well served in bird portraiture which tends to show them as being darker than they appear in the field. There is, however, a good colour photograph of the yellow-gaped form in the Reader's Digest compendium (1976) and Slater (1974) has plates of the two forms which are accurate.

References

Baker, B. (1977) 'Summer records of the Fuscous Honeyeater in the A.C.T., Canberra Bird Notes 3, 9, p. 16.

Reader's Digest (1976) Complete book of Australian birds, Reader's Digest, Sydney.

Slater, P. (1974) A field guide to Australian birds: passerines, Rigby, Adelaide.

A. Morrison, 26 Canning Street, Ainslie, A.C.T. 2602.

Note: This article records the first breeding records of the Fuscous Honeyeater in the A.C.T. - Ed.

ODD OBS.

KING PARROTS *Steve Wilson*

The King Parrots are back. Every winter they flock to Yarralumla and are to be found about Weston Park, the Yarralumla Nursery, the suburban streets back to the shopping area and even beyond. This phenomenon raises questions. Why does this species flock in Yarralumla when it is quite rare elsewhere in Canberra? Is it a special food? Casual observations of feeding habits appear to show that they feed on trees that are common elsewhere. So what is the attraction? Regular observations on the feeding habits of these King Parrots should provide interesting information.

THE RAOU ATLAS: HOW ABOUT ADOPTING A FEW SQUARES?

John Penhallurick

To lighten somewhat the burden of work of the Regional Organiser for the Atlas, Grahame Clark has asked me to help in organising regular coverage of the area between 35° and 37° South and east of 149° East.

We already have offers of regular reports from some 10′ squares, and of course will receive irregular reports from many others. The ideal would be to have, for each 10′ square, an offer to visit the area at least every three months for a year. We are unlikely to achieve this, not least because of the inaccessibility of some areas. Still, in an effort to get as intensive a coverage as possible, would any bird watcher care to 'adopt′ any of the following squares (the coordinates are for the centre of a 10" square)?

Co-ordinates	*Vicinity*	*Co-ordinates*	*Vicinity*
35°35', 149°05'	Naas	36°25', 149°15'	Rock Flat/One Tree Hill
35°55', 149°05'	Mt Clear/Bredbo	36°35', 149°15'	Nimmitabel
36°05', 149°05'	Muddah Lake/ Cooma-Rosedale Rd	36°45', 149°15'	Jincumbilly/ Bibbenluke
36°25', 149°05'	Myalla Lake	36°55', 149°15'	Bombala
36°35', 149°05'	Wog Wog/ Avon Lake	35°05', 149°25'	Lake George
		35°15', 149°25'	Bungendore
36°45', 149°05'	Bungarby/ Gunning Grach	35°25', 149°25'	Hoskinstown
36°55', 149°05'	Cambalong	35°35', 149°25'	Captains Flat
35°35', 149°15'	Burra Creek	35°45', 149°25'	Boolboolma Crossing
35°45', 149°15'	Tinderry	35°55', 149°25'	Jerangle
35°55', 149°15'	Bredbo River	36°05', 149°25' } 36°15', 149°25'	Numeralla
36°05', 149°15'	Chakola		
36°15', 149°15'	E. of Cooma	36°25', 149°25'	Kydra

Co-ordinates	*Vicinity*
36°35', 149°25'	Bemboka - Nimmitabel Rd
36°45', 149°25'	E. of Bibbenluke
36°55', 149°25'	Cathcart
35°05', 149°35'	E. of Tarago
35°15', 149°35'	Kings Highway between Bungendore & Manar
35°25', 149°35'	Hoskinstown - Braidwood Rd
36°05', 149°35' } 36°15', 149°35' } 36°25', 149°35'	inaccessible country - Mts Jillicambra, Wadbilliga & Kydra
36°35', 149°35'	Bemboka
36°45', 149°35'	Tantawangallo
36°55', 149°35'	Wyndham
35°05', 149°45'	Lake Bathurst
35°15', 149°45'	Manar
35°35', 149°45' } 35°45', 149°45'	Araluen
35°55', 149°45'	S. of Araluen
36°05', 149°45'	Belowra
36°15', 149°45'	Yowrie
36°25', 149°45'	Puen Buen
36°35', 149°45'	Brogo

Co-ordinates	*Vicinity*
36°45', 149°45'	Candelo
36°55', 149°45'	Lochiel
35°05', 149°55' } 35°15', 149°55'	Charleyong
35°25', 149°55'	Mongarlowe
36°15', 149°55'	Mt Dromedary
36°25', 149°55'	Cobargo/Quaama
36°35', 149°55'	Angledale
36°45', 149°55'	Bega/Tathra
36°55', 149°55'	Merimbula
35°05', 150°05'	Nerriga
35°15', 150°05'	Corang
35°25', 150°05'	Currockbilly Mt
35°35', 150°05'	Currowan/Nelligen
36°15', 150°05'	Narooma
35°25', 150°05'	Bermagui South
36°35', 150°05'	Murrah Lake
35°05', 150°15'	Mt Tianjarra
35°15', 150°25'	Conjola
35°35', 150°25'	Kioloa
35°15', 150°35'	Bendalong
35°05', 150°45'	Jervis Bay

some of these are on well-travelled routes to the coast, and should be quite easy to cover.

If you are interested, don't be put off by any fears that you are not sufficiently experienced. For this scheme, the birds that are regularly present in an area are more important than the rare species and vagrants.

Regular visits to an area are an excellent way of getting to know birds. Grahame Clark and I will be very happy to help with any questions or problems you may have.

