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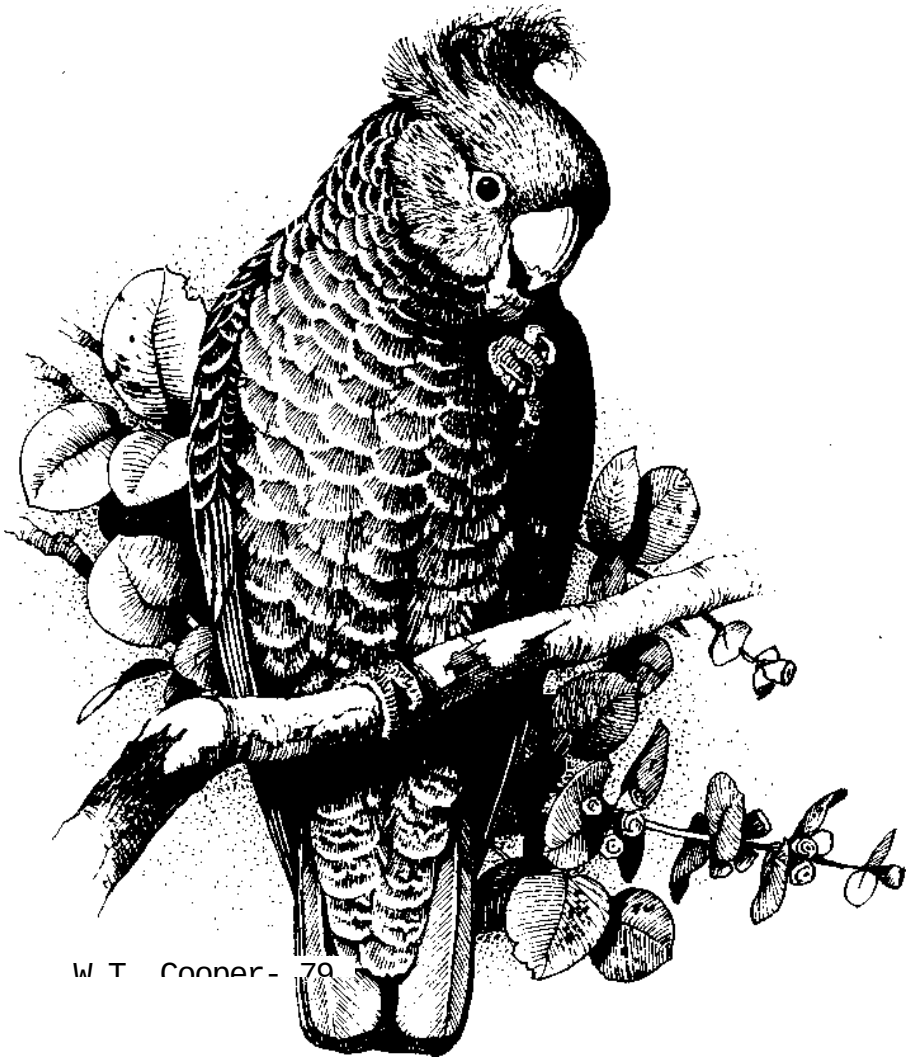

W.T. Cooper - '79

EDITORIAL

There has much been said and written of late concerning counting birds. COG members have recently been asked to record the numbers of birds seen in their gardens (see article in this issue). A waterbird survey has been conducted by club members for several years. For many years members have been asked to contribute to the annual bird report. (The first was published in 1969 for 1967-68.)

What is the purpose of these projects? Firstly, it is hoped that participation in collecting data for these studies be enjoyable. For most of us, bird watching is a pleasant outdoor recreation. For some bird watching is a social activity and COG excursions or waterbird surveys are a way of enjoying your past-time with like-minded friends.

However, much of this bird watching activity can be used to provide useful information on a range of aspects of the lives of birds. In the simplest form the data collected are species lists. This can give information on the increase or decrease of species. Common Mynah, Galah and Maned Duck are examples of the former and Bush Thick-knee, Australian Bustard and Brolga, examples of the latter in our region. The information collected for the annual bird report can be used to determine these gross changes in the composition of our local avifauna.

More precise studies such as the waterbird surveys, the new garden charts or the proposed habitat surveys can give much more information on the annual fluctuations of birds or other, more subtle changes. These changes may be the result of alterations to the bird's environment, eg. planting of native plants in the new suburbs, use of insecticides, or increases or decreases in cat numbers. Although each member's contribution may not in itself show any significant trends, the combination of all observations may show highly significant patterns.

It should be pleasing to know that as well as enjoying our bird watching and increasing our personal knowledge of our garden, lake or mountain birds, each member can also contribute to our detailed understanding of Canberra birds.

On another subject, this issue contains new breeding records for the region and unconfirmed sightings of other species. The editorial panel and rarities committees have examined these records and based on the information supplied support the views expressed by the individual authors.

FAIRY TERN NESTING IN NSW

Peter Bolger & Elizabeth Dennis

In the early weeks of December 1980 at Tilba Lake the Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* were noisily conducting their courtship displays and giving a hard time to the resident oystercatchers, magpies and galahs. By 14 December the shell shingle bar at the lake entrance was spotted by 20 or more trial scrapes and there were 8-10 birds in evidence. From a distance 3 pairs could be seen to have an interest in specific locations. Careful examination showed a nest with a single egg and another with 2 and, although the sitting birds returned promptly as if serious incubation had begun, it was assumed that laying was not complete.

On 20 December the terns were just as noisy, the scrapes were as fresh, but no eggs were to be found. The lake bed was nearly dry, because of the long, hard drought; there were wide nesting grounds available. On a barely-dry shell bank, way down the lake, some 10 nests all held eggs varying from 2 to 3 in number. Birds were sitting closely and we had no trouble watching for an hour from 10 metres through binoculars and 30x telescope. It was obvious that one of the sitting birds was a ring in.

