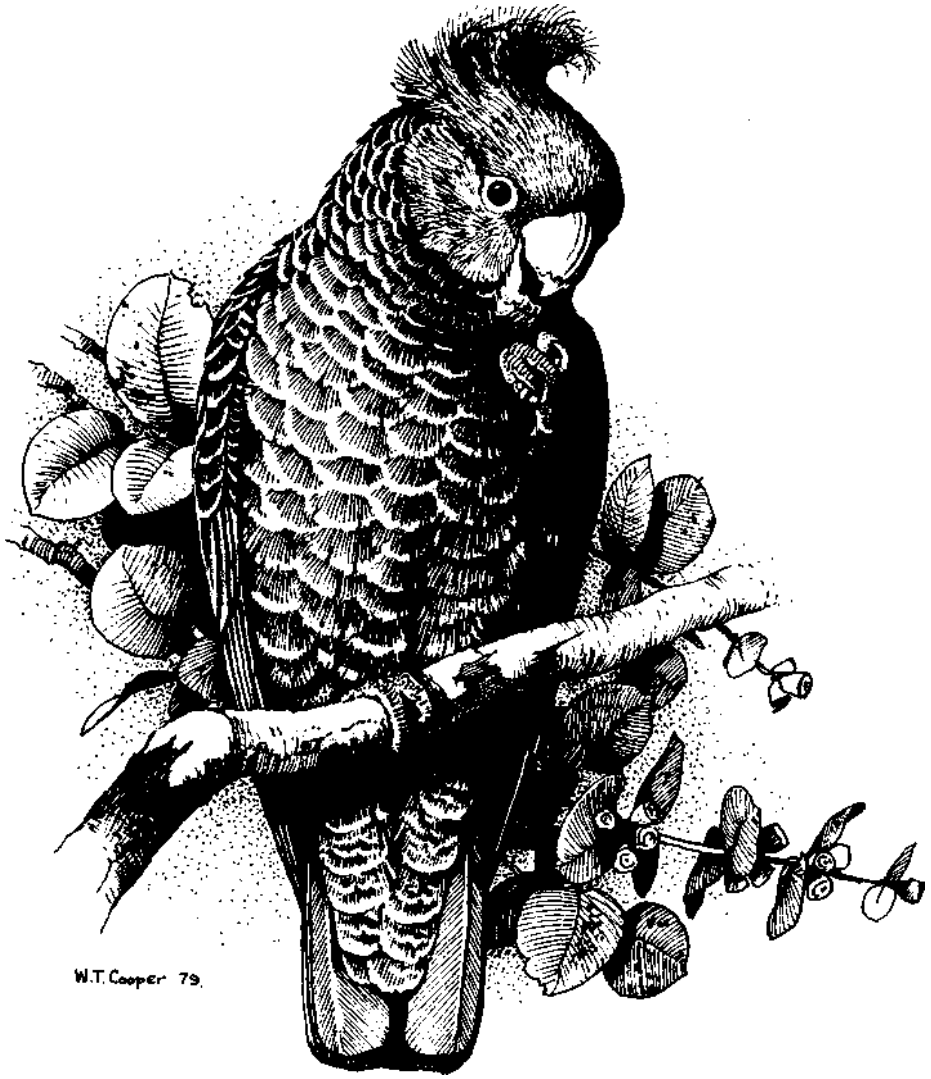
ISSN 0314-8211

CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

Volume 5
Number 2
April 1980



EDITORIAL

During the period Janet Wyatt typed the production pages for Canberra Bird Notes and occupied the office of Assistant Editor, our publication has reached new standards for such a journal. Janet has also been a driving force in the discussions and negotiations leading to Canberra Bird Notes appearing in new format.

Unfortunately private commitments prevent Janet continuing on so as she leaves the Committee and the Canberra Bird Notes team we say a most sincere thank you for all her willing and competent work on our behalf.

We also welcome Cheryl Bennett who takes over the typing duties from Janet as from this issue and Bryan Fitzgerald as Assistant Editor.

In some quarters, our new format and 48 page issue with Vol 5 No 1 was hailed as an indication of our intentions to broaden the scope of Canberra Bird Notes and to permanently increase its size. This is not so for many reasons:-

a) The last issue cost more than $1.00 per copy to produce; to continue like that would cause an increase in subscriptions immediately;
b) The new format is more expensive but with 24 page issues we can produce it during 1980 within our financial reserves;
c) Material for 24 pages can be obtained without undue strain on those involved;
d) To strive for a standard of more than 24 pages will make the task of future Editorial staff very difficult; and
e) We regard Canberra Bird Notes as a chatty, unpretentious magazine reporting on the local scene for local readers. We do not intend to broaden our scope to compete in any way with State based journals. One criterion we use for acceptance of a paper is that it should not be the type of permanent record of affairs of a nationally important type which requires reference by ornithologists from outside Canberra in the future; nationally important material should appear in national journals which then permit easy reference to the paper concerned by future workers. So we intend to remain as we are; we feel we fill a real local need in this way.

With a change of typist it seems an appropriate time to request that wherever possible authors present their papers in typed form, following as closely as possible the format we use.

In future *Canberra Bird Notes* will be published in annual Volumes of four issues.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE COMMON WATERBIRDS OF LAKE GINNINDERRA: 1978-79

Chris Davey

NOTE: New water attracts birds and we have the example of what happened with the filling of Lake Burley Griffin to show this. As Lake Ginninderra "ages" no doubt there will be considerable change in its avifauna especially if breeding occurs in areas away from the public. This paper is important in that it presents a basis against which future change can be measured.
Editor

Lake Ginninderra is a v-shaped, man-made lake created by the damming of Ginninderra Creek. The lake is located in Belconnen, and was filled by early 1974. It has a surface area of 105 h and is 365 m long. The lake is surrounded by 87 h of parkland consisting of improved pastures with trees planted in certain parts, mainly on the central peninsula. (Unsigned pamphlet: Lake Ginninderra, Belconnen NCDC April 1977). Due to the recent establishment of the lake the area is undergoing change and it is hoped to relate this change to changes in bird numbers and bird distribution as time goes on.

A brief report on the birds which were seen at the lake on 12th February 1978 was given in C.B.N. Vol 4 No 3. Since February 1978 I have attempted to measure the numbers and distribution of the waterbirds on the lake and this article reports the results of the observations made during a full year.

For my observations the lake was gridded into 174 squares of 100 m - see Fig 1. Observations, starting 5 minutes after sunrise, were made once a month from four sites. These sites are shown on Fig 1 as A, B, C and D. The morning was chosen to ensure that the weather was as uniform as possible with little wind.

For the first seven observations there were two observers. Observations were made from points A and D simultaneously for one hour and then from points B and C for another hour. During this time each observer scanned the field of view twice with a x25 telescope, recording the birds seen within each grid square. For the remaining observations one observer visited all points in the order A, B, D, C, staying at each point long enough for two sweeps to be made. For the February watch no observations occurred from point D whilst in the March watch numbers present at point D, but not their location, were recorded. At no time were any birds so disturbed as to leave the area on the approach of the observer.

For the purpose of determining the number of each species

on the lake, the area was divided into three - see Fig 1. Area I covers observations from points A and B, Area II covers observations from point C, and Area III those from point D. The number of birds within each of these areas was taken as the largest number seen in one sweep. The total numbers of birds for each of 15 of the most common species are shown in Table 1 (page 5).