I would be glad to hear of any offers of coverage, and can be contacted during business hours at (Canberra) 52 2113 or after hours at 58 5428.

J. Penhallurick, 86 Bingley Crescent, Fraser, A.C.T. 2615.

WATER BIRDS IN SOUTHERN N.S.W.

Doug Ross

Do you know the ponds at Maffra (near Dalgety), N.S.W.? On 24 January 1977 one couldn't put a stick between the birds.

Black Swan – several hundreds
Coot – several hundreds
Grebe (species not determined) – approx. 100
Wood Duck – approx. 20
Mountain Duck – 10
Musk Duck – at least 12, all males
White-faced Heron – 12
White-necked Heron – 1
White Ibis – 1
Masked Plover – approx. 50

Two Whistling Kites were also present. Large flocks of ravens (Little Raven? Ed.) were seen in the rock areas near Dalgety – 50 to 100 in each and many flocks were seen.
The area Berridale, Bombala, Nimmitabel seems to be really worth working over. There is a vast amount of water and wetland, far more than the general appearance of the country suggests, with water birds all over the place in small numbers apart from the Maffra type concentrations .

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

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OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

Bungendore has a monthly newspaper called (would you believe it) the Bungendore Mirror, published on the first of each month. The April issue had an article about sightings of a creature (s) on Lake George. Apparently the things had scaly blue feet with claws on the end and the hind limbs were like modified paddles (presumably to assist in locomotion) . The large head of the creature had a mouth that opened at least two feet wide (according to one witness) and was viciously hooked on the upper part. The face had some orange and black colouration and the eyes were surrounded by a yellow fleshy ring. The paper even stated that this beast had emerged from the water and left footprints on a sandbar in the lake! So if you are going to Lake George you have been warned (for what it is worth)!

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The Bird Observers Association of Tasmania have published their 5th Project Report (or annual bird list) . Copies of this report and previous ones can be obtained from Dr O. Newman, 58 Sinclair Ave, West Moonal, Tas. 7009; price $1.00 each.

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Audubon Bird Callers are available (priced at $4.20) from York Instrument Services, P.O. Box 1566P, G.P.O. Melbourne, Vic. 3001. For those who do not know the Audubon Bird Caller, it is an instrument with which one can make squeaky noises to attract birds. Those who know the caller split into two violently opposed camps –those who believe it works and those who do not. I leave you to decide for yourselves whether to try one or not.

*****

Did you know that the novel Animal Farm was not George Orwell's only interest in wildlife? It appears that he was also something of a bird watcher. Recently I was reading his autobiography Homage to Catalonia which covers his service in the Spanish Civil War as a P.O.U.M. militiaman on various fronts in northern Spain. He first

served on the front near Zaragoza in a very mountainous area and he describes the lack of birdlife since there were only magpies, partridges and a few eagles around. He then goes on to compare stray bullets flying overhead to redshanks whistling, so he must have had a reasonable knowledge of birds. If I were in such circumstances I feel I would, rapidly give up watching birds and start watching earthworms (or ants)!

*****

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is often quoted as an example of how a successful bird society can grow if it hits the right public nerve at the right time. Its growth rate really has been staggering; from 31 000 members in 1967 to 250 000 in 1976. Not only is their membership strong but their mail order sales figures are staggering - a net profit of almost a quarter of a million pounds for the year 1975-76, that is on the sales of nest boxes, books, jigsaws and so on. One final statistic: they own sixty-eight reserves!

*****

Were you aware that Dr Schodde has added a new bird to the Australian list? In his Interim List of Australian Songbirds he lists the Black-faced Cuckoo-strike. I am wondering whether it is related to that other bird mentioned on the contents page of Emu vol. 69 part 4 in a paper by H.L. Bell, 'Status of the White-winged Thriller in Papua New Guinea'. Presumably the former bird will actually hit you when it swoops at you whereas the latter just misses.

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Footnote for those who have not already guessed: the creature described in Lake George is in fact genuine and its beak can hold more than its belly can!

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BOOBOOK OWL *Doug Ross*

A Boobook Owl was heard calling for about 15 minutes from a point close to the Caley — Carnegie Crescents intersection in Narrabundah at 3.30 a.m. on 14 January 1977. The call was quite loud, so presumably the bird was close by. Another bird was heard calling less close by early in the morning of 28 January 1977.

BOOK MARKET

WANTED

One of our members would like to acquire the following books:
Chapin, *Birds of the Belgian Congo*, parts 1 and 2
Bannerman, *Birds of the Atlantic Islands*, part 1 only
Bannerman, *Birds of the British Isles*, all 12 volumes

If you can help please drop a line to Book market, P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608 giving details and prices required. Alternatively ring G.S. Clark on (062) 54 1279.

FOR SALE

New members might be interested to know that copies of the booklet Field list of the birds of Canberra and district are available from the above address at 40 cents each. This publication lists the birds of our area and gives some idea of their seasonal abundance and habitat requirements. Beginners will find a copy almost essential to assist in verifying identifications of birds.

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ODD OBS

BLACK DUCK v. SWAMP HARRIER *Jim McNaughton*

On 16 November 1976 I saw a Black Duck and seven young at Kelly's Swamp. A Swamp Harrier came in and made several attacks. The parent duck fought off the first attack and the noise she made attracted two other Black Ducks which joined in and assisted in repelling the Harrier.

LITTLE FALCONS v. BROWN HAWK *Jim McNaughton*

On 18 July 1976 I observed two Little Falcons at Kelly's Swamp attacking a Brown Hawk which they finally drove out of the area.

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