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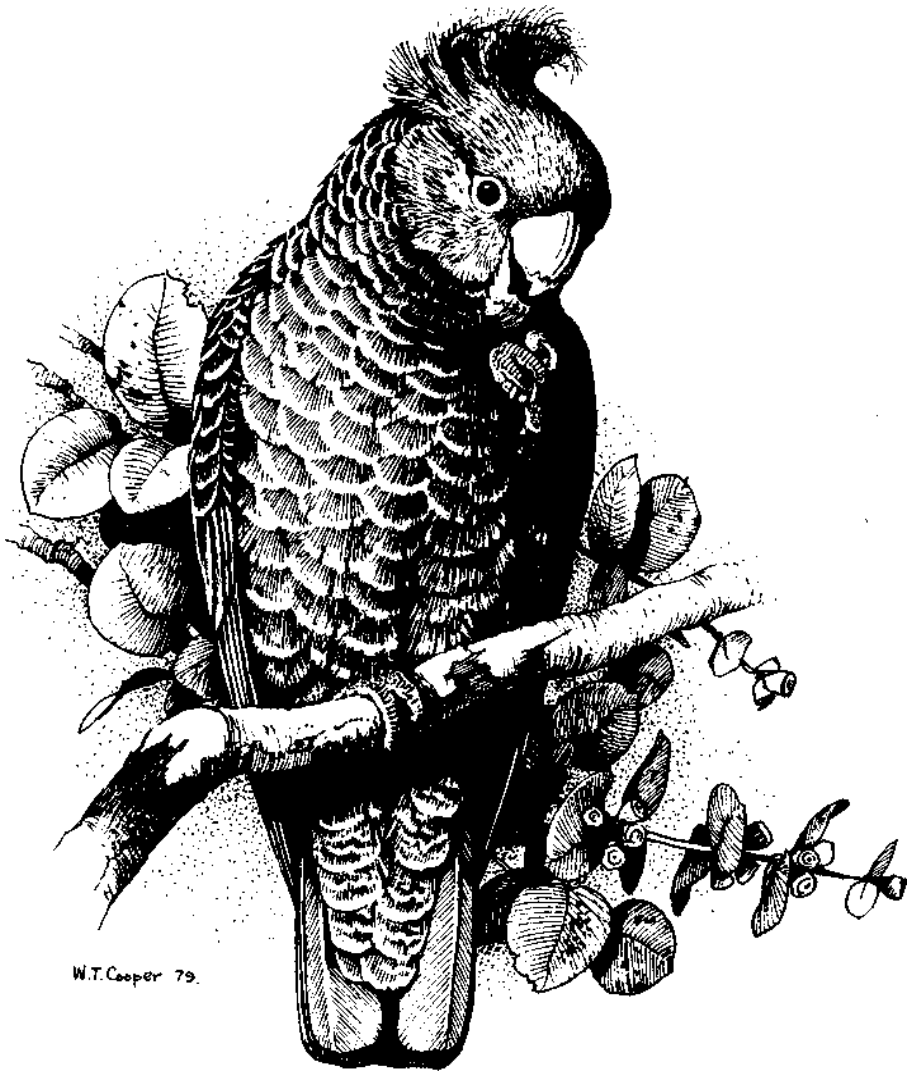

EDITORIAL

The previous issue of Canberra Bird Notes was the fiftieth part and was also the last issue to be edited by Steve Wilson. Steve was editor of 24 parts. This enormous contribution to COG over the last 6 years has, I am sure, been greatly appreciated by all members. In addition to editing almost half of the total number of issues so far produced, Steve has supervised the production of some of the largest issues. There has also been a new design and enlarged format for Canberra Bird Notes during this time.

Fortunately, and in a sense despite, these achievements, Steve has been able to maintain the original objectives of Canberra Bird Notes. In 1968 the first editors, G Chapman and D Purchase, stated that Canberra Bird Notes was produced as a newsletter and was intended as an informal medium of communication. In a 1980 issue it was described as a chatty and unpretentious magazine reporting on the local scene for local readers.

It is my intention that the present objectives of Canberra Bird Notes should not change. It is a regional magazine and should not claim to be anything more. All members are encouraged to contribute articles or notes. The editor or members of the editorial panel will be only too pleased to advise members on ways of presenting observations. Despite the name Canberra Bird Notes, this magazine has in the past published notes and observations from the region. This area includes areas on the NSW coast as far north as Jervis Bay and areas to the west into the Riverina. It is hoped that members of other ornithological clubs may be encouraged to use Canberra Bird Notes to report observations made in this region.

Finally I would like to again thank Steve Wilson for his fine contribution as Editor since 1976. It is appropriate that mention should be made of Steve's assistants during this time, namely, J Wyatt, B Baker, B FitzGerald, D Purchase and of course Nonie Wilson. The thanks of all COG members go to them for their efforts.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE WATERBIRDS OF LAKE GINNINDERRA: 1979-80

Chris Davey

Observations on waterbirds of Lake Ginninderra from February 1978 to January 1979 were published in CBN (Vol 5, No 2, pp 3-12). This article reports the results from 11 more watches between February 1979 and February 1980.

The same methods as those described in the previous article were used from February to April. Numbers and distributions of birds were then determined with one sweep at each of the four observation points.

Twenty-five waterbird species were recorded and numbers for sixteen of the most common are shown in Table 1. Hoary-headed Grebe *Podiocephalus poliocephalus* and the Australasian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* could not always be separated with complete confidence so the numbers for both have been combined.

Comparing figures in Table 1 with those from the previous year it is clear that an increase occurred during 1979 all through the year. The Great Cormorant *Phalaarocorax aarbo* and Australian Pelican *Peleaanus conspicillatus* were the only species not showing an increase.