Its general form was bulkier than its neighbours, the bill was a brighter yellow over all its length and a paler edge to the wings was noticeable at rest. Particularly prominent was the different head pattern; the black feathers extended merely a fraction before the eye and not down to the lores. The white forehead formed no neat triangle, as in the other birds, but instead made its own distinctive pattern which we carefully noted. No difference in leg colour between the birds could be distinguished despite deliberate attention to this point, nor could any differences in flight or call be found. All of the Little Terns under observation had black tips to the bills and all had crisp forehead triangles in clear breeding plumage.

The distinctive bird, and there was only one of its kind, was incubating, but after some time was relieved at nest by a partner which was typically Little Tern in description. We watched three changeovers with the distinctive bird putting in the longer stints at the nest. It contained 3 eggs of which nothing could be learned from the colouration, but 2 of them could be seen to be relatively longer, in proportion, to the other, a comparatively rounder egg more like the ones in nearby nest-scrapes.

Back consulting the literature it was plain our observations tallied clearly with published descriptions of _the Fairy Tern *Sterna nereis.* We looked at several illustrations, and the Readers Digest photographs are excellent, but we recommend the drawings in Serventy et al (1971) and photos in Simpson (1972). Our observation conditions had been as perfect as they can be in the field, with birds sitting quite still on the nests.

So at Tilba we had had one of the few certain field observations of Fairy Terns being present in New South Wales and the first recorded nesting of the species in the State, and indeed east of South Gippsland. The joint incubation behaviour was a puzzle but we had insufficient information to attempt to distinguish between the few behavioural options which seem possible. Later we found that the sightings of a Little Tern at nest in a colony of Fairy Terns in South Australia had been interpreted more firmly by Cox and Close (1977).than we were prepared to attempt.

Christmas intervening, it was 1 January 1981, before we could arrive at the ternery with camera and telephoto. The important nest-scrape, though distinguishable, was quite empty. Nor did any of the other nests have eggs, though 5 newly-fledged terns were being fed at the water shallows nearby. We found a new nest in a new area not far off and there we watched a pair of Little Terns copulating. At our first-located nest area, half a mile away, 2 eggs were being incubated and another pair of terns seemed to be broody.

A week later a tern was still brooding at the entrance bar but its eggs were not checked, for there were a number of people around. A week later again there were no eggs, runners or fledglings there, or at either of the other two nest groups down the lake. Some hundreds of metres away, quite a different area, adult tern noise brought us to a single runner, which was photographed. This was the final observation of the breeding behaviour for the season.

Throughout the two midsummer months .December and January, Little Terns were to be seen in plenty along the stretch of coast from Mystery Bay to Wallaga Lake. Besides the apparently compact ternery at the latter place it seemed there were Little Terns attempting incubation in a spread of sites, mostly in small numbers and isolated from each other, though all within the general milieu of the feeding grounds in shallow waters. This year at least this area must have been important for this endangered species.

The Tilba records of uncompleted incubations (which will be monitored in future seasons)re-emphasise that breeding success remains a chancy business and that the shell banks of coastal lakes require maximum protection during the busy summer weeks. In this light the decision of Eurobodalla Shire Council in protecting the Wallaga Lake site during the crucial time is to be applauded. Now such action needs to become an annual event and extended from Wallaga. Our Tilba Lake Community will be working to help in our area.

These observations are recorded here for the interest of local readers and will be the subject of a paper in another place.

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FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF YELLOW THORNBILL IN REGION

Michael Lenz

The status of Yellow Thornbill *Acanthiza nana* in our region is still uncertain. Despite regular observations there has previously not been a published breeding record (Wilson in Birds of the Australian High Country, 1969). On the AND campus I have seen this species in the area opposite the Botanic Gardens and around Balmain Crescent in the south-west corner of the campus.

On 31 January 1981 I saw a Yellow Thornbill collecting food near the carpark of the Research School of Earth Sciences. This bird disappeared into a Cootamundra Wattle and was soon followed by a second bird into the tree. From the top of the wattle I could hear begging calls. The thornbill's nest was 5 metres above the ground and the young birds were being fed at the nest entrance. On 14 February 1981 an adult and young bird were observed near Balmain Crescent.

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ODD OBS

CASPIAN TERN OVER JERRABOMBERRA WETLANDS R C Gregory-Smith

On 8 July 1981 I took an early morning stroll from Dairy Flat Road towards the East Basin of Lake Burley Griffin. After the recent heavy rains the wetlands were very wet indeed, making progress difficult and the route circuitous. Eventually on reaching the East Basin and having seen 30 species en route that I would have expected to see, I saw the sighting of the morning.

Flying west from Jerrabomberra Creek at a height of about 200 m was a tern. It was large, with a black cap and a distinctive large red bill - clearly the ubiquitous, but occasional Canberra visitor, Caspian Tern. I was able to observe the bird flying strongly with powerful wing beats for about ten seconds before it disappeared behind trees heading over the lake.

ACT ORNITHOLOGY AND NEW CHUM'S ROAD ANNIVERSARY

Steve Wilson

The bird banding activities of the Brindabella Ranges have been mentioned in these pages occasionally but it must be admitted that it has been mostly a low key affair publicity-wise. Its history is now quite a long one; indeed it is probably the longest running amateur bird banding activity in natural forests anywhere in the world. Its history has not been all plain sailing by any means and it is probably worthwhile putting on paper in this year of the 20th anniversary of its commencement.

To get a little of the feel of bird activity in the ACT prior to the mid 60's, see the forward to 'Birds of the Australian High Country' where the late Francis Ratcliffe painted quite a good picture.

A few ornithologists lived and worked in Canberra prior to 1960. Gregory Mathews lived here for a while and published a very poor list about 1943 which did not include such birds as the Rufous Fantail, Rose Robin, Striated Thornbill or the White-browed Scrubwren (Mathews, 1943). However, his was not the first effort as Charles Barrett who edited The Emu for many years published a story of birds seen on two visits to the Federal Territory as it was then (Barrett, 1922). Less than 50 species were recorded.

D P Jones, Head Teacher at Duntroon Public School, ACT, listed 121 species in an article in The Emu (Jones, 1929).

