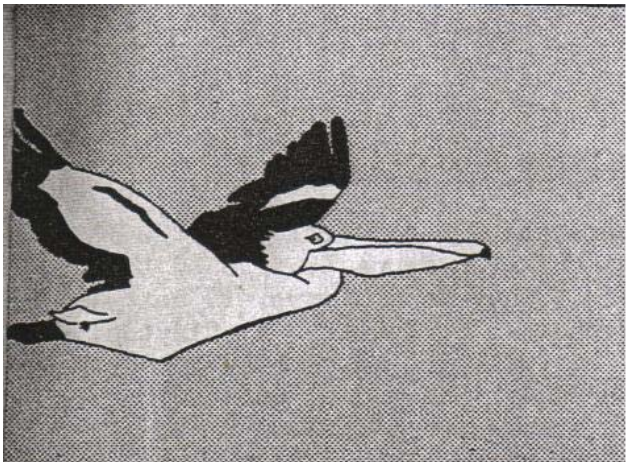

Canberra bird notes

Volume 3 Number 9 January 1977

EDITORIAL

SCIENTIFIC COLLECTING - GOOD OR BAD?

This was the subject of the meeting in October; four papers were given and it proved impossible to terminate the subsequent discussion until after 10.15 p.m.! In the opinion of many members it was one of the better C.O.G. meetings; questions were many and very varied and most members present participated in the discussion.

This is a most important subject and one that needs a full airing. It is intended to publish the four initial papers and to add material arising from the discussions. Some points which were not fully covered at the meeting will be elaborated and comment will be welcomed regarding material published.

Obviously this material will be published over several issues. If you missed the meeting (or were there) it's not too late to have your say, so please write to the Editor.

SCIENTIFIC COLLECTING - GOOD OR BAD?

COLLECTING FOR TAXONOMIC RESEARCH - IS IT STILL NECESSARY?

Richard Schodde

Considering the subject matter of this paper, how about a provocative opening gambit, like collecting today is a dirty, ten-letter word. I am not here to evaluate that judgment nor to consider its philosophical implications. Rather I want to draw your attention to the crippling situation into which taxonomists working on Australian birds are falling, because of the stigma and restrictions attached to collecting and to collections.

Taxonomic research today employs many specialised and often sophisticated techniques: comparative anatomy, hybridisation of the genetic material of animal cells (DNA), analysis of blood and egg-white proteins, studies of the form of chromosomes, and the analysis of parameters by computer. But all of these techniques rest, like the traditional analysis of series of dry skins, upon the availability of collected specimens. In a nutshell, it means no specimens, then no data, no research, no taxonomic results.

Of course, there are specimens available, and indeed thousands of study skins of Australian species in Australian and overseas museums. Because of this and a widely held misconception here that all the basic alpha-level taxonomy on Australian birds has been done, it is often thought that further collecting is unnecessary, at least in any comprehensive way. After such paragons as Gould, Mathews, Mayr and Keast made their assessments and dispersed their opinions, what could there be left to add? I mention this to paraphrase some current opinion, not to disparage these excellent ornithologists, none of whom made any claims about producing a final solution or a last judgment. The undeniable fact is that now, a hundred years after Gould, we know no more than he did about the nearest relatives of Australian birds or where they came from.

At the level of genus and above, there is an enormous state of taxonomic flux, as the work of Professor Charles Sibley on egg-white proteins and Dr Peter Ames on the passerine syrinx has revealed. If Gould and others felt safe in relating our robin flycatchers to the old world

Muscicapines and our acanthizine warblers to the Eurasian sylviids, we no longer do; nor are we sure with what else they have affinities. Sibley's work has refocused attention on the questions of the relationships of the major elements in the Australian land bird fauna that taxonomists have been glossing over for years. The basic comparative studies needed to clarify these problems have simply never been done; nor are the prospects promising of this work being done.

At the level of species and below, the taxonomic picture is a little clearer. Here the work of Gould, Mathews, Mayr and others can be hardly more complete than the material on which it was based, and it is to their credit that they estimated and even predicted so consistently well. But the material they had to work with, large in number of specimens, was generally inadequate in its information and scrappy in its geographical representation. To produce a properly comprehensive and long-standing survey of speciation and specific and subspecific delimitation, the series of specimens being studied must be accurately sexed and aged, must carry the precise place and date of each collection, and must be comprehensively representative of distribution and variation. There are no collections of Australian birds today, separately or collectively, that fill these requirements.