The figures showing the use of each square were determined by recording the largest number of birds of each species seen in each square for either of the two sweeps. The mathematical centre of distribution (Hayne, 1949) is marked for each species. This can be compared with a hypothetical centre of the lake calculated for an equal number of birds observed in all squares. It is hoped that this centre of distribution can be used in future reports to determine any changes in distribution of the different species.

The distribution and frequency of 23 species were recorded. Frequency distribution maps are presented for 15 species with the greatest number of observations (Figures 2a-o). Of the remaining eight species five hybrid Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* at the bridge and one at the communication station were seen on all visits except that of August. Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* were seen on two occasions, four being observed in June and one in October, both times on the main body of the lake. Four Yellow-billed Spoonbills *Platalea flavipes* were seen at the communication station in April. Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica* were also observed infrequently with 16 in February, one in April and one in January; again, all at the communication station. Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* were seen in June and January, both times two birds being seen, one at the communication station and one on each bank half way along the west arm. Great Egret *Egretta alba* were seen more frequently; March (1), April (2), August (1) and September (2); none were seen along the west bank of the peninsula. Black-fronted Plover *Charadrius melanops* were observed twice, both at the communication station, one bird being seen in November and one in January. Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* were also recorded but they were only seen sporadically.

The distribution map for all 23 species (Fig 2p) indicates that the west bank of the west arm, especially the northern half, was well frequented. This area is characterized by bays. Also well frequented was the area around the new beach to the south, again a bay, and around the peninsula and up to the bridge, which is characterised by Cumbungi Typha angustifolia beds.

TABLE 1
(+) incomplete numbers due to no observations at point D - see text.

SPECIES	DATE OF WATCH									
	Summer	Autumn			Winter				Spring	Summer
	24.2	26.3	26.4	25.5	29.6	4.8	14.9	12.10	27.11	23.1
Dusky Moorhen	0+	0	0	2	2	2	0	2	1	11
Eurasian Coot	55+	18	556	747	829	530	404	4	3	1
Grebe	19+	11	231	58	44	58	26	19	5	36
Great Cormorant	15+	19	46	14	26	25	11	12	11	31
Little Black Cormorant	1+	58	10	0	3	7	3	0	0	17
Little Pied Cormorant	0+	7	11	12	24	6	2	23	0	0
Australian Pelican	3+	17	2	4	5	4	2	0	0	0
Masked Lapwing	6+	8	0	4	1	2	4	6	5	14
White- faced Heron	1+	2	3	0	2	1	0	2	0	0
Maned Duck	0+	12	0	27	0	1	1	17	20	82
Black Swan	11+	14	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	7
Pacific Black Duck	39+	12	130	30	5	15	8	26	50	62
Grey Teal	2+	9	2	7	5	0	2	2	7	44
Hardhead	2+	20	53	9	3	2	0	0	0	13
Musk Duck	0+	7	6	5	11	12	6	5	4	19
Totals	154+	59	1055	939	960	665	469	11	106	417

Table 1 Numbers of some common water birds seen each watch on Lake Ginninderra

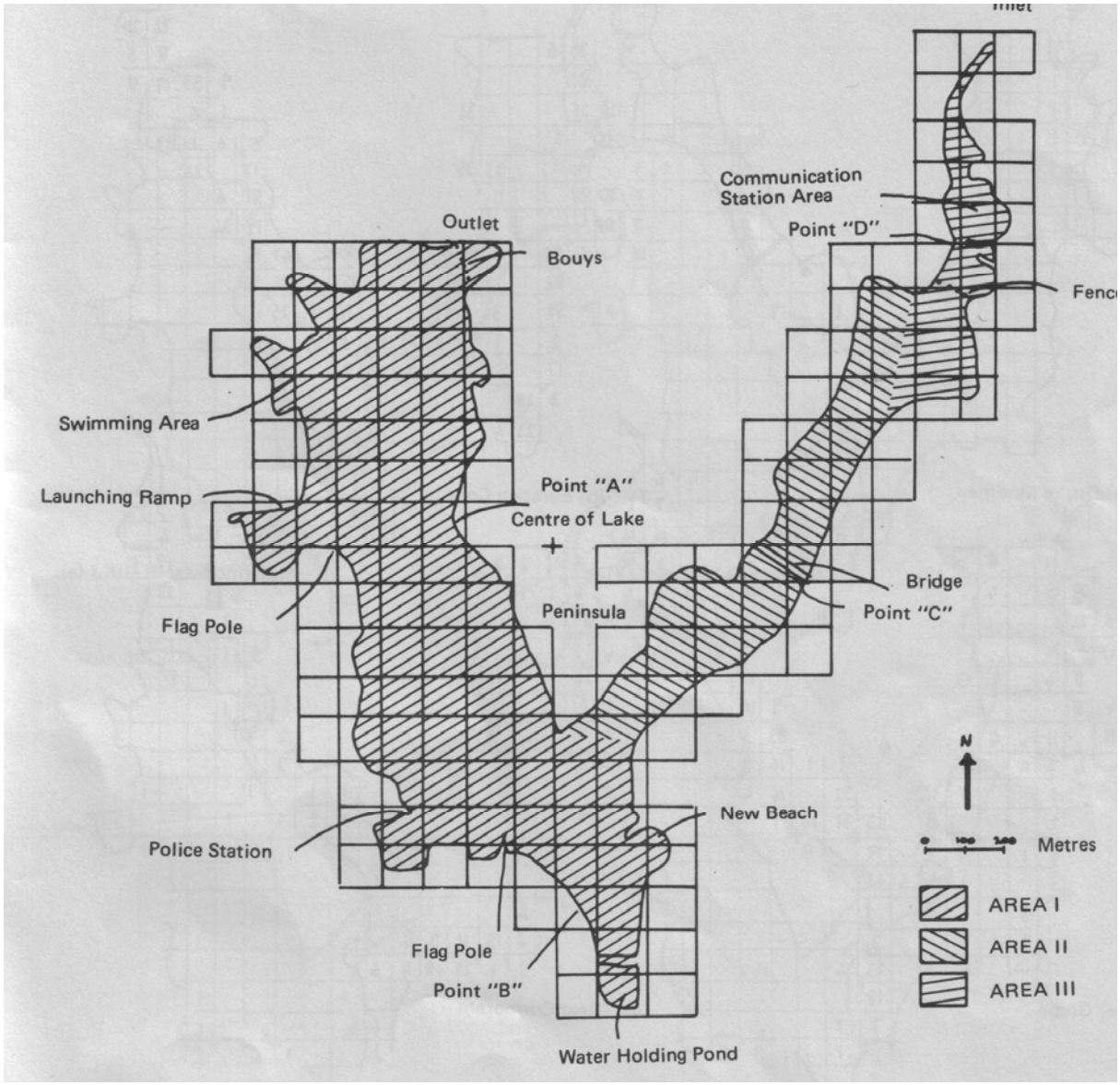
The communication station area was also well frequented with a much greater variety of birds than elsewhere. The November and January watches were noted for the lack of birds on the body of the lake, yet Area III was well frequented by many species.