Don Lamm, known personally to the older generation of our members, was at the United States Embassy in the late 1940's and two published papers and the listing of many additional species resulted. Don did a regular survey by walking from Uriarra Crossing to the Cotter and he and John Calaby published the results (Lamm and Calaby, 1950). The second paper was a list written with David White of birds not noted by earlier workers (Lamm and White, 1950).

Various professional ornithologists were here before 1960 but they can hardly be blamed for concentrating on the birds they were studying in working hours; nothing was published of their sightings of local birds.

I arrived in Canberra in September 1959 to be followed closely by an American diplomat, Bill Belton, who was here until 1963. Don Lamm was back in Canberra for another stint at the United States Embassy in 1960.

Betty Temple Watts arrived in Canberra in 1958 to work on the plates for 'Birds of the Australian High Country'. Warren Hitchcock and Robert Carrick both with CSIRO, worked out a listing of known and probable birds and Robert Carrick arranged species poses for the plates.

My sons Brendon and Denis were very active then and with other amateur bird watchers arriving here in those days new birds

were rapidly added, heaping much new work on Betty. Lamm, Wilson and Belton (1963) added 45 new species. The early 1960's were tremendously important in that the local bird list was well established. But I press on too rapidly.

On his return to Canberra in 1960 Don Lamm and John Calaby sought an area of uniform, wet sclerophyll forest about 2 miles in length in which Don would do a regular visual survey. Finally they found New Chum's Road on the eastern slopes of the Brindabella Ranges below Bull's Head. The road runs from Wark's Road to the Bendora Road and was built as a forestry access road. Don also did a survey of the birds of the northern end of Lake George at that time (Lamm, 1964).

A few exploratory trips were made for the visual survey in late 1960 and the length of the walk established. The work at New Chum's Road commenced in January 1961.

Early banding trips were done with the eager assistance of Brendan, who inspired my start as a bird bander and Denis, Don Lamm and Bill Belton also helping. Mist nets were very new to Australia and little had been written anywhere regarding their use. So we had to learn how to catch and handle birds the hard way, in retrospect some of the early places we tried were quite funny. The little literature that was available (from the northern hemisphere) always spoke of netting flyways. After some time the team tried the Ranges; the first site was on Lee's Creek and this proved to be a worthwhile site.

Don, Bill, Brendan, Denis, Dick Schodde and I discussed netting areas frequently. We debated netting at New Chum's Road and in our inexperience decided to erect a continuous barrier of nets along the road in an area near the middle of the present banding area. So this was done on 9 April 1961. The thought was to erect the nets very early, walk up the steep slope to the west and then have all those present walk down the slope driving the birds ahead of us. To walk through the wet forest was hard enough but to attempt to beat birds along was futility itself. The catch was nil and we were exhausted. We went back to the cars for a rest and a snack. On our return the net nearest the creek had a good catch of birds, mostly migrating White-naped Honeyeaters! On 25 April 1962 we tried again, placing the nets in the shelter of trees and shrubs and avoiding the more open sites. Gullies where tiny creeks crossed the road were favoured and in general sites used in April 1961 are those in use today.

The pattern for banding trips now became well established. We left home 3 hours before first light, taking all equipment including net poles with us. This timing allowed an hour's driving time and 2 hours to erect the 22 nets. This was done in the light of the car headlights and torches.

The netting area covered about 3/4 of the visual survey (ie. about 1½ miles). The netting area commencing at the place where

the power lines cross the road whereas the visual survey commenced at the northern end of the road. The netting and visual survey ended at the same place on the south end of the road. Don would help with net erection and I would drive him up to his starting point to enable him to be on the job at sunrise.

The team of three Wilsons, Lamm and Belton rapidly became extremely efficient at net erection, each did a particular task and it was often commented that the whole exercise was completed without a spoken word. When a pre-dawn cup of tea was being drunk the verbal situation would be different. Two subjects were never mentioned - their work at the US Embassy or mine in the Department of the Navy; we were out there to get away from office concerns.

In late 1963 Bill Belton was posted to Panama and in mid 1964 Don retired and returned to the USA to settle in Tuscon, Arizona. A little later Brendan left Canberra to study to be followed a year or so later by Denis. Early results of this early work were published in 1966 (Lamm and Wilson). Peter Davidson was one of the first school boys to join the team and he recruited Barry Baker. Simon Bennett, Tony Stokes, Neil Hermes and Mark Clayton were all junior helpers in their school days. Of these early helpers, all are still members of COG and all work professionally in fields related to natural history.

The banding effort in the last half of the 1960's relied heavily on these and other less regular helpers, all of whom were in their teens. One difficulty was that some parents attempted to use the banding trips as a behavioural carrot and had several calls to inform me that certain individuals (not any of those named) could not go because of disciplinary reasons. Regular assistants at various times during the sixties included Gerry van Tets, Grahame Clark, Terry Gourlay and Stephen Marchant.

At times trips were quite uncertain as one could not tell in advance whether a team would be available and the same situation recurred in the early 1970's for the same reasons. Indeed in the 1970's it seemed at times that the end was in sight as we could not see a team being available in the future.

I had a serious back injury in 1967, after which my participation in the field work for some years was irregular. This situation reached a climax with my retirement on health grounds in February 1971. By this time Gerald and Shirley Horey had taken an interest in New Chum's Road and Gerald took over from me. After a time Gerald found the going too hard, very early mornings, long days, the drive home down the mountain when one is tired all told on him as it had on me. David Stewart was then persuaded to take the responsibility of leader and ran the site with Barry Baker's assistance.

After 1975 a further change in leadership occurred. David Purchase as the man in charge of the Australian Bird-banding Scheme

knew the value of the accumulating data and he was a great advocate of continuation of the project. By now the helpers and trip leaders were mostly associated with the Australian National University either as graduates or undergraduates. It was found impossible to find one person to take full responsibility for all trips but several were prepared to lead two or more trips per year. In about 1974 the Brindabella Banding Group was formed to take the responsibility with leaders doing a few trips per year. Sonia Tidemann is now responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the group while the field records are in my care.