Because of the dearth of accurately sexed or even just sexed specimens in Australian museums, the marked sexual dimorphism in the two species of Hylacola has never been emphasised in the literature. Females are only about two-thirds to three-quarters the size of males, have creamy instead of white breasts, and thin instead of broad drop-shaped ventral black streaks. This pattern of dimorphism plus a varicoloured throat is repeated in the Field-wren, and the varicoloured throat occurs again in the Redthroat. These characters in common are among a number that convinced me that these ‘genera’ should be lumped. It is, however, eminently sensible to treat them as subgenera and this is how I expect them to appear in the Checklist.

Gaps in geographical representation are much more serious; so serious that published geographies of subspeciation are in reality geographies of collecting, and may bear little relation to the situation in nature, as has been shown by Julian Ford and Shane Parker for the

Grey Shrike-thrush group. It is only through the infrequent efforts of some Australian collectors and the Harold Hall

expeditions over the last decade or so that we have come to realise how many forms may be connected across and around the continent, and where critical zones of meeting or intergradation lie. Comprehensive sampling in the zones of intergradation should be the next phase of study but there is little prospect of that at the moment. The sorts of situations one finds in zones of intergradation or meeting are, of course, hybrid swarms, stepped clines or ecological parapatry, and each requires its own taxonomic solution. How inadequate present collections are in providing data about these situations is well shown in the Striated Pardalote. I have heard it said that the Black-headed and Eastern Striated Pardalotes overlap widely without interbreeding in north-eastern New South Wales. Specimens in Australian museums from the critical coastal region between Newcastle and the Queensland border are no more than half a dozen or so. The four in one major museum, the whole four, are all hybrids. What a tantalising circumstance; it is almost like having an answer without proof. On top of this, recent collecting in inland western and central Australia has revealed a resident population there of yellow-tipped pardalotes with broad white wing stripes. The limited material we have suggests that yellow-tipped birds mix with red-tipped birds in that area. This adds strength to the supposition that the inheritance of red and yellow tips is controlled by only one or two Mendelian factors. But, of course, more specimen material and further study will be needed to demonstrate this conclusively.

Such are the collections that Australian taxonomists have at their disposal today, poor in data, deficient in geographical representation, mostly gathered before 1930 and, because of poor storage, now foxing and fading. They are being added to, but in an extremely limited way. Those few taxonomists who are collecting know well the geographical gaps and explore them selectively as their infrequent opportunities and impecuniary circumstances permit. The consequence of this is that the review, updating and correcting of the taxonomic status of species or species groups drags on with piecemeal changes in names. If that is unsatisfactory to you, I can assure you it is the bane of a checklist compiler. If, on the other hand, we want an up-to-date and even taxonomy, with

a moderately settled scientific nomenclature for Australian birds, then we will have to accept, even encourage, selective sampling of the

Australian bird fauna throughout the whole of the continent.

Some may not see this as sufficient justification to kill birds. It is not my task to argue that point. None of us, I'm sure, like the killing of native animals. I personally believe that no birds should be taken without good reason, and the best reason I can think of is one that will help their future survival. I shall return to that point later. No one, taxonomist or otherwise, should do any collecting that will endanger the survival of any species of even any local population. It is sometimes said that because farmers indirectly kill so much wildlife by destroying habitat, scientist-collectors should be allowed to take the specimens they need. But if, as a result, a species or subspecies or local population can be pushed over the brink to oblivion, that is just not good enough. It is important to remember that, while the farmer kills animals unwittingly, the scientist knows, or should know, exactly what he is doing.

In terms of the number of Australian birds, the total needs for taxonomic research are less than modest and, in fact, almost minuscule. The rarer or endangered species are usually those of least taxonomic significance, at least in studies of speciation in which series of skins are needed. To study speciation in the average passerine, a series of ten males, ten females and several juvenile stages is needed from about every 1000-3000 square miles, except in zones of meeting or intergradation where larger samples are statistically necessary. From what is known of the dynamics of natural populations, about birth rate, death rate, longevity, carrying capacity of the environment, density-dependent mortality and the production of surpluses, collecting on such a scale can be expected to have no effect whatever on survival. For example, the number of surplus birds produced each year can be estimated by the formula X = T x N Xc x F - 2T/Y where:

X = surplus birds produced each year
T = breeding birds per unit of area
N = number of broods per pair per year
C = average clutch sizes
F = percentage of eggs resulting in fledged young

Y = number of additional breeding seasons (average) a bird will survive.

We don't have all these data yet for any Australian species but if the formula is applied to Margaret Nice's

study of the Song Sparrow, we get a theoretical figure of about 685 surplus birds of that one species being produced each year per square mile. It is likely that similarly small Australian passerines, which are on average longer lived, raise fewer broods per year, and may perhaps be affected by other factors, will have smaller surpluses. These surpluses, nevertheless, will probably be more in one year than a taxonomist needs in fifty years.