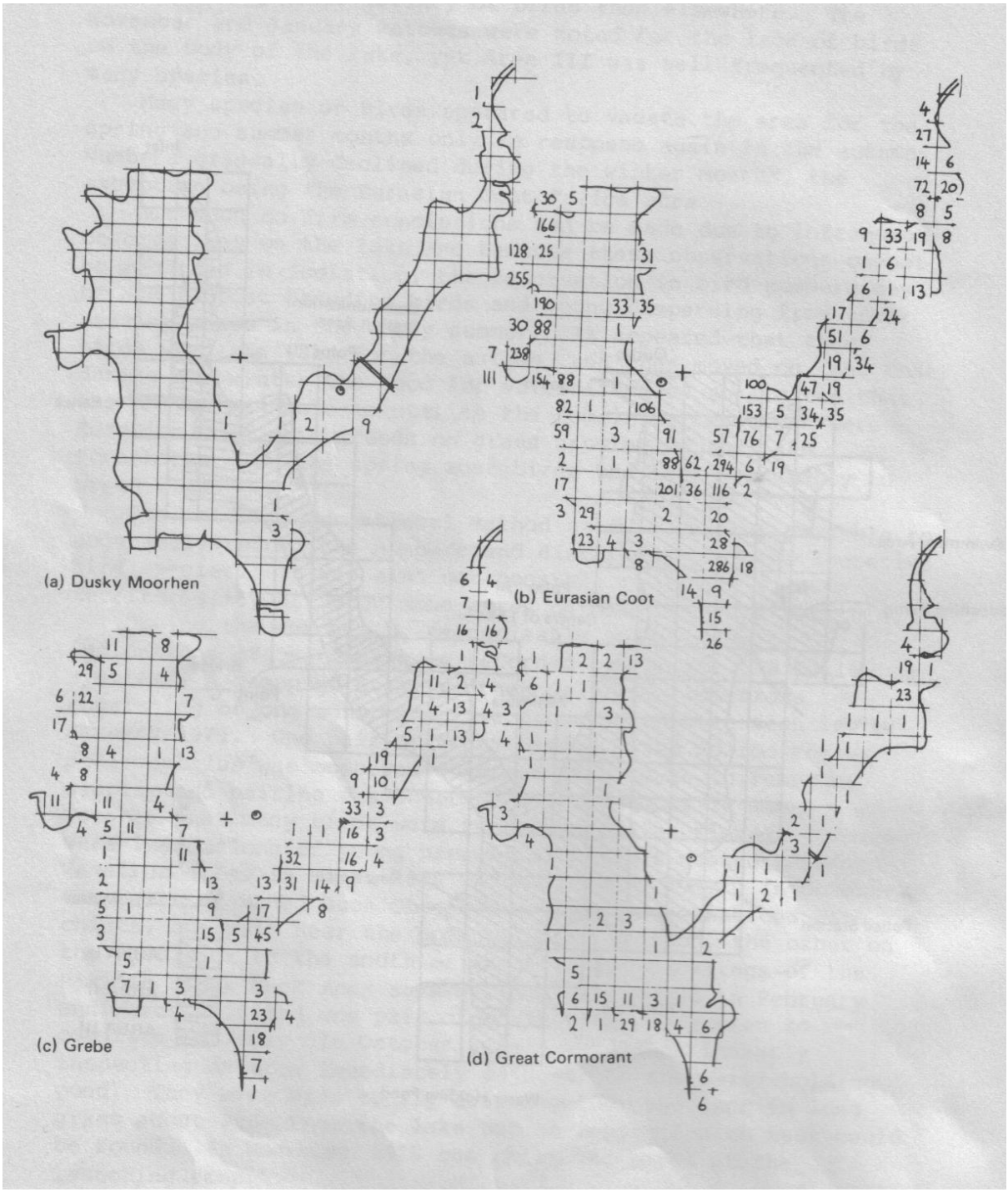
Many species of birds appeared to vacate the area for the spring and summer months only to reappear again in the autumn. Numbers gradually declined during the winter months, the exception being the Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*.

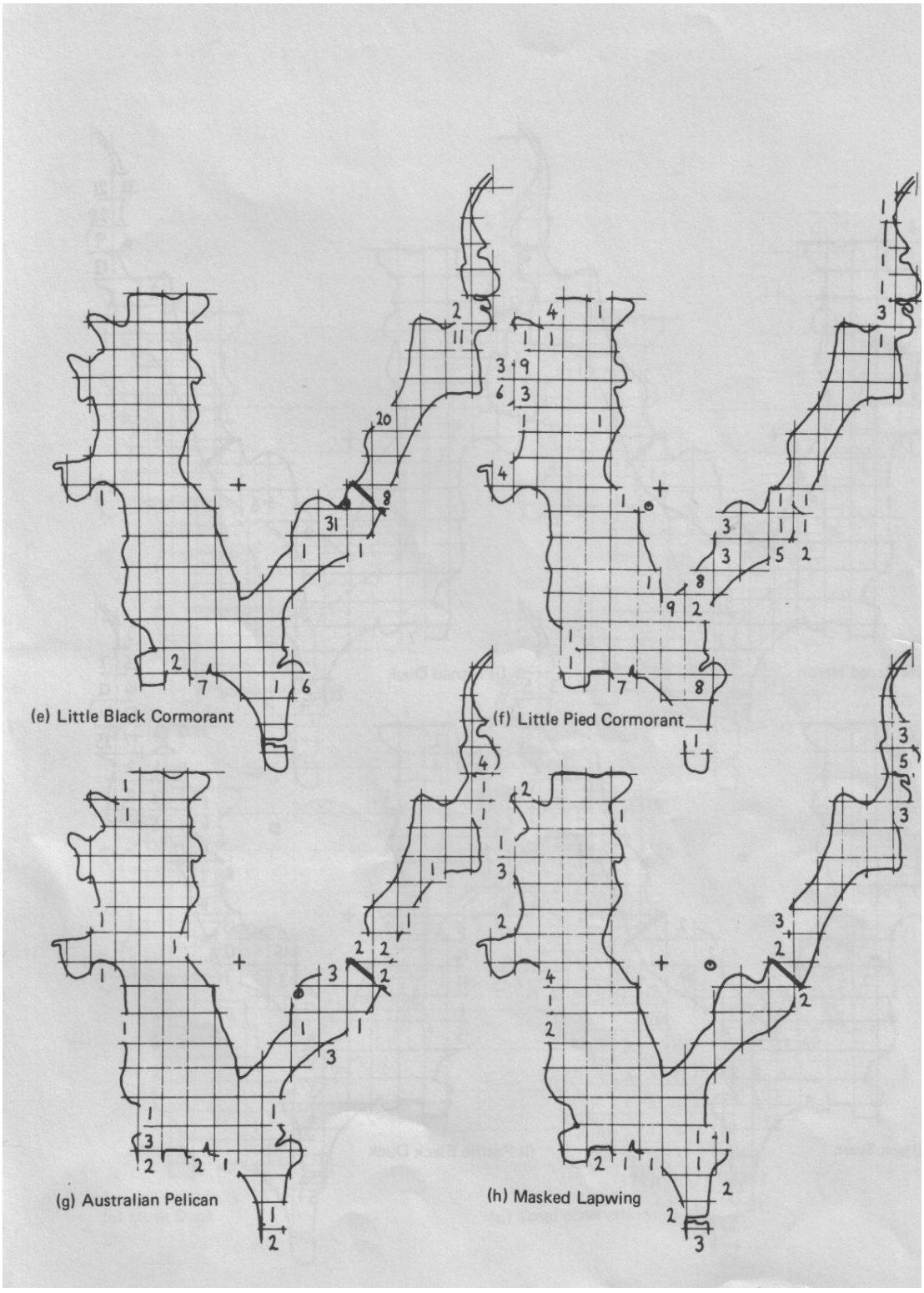
Although no firm conclusions can be made due to infrequent observations on the lake and because these observations cannot be regarded in isolation, the fluctuation in bird numbers may be due to post breeding birds and young dispersing from their nesting areas in the early summer. It appeared that these birds used the lake for the autumn, and then moved on, and that during the winter the food for waterbirds was so limited that the only birds able to utilise the remaining resources were Eurasian Coot which feeds on grass growing on the lake foreshores. By the spring most birds had left presumably to breed elsewhere.