Current field trip leaders are Kath Britt, Stuart Davey, Neil Hermes, Simon Inwards, Tony Stokes and Sonia Tidemann. There is now a great degree of permanency in the team as the majority are residents of Canberra and plan to remain here. This contrasts strongly with the situation of a few years ago when we did not know who could possibly be called on to lead trips even a couple of months ahead.

New Chum's Road has not been the only banding activity in the Brindabella Ranges. I banded at Lee's Creek (mentioned earlier) from 1961 to 1970 and others did a few trips in the next two years but it was then dropped until John Penhallurick revived the project in 1978 and now runs the site with Cedric Bear.

Many who helped at New Chum's Road were eager to start their own study areas in the Ranges. Bob Evans started areas at Lee's Creek Road and near Lee's Springs not far from Picadilly Circus. His efforts did not last long.

Ian Grant started banding at Bushrangers Creek on Warks Road south of the Bendora Dam road. After a few years the RAAF posted him away and John McKean took over to be followed by David Stewart when John transferred to Darwin. For a time the Bushrangers Creek site was not used but more lately Ian Grant has been working it again.

Max Murn started Blundells Creek Road site about 1964 and tried two other areas near there but Blundells Creek was chosen for long term work.

Work at New Chum's Road has continued for over 20 years, and with only a few minor breaks, banding trips have been made at least once a month. Work at the time of writing also continues regularly at Lee's Creek Road and occasionally at Bushrangers Creek and Blundells Creek Road.

Dr Stephen Russell came to Canberra with Don Lamm in 1974 for the 16th International Ornithological Congress; the two have worked together in Arizona. During the Congress the three of us visited New Chum's Road and Steve and I started discussions as to the possibility of his taking sabbatical leave and coming to Canberra to analyse the New Chum's Road banding data. Discussions continued by mail until a visit was finally arranged. At the same time

discussions with staff of the Division of Wildlife Research in particular Dr Harry Frith and David Purchase (Bird Banding Scheme) and Bruce Parker on the computer side resulted in the decision to put the bird data on computer. It was decided to look at all bird data from the Brindabella Ranges rather than the New Chum's Road site alone.

No-one realised the magnitude of the task we were taking on when I started writing up data sheets in November 1979. When we were satisfied with the format of the data sheet it was printed and the leaders started writing data sheets with me. By the time Steve Russell arrived in June 1980 card punching was nearly complete.

Steve worked during his six month's visit but the task is so large that we had only reached the stage of the bulk analysis by the time of his return to the USA. Computer programmes are still being written to provide detailed analysis of the data. It will all be written up for publication but that will not be immediately as we are dealing with 35,000 individual banding or retrapping records from four major and five minor banding stations.

A fire engulfed many of the net sites at New Chum's Road in 1972 and at the time nearly caused the termination of work here. This will actually provide valuable additional information.

When the visual survey started in 1961 the species present were not known; we now have excellent information on the fifty odd species banded and it is now a long time since a new species turned up in a net or has been observed.

Much of the more interesting data relate to individual longevity records. The oldest bird to date is a female Golden Whistler banded by Ian Grant and retrapped by him more than 16 years later. A White-browed Scrubwren lived for more than 14 years and a Brown Thornbill for more than 13 years. Prior to this study and similar work in other parts of Australia nothing was known regarding how long our birds lived; good information is now available on several species. Similarly nothing was known about average life expectancy which is of relatively short duration compared with the long lives of some individuals. Survival curves indicate that while average life expectancy of many small birds is relatively short, extremes such as those mentioned above are to be expected. Early calculations indicate that life expectancy for the White-browed Scrubwren may be the longest average life expectancy recorded for a passerine species.

A mine of information exists in these data; I look forward to the completion of the analysis and publication of the results. Neil Hermes in CBN 6 3 p 91 commented on the anniversary celebrations on 3 May 1981. A further celebration was arranged a few days later at our home at Narrabundah and these notes are based on remarks *I* made on that occasion. Many people have assisted our New Chum's

Road over the years and it has unfortunately not been possible to mention them all by name here.

Don't forget Neil's comment in that article that there are always opportunities for others to join the work - just get in touch with the author or with one of the leaders.

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BREEDING RECORDS FOR THE RED-CAPPED PLOVER FROM LAKE BATHURST AND LAKE GEORGE

Michael Lenz

The Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus* occurs regularly at Lake Bathurst and Lake George, but breeding has not yet been recorded from these lakes. During the COG waterbird surveys in the 1980/81 season plover runners were seen four times: 14 December 1980: 2 times, 3 jttv, L Bathurst (R Bennett, N Hix, J Vandermark) 11 January 1981: 1 pair + 2 juv, L George, northern end (R Digan M Lenz) 22 February 1981: 1 Pair + 1 juv, same area (M Lenz)

The COG Field List (1974) indicates a breeding season from November to December. The breeding season extends from August to March for coastal populations in the east and south of Australia and inland birds can breed at any time of the year (Hitchcock in *Birds of the High Country, 1969).*

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WHAT WORD IS THAT?

Ian Taylor

A pelican, an American prison and an albatross; what do these have in common? The names of many birds have a complex and interesting history behind them and a brief exploration into the derivation of some of these names can be both rewarding and entertaining. In the case of the three above, the Spanish originally called the pelicans 'bucket birds' or 'alcatraz', a word which later came to mean any large white bird. When Spanish explorers came across a rocky island in San Francisco Bay, they named it Alcatraz Island and it was here that the infamous prison was built. In the mean time, the Dutch also took the word to sea and, apparently confusing it with the Latin word for white (albus) they applied the name to another bird which they called 'albatross'.

Many ancient or traditional names conjure up images of England; wren, lark, quail, swan, finch, duck and dove. In fact many of these names go far beyond the birth of the English language. Words like 'fowl' and 'goose' are derived from the Indo-European mother language spoken almost four thousand years ago. Other names have come to us from the Teutonic mother language from which languages such as English and German developed and as a result, both share similar words for swallow, raven, starling, owl and thrush. Ancient Greek has made its contribution with such words as ibis and heron, and from Old Norse come the words snipe, tern and skua. Other words like kite, crane, eagle, chough and sparrow also have ancient origins. Sparrow, for example, is related to the Latin word 'passer' which gave us the word 'passerine' which originally means sparrow-like.