Collecting for taxonomic research, if carried out selectively and judiciously, actually contributes information that can be essential in ensuring the survival of a species or local population. The basic information available for the conservation of Australian birds today comes from biological survey and survey for impact statements. The objectives of these surveys is to discover what species of birds occur in the area being surveyed, what habitats these species live in, when each species breeds and where it wanders and, last but not least, how unique each species is. If this information is needed quickly, as it often is, there will be no chance to gather breeding data on all species by simple observation; instead, specimens can be collected at any time in seasonal climates which, from the condition of their gonads, fattiness and moult, will allow the reconstruction of annual breeding cycles. For my own avifaunal reconnaissance surveys in the Northern Territory, I have found that three or four specimens per species per year, taken at different times of each year over several years, are sufficient when combined with observations of singing, display and nesting.

As for uniqueness, how is it judged or measured? It is measured by taxonomic research. Only taxonomic research judges how distinct any population is, and classifies it accordingly, for use by other scientists, laymen and conservationists.

Dr R. Schodde, 30 Bamford Street, Hughes, A.C.T. 2605.

SOME ASPECTS OF THE NEED FOR ADEQUATE CONTROL

Grahame Clark

On the surface the title question seems to be a simple one with a simple answer - if it is for scientific purposes it must be good.

However recently people both inside and outside the so-called 'scientific community' have started to question whether everything the tag 'scientific' is applied to is necessarily (a) scientific and (b) good.

This exact situation has now been reached in collecting, where for so long the tag 'scientific' has been used to head off criticism. Indeed by using that tag the following situations have arisen.

1. An internationally famous ornithologist has broken the fauna laws of his own and other countries. (This is an example from outside Australia, the only one I shall quote, my other examples being Australian.)
2. Collectors have operated with photocopies of authorities.
3. Collectors have operated within nature reserves.
4. Collectors operating on behalf of institutions have had
   private collections themselves, thus raising the obvious question of which material goes where.
5. Specimens have been rendered useless due to:
   a) improper preparation on collection;
   b) deterioration due to bad storage; and
   c) being "lost" due to bad cataloguing and/or inability to house specimens properly.

It is surely time that we as a pressure group of bird watchers and/or ornithologists (call us whatever name you like) ought to apply pressure on the various levels of government, both State and Federal, to ensure that such situations do not continue to arise. Also the collectors themselves should be applying similar pressure from their direction if they wish to be taken seriously and evolve some order out of the present chaos. It will be a good test of their intentions to see if they do so.

It is interesting to note that where there is a commercial interest involved in fauna matters State and Federal authorities can get together and regulate matters to some degree, for example the Australian Waterfowl

Conference. Why is it impossible to do so when it is not money but possibly parts of our heritage at stake? Bringing order into collecting is not just a matter of standardising collection procedures and laws but also of establishing communication between collecting institutions to ensure that collections are complementary rather than competitive. Surely we have gone past the point where specimen collections are similar to stamp collections, yet the point is often made with some justification that rare species are far better represented in certain collections than common species. Is there a scientific basis for this or is it rather an acquisitive basis?

Most of this discussion has been centred around the problem of taxonomic collection, yet in numbers of specimens taken taxonomic collecting comes a very poor second to the so-called ecological collecting. Yet it is next to impossible to find out any details about ecological collecting and the stories emanating from various areas of Australia about this matter are so horrific that they must surely be untrue. But when there is no way of checking these stories by using existing controls it is only human nature to fear the worst.

One final point to consider is the question of emotion. The difference between a man and a machine is that a man has emotions and no enterprise he is involved in can be completely unaffected by that fact. A world without emotion would be a poor place indeed. However in preparing the above I have endeavoured not to base the whole argument on emotion. I leave the reader to decide whether I have succeeded.

In summary I think it is fair to say that bird watchers are not complete idiots; they can see that there are no effective controls and they want some. It is now up to the people involved in collecting to get together and formulate those controls. The longer they delay the more bad feeling will be created. To quote an old adage: ' Justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done'; and it must be seen to be done not only by the scientist but by that proverbial legal man in the street, ‘the man on the Clapham omnibus’. He does after all indirectly pay for the majority of the collecting and why should he not know and have a say in how his money is

being used?

G.S. Clark, 24 Adair Street, Scullin, A.C.T. 2614.

C.O.G. EXCURSION TO COCOPARRA RANGE

Two reports were provided by members who participated in this rather ambitious long weekend trip. Both are appended. - Ed.