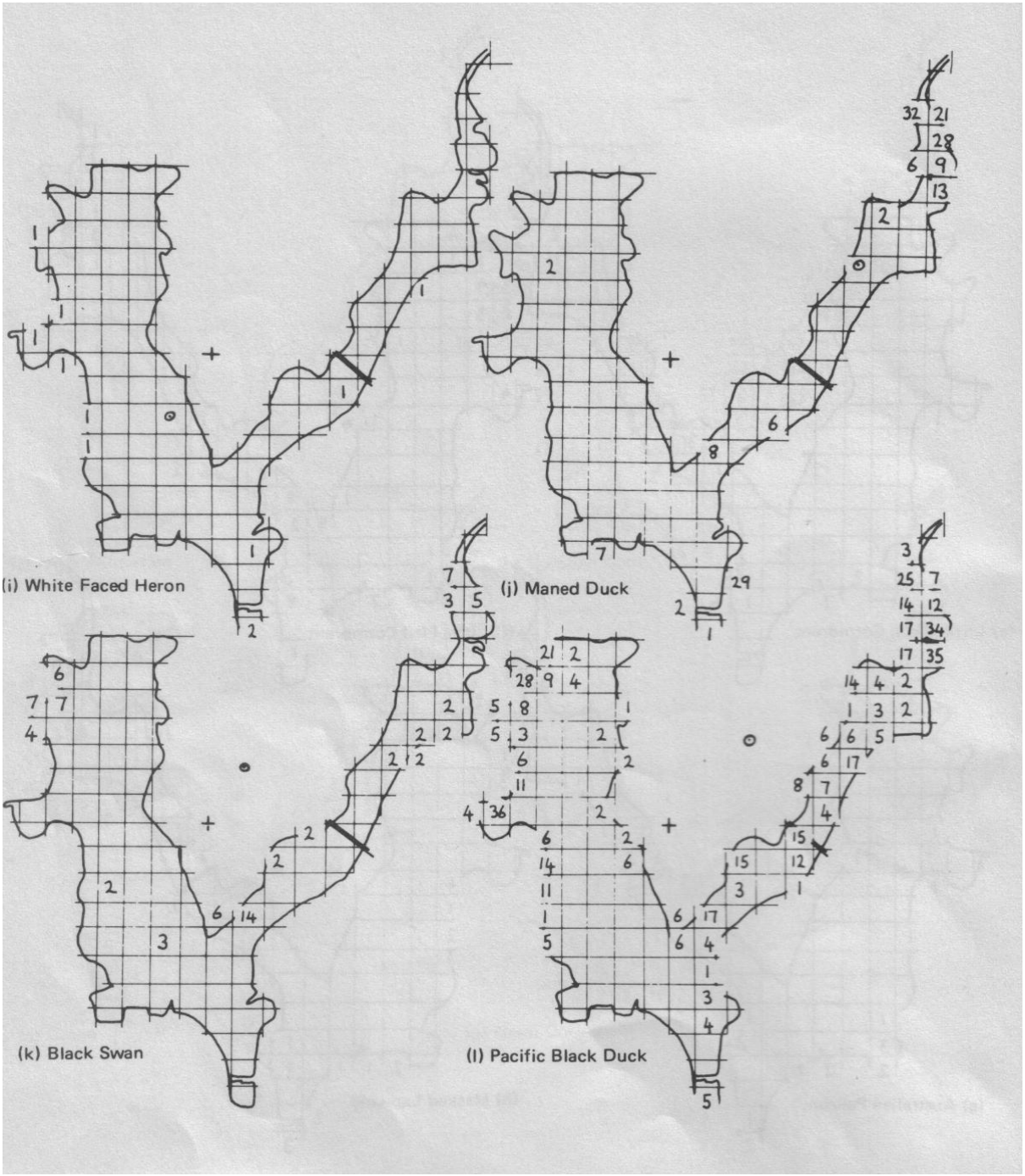
Due to the observational method used it was not possible to accurately record the numbers and distribution of the secretive bird species. It was also not possible to obtain data on territoriality although some notes on breeding were possible.

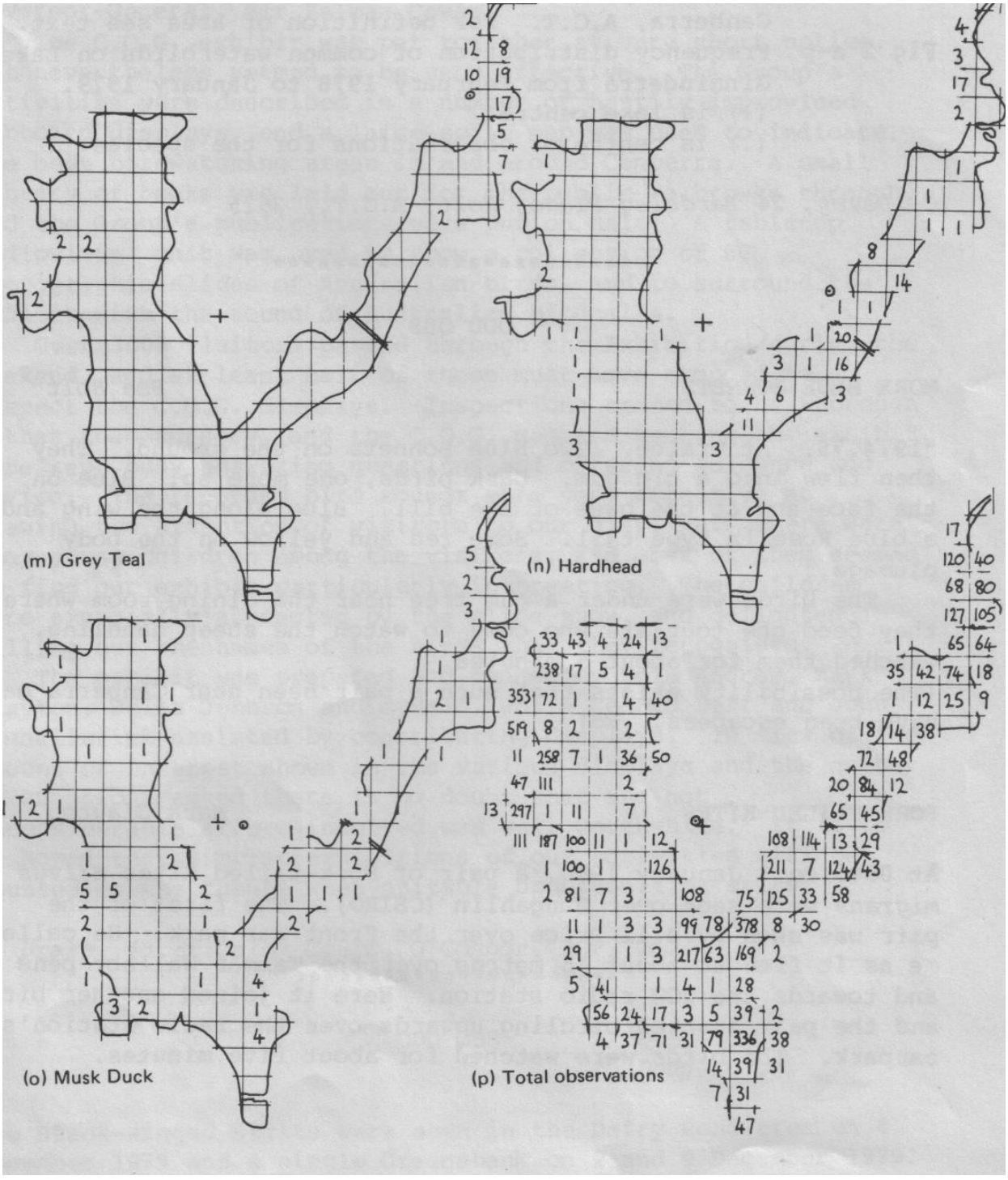
During the watches no recognisably young birds or indications of breeding were recorded except for the following species. A group of Dusky Moorhen *Gallinula tenebrosa* consisting of one adult and five grown young were seen in January 1979. One pair of Hoary-headed Grebe *Poliocephalus poliocephalus* was observed in breeding plumage in February, display and pairing was observed in August but it was not until October that many birds were seen in breeding plumage. There were indications of young present with adult Masked Lapwings Vanellus miles in March 1978 and in January 1979. In October two pairs of Maned Duck *Chenonetta jubata* were noticed with chicks, one pair near the communication station, the other on the east bank to the south of the bridge. Ducklings of the Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa* were noted in February and March 1978 and one pair of adult birds were seen to copulate in June. In October a pair were seen intently inspecting an area immediately adjacent to the water-holding pond. They were seen to fly away together and land in long grass about 200m from the lake but on inspection no nest could be found. In November 1978 one chick was noted at the launching ramp.