Other names describe the bird's appearance - thornbill, spinebill, spoonbill, wedgebill, weebill, fantail, firetail, whiteeye, silvereye and whiteface to name only a few. Others are less obvious: penguin comes from the 'pen gwyn' meaning 'white head' in Welsh, 'oriole' comes from the Latin for 'golden', falcon comes from the Latin 'falx' meaning 'sickle', budgerigar means 'beautiful bird', pharalope means 'coot-foot', pardalote means 'leopard spots', cormorant means 'sea crow' and our word for pelican has nothing to do with buckets, but comes from the Greek for 'axe'.

The name of *a* bird is often derived from its call, for example, cuckoo, Jacky Winter, chat, shrike (meaning shriek), rail, whimbrel, pipit and the native names, kookaburra, boobook, mopoke and currawong. There are also whistler, triller, babbler, warbler. Strangely enough both gull, (Welsh for 'weeper'), and pigeon (which is derived from the Latin word for 'peeper') are in this group. Whipbird, catbird and cicadabird should also be included. Bittern has come to us by way of the Middle English 'botor' which itself is said to be a derivation of the Latin 'bos taurus' or 'bull of the bog' because of its booming call.

The feeding habits and movements were the inspiration of the names flycatcher, beeeater, honeyeater, treecreeper, shoveller, turnstone, osprey, (meaning 'bone-crusher' in Latin), sanderling (Old English for 'sand ploughman'), and pratincole or 'meadow dweller'.

Plover comes from the Latin 'pluvia' and the French 'pluvier' both meaning rain - those who have seen pairs of plovers in the middle of a paddock quite oblivious to the rain may appreciate this one. The origin of the name 'swift' is obvious, but 'bustard' is a little more difficult coming from the Latin 'avia tarda' which means 'slow bird'.

Some birds have come by their names in ways apart from those in the four main categories mentioned above. A few bear Christian names such as robin, martin, petrel (or little Peter), parrot (from the French Pierrot), and magpie from Margret's Pie (pie is a type of bird). It is worth noting that despite its beautiful carolling our noble magpie has been called 'crow shrike' from time to time. Others have even more unusual origins like the Rose Hill parrot named after the Governor's residence near Parramatta where they were first noted. This name later became 'Rosehiller' and, finally, the familiar 'rosella'. Pheasants were so called by the ancient Greeks after the region of the Phasis River on the east coast of the Black Sea where they are said to have originated. Some words have been borrowed from Asian languages, for example, lory, cassowary and cockatoo are all Malay words (cockatiel carries the Dutch diminutive ending), while koel, myna and pitta all come from Indian languages. I imagine that drongo is the only Mada-gascan word to have found its way into colloquial Australian.

There are still many words I have left unexplored. Can any interested reader help me with 'cisticola', 'hylacola' or 'sitella'? In the mean time let us empathise with our German colleagues who have to manage names like 'Kurzschnabelschlammlaufer' and 'Weissachselnonnensteinschmatzer'!

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ODD OBS

CAPE BARREN GEESE IN BRINDABELLA VALLEY — Helen Dowling

A pair of Cape Barren Geese was observed at Brindabella Homestead in September 1980. It was assumed that these birds were from Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve as they were very tame. Other (the same?) birds of this species have been observed at Koorabri property to the south of Brindabella Homestead and also from the road into the valley from the ACT.

BIRDS OF NORTH WESTERN MEXICO - PART 1

John Penhallurick

When Professor Steve Russell of Tucson, Arizona was visiting Canberra last year, I learned that the Tucson Audubon Society was organising a trip to Mexico at a time when I would be visiting the United States of America. I contacted the organiser Harriet Barkor and was fortunate to get one of the limited number of places.

I joined the party in Tuscon, and although I was still within the United States, was already in the northern-most of the habitat zones of north-western Mexico. This is because the great Sonoran Desert that dominates the northern Mexican state of Sonora extends into southern Arizona. In fact, a glance at the distribution maps in a North American field guide will show that bird species found around Arizona group naturally with Mexico rather than the rest of the United States. It is the only area where the Elegant Trogon breeds in the United States. Similarly, over sixteen species of hummingbird occur in Arizona, as opposed to four in the rest of the west of the United States and only one species in the east.

The most striking feature of the Sonoran Desert is the giant Saguaro cactus. Such birds as the Gila Woodpecker and Common Flicker excavate holes in these, which are later occupied by other species, including the tiny Elf Owl. A lower-growing cactus is the Cholla or Jumping cactus. The spines of this fearsome plant are far sharper than any needle, and it is astonishing how birds such as the big Cactus Wren and Curve-billed Thrasher can make their nests in the middle of an apparently impenetrable mass of spines. The Curve-billed Thrasher is one of eight species of thrashers in the United States which belong to the Mimidae, the same family as the Mockingbirds.

Towhees are large ground-feeding sparrows and all four species occur in Arizona. Abert's Towhee, distinguished from the Brown Towhee by its black face is confined to the south-west. Gambels Quail which differs from the Californian Quail in lacking the scaling on the belly, is common in the Sonoran region and can be found wandering through suburban gardens of Tucson in the early morning.

From Tuscon the party travelled by road to the border town of Nogales where we caught a train for the overnight journey of over 1200 km to the coastal town of Mazatlan. As one moves further south, the rainfall gradually increases and the desert of Sonora gradually gives way to a mix of thorn scrub and cactus in the state of Sinaloa.

The first sight to greet us when we reached Mazatlan in southern Sinaloa were hundreds of Magnificent Frigatebirds some hanging motionless over a rocky point, and others harrying gulls and Brown and Blue-footed Boobies offshore. Many wading birds were seen along the foreshores and lagoons including American Avocets,

Roseate Spoonbills and Spotted Sandpipers. A field covered with low thorny bushed yielded many new species such as Hooded, Black-vented and Streak-backed Orioles and a party of Groove-billed Anis, most unlikely looking members of the cuckoo family. A small Green Kingfisher obligingly perched on a 'Keep Off sign. In the fading light we found a Crested Caracara, Mexico's national bird and a Lesser Nighthawk.