Richard Schodde

The October weekend camp-out in the Cocoparra Range near Griffith, New South Wales, was very well attended. Most arrived during the preceding Friday afternoon and evening and others later during the Saturday. Informality was the keynote of the program, and groups came and went and visited various habitats in the Cocoparras, swamplands about Griffith and nearby mallee at Pulletop as they wished; several even travelled as far west as Goolgowi, to a tank 5 km west on the Hay road where the Land Rail, Spotted and Marsh Crakes, Brown Bittern and four species of Wood-swallow were seen.

Most members spent Saturday morning exploring the hilly woodlands of the Cocoparras near the camp site at Woolshed Flat. The Black-eared Cuckoo, Gilbert's Whistler and Yellow-rumped Pardalote were highlights. During the afternoon Lake Wyangan was visited under the guidance of Mrs Val Jenkins of Yenda. There the Ground Cuckoo-shrike, Little Grassbird, Emu, Marsh Crake, Great Crested Grebe and Blue-billed Duck were seen. After a pleasant evening around the campfire and a thunderstormy night, the party spent Sunday morning checking mist nets (which had caught the Inland Thornbill and Owlet Nightjar) and preparing to visit the Pulletop mallee reserve where some camped. At Pulletop, on Sunday afternoon and Monday morning, the Chestnut Quail-thrush, Blue-winged Parrot, Southern Scrub-robin and nesting Superb Parrots enlivened interest. Altogether about 160 species were recorded.

Dr R. Schodde, 30 Bamford Street, Hughes, A.C.T. 2605.

Kay Anway

During the October long weekend a group of thirty people (including eight children, two couples from Sydney and a local bird watcher from Yenda, Mrs Val Jenkins) enjoyed a pleasant and rewarding camp-out at Cocoparra National Park near Griffith, N.S.W. Most groups

arrived Friday evening and stayed until Monday morning, 4 October 1976. A wide variety of birds were observed, and from 90 to 150 species were seen, depending on how many areas were visited.

Cocoparra National Park yielded some 50 species, with the Rainbow Bee-eater, White-browed Babbler and White-plumed Honeyeater plentiful about the camp site. Both Peaceful and Bar-shouldered Doves were calling, and also the Crested Bellbird. Mist nets were put up and the catch consisted of one long-eared bat, Eastern Yellow Robin, White-eared Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, Broad-tailed Thornbill and a delightful little Owlet Nightjar which had its photograph taken innumerable times and was the general centre of attention until released.

Saturday afternoon most groups drove to nearby Lake Wyangan for a look at water birds. Besides many Black Swans, ducks, cormorants, egrets and ibis of several species, the lake region provided a view of the Marsh Crake, Pied Stilt, with White-breasted Woodswallows flying overhead; at least 20 species in all. One group visited another lake and observed as many as 40 Spotted Crakes along with Marsh Crakes.

On Sunday a visit was made to Pulletop Nature Reserve, nearly 350 acres of fenced-off mallee scrub. Brown Songlarks were singing in the adjacent paddocks, but the mallee itself revealed such species as the Red-capped Robin, Variegated and Splendid Wren, Yellow-rumped Pardalote, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Mallee Ringneck and Blue-winged Parrot, as well as the more elusive Shy Hylacola and Southern Scrub-robin. Several malleefowl mounds were found, some of which were active judging by fresh footprints and scratch marks, but no one actually saw this species. Mist nets revealed the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Grey Shrike-thrush and the very abundant Yellow-plumed Honeyeater.

Even the way home was eventful, with a noon stop 21 km west of Rankin Springs yielding the Superb Parrot, Red-rumped Parrot, Apostlebird, Grey-crowned Babbler, Cockatiel and a lovely Pink Cockatoo.

The weekend provided a lot of fresh air, a bit of night rain, lots of good company and new birds for life lists - all the way from 80 new species for a beginner to one new species for an 'old-timer’.

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

THE AUSTRALASIAN SEABIRD GROUP

(Reprinted by request from the A.S.G. Newsletter - Ed.)

In order to foster further trans-Tasman co-operation in the study of seabirds, our Group has increased its sphere of interest to include the seas around Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea and their oceanic islands. Hence the change of name from Australian to Australasian Seabird Group of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. Two New Zealanders have been co-opted to our organising committee and they will also act as regional representatives for New Zealand.

Subscriptions for New Zealand members will be payable in NZ$ to our Wellington address (P.O. Box 12397, Wellington North) and for all other members in Aust. $ to our Canberra address (P.O. Box 65, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608). Correspondence should continue to go to our Canberra address where material for the Newsletter will be assembled. Matters pertaining to the Seabird Mapping Scheme will Continue to be dealt with by the New Zealand Wildlife Service in Wellington. The Newsletter will be printed and distributed from Wellington.