Communication
Station Area
Point "D"
Outlet
Bouys
Swimming Area
Launching Ramp
Point "A"
Centre of Lake
Bridge
Point "C"
Peninsula
Flag Pole
New Beach
Police Station
Flag Pole
Point "B"
Water Holding Pond
N
Metres
AREA I
AREA II
AREA III


(a) Dusky Moorhen
(b) Eurasian Coot
(c) Grebe
(d) Great Cormorant


(e) Little Black Cormorant
(f) Little Pied Cormorant
(g) Australian Pelican
(h) Masked Lapwing


(i) White Faced Heron
(j) Maned Duck
(k) Black Swan
(l) Pacific Black Duck


(m) Grey Teal
(n) Hardhead
(o) Musk Duck
(p) Total observations

References

HAYNE, D.W. (1949). Calculation of size of home range. J. Mammal. 30, p. 1-18.

Figures
Fig 1 Watching points and grid on Lake Ginninderra, Canberra, A.C.T. For definition of area see text.
Fig 2 a-p Frequency distribution of common waterbirds on Lake Ginninderra from February 1978 to January 1979.
(+) is lake centre.
(.) is centre of observations for the species.

C. Davey, 24 Bardsley Place, Holt, A.C.T., 2615

****

ODD OBS

MORE BLUE BONNETS *Bea Holt*

19.4.75. At Tralee. Two Blue Bonnets on the ground. They then flew into a big gum. Dark birds, one more so. Blue on the face and at the base of the bill. Blue along the wing and a blue Rosella type tail. Some red and yellow on the body plumage." The birds were under a gum tree near the dining room where they feed the tourists who come to watch the sheep handling. I watched them for about 5 minutes.
(The possibility exists that such a pair seen near Canberra may have been escapees. Ed)

FORK-TAILED KITES *Mark Clayton*

At 0845 on 7 January 1980, a pair of Fork-tailed Kites *Milvus migrans* were seen over Gungahlin (CSIRO). The first of the pair was seen by Bill Price over the front car park. He called me as it flew at about 15 metres over the Tammar Wallaby pens and towards the 2CC radio station. Here it joined another bird and the pair started circling upwards over the radio station's carpark. The birds were watched for about five minutes.

C.O.G. AT THE NATIVE PLANTS EXHIBITION

Alistair Drake

C.O.G. made one of its rather rare forays into the public view when it contributed an exhibit to the Society for Growing Australian Plants' annual Native Plants Exhibition. The Exhibition was held at the Canberra Showgrounds on the weekend of the 27 and 28 October 1979, and was opened by the Governor-General, Sir Zelman Cowan.

The C.O.G. exhibit was put together at very short notice, but nevertheless seemed to be very effective. The Group's activities were described in a number of hastily improvised pinboard displays, and a large-scale map was used to indicate the best birdwatching areas in and around Canberra. A small library of books was laid out for the public to browse through, and the Group's publications were put on sale. A tabletop audiovisual unit was used to show a collection of 80 photographic slides of Australian birds, and to surround the exhibit with the sound of Australian birdcalls.

Over 3000 visitors passed through the Exhibition during the weekend, and at least half of these must have stopped to inspect the C.O.G. displays. Inspections tended to be thorough rather than cursory, and the C.O.G. members manning the exhibit were kept busy answering questions and offering guidance and advice. The recorded bird sounds were very effective at drawing the attention of visitors to our displays. There were many young children among the visitors, and most of them seemed to find our exhibit particularly interesting. The children were especially attracted by the slide show, and delighted in calling out the names of the birds that they recognised.

The exhibit was prepared and manned by Eric Andrew, Mark Clayton, Delia Johnson and myself, while Cedric Bear and John Penhallurick assisted by contributing displays. In view of the amount of interest shown in the various displays and the number of questions asked there is no doubt that the not inconsiderable effort involved was well worthwhile. It is to be hoped that similar exhibitions of our activities will be mounted in the future when suitable opportunities arise.

A. Drake, 48 Brigalow Court, O'Connor, ACT, 2601

****

ODD OBS

Doug Ross
Two Black-winged Stilts were seen in the Dairy Road area on 4 November 1979 and a single Greenshank on 2 and 9 December 1979.

VICTORIAN WADER STUDY GROUP

The V.W.S.G. was inaugurated in Melbourne in June 1979 by various people interested in the study of waders in Victoria. The setting up of a formal group developed from the need for more co-ordination among wader enthusiasts to carry out large scale projects on Waders.

Increasing development in coastal areas is causing the destruction and modification of wader habitat. Information on the movements, abundance and feeding requirements of waders is necessary before any reasonable attempts to minimise adverse effects of these developments can be made. Management guidelines need a sound scientific basis and at present this is not available for waders in Victoria.

Participation is open to everyone and does not require any knowledge of waders or ornithological techniques. The VWSG's activities centre around banding at Werribee once a month and provides an excellent opportunity to observe waders in the hand as well as in the field.

The initial formation of VWSG, together with the costs of equipment and publication of the Annual Report and Bulletin necessitates a subscription to the Group. The rates are: $10 p.a. for participating members; $5 p.a. for Associate membership which is available to students, country and interstate people and entitles them to receive the Annual *Report and Bulletin.*

Cheques should be made payable to the Victorian Wader Study Group and sent to Julie Strudwick, C/- R.A.O.U., 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039.

****

ODD OBS

SATIN FLY CATCHER *Steve Wilson*

On 23 October 1979 an unusual call in our garden attracted my attention; it was repeated every minute or so. In the emerging leaves of various deciduous trees the bird was readily found and it was followed and observed for 15 minutes as it moved off slowly. I was able to approach to 3 metres several times. The upper-parts were a very shiny and deep blue-black with light reflections showing as a deep, glossy blue; the under-parts were pure white - an adult male Satin Flycatcher.

The Leaden Flycatcher is the more common in Canberra but the upper-parts are leaden grey. There are earlier records of the Satin Flycatcher in Canberra gardens during migration periods. The vertical tail-flicking was noticed repeatedly.