Maximum numbers at the end of April and minimum at the end of November followed the pattern seen previously. Numbers were much higher in December 1979 due to a large influx of Eurasian Coot *Fulioa atra,* Black Swan *Cygnus atratus,* Maned Duck *Chenonetta jubata,* grebe, Pacific Black Duck *Anas supereiliosa,* Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons,* Hardhead *Aythya australis*, Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulairostris* and Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles.* These birds were all to be found on the large area of open water to the south of the fence surrounding the communication station. A study of the primary productivity in Lake Ginninderra showed that the water weed *Potamogeton orispus,* which was growing densely in this area, started dying about 6 December, possibly due to the water temperature being in excess of 23°C. This may have led to a release of nutrients and an increase in light levels. Water samples taken during this period indicate a heavy bloom of phytoplankton and zooplankton about 20 December. Large numbers of small fish were collected at this time (P Cullen, personal communication) . These factors may have been responsible for the increase in birds.

The numbers of infrequently seen waterbirds are shown in Table 2.

Distribution maps (Fig 1) are presented for the 16 most common species. Each map shows the arithmetic centre of distribution for the 1978/79 data and for the 1979/80 data to indicate changes in distribution. The lake centre is the arithmetic centre for a hypothetical uniformly distributed species and is also indicated.

Q			Summer		Autumn	29.3	Winter		Spring			Summer	
*	SPECIES	DATE	28.2	26.4	29.5		23.7	14.9	31.10	29.11	21.12	30.1	19.2
	Dusky Moorhen		11	2	9	5	5	1	1	4*	11*	8	8
	Eurasian Coot		235	533	1450	1011	766	715	371	166	432	365	528
	Grebes		50	58	230	235	165	63	16	11	38	22	40
	Great Cormorant		61	9	5	0	4	6	8	1	11	34	14
	Little Black Cormorant		28	4	0	0	6	3	3	7	42	23	0
	Little Pied Cormorant		12	12	5	58	34	5	0	0	0	3	1
	Australian Pelican		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
	Masked Lapwing		11	5	5	2	3	7	5	6	16	24	4
«5	White-faced Heron		7	2	0	3	1	0	0	1	3	3	0
	Maned Duck		117	18	44	28	12	2	6	42*	88	51	20
	Black Swan		8	10	14	4	6	4	0	3	19	10	11
	Pacific Black Duck		87	69	37	42	12	36	30	95*	239*	59*	59
	Grey Teal		4	0	40	0	36	0	3	12	67	13	0
	Hardhead		10	0	2	2	19	21	8	68	170	332	86
	Musk Duck		17	14	14	10	29	10	14	18	18	21	33
	Mallard hybrid		15	1	8	9	6	7	8	9	6	20	12 *
^		TOTALS	673	737	1863	1409	1104	844	473	444	1160	990	816

QQ
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Table 1: Numbers of common waterbirds seen each watch on Lake Ginninderra.
(*) Numbers include chicks - see text.

	Summer		Autumn		Winter		Spring		Summer		
SPFPTFS DATE	28.2	29.3	26.4	29.5	23.7	14.9	31.10	29.11	21.12	30.1	19.2
Great Crested Grebe		1	10		1	1					6*
Black-fronted Plover							2				
Great Egret				3	2						
Pacific Heron	2		2								
Purple Swamphen	1										
Cattle Egret		1		1							
Australian Shelduck		1							1		
Little Egret						1					
Australasian Shoveler											2

Table 2: Numbers of infrequently seen waterbirds on Lake Ginninderra.
(*) Numbers include chicks - see text.

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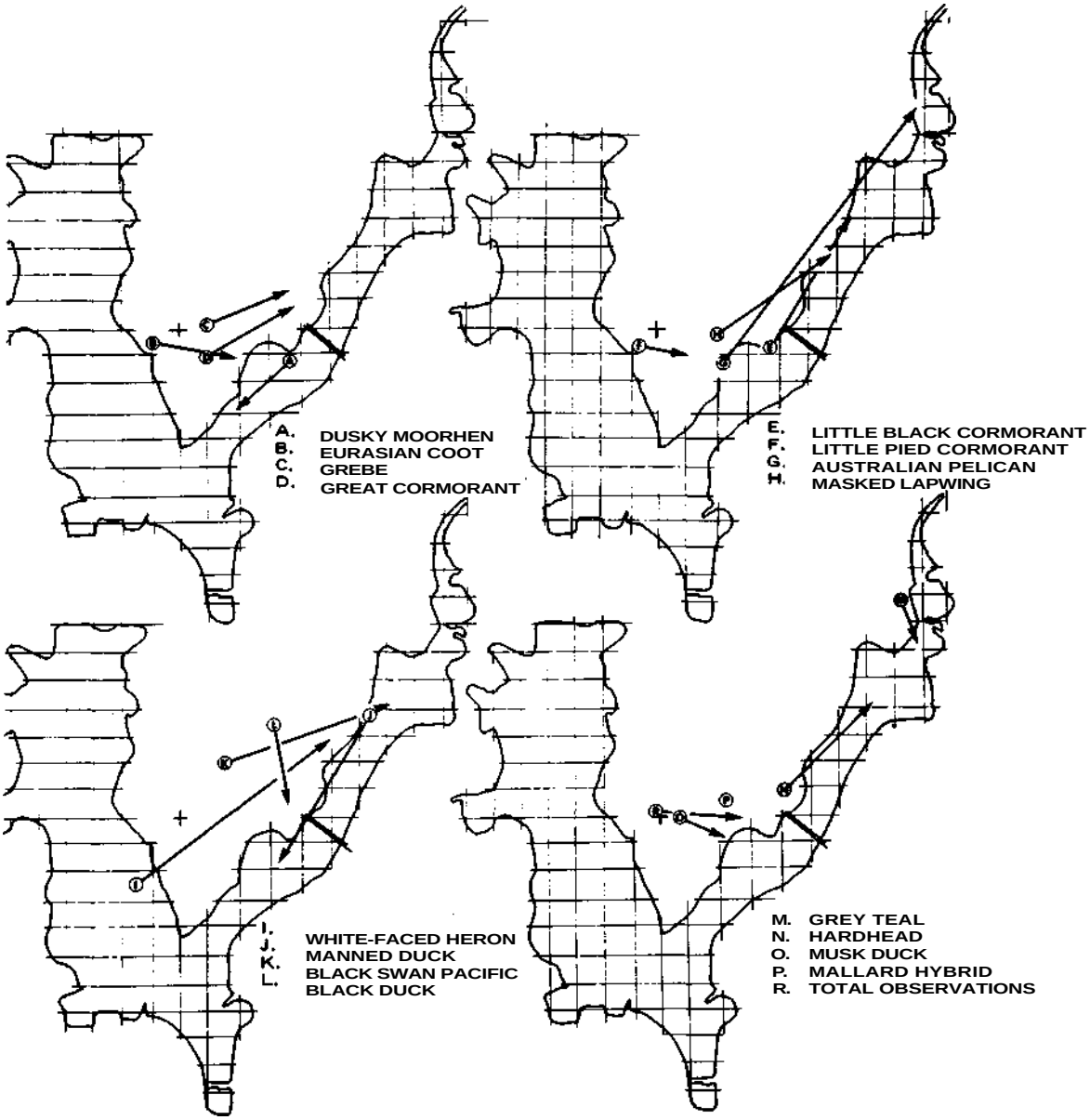