Survey forms for birds washed up on Australian beaches and for Australian seabird island surveys are available from our Canberra address and should be returned there on completion. Beach patrols are organised regionally and the initial results are published in the local bird journals. Copies of the completed beach survey forms will be held for further analysis by the regional organisers and at Canberra. Beach surveys in New Zealand will continue to be co-ordinated by the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. The island survey forms should assist the preparation and updating of the Seabird Island Reports which are being published by the Australian Bird Bander. Copies of the completed island reports will be held by the regional organisers, the Editor of the Australian Bird Bander, and at our Canberra address.

We hope to improve the recording of offshore movements of seabirds from land, sea and air, and of prehistoric deposits of seabird material. We would appreciate comments from our readers in a form suitable for publication in our Newsletter.

We welcome the formation of the Southern African Seabird Group. Other seabird groups that we are in contact with are those of the International Ornithological Congress, United Kingdom, and Pacific.

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DISPLAYS BY THE MALE MUSK DUCK

Doug Ross

The breeding season of the Musk Duck *Biziura lobata* is described as 'very regular September to November' in *Birds in the Australian High Country* (Frith ed.); while 'most males' are said to be 'sexually active in the period from mid May until the end of September' in Waterfowl in Australia (Frith H.J.).

If displaying is any indication of sexual activity, there are some precocious males in Canberra, or Canberra's climate and rainfall may have something to answer for.

Males have been seen displaying regularly on the Central Basin of Lake Burley Griffin from late January to mid May. The birds concerned had lobes ranging from the barely emergent to the full moon. Displays have been seen at all hours of the day and, by lamplight, after sunset.

Only twice has there been an apparent response. On one occasion, the two birds were seen to circle each other for about five minutes; it was not possible to see whether copulation occurred as the birds subsequently moved out of a pool of lamplight into darkness. On the second occasion, the female was seen to swim steadily in a straight line to the displaying male and the birds then to circle each other but other duties made it necessary to break off the observation at that point.

The display is highly spectacular and it has been reported to me that tourists have been both entertained and sometimes alarmed by it.

Frith gives a very good description of the display activity. I have still to hear the 'plonking' noise he reports but the whistle has been a constant feature of the displays I have seen and often was the first notice given that a display was occurring.

My observations suggest at the climax of the activity, when whistling begins, the vigour of the kicks

and their

frequency drops away. The process of bringing the tail feathers over the back can also be very much more pronounced and spectacular than Frith suggests. A mass of light and dark feathers is brought up and over to a degree that seems worthy of a contortionist - and seems to be the only occasion when the duck has a claim to beauty.

Other aspects of display I have not seen reported include a partial rising out of the water, assisted by wing beats and, on one occasion, a fit of very vigorous, short dives interspersed with rising out of the water and stuttering across the surface of the water. Skittering is also a favoured form of avoiding work boats by musk ducks that have failed to notice the boats in time to dive.

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

ODD OBS

GAPE BARREN GEESE — John Shankey

On Saturday 15 May 1976 two Cape Barren Geese *Cereopsis novaehollandiae* were seen near the large dam at Uriarra Homestead.

EMU ON THE CORIN DAM ROAD — John L. McKean

On 3 July 1976 an Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae* was seen feeding alongside the road to Corin Dam some 4 km up from its junction with the Tidbinbilla-Tharwa road.

Editorial note: It must be presumed that both the Emu and the Cape Barren Geese originated from the populations introduced into and breeding at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. There is some possibility of feral populations of these species becoming established in this area (re-established in the case of the Emu).

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

The following item is taken from the November-December 1973 copy of *International Wildlife*.

African ostriches and Australian emus have been successfully acclimatised in the Ukraine, where for the past eighty years they have lived and nested on the open steppe. Except during severe winters when they take shelter in huts built by local naturalists, they live and breed without interference from man.

Unlike ostriches in Africa, Ukrainian ostrich females, after laying a tremendous number of eggs, lose all subsequent interest in either hatching them or raising the chicks. These duties are delegated entirely to the male.

The ostrich's universally weird appearance is enough to startle anybody seeing one for the first time. An old Ukrainian peasant happened to come across some ostriches one day on the steppe. Dumbfounded, she made the sign of the cross in the Orthodox manner and claimed, 'So this is what those godless Bolsheviks have done to our chickens! For shame!'

- George St George, Roving Editor

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Whilst still on the international scene, a tip for those about to travel. If you are going to Scotland and plan to be in the Aberdeen area, stay at the Udny Arms Hotel, Newburgh. It is next to the Sands of Forvie Nature Reserve and the University of Aberdeen Culterty Field Station. The Hotel is one of those rarities in today's age - service is freely and happily given. Not only that but the bird watching is excellent too - the icing on the cake!