SOME BIRDS OF THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC

Richard Gregory-Smith

During March 1979 we had the opportunity to visit both the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Whilst one of the primary objects of our visit was to see the birds and other wild life of these islands, there was so much else of interest that our time was never sufficient for all we wished to do.

However, I have put together some bird notes from observations on Efate, New Hebrides and lie des Pins, New Caledonia.

EFATE

The Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides has its administrative and commercial centre at Vila on the island of Efate. Efate is the second largest island of the New Hebrides group and is approximately 41km by 22km. The island is rugged and covered with tropical rain forest where not cultivated or planted with coconut palms. There is a road around the coast, but none to the interior which is inaccessible. The climate is hot and humid with heavy rains during the cyclone period between December and March.

Less than 60 species are recorded as indigenous to the New Hebrides, not counting the wide-ranging South West Pacific sea birds. During our short visit from 4 to 8 March we saw 19 species, predominately tropical.

Of the several species indicating their family connections with Australasia, the commonest is probably the Silver-eared Honeyeater. This is a small honey-eater, slender, with a curved bill rather like a sunbird. It is dark olive above and dirty white below, the head dark grey with silver grey ear coverts. It is regularly seen in coconut palms and around Melanesian village cultivation.

Amongst the recent immigrants we saw were the House Sparrow, Indian Myna, Bengali Astrild and possibly the Jungle Fowl, though they may well be domestic Fowl that have reverted. The Indian Myna made its appearance in the 1940's and is now very common. The Bengal Astrild was not mentioned forty years ago and was presumably introduced from escaped cage birds. It is frequently seen feeding on seeding grasses. Coconut Lories are some of the most spectacular birds on Efate. They come screeching through the palms, a flash of green and scarlet, and are often seen feeding on casuarina cones. The male has a scarlet head whilst that of the female is slate, but both have scarlet bills and feet. The bright green bodies are relieved with yellow speckling below and a touch of red on the breast.

BIRDS OF SPATE, NEW HEBRIDES (4-8 MARCH 1979)

Reef Heron
Demigretta sacra
Swamp Harrier
Circus approximans
Jungle Fowl
Banded Rail
Rallus philippensis
Purple Swamphen
Porphyrio porphyrio
Red-bellied Fruit dove
Ptilinopus greyii
Green-winged Ground Pigeon
Chalcophaps indica
Coconut Lory
Trichyglossus haematodus
Glossy Swiftlet
Collocalia escalenta
White-collared Kingfisher
Halcyon chloris
Long-tailed Triller
Lalaga leucopyga
Collared Fantail
Rhipidura fuliginosa
Broad-billed Flycatcher
Myiagra caledonica
White-breasted Woodswallow
Artamus leucorhynchus
Indian Myna
Acridotheres tristis
Silver-eared Honeyeater
Lichmera incana
Yellow White-eye
Zosterops flavifrons
Bengali Astrild
Estrilda astrild
House Sparrow
Passer domesticus

We saw both the Collared Fantail and the Broad-billed Flycatcher. The former is very much like the Grey Fantail found in Australia, and appears to have similar habits. The male Broad-filled Flycatcher is a very smart and neat looking bird, glossy black above with a white abdomen. In the female the black is replaced by less conspicuous shades of grey and brown with a pale rufous throat. They deftly fly after and secure insects from a perch on a vantage point on a tree or bush.

ILE des PINS

Ile des Pins is situated some 50km south east of the main island of New Caledonia. The island is 134 sq km in area and has a population of about 2000. It is surrounded by coral reefs and islands. It was named in 1774 by its discoverer, Capt Cook, who noted its tall, slim pine trees which now bear his name - Araucaria Cookii. The Melanesian name of the island is Kune. The climate is tropical, slightly cooler and less humid than the New Hebrides, but subject to the same cyclonic rains during the period December to March.

We lived at Kuto in a thatched hut beside a curving bay of white coral sand. Our noisiest neighbours were the Sacred Kingfishers, regularly on the lookout for lizards as they emerged for food and sun.

Being considerably further south and nearer Australia than Efate the environment, and hence the bird population was less tropical and the influence was more Australasian. Of the cuckoo-shrikes we saw the Long-tailed Triller and Melanesian Graybird. Honeyeaters included the New Caledonian Friarbird and Silver-eared Honeyeater. The Melanesian Graybird has a piercing single-note call and frequents coconut palms looking for locusts and other large insects. The New Caledonian sub-species is a very dark grey, and about the size of a crow, for which we mistook it at first glance. The New Caledonian Friarbird is a large and noisy member of the Melaphagidae. We saw this feeding on fruit in a very high tree at Kuto. Feeding on casuarina seeds above the beach at Kuto we were delighted to identify the Red-throated Parrot Finch. This striking bird is only llcm long. It is dark green except for a bright crimson head and throat, with scarlet rump and tail. The female is a duller version of the male.

The Bridled Tern is possibly the smartest of the family. We observed a party of them resting on a bollard by the deep-water anchorage. Their silvery upper plumage is relieved by the intensely black bridle around the head.

We noted with pleasure, that though very common on the main island of New Caledonia, the House Sparrow and Indian Myna had not invaded lie de Pins.

BIRDS OF ILE des PINS, NEW CALEDONIA (9-10 MARCH 1979)
Swamp Harrier Circus approximans
Banded Rail Rallus philippensis
Silver Gull Larus novaehollandiae
Crested Tern Thalasseus kergii
Bridled Tern Sterna sumatrensis
Green-winged Ground Pigeon Chalcophaps indica
Glossy Swiftlet Collocalia esculenta
Sacred Kingfisher Halcyon sancta
Long-tailed Triller Lai age leucopyga
Melanesian Graybird Coracina caledonica
Collared Fantail Rhipidura fuliginosa
Yellow-bellied Robin Eopsaltria flaviventris
Glossy Starling Aplomis striatus
Silver-eared Honeyeater Lichmara incana
New Caledonian Friarbird Philemon diemenensis
Green-backed White-eye Zosterops xanthochroa
Red-throated Parrot-Finch Erythrura psittacea
UI Warbler Phylloscopus spp

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

In TIME magazine dated 14 Jan 1980 there is an article about a 58 year old American named James Vardaman. His particular claim to fame was that during the calendar year 1979 he tried to become the first person to sight 700 different species of birds in North America. He spent 170 days travelling and logged 161,331 miles at a cost of US$35,000. His final tally for the year was 698 easily surpassing the previous record of 657 but still two short of his target. Why did he do it? Well he remembers saying "Hot damn! That's my kind of challenge" when he first thought of the idea. What is his next target? To sight more than 5,000 species around the world in one year. All this just tends to confirm the feeling that "ticking" is just a case of time and money and not so much skill as Mr. Vardarman for instance hired guides wherever he went.

******

Not all Americans are like Mr. Vardaman though the above article went on to quote the editor of the magazine "Audubon", Les Line, who stated that this venture "has more to do with sport than with nature or the beauty of birds. It is not an appreciation of nature - it's a game." Mr. Line went on to liken Vardaman's pursuit to "counting out-of-state license plates".

******

Recently a leaflet arrived in my letter box advertising a book by Frank S. Todd entitled Waterfowl - Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World and priced at $57.50. However a letter with the leaflet offered me as one of a "few select (?) ornithologists" the chance to buy at a special pre-Christmas price of $46.00. So far so good but when I looked at the leaflet again I noticed that it had a price of US$45.00 on it and this had been overstamped with the $57.50 price. Now in my poor befuddled brain US$45.00 equals only about $38.00.