Figure 1: Changes in the distribution patterns of waterbirds on Lake Ginninderra between 1978/79 and 1979/80. (+) is lake centre, 0 is centre of observations for 1978/79, arrow points to centre of observations for 1979/80.

Comparing distribution maps between years it is seen that the Dusky Moorhen *Gallinula tenebrosa* and Mallard hybrid are no longer restricted to the east arm and now occur all round the lake. The distribution pattern of Eurasian Coot, Masked Lapwing, Black Swan, Hardhead and grebe have been greatly influenced by the heavy use of the area to the south of the communication station fence during the summer months. The Great Cormorant and Little Black Cormorant were more frequently seen perching on the fence surrounding the communication station whilst the White-faced Heron *Ardea novae-hollandiae* was more often seen north of the fence during 1979/80. Comparing the two years similar patterns of distribution were shown by Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos,* Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal and Musk Duck *Bi-zi-ura lobata,* Maned Duck were frequently observed feeding on the newly planted grass at the south end of the lake and has caused a shift in their distribution pattern.

A shift in the distribution of birds towards the northern end of the east arm during the summer months has been noted. Details will be shown in a further report. This shift was observed in both summers. In 1979/80 the shift occurred before the December influx. This change in distribution is particularly noticeable in Eurasian Coot, grebe, Little Black Cormorant and Pacific Black Duck.

Few indications of breeding were obtained. The following were noted. At the end of November a Pacific Black Duck with six ducklings to the south of the launching ramp, a Dusky Moorhen with two chicks just south of the bridge and a Maned Duck with six ducklings at the water holding pond. At the end of December a Pacific Black Duck with a brood of five at the water holding pond, a Dusky Moorhen and three chicks north of the police station and a Dusky Moorhen chick south of the bridge. At the end of January a Pacific Black Duck with five ducklings at the water holding pond. In February 1980 five juvenile Mallard hybrids were noted around the bridge and five immature Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* were seen in the communication station area.

Comparing the two years, an increase in the number of birds was seen on Lake Ginninderra but the fluctuations during the year were similar. There was a noticeable increase in birds at the northern end of the east arm during the summer of 1979/80. A shift by birds to the inlet area of the lake occurred in both years during the summer months.

Mr C Davey, 24 Bardsley Place, HOLT, ACT, 2615

NESTING OF STRIATED PARDALOTE IN A BUILDING

Alan Toysan

In 1975 our family acquired some bushland, partially cleared, on the Bombala River between Nimmitabel and Bombala, some 180 km from Canberra in dry sclerophyll forest country. On the property was a derelict weatherboard house at 480 metres above sea level which is marked as 'The Valley* on a recently published map (Glen Allen -724 - 1 - S First Edition, 1:25,000 Series). 'The Valley' is shown as being part of the 'Creewah' station.

Lacking doors, and with the windows shot out and broken, the house was being used for nesting by the Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena* and the Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus.* The swallows nested mainly under the roof of the attached car port. The pardalotes used the ventilation holes placed just below the roof line. These led to cavities averaging 5 cm front to back, 15 cm deep (to the next horizontal cross beam) and 30 cm wide (between the uprights). The cavities afforded complete protection from the weather. After a nesting season or two, the pardalotes had become a nuisance with their frequent comings and goings, and accompanying clamour of the young, not to mention the scratchings, tappings and other noises the families made. To reduce the incidence of this hub-bub to acceptable proportions all but three of the roof-line holes were blocked. Three similar cavities were available through circular holes made in a wooden screen which formed part of the car port.

Now, on 22 October 1979, four cavities are in constant use with broods in each. Such is the competition for these cavities that the squabbling over them in September made the birds something of a pest to people staying in the house. The pressure is now so great that it seems the birds may be depending entirely on the house for nesting cavities. There is no evidence of them nesting in holes in trees or tunnels in the river banks or elsewhere. Unless we block up some or all of the remaining holes, it seems we are stuck with these pert and attractive, but in this setting, over-active little birds. Their almost continuous calling at and around the house is now very much a feature of the total medley of bird sounds.

Finally, although most of the other resident species disappear for some months during the cold weather, returning in August and September, the advance guard of the pardalotes is at times back as early as July to begin nest renovation. They are nothing if not enthusiastic about the business of nesting!!

Mr A Toysan, 5 Charlotte Street, RED HILL, ACT, 2603

A LATE RUFOUS FANTAIL NEST

Val Routley

No bird of the cool mountain forests of the south-east has a tighter breeding schedule that the Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons.* In our area it is the last of the breeding migrants to arrive, appearing in the forests where I live near Clyde Mountain around mid-October, and it is also apparently one of the earliest to leave. Its short breeding season of only 3 months or so thus leaves little room for accidents or mistakes, as the observations below illustrate.

Rufous Fantail nests in our area are normally constructed in the third and fourth weeks of November, although are occasionally a little earlier. The pair described below nested in dense undergrowth close to our house and were observed constructing the nest in the first week of December, that is, a week or two later than normal. This pair appeared to experience more than normal difficulty in establishing their territory, as the construction of the nest was accompanied by unusually copious and noisy altercation with the owners of a neighbouring territory, which continued for many hours a day well into the incubation period.