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The Bird Observers Club have published a leaflet *Binoculars -choice and use* which covers exactly that. If you want to know more about binoculars £hen this little publication will help you.

The cost is 30 cents plus 20 cents postage and it is obtainable from the B.O.C. at P.O. Box 185, Nunawading, Vic. 3131.

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Tess Kloot of 8/114 Shannon Street, Box Hill North, Vic. 3129 has written to C.O.G. as follows:

In the course of preparing *A Bio-bibliography of Australian Ornithology: 1951-1975* I am gathering a great deal of biographical data on many of the people who, in numerous ways, have contributed to Australian ornithology.

I am happy to report that people are already drawing on this material for a variety of purposes, and I would like to advise that the information is available should it be required.

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A short word of reminder: the RAOU Atlas Field Scheme starts from 1 January 1977. If you are reading this you are able enough and interested enough to contribute - or else you would not be getting *Canberra Bird Notes*. So if you have not already written to RAOU Atlas, 119 Dryburgh Street, North Melbourne, Vic. 3051, do so now for details of how you can help.

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Keep a green bough in your heart and the singing bird will come.

- Chinese proverb

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ODD OBS

SILVEREYES DRINKING *Doug Ross*

After a very frosty night in July, at 8 a.m. several Silvereyes were seen perched on the telephone line near my house. They were bending forward and taking something from the underside of the wire. As the likelihood of there being insects on the wire at such a time and in such a season was slim, the most probable explanation of

the birds' behaviour is that they were catching the drops as the frozen deposits of water on the wire thawed out.

SUMMER RECORDS OF THE FUSCOUS HONEYEATER IN THE A.C.T.

Barry Baker

Lane (1974) has shown that the Fuscous Honeyeater, *Lichenostomus fuscus*, 'has a black bill, black gape and a black or darkish eye-ring when breeding, after which the colours change to yellow gape, horn to yellow base to the bill, which has a black or dark tip, and a yellow eye-ring'.

In the A.C.T. the Fuscous Honeyeater has been regarded as an autumn and spring passage migrant. Anon. (1971) shows the species as being present from April to mid November, regularly recorded in autumn and spring and uncommon during winter. Wilson in Frith (1969) says: 'The species does not appear to breed in the Southern Tablelands area. While in other places it is reported to be sedentary and occasionally nomadic, in the Brindabella Ranges and about Canberra it assumes the unexpected role of a passage migrant in autumn and spring, with a few individuals remaining over winter. There are no summer records from the region'.

The presence of this species in the high country of the A.C.T. during February 1976, therefore, appears worthy of note. On 1 February 1976 F. Crome and H.B. Gill (pers. comm.) recorded the Fuscous Honeyeater as common at the intersection of the Gudgenby Road with the Orroral Valley Tracking Station Access Road (35°39 S, 149°01 E). The habitat is typical sub-alpine woodland, characterised by a ground cover of small shrubs and herbs, with woodland dominated by *Eucalyptus pauciflora*. All birds of this species observed had black gapes and eye-rings.

This area was visited by the author on 3 February 1976 and again on 15 February 1976, the second time accompanied by S. Bennett. On both occasions Fuscous Honeyeaters were common and all observed had black gapes and black eye-rings.

The author also visited Glendale Crossing on 15 February 1976 and observed a single Fuscous Honeyeater with a black gape and eye-ring. Hermes (1976) also recorded the species present at this locality on the same date, but gives no details of numbers or of soft part colours.

The occurrence of the Fuscous Honeyeater at two separate high altitude localities in the A.C.T. during the summer of 1976 may

indicate the origin of birds observed in the A.C.T. during the period April to November. Although breeding was not confirmed, the presence of large numbers of birds exhibiting breeding characteristics appears to indicate that breeding was taking place. It is unlikely that breeding had finished as birds showing juvenile characteristics were not observed.

The paucity of summer records of Fuscous Honeyeaters in the A.C.T. may be attributable to a lack of observers, and further observations in these and other localities are required to determine the true status of the species in this region.

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G.B. Baker, 5 Millar Place, Kambah, A.C.T. 2902.

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LESSER FRIGATEBIRD AT MERIMBULA, N.S.W.

A.E. Lucas

On Sunday 1 February 1976 at 2 p.m., whilst fishing on the old wharf at Merimbula, I saw a Lesser Frigatebird Fregata ariel.

Having been at sea for a great part of my life I am familiar with many sea birds and this sighting was also witnessed by my cousin who is a keen amateur ornithologist and who also has spent much of his life at sea.

The bird was identified as follows: white on both sides of the breast, brownish red on the throat, otherwise black all over with black feet and a blackish bill. The shape of the wings is diagnostic. I have seen frigatebirds in many parts of the world including tropical Australia and Ascension Island.