Mazatlan has some way to go as a tourist resort. There are a number of plush (and expensive) luxury hotels and we enjoyed good meals at restaurants - mainly seafood. By the way, the only Mexican food we ate in Mexico was at a restaurant run by an American at a little town called Copala. The beach was not up to much and it gets irritating having to remember not to drink the water.

From Mazatlan we travelled some 250 km south to San Bias, crossing into the state of Nayarit. Stops along the route produced the jewel-like Fork-tailed, Emerald and Berylline Hummingbirds plus the Cinamon Hummingbird. The Americans were very excited to see White-fronted and Lilac-crowned Parrots. The only parrot native to the United States - the Carolina Parakeet - became extinct before the turn of the century. We called up a Yellow- rumped Attila, and saw our first Magpie Jays, magnificent blue and white birds with a large crest and a tail nearly Jg metre long. In roadside pools were seen Jacanas, Green Herons and my first Wood Ibis while overhead were seen Black and Turkey Vultures, Coopers Hawk, Grey Hawk and White- tailed Kite.

(In Part 2, John will discuss birding in the mangroves and jungles around San Bias and in the nearby mountain tops of the Sierra Madre Occidental.)

Mr J Penhallurick, 86 Bingley Crescent, ERASER, ACT, 2615

ODD OBS

STRAW-NECKED IBIS ON MACQUARIE OVAL

Bruce Lindenmayer

Following a period of heavy rain in early June 1981, areas of Macquarie Oval were covered with water to a depth of about 1.1-5 metres. On the morning of 6 June, seven Straw-necked Ibis were observed feeding on the oval for about 2 hours. These birds were joined by 13 others during the morning. On 7 June, nine birds returned and fed for about an hour before being disturbed.

Although I have lived next to the oval since January 1979, I have never previously seen Straw-necked Ibis in the area.

GARDEN BIRD CHART AND SURVEY

Neil Hermes

The new Garden Bird Chart has been produced to increase our knowledge of common Canberra birds. Although records for a full year should ideally start on 3 July a chart can be started at any time of the year. It is proposed that those contributing to the Garden Bird Survey in the Canberra region should fill in the details on a chart and at the end of the year return it to the Records Officer. It is hoped that many people outside the Canberra region may also find the chart useful. Teachers may also use the chart, perhaps in conjunction with the Gould League posters.

There are spaces for 70 species to be entered down the left hand side of the chart (common species are already entered) and it is divided into 52 weekly columns. The date of the first day of each 7 day week is written across the top of the chart along with the standard week number (ie. 1-52).

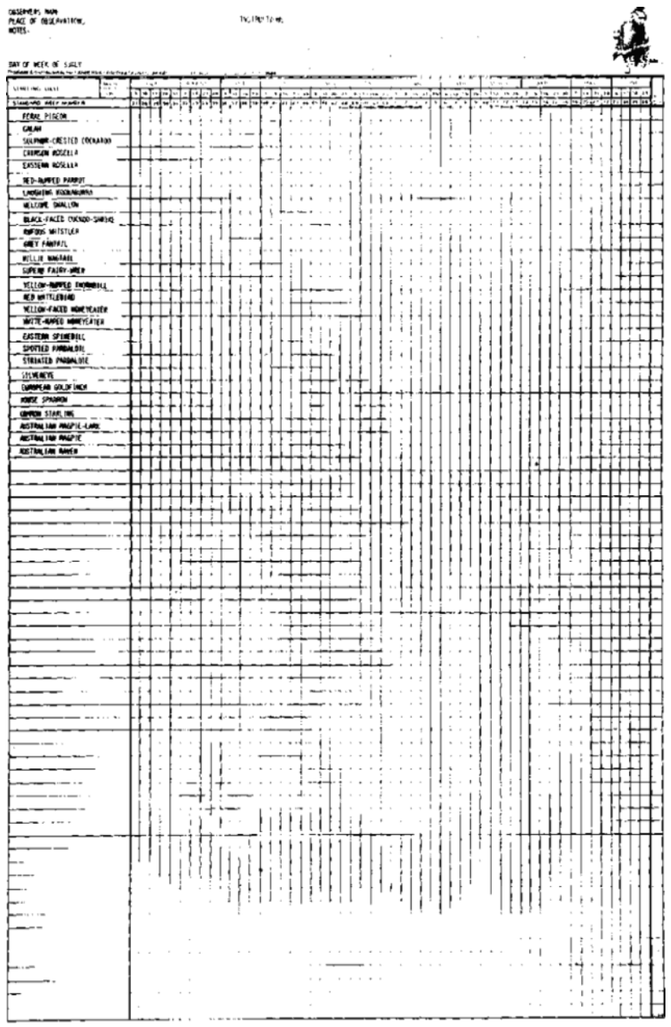
The procedure for keeping records is as follows. During each week the maximum number of birds of each species seen is entered against the species name on the chart. Only those birds seen in the garden, in trees, on the ground or hawking within 100 m of the centre of the house are counted. If birds are seen flying high over the house and are in no way dependent on it or beyond 100 m from the house, they may be entered on the chart but the record must be underlined. For breeding records the following code may also be added. C = RAOU nest record card, N = nest with eggs or young and F = dependent fledglings.

If no records were kept in any week because of holidays, illness, etc a cross can be put through the appropriate dates. Below is a hypothetical example of part of a completed chart.