The nest was 1.5 m from the ground on a horizontal branch of a Musk Daisy Bush *Olearia argophylla.* Since inspection of fantail nests before hatching carries the risk of causing abandonment, the nest was not inspected until 29 December, after hatching. It contained 2 naked nestlings a day or so old. They developed normally and were inspected regularly with some pleasure. In the late afternoon of 9 January 1980 I showed them to a overseas visitor. They had quite a few feathers and were full of life, the beaks opening and heads popping up like tiny Jack-in-the-boxes when the branch was lightly tapped to simulate the alighting of the parents. During the night of 9-10 January there was 50 mm of very heavy rain, and in the morning of 10 January the nest and nestlings were soaked, and the nestlings cold and dead. The parents still flew around the nest, and had evidently made an attempt to remove one dead nestling, which was hanging partly out of the nest.

After a short interval more territorial calling and rebuilding commenced in the same territory. The new nest was 1 m from the ground on a horizontal branch of a small tree of *Doryphora sassafras* in the dense, rainforest understorey of wet sclerophyll forest. On 28 January after watching carefully from a distance through binoculars to make sure the female had departed on one of her breaks from sitting, I quickly inspected the nest, which contained 2 eggs. It was cautiously inspected in the same way on 2 more occasions until 13 February when the female finally abandoned the nest. At this point she had, in my estimation, been sitting at least 18 days. Several days later we took the deserted eggs from the nest and broke them open. They were infertile.

This nest is interesting because adult Rufous Fantails, it has been stated, move north in February (eg. in 'The Complete Book of Australian Birds', p 390). However, if the eggs of this pair had not been infertile and the nesting had continued, the nesting itself would have continued into late February or early March, and the subsequent feeding of the fledglings would have kept the parents occupied in the area until well into March, which is well past the period in which they would normally have left on the northern migration.

The fact that this pair was unable to breed successfully also illustrates the relatively precarious breeding situation of individual Rufous Fantails. Most forest birds, especially sedentary birds, get three or even more opportunities to breed successfully during the period from September to February. For the Rufous Fantail, here in the southern part of its range, the situation is much less assured. A late start on breeding, perhaps due to difficulty in establishing a territory, can mean that there are no proper second chances, and even with a prompt start there could normally be time for only one second chance, unless the nestlings fail early in the piece.

Ms V Routley, Plumwood Mountain, PO Box 37, BRAIDWOD, NSW, 2622

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ODD OBS A PARTIALLY ALBINO COMMON STARLING *Richard & Judy Gregory-Smith*

Sunday 29 June 1980 was cold and wet with snow on the high ground and sleet at Weston Creek. As we drove along Streeton Drive about 1500 a flock of Common Starlings arose from a grass area beside the road and we noticed one had a white tail; no - not snow! This is the first time we had seen albinism in starlings. When we came to think about albinism we realised we had not seen the feature in starlings or in Blackbirds in Australia, although partial albino Blackbirds are not uncommon in England. It could be interesting to know if there are any albinistic strains in Australia. Also if the original immigrant birds were without this defect, could it develop in later generations?

UNUSUAL FEEDING (?) BEHAVIOUR *Kurt Thaler*

Seen near Sullivans Creek was an adult Purple Swamphen with a young Clamorous Reed-Warbler in its bill.

BIRDS OF BRINDABELLA VALLEY

Helen Dowling

The list that follows records those birds observed over the last 10 years in the Brindabella Valley centred on the Brindabella homestead. Birds recorded include those seen up to 2 km into forested areas adjacent to the cleared valley.

Hoary-headed Grebe
Australasian Grebe (see notes)
Australian Pelican
Darter (one record)
Little Black Cormorant
Little Pied Cormorant
Pacific Heron
White-faced Heron
Cattle Egret (see notes)
Great Egret
Rufous Night Heron
Sacred Ibis
Straw-necked Ibis
Yellow-billed Spoonbill
Plumed Whistling-Duck (see notes)
Black Swan
Australian Shelduck
Pacific Black Duck
Grey Teal
Chestnut Teal
Hardhead
Maned Duck (up to 150 birds)
Black-shouldered Kite
Brown Goshawk
Wedge-tailed Eagle
Australian Hobby
Brown Falcon
Australian Kestrel
Stubble Quail
Dusky Moorhen
Masked Lapwing
Red-kneed Dotterel
Black-fronted Plover
Silver Gull
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo
Gang-gang Cockatoo
Galah
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Australian King-Parrot
Crimson Rosella Eastern
Rosella Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo
Tawny Frogmouth Laughing
Kookaburra Sacred
Kingfisher Rainbow Bee-
eater Dollarbird Superb
Lyrebird Welcome Swallow
Richard's Pipit Black-
faced Cuckoo-shrike
Blackbird Flame Robin
Scarlet Robin Eastern
Yellow Robin Golden
Whistler Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Restless Flycatcher Rufous
Fantail Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail Spotted
Quail-thrush Clamorous
Reed-Tferbler Superb Fairy-
wren White-browed
Scrubwren Brown Thornbill
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Striated Thornbill Varied
Sittella White-throated
Treecreeper Red Wattlebird
Noisy Friarbird Yellow-
faced Honeyeater White-
eared Honeyeater

Fuscous Honeyeater	Common Starling Satin
White-plumed Honeyeater	Bowerbird White-winged
White-naped Honeyeater	Chough Australian
Eastern Spinebill	Magpie-lark Dusky
Mistletoebird Spotted	Woodswallow Grey
Pardalote Striated	Butcherbird Australian
Pardalote Silvereye	Magpie Pied Currawong
European Goldfinch	Grey Currawong
House Sparrow Red-	Australian Raven
browed Firetail	Little Raven
Double-barred Finch	

Further details on the occurrences of Cattle Egrets appear elsewhere (Bird Observer, March 1979). Australian Grebes have nested in about 3 or 4 years. Plumed Whistling-Duck have been seen twice and both times for less than 24 hours. One flock was of 3 and the other of 15 individuals.