A.E. Lucas, 38 Beagle Street, Red Hill, A.C.T. 2603.

COMMENTS ON THE STATUS OF BIRDS

Editor

Further to the notes on the status of birds of Canberra and district, Canberra Bird Notes vol. 3 no. 6, a letter has been received from Lt Col H.L. Bell, c/- P.O. Box 1216, Boroko, Papua New Guinea. While resident, in Canberra, Harry did a survey of the birds of an area in the north-western corner of the Black Mountain Reserve, and in regard to the Orange-winged Sittella *Neositta chrysoptera* he commented as follows:

'I counted from March 1974 to April 1975, from six to twenty-one times a month but nine times on average. The transect was 5 ha in area. Figures are expressed in "average number per 10 hectares" (the standard measure of population).

Mar. 1974	0.5	Oct. 1974	0.2
Apr. 1974	0.6	Nov. 1974	0.8
May 1974	0.8	Dec. 1974	2.6
June 1974	0.7	Jan. 1974	0.5
July 1974	2.5	Feb. 1974	Nil
Aug. 1974	0.9	Mar. 1974	0.7
Sep. 1974	0.9	Apr. 1974	0.6

In February 1975 the species was not seen in the area but was seen outside it.

So one can presume that in all probability the Sittella is a pretty sedentary species. The consistency of count is particularly interesting as birds that are seen in groups usually don't show even statistics as do those evenly spread out in pairs. My guess is that there is one party of Sittellas in my area, in an area of say 25 ha.'

In regard to the striped-crowned Pardalotes, in the Interim List regarded as one species, the Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*, Harry also forwarded this information:

'My guess is that these Pardalotes occur as:

(a) resident breeders;
(b) wintering migrants; and
(c) transit migrants.

I gained a definite impression (quite unprovable of

course) that

there were three distinct populations. For all striped-crowned Pardalotes (for I lumped them) the figure per 10 ha is:

Mar. 1974	7.3	Oct. 1974	18.2
Apr. 1974	12.9	Nov. 1974	21.4
May 1974	5.8	Dec. 1974	17.6
June 1974	10.6	Jan. 1975	18.2
July 1974	3.0	Feb. 1975	13.5
Aug. 1974	5.7	Mar. 1975	20.5
Sept.1974	14.6	Apr. 1975	17.2

Although the above are averages, individual counts within months were very similar. Would it indicate a big transit build-up and a build-up of young in late summer?'

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BIRDS HIDING FOOD

Shirley Chittick

The following are instances where I have observed birds secreting food. This occurred when birds were being fed kitchen scraps - mainly soaked bread or chopped meat.

17 July 1969: An Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides* was observed in the garden. This bird had an injured wing and although very agile it was unable to fly. It had been coming regularly for food, but was timid and would appear only if it felt it was not observed.

It would run in from cover of surrounding shrubs, grab a piece of meat or bread, hide the food, then return and repeat the performance. Sometimes a piece would be eaten, but not in the open on the lawn. The pieces I saw hidden were taken to an open paddock and covered with leaves, bark, or dried grass. Each piece of food was placed individually but concealed with meticulous care, the bird standing back with head to one side to observe the effect and then slightly rearranging the covering or adding more. One piece was hidden in a horse's hoof print where the hoof had gone in deeply when the animal was galloping. The meat was put in, a piece of wood (chip sized) placed on top to fit the hole in the ground and a leaf placed on top of this. When I went to examine it, although I had watched the whole procedure from the kitchen window and carefully noted the position

it was most difficult to find, so natural was the whole effect. This was viewed from a distance of approximately 20 metres. Unfortunately it was not noted whether the bird returned to retrieve the food.

Going further back through my notes I also found the following regarding the Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*.

12 August 1968: Three pairs of Magpies which had formed one group for winter were fed kitchen scraps plus chopped raw meat each morning. One female was seen regularly hiding crusts under shrubs around the feeding area. These were certainly out of sight but not as cunningly concealed as were the Australian Raven's efforts. Often these hidden crusts were removed by Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* as soon as the Magpies left the area. The Currawongs were certainly subordinate to the Magpies when it came to sharing the feeding area. They sat in the trees and watched where the crusts were hidden and then helped themselves. However on this occasion the female Magpie returned after several hours and retrieved and ate a piece of bread she had previously hidden.

I would be interested to hear from other members who may have observed similar behaviour under 'natural' conditions, i.e. amongst birds not getting an abundance of extra feeding. Is this behaviour only indulged in when there is more food available than the bird can eat immediately?

Mrs S. Chittick, 13 Alexandra Street, Hall, A.C.T. 2618.