I leave you to draw your own conclusion. The organisation responsible is Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch Group (Australia) Pty Ltd.

******

Recently there has been a renewed interest amongst bird watchers in the provision of artificial hollows for nesting birds, bats and other mammals. If you are interested in trying your hand there is an article in the magazine Habitat (journal of the Australian Conservation Foundation) volume 7 number 6 - December 1979. Detailed instructions for constructing nest boxes can be obtained from the Bird Observers Club, P.O. Box 185, Nunawading, Vic. 3131 - please enclose 30 cents for postage. There is also an interesting article written by Peter Ormay about his experiences with artificial nest boxes in Aranda that should be read. This is in *Canberra Bird Notes* [volume 2 no. 9 January 1974.

******

Two species that appear to be on the decline in Australia are the Regent Honeyeater and the Little Tern (the latter as a breeding species). Although the plight of the latter has been known for some time, the decline of the former has been highlighted by the R.A.O.U. Atlas scheme. Both of these birds are fairly easily recognisable by even the beginner and if you see any Regent Honeyeaters could you please send details of the number, time and place to David Peters, C/- 21 Gladstone St, Moonee Ponds, Vic. 3039. If you are lucky enough to find a Little Tern breeding colony then please send details to Terry Lindsey, 234 Alfred St, Narraweena, NSW, 2099.

******

If you wish to read about the declining status of the Little Tern in New South Wales there is an article by Alan Morris in "Corella" (the journal of the Australian Bird Study Association) volume 3 number 5 - December 1979.

******

Did you realise that the Japan-Australia Treaty for the Protection of Migratory Birds which was signed in 1974 still has not been ratified by the Australian government. The Japanese government has met their treaty obligations but ours hasn't - funny isn't it?

****

C.O.G. AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Alistair Drake

COG no longer seems to be attracting young people. A few years ago (I am told) there was an enthusiastic band of school-age members, some of whom have since become professional ornithologists; as adults they continued to do a great deal to invigorate the Group, by leading field meetings, for example, and by serving on Committee. Unhappily today schoolchildren are only occasionally seen at COG meetings, and the number of school-age members is very low. The Group's failure to attract young people has been the subject of a number of discussions in Committee recently, and Sonia Tidemann and I were asked to make a brief investigation of the problem. This article is a condensed version of our report.

Our method of investigation was simply to gather suggestions from as many sources as possible. An appeal for information at the July indoor meeting produced a worthwhile response, and a number of useful suggestions were made during discussions in Committee. We made contact with a number of other organisations with related interests, and interviewed some of their officers. We even thought up one or two ideas ourselves! Finally, all the various suggestions were discussed at length with two enthusiastic school-teachers, Lydia Royicek and Helen Burfitt, and a report summarising our findings was prepared.

Our first conclusion was simply that the problem was a very real one: young people of all ages, from primary school-children to university students, are absent from COG. With both a university and a C.A.E. in the city it should not be difficult to attract a few active student members, for example, but there do not appear to be any; this is a pity, because a small group of enthusiastic students might do a great deal to invigorate the Group. Our second conclusion, reached after a certain amount of philosophising, was that something should be done. We felt that it was highly desirable that young people in Canberra should become more aware of the natural environment and its wildlife, and that COG could and should make a significant contribution to this end. A greater level of interest in Australian birds and ornithology among young people would surely be of benefit not only to COG itself and the conservation movement in general but also (and we felt much more importantly) to the young people themselves.

One of the main objectives of our investigation was to determine exactly why COG had so few young members. We identified quite a number of reasons why young people might be

deterred from joining COG, but it soon became apparent that the primary problem was of a more fundamental nature: COG keeps such a ‘low profile’ that very few young people would ever even learn that it exists. Helen Burfitt, for example, had been a practising science teacher in Canberra for five years before she first heard of COG. If COG is to attract more young people it will have to make itself better known in the city's schools and colleges. At the very least it must endeavour to ensure that all secondary science teachers are aware of its existence and functions. The factors which we felt might deter those young people who do get to hear about COG were: the problem of transport to both indoor and field meetings for people without cars, the absence of any subscription concessions, and the late finishing time of indoor meetings; it was also felt that the name 'Canberra Ornithologists Group' might lead a complete beginner to infer that the club catered only for expert scientists. We also recognised that, in addition to these factors deterring young people from joining COG, there are at least two very serious obstacles which any young person wishing to take up ornithology has to overcome: the high initial expenditure associated with the purchase of a pair of binoculars, and the more long-term problem of finding transport into the field. What, then, can COG do to encourage more young people to take an active interest in the environment in general, and in ornithology in particular? First of all it needs to make itself better known, especially among teachers, who should be encouraged to refer to it when in need of ornithological advice. COG should provide support for those teachers who are already introducing material on birds and their scientific study into their courses, and it should encourage other teachers to follow suit. Although some COG members have provided help of this sort in the past, mainly by giving talks or leading school parties in the field, there can be no doubt that a great deal more could be done. For the youngest children - and those of us who manned the COG display at the Native Plant Exhibition in October were left in no doubt that there is plenty of potential interest amongst this age group - this is perhaps as much as COG can do. However any secondary student with a genuine interest in the natural environment would profit from actually joining COG, and we should encourage them to do so my making a greater effort to cater for young people - e.g. by introducing a reduced subscription, by finishing our evening meetings somewhat earlier, and by making sure that transport is always available for people without cars. COG could perhaps make itself known to potential members

of this age by just occasionally forsaking its eyrie on Black Mountain and venturing out to the suburbs to hold one of its evening meetings in a local high school or college, after circulating an invitation to attend to all the students and their families. Similarly an occasional joint meeting with one of the campus scientific societies might serve to make COG a little better known among the students at the CCAE and the ANU. There are, therefore, many ways in which COG can help young people to enjoy the natural environment, and at the same time help itself by attracting more young members. COG has not, however, at least in the recent past, shown much inclination to trouble itself for the sake of young people - when members have given talks to schools, for example, or lead school parties into the field, it has been on their own initiative, and they have not received any worthwhile support from the Group. One of the most obvious, but perhaps also of the most important, recommendations resulting from our investigations was that, if this state of affairs is to be changed, COG should appoint an Education Officer to liaise between the young people and teachers on the one hand, and the Group's members on the other. This recommendation was accepted by Committee, and at the January A.G.M. Delia Johnson was elected to this office for the coming year. I hope Delia will receive from members the level of support that her work so evidently deserves.

V.A. Drake, 48 Brigalow Court, O'Connor, A.C.T., 2601

****

ODD OBS

GREY FANTAIL BEHAVIOUR

Steve Wilson

The old road to Tomakin (formerly Sun Patch) on the N.S.W. south coast is alive with birds at almost any season, especially where it curves around the swamp a km or so north of the river. Early on the morning of 15 November 1979 I was bird watching there among literally hundreds of birds of many species; the bush flies were even more numerous.

I stopped to look at something and noticed a Grey Fantail in a metre high acacia barely l½m away. Almost as soon as I stopped the bird flew towards me, gently brushing my arm as it removed a bush fly. Naturally I was fascinated and as I stood there the bird repeated its act five more times and it appeared to take a fly each time from my arm back or leg. An occasion to be remembered.

BOOK REVIEW

Steve Wilson

Australian Birds and Their Young.
Paintings by Gladys Y. O'Grady with text by Terence Lindsey.
Published by Cassell Australia Limited, P.O. Box 52,
Camperdown, NSW, 2050. 280 pp. with 74 plates. $25.00.