Mrs H Dowling, 'Brindabella ', NSW via WODEN, ACT, 2611.

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BOOK MARKET

Still available THE EMU, Vols 74-79. RAOU price is $20 per volume or $5.00 per part. Also now available an almost complete set Vols 65-76. These volumes have been donated and proceeds go to COG funds. Offers per volume or for either set to the Secretary, by 30 April 1981.

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THE SULIDAE. The monograph on gannets and boobies written by B Nelson and published by Aberdeen Press. Brand new copy for $83.00 (normal retail price approximately $120). Contact Editor.

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EARLY NUMBERS OF CBN

The Editor has at hand many back numbers of CBN for sale at 50c each. In addition an incomplete set of Volume 1 has been donated. Those parts available are Vol 1, No 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12 and 13. These are available as a set to the highest bidder. Offers to the Secretary by 30 April 1981.

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS

No 6: DAIRY ROAD AREA

Mark Clayton

Area: This area is variously known as 'Kelly's Swamp', 'East Basin', 'Jerrabomberra Creek' but probably is more accurately known as the Dairy Road area. It is boarded by the Molonglo River, the eastern shore of Lake Burley Griffin, the Causeway, Jerrabomberra Creek and the Fyshwick sewage works east of Dairy Road.

Access: Dairy Road crosses the area from Duntroon in the north to Fyshwick in the south. The sewage works is government property and permission to enter is readily granted; the drive to the office is south of the ponds. You will be asked to sign the Visitors Book!

Most of the land west of Dairy Road is a private lease grazing area. Permission to enter should be sought at the farmhouse near the Fyshwick end of the road.

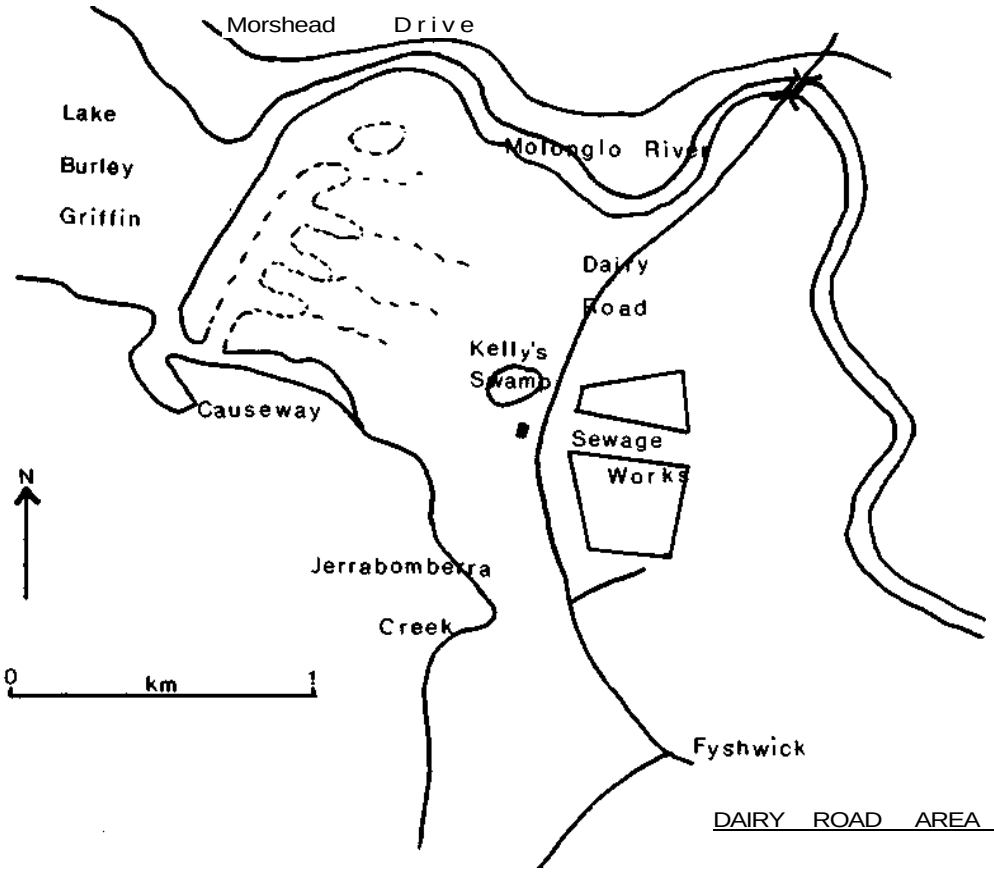
General Description: The sewage treatment ponds (which are never offensive to the nose!) are open earth tanks containing relatively deep water. The northern ponds are sometimes fairly dry and become particularly attractive for many birds. The banks between the tanks provide a roost for many hundreds of birds.

West of Dairy Road the area appears to be just grazing paddocks. However, there are a number of water channels through the area. The principal channel runs from a point on Jerrabomberra Creek and parallel to the eastern end of the lake. From this channel there are a number of channels of water which run back towards the Dairy Road. Two other important areas are Kelly's Swamp which is the main pond visible from Dairy Road and Jerrabomberra Creek which is best approached from the Causeway.

Most areas have very shallow water and the water margins are lined with Bullrushes *Typha sp.* Willows *Salix bdbylonica* line some of the major water courses and the Molonglo River and these are roosting and nesting sites for many bird species. *Birds:* The ACT has little wetland and this area is the most important. Nearly all the Australian ducks occurring in the southeast of the continent have been recorded here.

The reed beds and mud margins provide habitat for such species as the Buff-banded Rail, Baillon's Crake, Australian Crake and the Spotless Crake which are probably warm weather visitors. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-kneed Dotterel and the Black-fronted Plover are also regularly noted. The Black-fronted Plover is there in all seasons.

Trees provide nesting sites for many species notably the Darter, Little Pied Cormorant and White-faced Heron and roosting places for the Rufous Night Heron.