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ODD OBS

AN ODD FEEDING PARTNERSHIP

Doug Ross

On 4 September 1976 two different birds were seen feeding together on the rim of one of the ponds on the Bungendore side of Lake Road, Bungendore. The birds proved to be a Swamp Harrier (recognisable by the white rump patch) and an Australian Raven. They were pulling at a carcase - whether fresh killed or carrion could not be seen - quite amicably, side by side. The birds were seen at it for

about three minutes and presumably they had been at work for some time before I arrived.

BOOK REVIEW

Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia by H.G. Cogger, A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1975.

You will probably think that these notes were sent to the wrong editor when you see the title of the book under review. However, one glance at this book should be enough to show that it is a publication of outstanding value to any naturalist regardless of the field of interest.

Dr Cogger's lifelong attempt to list all the known reptiles and amphibians of Australia has resulted in a book that herpetologists have long awaited. It is at last possible to gain a reasonable picture of the herpetological fauna without poring over endless publications and museum specimens.

The book contains a description of each reptile and frog and a map showing the known distribution. As with all books including distribution maps the area shown represents only the 'known' range of each individual and already specimens have been collected extending ranges sometimes hundreds of kilometres.

The black and white photographs are at the back and colour blocks are liberally spread throughout. Over 68 per cent of individuals are represented by one or more photographs, which is a very generous coverage as many closely related species are identified more accurately by scalation differences and would appear inseparable from photographs. Keys to genera and species are provided and line drawings are also included to explain anatomical nomenclature and assist methods of study.

The introduction includes very valuable information on collection and preserving techniques, conservation and protection. There is a brief chapter on snake bite and its treatment. A glossary and selected references are given. The index has an added bonus of the specific names in alphabetical order as well as the generic names, and so without knowing a recently altered generic name the reader can easily locate any familiar species.

Because of the large number of animals involved some errors could be expected but due to publishing difficulties this book

suffers from more than its share. Any student of herpetology intending to use this text to assist his studies would be well advised to obtain a list of corrigenda when it appears.

It was intended that the book be published at the same time as a checklist to be issued by the Australian Museum but unfortunately the latter has not appeared. Many of us are familiar with some of the more well-known reptiles and amphibians by specific names which are no longer valid. When it appears, the checklist will allow the reader to follow through from a familiar name to the most recently accepted name. Dr Cogger's book only includes the most recent name, which can lead to confusion regarding the identity of some species.

Finally, the list is incomplete as there are some undescribed species not mentioned and new species still being discovered; also the taxonomic status of some species covered is in doubt and therefore additions and changes can be expected in the near future; but if this book aids and stimulates this work to be carried out then it has accomplished what it set out to do.

J.W.

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BOOK MARKET

FOR SALE

Tasmanian Birds by M. Sharland - price $7.00.

Birds of Palearctic Fauna vol. 2 (Non-passerines) by C. Vaurie -price $20.00 for the volume.

Mateship with Birds by Alec Chisholm - price $15.00 (this is the book that contains an account of the rediscovery of the Paradise Parrot - with photos).

Bents Life Histories of North American Birds - 2 vols, price $20.00 for both. (This is the condensed Harper Bros version published 1960, edited and abridged by Henry Hill Collins Jr.)

Proceedings of the 16th International Ornithological Congress -offers please. (This volume has been donated to

C.O.G. by Mr A.

Morrison and contains the full text of the invited symposium papers of the recent I.O.C. held in Canberra.)

Back numbers of Canberra Bird Notes - 50 cents per copy; contact the Editor.

WANTED

The Fairy Wrens of Australia by Neville W. Cayley (1949).

Orchids of Australia by W.H. Nicholls (1969).
(Name your price on the above two.)

Birds of Western Australia by D.L. Serventy and H.M. Whittell.

If you have any queries about the above or wish to buy or sell a book (or anything else for that matter) just drop a line to Book Market, P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608 or phone G. Clark on (062) 54 1279.

Over the past year we have received many requests for back numbers of Canberra Bird Notes and a few people are still endeavouring to complete their collections. If you have spare copies of Canberra Bird Notes, especially early numbers (but nevertheless any issue) please contact the Editor.

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FREDDIE LAMM

It is with sadness that we record the death of Freddie Lamm in Tucson, Arizona, on 11 November 1976. Don and Freddie will be well remembered by our older members. They lived in Canberra for two periods each of four years during which Don was attached to the American Embassy, first in the late 1940s and again in the early 1960s.

Don retired in 1964, after which he and Freddie set up home in southern Arizona.

Freddie will be remembered by her many Canberra friends as a gracious hostess, as a charming lady in the true sense of the term and as a staunch friend.

S.W.

CONTENTS

Page

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