In my earlier days every bird watcher had all available Australian bird books; today new books arrive with regularity and many are quite specialised while the majority have a very general appeal. This is a most unusual offering - the first publication by an artist now 85 years of age, an artist who has spent virtually all her life on the Clarence River in northern N.S.W.

Miss O'Grady's interest in watercolour painting has been to illustrate nests, eggs and young of species found in her home area and in this bird watchers will find great interest; too often nests, eggs, juveniles and immatures are not illustrated.

The book is obviously regarded as something of an important social event in the Grafton area; it was launched at a Civic Function held during the last Jacaranda Festival. Probably its greatest appeal will be in that area.

The book is important as a vehicle for Miss O'Grady's watercolours; it is not intended as a field guide to the birds of her area so the cover while extensive is not complete nor was this intended. The text by Terence Lindsey is interesting at all times but it must be admitted that his task was purely incidental to that of the artist.

Obviously the book contains pictures personally selected by Miss O'Grady and it is evident that the selection covers a long period of her working artistic life. Most of what appears to be early work is presented in a rather formal, rectangular format. It is when she breaks away from that rather severe presentation with the Diamond Dove, Scarlet Robin, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Scarlet Honeyeater and some finches that the paintings have a more modern feel and have to my mind a far greater appeal. A guess is that these are more recent works.

Two criticisms must be made. One is a lack of total ornithological accuracy and the other is in artistic method. Some artists working with Australian birds can present the birds as they are - beautifully groomed creatures. Miss O'Grady approaches the natural "groomed" appearance in some plates e.g. that of the Crested Pigeon but more often, even with adult birds this essential effect is lost, one would feel,

in an endeavour to show extreme detail of the plumage. The Golden Whistler is shown with adults and nest; what a chance was missed to portray a plumage phase virtually unknown to bird-watchers, that of the juvenile.

This offering does add to the sum of our published knowledge especially where young birds are illustrated as many of us are unfamiliar with juvenile and immature plumages. Where else can one see a fairly adequate representation of newly fledged Scarlet Robins. Here is the book's greatest value and in this it adds considerably to illustrated information regarding Australian birds.

S.J. Wilson, 2 Scott Street, Narrabundah, ACT, 2604

****

BIRD NEWS FROM BRITAIN

John Penhallurick

A "Country Diary" column by W.D. Campbell in a recent copy of the Guardian Weekly brought some interesting news about British birds. After the very severe winter of 1962-63, the Ringing Office of the British Trust for Ornithology was flooded with reports of rings recovered from dead birds, pointing to a very heavy mortality. There were fears that the equally severe winter of 1978-79 would exact a similar sad toll. But to judge again from ringing returns, the bird population has come through very well.

Campbell suggests that the main reason for the improvement is a decline in the amount of chlorinated hydrocarbons in the environment. These pesticides, which include DDT and dieldrin, were widely used in the fifties and early sixties. These chemicals are readily soluble in fat, and large amounts could build up in the subcutaneous fat of a well-fed bird without any apparent harm to the bird. But as soon as the bird needed to draw on these fat reserves during a hard winter, the poison would be released into the bird's system, with fatal results. It is to be hoped that the healthy state of bird populations despite the severe winter means that these persistent and highly dangerous poisons are at last disappearing from the food chain.

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

WOODSWALLOW IDENTIFICATION

Tony Stokes

Based on a 'bird of the month' talk at a recent COG meeting.

There can't be many families of birds easier to separate into species in Australia than the six Woodswallow species. For a start, only three species have been recorded from the Canberra district. So if you think you are looking at a Woodswallow in this district which is not of the Dusky, Masked or White-browed species have a very good look and take notes.

The following are the main distinguishing points with perched Woodswallows:

- white outer edge on folded wing — Dusky
- white scythe-like border to black ear coverts and throat — Masked
- white eyebrows, chestnut or buffish breast — White-browed
- white breast and belly, black tail, head and mantle — White-breasted
- black lores and chin, grey ear coverts — Black-faced
- smaller than all others; dark brown, appearing almost black on all upper and lower body parts — Little

If the birds aren't perched, it's a good idea to wait until they do so because they are usually "sallying" birds and not on the wing for long periods. However if you can't wait or want to hone up your identification of Woodswallows in flight, look for these points to separate them:

- all black tail, black throat, white belly and breast — White-breasted
- pale tail, belly and breast, black throat — Masked
- pale tail, chestnut or buff belly and — White-browed
- breast, dark grey throat
- tail blackish tipped white, belly, breast — Dusky
- and throat sepia-brown
- tail blackish tipped white, belly, breast and throat dark brown appearing almost black — Little
- tail blackish tipped white, belly, breast and throat pale grey — Black-faced

Tony Stokes, Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, Box 636, Canberra City, A.C.T., 2601

COLOUR-MARKED RAPTORS

David Baker-Gabb

A research project involving the individual marking of Swamp Harriers, Brown Falcons and Brown Goshawks with coloured wing tags is currently in progress on the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works farm at Werribee. I would appreciate information on any sightings but particularly those outside the M.M.B.W. farm. Birds may have only one or both wings tagged and some colours are more obvious than others. Some tags have a black lateral stripe through them.

Information required is: date, location, colour of wing tag or tags, the presence or absence of a black lateral stripe on the tags and the wing the tag is on. Please write to: Mr David Baker-Gabb, Zoology Department, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, 3168.

D. Baker-Gabb, Zoology Department, Monash University, Clayton, Vic., 3168

****

MUSK DUCK ATTEMPTS TO EAT COMMON CARP

Neil Hermes

On 24 June, 1979 at about 1430 hours, an adult male Musk Duck was observed in Lake Burley Griffin about 20 metres from the shore near the National Gallery. The bird was attempting to swallow some food that was too large for it. The bird was observed with the food for about 10-12 minutes during which time it dived a number of times. The reason for this is not clear although at this point the lake is fairly shallow and it may have been manipulating the food on the bed of the lake. Twice the bird was swooped by Silver Gulls in unsuccessful attempts to steal the food.

Finally, a Silver Gull made a successful grab at the food but soon dropped it. I was able to retrieve the food and identified it as a 15cm long common carp Cyprinus carpio. Frith (1967) states that Musk Duck rarely eat fish despite feeding mainly on animals such as crayfish and aquatic insects. Although completely intact, the fish appeared to have been dead for some time, certainly longer than the 15 minutes I had been observing. It is hard to tell whether the Musk Duck caught the fish alive or had found it already dead.

Ref: Frith, H.J. (1967) "Waterfowl in Australia"

N. Hermes, 603/12 Ithaca Road, Elizabeth Bay, NSW, 2011

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. The special subscription rate for the period July 1979 to December 1980 (to provide for a changeover calendar year system) is: single, $7.00; family, $9.00, both with one copy.

Secretary: Mr E. Andrew, PO Box 301, Civic Square, ACT, 2608
Editor: Mr S.J. Wilson, PO Box 301, Civic Square, ACT, 2608
Assistant Editor: Mr. B. Fitzgerald Editorial Panel: Messrs J. Penhallurick, G. Clark, D. Purchase

---

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	2
Some Observations of the Common Waterbirds of Lake Ginninderra 1978-79	3
C.O.G. at the Native Plants Exhibition	13
Victorian Wader Study Group	14
Some Birds of the South-West Pacific	15
Out and About	19
C.O.G. and Young People	21
Book Review	24
Bird News from Britain	25
Woodswallow Identification	26
Colour Marked Raptors	27
Musk Duck Attempts to Eat Common Carp	27