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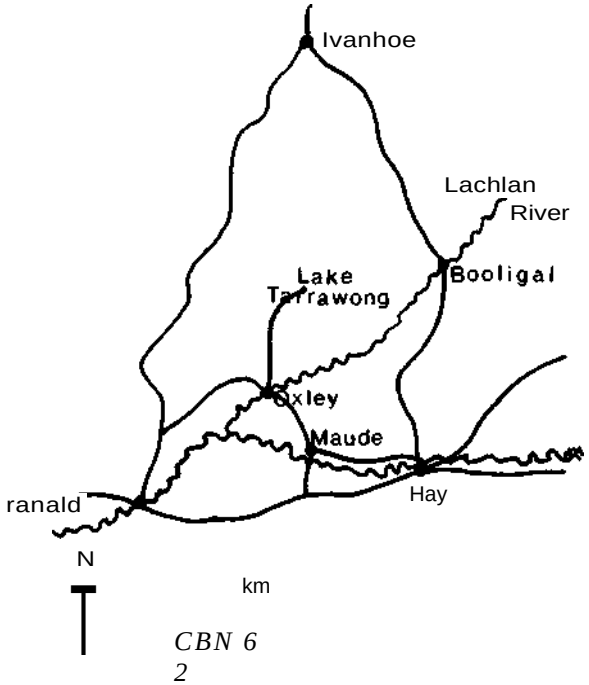

LAKE TARRAWONG No 7

CBN 6
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One only has to look through past issues of Canberra Bird Notes to see the number of interesting species recorded from this area. For many species in the region, the Dairy Flat area is the only known suitable habitat. It is very important that this area be kept as attractive as possible for wetland bird species. Overseas visitors are always impressed by this unique bird watching spot so close to the centre of the city.

No 7: LAKE TARRAWONG (TARWONG PROPERTY) *Mark Clayton*

Area: Lake Tarrawong is in the central west of NSW, north-west of Hay near Oxley. Both the lake and the surrounding timbered country are attractive for birds.

Access: From Hay access is by the road to Maude. About 60 km from Hay and 10 km short of Maude there is a road north to Oxley about 40 km away. In Oxley there is a road marked to Tarwong Bridge, about 25 km, and beyond the bridge is a road to the right to Tarwong and Merritop. The Tarwong homestead is little over 10 km from the bridge.

The property is a sheep station owned by Mr Breen Schiller. He is keen to see the area kept as natural as possible and welcomes interested bird watchers. Please contact the author for Mr Schiller's address if you are planning a visit. *General Description:* The lake is occasionally filled by flood waters from the Lachlan River. These waters are diverted to relieve the water volume in the river itself. The bed of the lake is covered by River Red Gums *Eucalyptus cconaldulensis* and Lignum *Muehleribeckia cunninghamii* and this vegetation provides nesting and roosting sites for large numbers of cormorants and egrets. Ribbon weed *Vallisneria sp* provides food for many species of ducks.

Surrounding the lake is an area of Black Box *Eucalyptus largiflorens* with an understory of Lignum and *Chenopodium .* Away from the lake the country is flat and almost treeless and this area has comparatively few birds by comparison with the lake and its shores.

A few words of warning. Summer is hot and Tiger Snakes *Notechis scrututus* and Brown Snakes *Pseudonaja textilis* are common as are feral pigs. Also don't visit the area during the duck shooting season.

Birds: The birds to be found at Lake Tarrawong are virtually the species listed by Sonia Tidemann in 'Booligal Birds', CBN Vol 4, No 5, January 1979; her study area is about 30 km away as the crow flies (but not by road) .

Some of the birds mentioned by Sonia as occurring in the salt-bush country include Superb Fairy-wren, White-winged Fairy-wren,

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Zebra Finch and Red-capped Robin. In the more open country it is possible to see Australian Pratincole, Crimson and Orange Chats and of course plenty of Emu. The 40 or so species of waterbirds include Glossy Ibis, Freckled Duck and Black-tailed Native-hen. Sonia's list contains over 130 species of birds and all these and more could be expected at Lake Tarrawong and Tarwong property.

Mr M Clayton, 81 Maribyrnong Avenue, KALEEN, ACT, 2617

THE GAPE OF THE FUSCOUS HONEYEATER

E C Metcalf

In CBN, Vol 4, No 8, p 18, Oct 1979, there are notes by Alistair Morrison and of the Editor on the Fuscous Honeyeater *Lichenostomas fusous.* Morrison's notes refer to sightings from months August to January. My sightings date from May to September.

I had not seen this species in my garden before the winter of 1979. I saw it again in the winter of 1980. The birds were seen consistently from 15 May 1979 to 20 September 1979; and from early April 1980 to 19 September 1980. I saw as many as twenty birds in an afternoon as they fed and bathed from 1400 to 1600 hours daily.

When I had first identified them, I had assumed, (until I read the CBN notes) that the birds with pale gapes were juveniles. Now, time and my own observations described below, have also corrected this assumption.

I found that the gapes of the first-comers were a mixture of pale, part-coloured and dark. By the end of April 1980, I had seen groups of twos and threes with pale gapes. On 26 May 1980 one group of six birds comprised four birds with dark gapes and two with light-coloured gapes. By the end of June, most birds had dark-coloured gapes but this was not consistent; there were degrees of variation.

Within those two years, the gapes of two single birds seen on 20 September 1979 and 19 September 1980 were flesh-coloured. I tried to compare these sightings with those of birds seen later. On 9 November 1979 at Gudgenby I saw one Fuscous Honey-eater and its bill was dark-coloured.

I have concluded, as have others, that the most likely explanation is that Fuscous Honeyeaters go through a phase of pale-coloured flanges and gapes between April and September.

Mr E C Metcalf, 11 Peel Street, O'CONNOR, ACT, 2601

BOOK REVIEW

A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia: G Pizzey/R Doyle: Collins: Sydney, 1980: pp 460: Col pll.56: B&W pll.32: $25.00.

The longest awaited ornithological event for quite some time has been the publication *of* Pizzey's Field Guide. How long it has been awaited is shown in the Foreword where it mentions that only one volume of Slater had been published (although it adds in parentheses that 'a second volume has since been published[1]). This dates the Foreword between six and ten years old - an indication of how long this book has been awaited.