DAY OF WEEK OF 3 JULY *Friday*

Produced & distributed by the CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP

STARTING DATE		JULY				AUGUST				
	Date	3	10		31	7	14	21	28	
STANDARD WEEK NUMBER		27	28		31	32	33	34	35	3
FERAL PIGEON		2	2		2	2	2	-	2	
GALAH		10	10		2N	2N	2N	2N	10	
SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO		~*	—		6	6	6	10	10	



Garden Bird Chart

In this example, 3 July is a Friday. This means that Friday is the starting day for all weekly records in that year for all people using that chart. Two Feral Pigeons were recorded within 100 m of the house in each week except week 29 and 30 when no records were kept and week 34 when no pigeons were seen. Ten Galahs were seen beyond 100 m of the house in week 27, 28 and 35. Two Galahs were seen within 100 m of the house in week 31, 32, 33 and 34 and during this time there was a nest with young or eggs. Six Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were seen in week 31, 32 and 33 and ten in week 34 and 35.

Before returning the chart at the end of the year details can be made of the following under the 'Notes' heading; type of garden (exotic, native or mixed), number of cats living in the garden, whether there are bird feeders or nest boxes in the garden, etc.

The following are the most important features of the survey:

1. Enter the maximum number of birds seen each week within 100 m of the centre of the house.
2. Common birds are more important than the occasional rare record.
3. The more weeks recorded on the chart the more useful the records.

Charts are available to any purchaser (not just those intending to participate in the Garden Bird Survey) for 50 cents each from COG meetings or from Cedric Bear at Belconnen (Work Ph:526189); Henry Nix at O'Connor (Ph:478548) or Neil Hermes at Woden (Work Ph:897907)

Mr N Hermes, 'Kanangra', RMB 907, QUEANBEYAN, NSW, 2620.

ODD OBS

LATE BREEDING RECORD OF WHITE-EARED HONEYEATER — Michael Lenz

The White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis* nests in our area between November and December (COG Field List (1974)) and at the coast from August to January (Wilson in Birds of the High Country, 1969). During a lunch stop at the bridge across Condor Creek on the Uriarra Road on 30 March 1981 begging calls attracted my attention. To my surprise they came from a fully fledged White-eared Honeyeater being fed frequently by its parents. The family stayed at the site for the 60 minute observation period. The species is known to breed twice a year in some areas or under some conditions (Field Guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds, Beruldson, 1980). The dry warm summer in 1980/81 might have enabled the honeyeater to extend its breeding season which is normally short and early in summer in our area.

THREE CRAKES AROUND CANBERRA

John Penhallurick

One can hope to see three crakes around Canberra: the Australian Crake *Porzana fluminea* (formerly the Spotted Crake); Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* (formerly the Marsh Crake); and the Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis.* None of the three is easy to see, and Canberra birders were fortunate to have the first two species so readily visible at Kelly's Swamp last summer. The sudden appearance - and subsequent disappearance - of these birds points to the partially nomadic nature of the species.

The Australian Crake is probably the easiest of the three to see. It is about half the size of a coot with a brownish crown and back with white spots and some black streaks. The face and front are blue-grey, with flanks clearly barred black and white. The white undertail is, with the spotting on the back, the best field mark for recognising this species. The soft parts are greenish. Females are duller than the male and immatures are duller and paler.

The Australian Crake is quite a noisy bird producing quite a variety of calls, that at times recall a barnyard. It is found in freshwater swamps, especially those overgrown with cumbungi. Such swamps are in fact prime habitat for all three species. It can also be found in brackish coastal swamps and samphire marshes with scrubby cover, as at Point Wilson near Werribee, Victoria.

Baillon's Crake is the smallest of the three. Its brownish upperparts carry prominent black and white streaks. The face, neck and front are a blue-grey, and the flanks are less prominently barred than that of the Australian Crake. The prominently barred undertail is a diagnostic feature.

I have only heard the bird giving a soft tuck-tuck call, and it is certainly a quieter species than the Australian Crake. The handbooks also describe a kick call and a trill given when alarmed. Baillon's Crake is a bird of freshwater swamps and likes cumbungi and tussocks. It can usually be found in the reeds at the north end of Lake George.

The Spotless Crake is the hardest of the three to see, being rather secretive. It is a help to have a tape of the calls. It is intermediate in size between the Australian and Baillon's Crake. A plain brownish back accompanies dark blue-grey underparts. The lack of streaking or spotting on the back, and of barring on the flanks readily separate the bird from the two other species. The undertail is faintly barred but appears generally dark. A useful recognition character is the bright red legs, which hang in flight.

The call is a bubbling chatter which develops into a loud harsh rattle. The bird is found in well-vegetated swamps both fresh and brackish. As mentioned, it is a shy species and without a tape one may have to wait patiently for some time before the

bird will show itself. The Deniliquin area, where extensive irrigation has produced a big rise in the water table, is a good spot for these birds.

Mr J Penhallurick, 86 Bingley Crescent, PHASER, ACT, 2615

BREEDING RECORDS OF THE BROWN-HEADED HONEYEATER FROM MT AINSLIE

Michael Lenz

The Brown-headed Honeyeater *Melithreptus brevirostris* is described as 'an uncommon breeding resident around Canberra' (Status of Birds of Canberra and District, CBN, 3, 1975, No 2), with nesting records available from December and mid-February (Wilson in Birds of the High Country, 1969). During the 1980/81 season, the species has bred twice on the lower slopes of Mt Ainslie near the Pistol Club. On 2 November 1980, 3 adult birds were feeding a young Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus* which must have fledged shortly before to judge by its short tail feathers and the rather helpless fluttering flight. All three honeyeaters left as a group in search for food and returned together to feed the cuckoo. The previous year a Rufous Whistler was the host for the Pallid Cuckoo in exactly the same area.

During later visits I saw the species only once: 20 December 1980, one bird on the outskirts of Campbell. On 14 February 1981 I heard the Brown-headed Honeyeater singing from a small group of trees close to the Look-out Road opposite the Pistol Club. This bird had a partner, and both were collecting insects. The flight path of the adults and the begging calls of young birds soon gave the location of the nest site away: about 9 m above the ground in the top of the canopy of a eucalypt. At least one young nestling was visible when the parents brought in food. Later in the season on several occasions I saw 2 adults with 2 immature birds near the Pistol Club, most likely the family found in February.