Although it pains me to forego an excellent opportunity for displaying my erudite knowledge by quoting examples where the author is correct and incorrect, I feel that in the case of this book it would be better to ask three keen bird watchers for their own short opinions of the book so that the reader can make up his own mind rather than have to rely solely on this reviewer's opinions - indisputably correct though they might be!

So here goes.

Like most other bird watchers, not being omniscent I need/like to have a reference with me even when working familiar territory; the unfamiliar occurs so often.

Ideally, the reference should give compressed information on size and appearance, plumage changes, call, feeding, breeding, behaviour, range and seasonality. Equally important, perhaps, the book should be capable of slipping into one's pocket, to be forgotten until needed.

Slater is fully adequate for me on the first count (though his illustration pages do not indicate size) but falls down on the second; two volumes constitute a library. As well, the bindings do not stand up to rough handling.

Pizzey is a true manual; the strength of his bindings has to be tested in the field. His data, so far as I can see, will be adequate for my on-the-spot needs, but his retention of old common names is confusing (and could point to his data not being as up to date as the 1980 publication date might suggest).

Other than as regards portability, I see little ground for strongly preferring one publication to the other. Any beginner or middle-run watcher who already has Slater could stick with him without loss.

ADR

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Few field guides are small enough to be carried into the field, and this is no exception. It is however a well bound single volume guide with robust cover suitable for keeping for reference in the car or at base, and will give many years service.

The research, collation and compilation of this volume is a great achievement and it is interesting to note the cosmopolitan production involved in Australia, UK, Spain and Hong Kong.

On first impression the paintings appeared disappointingly small, but in use one finds they are clear and usually accurate, despite sometimes exaggerated colours. The comparisons of similar species are well done and the diagnostic features are indicated. I have found the illustrations of immatures and females to be very useful. Presumably cost precluded more plates being in colour.

In identifying three groups of birds we have found the book particularly useful already. Lorikeets are comprehensively covered giving full illustrations of wing and body colouration. The plates on terns are useful to narrow down species, the heads all being presented in colour. Bronze-Cuckoos are very well covered, both upper and under surfaces of tails being illustrated, together with juveniles.

The text is clear and the descriptions of species are as full as required for identification. The system is easy and quick to refer to. All in all I am pleased to be the possessor of this book and it will accompany us on all our expeditions in addition to our other guides.

RGS

The Pizzey Field Guide has a number of characteristics which are good and a number of features which are particularly bad.

- It is excellent that we now have a field guide in one volume. This will be of great benefit to beginners who in my experience can never fathom the seemingly arbitrary distinction between passerines and non-passerines.
- It has an excellent text with full details on many plumages (eg. male, female, juvenile, etc) and a range of songs and calls. Pizzey should be congratulated on the quality of this comprehensive text.

The guide is a true field guide including diagnostic arrows on plates and solid binding and cover.

However these features of the guide are let down by the following inadequacies of the complete work.

Pizzey has used a novel nomenclature with new vernacular names and new taxonomic arrangements. This is a major fault of the book and will contribute to the current confusion in common name usage.

The illustrations are not up to the standard of many bird paintings appearing in other current publications. Many illustrations are small, the printing has not been crisp and in my copy a number of plates were smudged. The colour of the breast of the Spotted Quail-thrush is an obvious printing error. The female robins and many honeyeaters are not well represented, however, the waders, terns and juvenile cuckoos are well illustrated.

The book has been let down by bad proof checking. There are annoying inaccuracies in the end paper maps, inconsistent use of common names between plates, text and distribution maps and a misleading introduction to the distribution maps (most waders and many other species do not breed in Australia). I find it frustrating not to have distribution maps for all the species listed in the text.

- A minor criticism is that Pizzey, like previous authors, has neglected to include species found on Norfolk, Lord Howe and Christmas Islands. These species and perhaps those of the Australian sub-Antarctic and Antarctic territories could have been included perhaps as appendices.

In conclusion I feel the text will be a useful volume for experienced bird watchers because of the features mentioned above. Experienced bird watchers will not be misled by the bad features as much as the new bird watcher. These beginners will have great difficulty with the names. For beginners the single volume will be very convenient, however, many of the illustrations do not clearly represent the diagnostic features or appearance of the bird.

I will recommend this book to beginners but primarily because it is the only available single volume field guide.

NLH

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In summary, all reviewers like the single volume vs two volume approach of Slater, but none appear *to* think it is streets ahead of Slater. In fact if you already have Slater you might be better off spending some of your money on Beruldson's 'Field Guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds' (review next issue) which complements rather than duplicates Slater. If you can afford both - no problem!

GSC

OBSERVATIONS ON BREEDING OF BLACK SWANS

Doug Ross

The Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* is often to be seen, but not in large numbers, on the sewage farm and along Jerrabomberra Creek. Nevertheless, breeding birds are few, presumably because of the scarcity of suitable breeding sites and fluctuations in pond water levels. Successful breeding pairs seen by me in recent years are:

1978 - Pair with 6 cygnets first seen 6 May; down to 4 cygnets by 9 June; and to 3 by 8 July.
- Pair with 5 cygnets first seen 27 November. The pair plus the 5 cygnets continued to be seen up to 5 February 1979.

1979 - Pair with 3 cygnets first seen 17 April. I think that must be the same pair with 4 cygnets seen on 14 May and 24 May (a newly hatched cygnet can be easily missed in rough water).
- Pair with a single well grown cygnet was seen on 9 July; the cygnet possibly being the survivor of the April/May batch.

1980 - Pair with a single cygnet first seen 20 December and on into January 1980. A pair had been about for some days previously and possibly even then had the (not seen) cygnet with them.
- Pair with 3 cygnets, 19 March, near Kings Avenue Bridge. The cygnets were very young; their waterline length was about 20 cms; they kept close to the parents at all times, often trying to burrow under the wing feathers while still swimming and, when that was unsuccessful, scrambling on to the parent's back.

An interesting feature of the sighting was that a third large bird was present in the group, which still had some sub-adult characteristics: brown tones in the feather colour and a rust-red, rather than blood-red, bill. This bird may be the cygnet, now almost full grown, that was sighted from January 1980 onwards. The parent birds did not appear in anyway concerned at the presence of the third bird in the family group, and the cygnets treated it as an elder brother, so to speak!

Mr A D Ross, 64 Sprent Street, NARRABUNDAH, ACT, 2604

OUT AND ABOUT

G Tibieen

The wide ranging effects of various herbicides and pesticides on our environment are well known and here is not the place to repeat them.

However, I must admit I have been worried recently by growing signs of an increase in the use of such substances and the clever way they are being pushed. A recent example was an article in The Canberra Times in which a gardening 'expert' stated that you cannot produce a garden in Canberra unless you use these substances and that they are quite safe to use 'providing the instructions are followed' . No comment was made about cumulative effects or that gardens can be produced without pesticides. Another example was an exhibition of various herbicides/pesticides in the National Botanic Gardens in which 2,4D (a close relative of 2,4,5T) was recommended.

In both cases no mention was made of the fact that prevention is better than cure and that if a plant is susceptible to attack an alternative not as susceptible to attack can be planted.

Remember gardens can be produced without using chemical aids. Admittedly, they don't look like an English garden but rather a tatty Australian one! Moreover, if you consciously attempt to attract birds to your garden you should not use chemical sprays as some have a considerable residual time on flowers and can kill birds quite a long time after spraying.

A directory is being planned of ornithologists and bird watchers who would like to exchange houses or hospitality. Those interested are asked to send an international reply coupon to May Lazar, 55 Grand Avenue, Rockville Centre, NY, 11570, United States of America.

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In April 1980 the Fisheries and Wildlife Division of the Victorian Ministry for Conservation published a nice little booklet entitled 'Strictly for the Birds ...'. It outlines the type of licences required for keeping various species of fauna in captivity and the minimum cage sizes for birds. It is a pity that such a booklet can't be produced in the ACT - especially after you see the conditions some pet-shop birds are kept in. Still the new ACT wildlife legislation has only been under review for ten years or so, so we can't expect miracles can we? Perhaps for the 200th anniversary in 1988?

For those with children the Hawthorn Junior Field Naturalists Club has produced these booklets:

Introducing Australian Native Orchids	24 pages 75 cents
How and When to Collect Fossils	25 pages 75 cents
Helpful Hints for Nature Study	27 pages 50 cents

All three can be posted anywhere for $2.50. Copies available from: D E Mclnnes, 129 Waverley Road, East Malvern, Vic, 3145.

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Rosemary Balmford has informed CBN that the Victorian Ornithological Research Group will be holding a Conference in Melbourne over the weekend 24-26 July 1981 on the theme of:

'Ideas for Ornithological Research in the Eighties' All interested persons are invited to attend and further details can be obtained from: VORG Conference Secretariat, PO Box 203, South Melbourne, Victoria, 3205.

A report in the Los Angeles Times describes the death of a nestling Californian Condor during a banding and weighing session which lasted 30 minutes. The banding was part of a US Fisheries and Wildlife Service rescue project which will cost $2 million over 20 years. The death of the chick was a major blow to the rescue attempt since there are less than 30 birds left in the world. The chick was autopsied and found to have died of 'shock and acute heart failure'. The researchers admit that the banding and weighing procedure should have been much quicker. The debate over the best management practices for very rare species such as the condor and many Australian species will no doubt be rekindled. However, it is difficult to see that the best course of action is to sit back and observe the decline without making some attempts to change the trends.

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ODD OBS

AUSTRALIAN CRAKES AND RED-KNEED DOTTERELS *Richard Mason*

Small parties of between two and six birds of both these species have been seen regularly at Kelly's Swamp. Sightings up until January 1981 have been made of the crakes from November 1980 and the dotterels from October 1980. The Australian Crakes are especially interesting because they are always to be found at the same spot; moreover, they are not really shy, but soon re-emerge to swim and feed after they have taken cover.

TRIP REPORT

OUTING TO CASTLE HILL, THARWA

Mark De Cean

On Sunday, 12 October, 1980, a group of COG members led by Richard Mason met at Castle Hill near Tharwa at 0930. The habitat was lightly timbered dry grassland at the foot of Castle Hill. The day was clear, warm and at first rather windy.

The most common birds were the woodswallows. There were two species, the white-browed and dusky. A Dusky Woodswallow had build a nest that was about 1.5 m from the ground in a recess in the trunk of a large stringybark. The three eggs were white with purplish brown streaks.

One of the highlights of the trip was the sighting of a pair of raptors which flew over the area too high for members to be sure of their identification. They were thought to be either Little or Peregrine Falcon.

Some of the more interesting birds we saw were the Rufous Songlark, Little Eagle, White-winged Triller, Singing Bushlark, White- throated Warbler, Mistletoebird, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Pallid Cuckoo and Red-capped Robin. Probably the most beautiful bird we saw was a Diamond Firetail.

We saw thirty-seven species of which four were nesting. They were the Tree Martin, Willie Wagtail, Striated Pardalote which had two nests in hollow trees and the Dusky Woodswallow.

Mark De Cean, Age 12, 21 Callings Street, PEARCE, ACT, 2607

LETTER TO EDITOR

WHITE-BROWED SCRUBWREN MOVING YOUNG

In a recent article in CBN (Vol 5, No 1, p 32, 1980) Val Routley described some interesting behaviour concerning White-browed Scrubwren *Sericornis frontalis* moving young from a nest. It was presumed that the adult bird was moving the young to a safer nest site.

Stephen Marchant writes with another explanation: *Such behaviour among passerines is either very rare indeed or unheard of. However, what was happening was that the parents were removing young evicted from the nest by a cuckoo (probably Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus pyrrhophanus)* . I have often seen eggs or young evicted and lying just outside the entrance to nests; but they soon disappear and I have wondered how this happened. If they were left there, they would probably endanger the nest by attracting predators. Now we know they are removed and the observation is important and interesting.

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