Mr M Lenz, 8 Suttor Street, AINSLIE, ACT, 2602

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ODD OBS

HOUSE SPARROWS EATING SCALE

Alistair Morrison

A fifteen year old Yellow Box outside my bedroom window has this year a considerable infestation of scale. During May and June I have been surprised on several occasions to see House Sparrows feeding on the scale. This species is not well adapted for eating scale but this observation is perhaps a noteworthy example of the extreme adaptability of this introduced species.

OUT AND ABOUT

G Tibicen

It is a fact that many bird watchers are very wary of the activities of bird-banders and suspect banders of injuring birds during the banding process. I can now positively reveal that there is indeed some justification in these suspicions and bird-banding is not what it appears to the casual observer but indeed is aimed at harming birds. The sources *I* must thank for this information are those espionage experts, the Russians. In a letter from the Russian Embassy to the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research (leaked to me by an inside informer) there is a clear and concise reference to the Australian Bird Banging Scheme. It is now quite apparent to me that all the so called Australian Bird Banding Scheme does is to ensure that the museum workers at CSIRO Wildlife are kept with fridges permanently full of skins (or to use the special museum terminology - they have a permanent 'skin full').

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For those who are interested in radio telemetry and" tracking of animals there is a very interesting article in the New Scientist of 19 February 1981. Did you know that one user of this technique managed to wire up a Goshawk in Sweden so that he could tell if it was flying, hunting or perching? If you want to know how - read the article.

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The following item is reprinted from a recent Australian Conservation Foundation Newsletter without further comment:

'Despite scientific evidence that the insecticides 2,4,5-T and 2-4D are toxic to birds the Victorian Lands Department is still using these chemicals in the Yellingbo Reserve near Melbourne. The Yellingbo Reserve is one of the last known breeding places of the Helmeted Honeyeater.

The use of the chemicals was revealed by Russell Jones of Sylvan who was recently fined $100 with $150 costs, after impounding a Lands Department spraying unit which he said had been brought onto his property to spray blackberries and noxious weeds in the Reserve (without his permission). Mr Jones is appealing against the judgement.'

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In the August 1981 issue of 'The Bird Observer' (the BOC newsletter) there is a nice article by D R Venn about the Helmeted Honeyeater

and I must say I thought it a breath of fresh air. In particular he disposed of all this pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo called taxonomy by comparing the bird with the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater and saying "I believe that the differences in appearance alone are sufficient to regard the Helmeted Honeyeaters as a separate species, or at the very least as a sub-species'. I agree with Mr Venn and I believe that for the same reasons the Reef Heron should be split into two species.

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Tess Kloot is looking for people to help her bring up to date Whittell's 'The Literature of Australian Birds'. She is appealing for volunteers to help her record information from journals like Canberra Bird Notes. If you are prepared to help by going through a couple of volumes of a bird journal please contact her. She would also appreciate information about bird articles that appeared in out-of-the-way publications.

If you can help Tess her address is: 8/114 Shannon Street, Box Hill North, Victoria, 3129.

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UNCONFIRMED NUTMEG MANNIKINS SIGHTING IN THE ACT

Ian Grant

Five Nutmeg Mannikins (Spice Finches) *Lonchura punctulata* were sighted on the ANU campus of 21 March 1981. The birds appeared to be feeding in the seed heads of some rank vegetation in an over-grown section of Sullivans Creek between the weir above the main pond and the bridge crossed by Fellows Road. The birds flew into and moved around in the vegetation for perhaps ten minutes, then flew on upstream.

The diagnostic features noted were a deep brown facial mask and heavily marked (light spotted) flanks. The observer has had little previous experience with this species. The observations were made on a clear and sunny afternoon, the light was good and 7 x 50 binoculars were used at a distance of perhaps 20-30 metres.

Mr I Grant, 12 Selwyn Street, HACKETT, ACT, 2602

EDITOR'S NOTE

There are no previous confirmed or unconfirmed records of Nutmeg Mannikins for the ACT but there are records for the NSW South Coast, eg. Moruya during the RAOU Pilot Atlas project. These birds are commonly kept as aviary birds and feral populations could establish in the ACT. Ed.

BOOK REVIEW

LEARNING ABOUT AUSTRALIAN BIRDS: Rosemary Balmford: Collins 1980: Pp 240: Col pll 8: B&W in-text line drawings: ISBN 0 00 216440 X: $16.95

This review is written from the viewpoint of two relative beginners to bird watching - one aged 12 and the other considerably older. Both found the book of great interest.

We considered that the range of information presented was comprehensive and totally relevant to the book's aims. Most of it is written in terms readily understood by a child yet quite acceptable to an adult. As a guide for beginners no subject is treated in great depth but enough information is presented to whet the appetite on any subject. The bibliography is arranged in order of chapters and is extremely comprehensive.

As the authoress states, the book is not a field guide. It would make an excellent introduction to bird watching for any beginner and is reasonably priced by today's standards. We would both be very happy to have it in our limited collection.

Mark and Gordon De Cean, 9 Parsons Street, TORRENS, ACT, 2607

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Many experienced bird watchers will find it difficult to judge the value of this book. This is because much of the information contained within the book is concerning topics that are either quite well known to the 'average' bird watcher or should be. However, there is something for everyone to learn in this book. Some experienced bird watchers may do well to examine the chapters on research, recording and studying birds and re-examine the aims and methods of their current ornithological studies.

Rosemary Balmford is well known to Australian bird watchers through her published articles and as past secretary of the RAOU and present secretary of the Victorian Ornithological Research Group. This book is primarily designed for those beginning in bird watching and it would appear from the De Ceans' comments that the author has succeeded in her aims. So if you are a beginning bird watcher or advising beginners on good purchases this book is worth a second look. Ed.

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ODD OBS

GANG-GANG COCKATOO EATING SAWFLY LARVAE Bruce Lindenmayer

On 14 October 1980 at 0750, whilst waiting for a bus in Bennelong Crescent, Macquarie, I observed a pair of Gang-gang Cockatoos in a gum tree. The female was perched next to a large colony of sawfly larvae and was picking up the caterpillars with one foot and eating them.

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