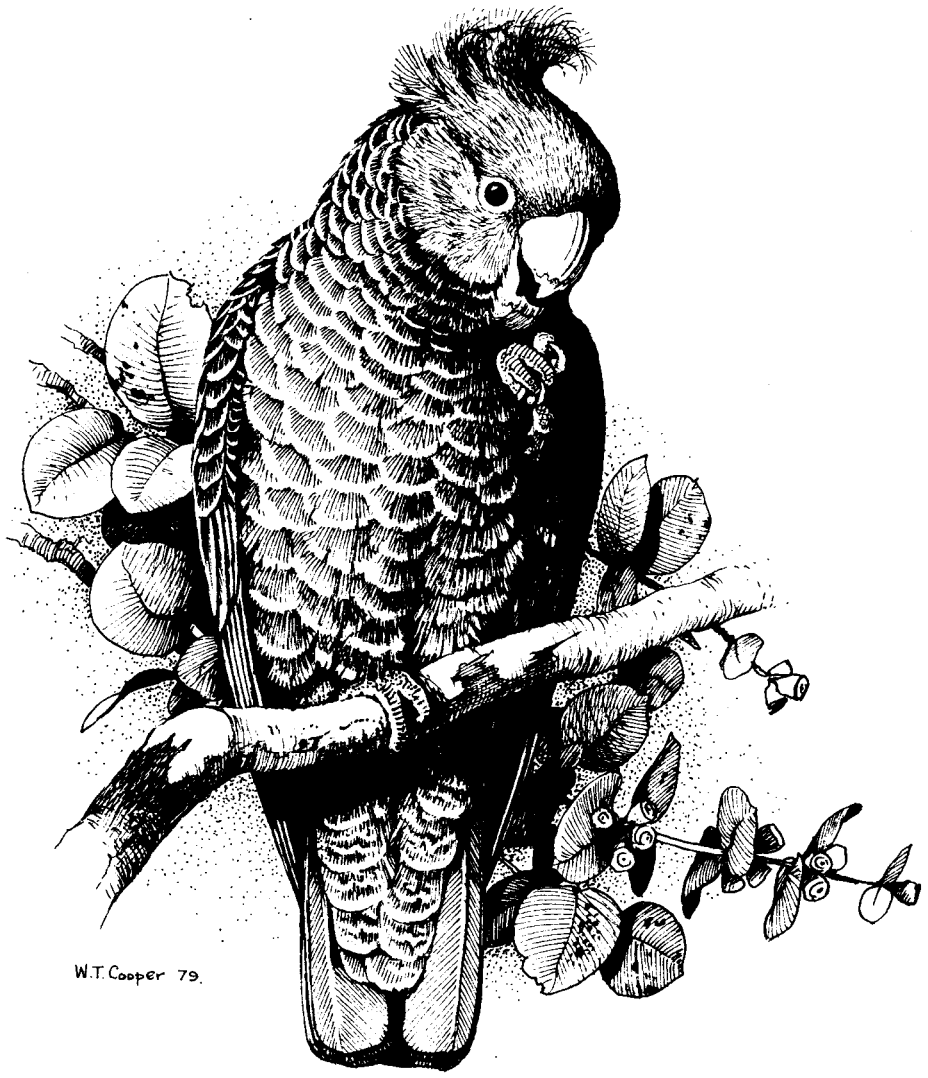
ISSN 0314-8211

CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

Vol 8
No 3
July 1983

Registered by Australia Post - Publication No NBH 0255



INTRODUCED SPECIES

Richard Gregory-Smith

INTRODUCTION

Like our predecessors, some exotic species came to Australia of their own volition, whilst others were brought here involuntarily. In the case of birds most fall into the latter category. In this article, I will review the significant bird immigrants to our continent and try to analyse the reasons for their success.

When one examines the records following the introduction of new species to Australia in the last century, one must remember that at that time there were relatively few observers compared with those in the decades leading to the 1980's, and even fewer observations recorded and still available. The coverage was therefore far less complete than it is today.

Birds were introduced for a number of reasons:

- to remind human immigrants of their home country and the birdlife of their former habitat;
- as cage/aviary birds for their song or decorative plumage;
- as a source of food or feathers;
- to combat insect and other pests to the farmer and horticulturalist;
- to be bred for sport.

Records of colonisation by the more successful introduced species are shown in Table 1, using data supplied from the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU) Atlas of Australian Birds Project.

Distribution maps for each of these species, designed to show the spread of each species since introduction and its current status, are located at the end of this paper and have been drawn from information contained in computer printouts of records submitted to the RAOU Atlas of Australian Birds Project.

DISCUSSION

Unsuccessful Species

Species were introduced for the above reasons and far more failed than succeeded. Ostriches *Struthio camelus* were imported and were bred for their feathers, but their numbers declined as ladies' fashions changed. The Mute Swan *Cygnus olor,* Turkey *Meleagris gallopava,* Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* and

gamebirds including the Lesser Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles sp,* Californian Quail *Lophortyx californicus,* Chinese Quail, Indian Jungle Fowl *Gallus gallus,* Guinea Fowl *Numididae,* Chukar Partridge *Alectoris*

chukar, French Partridge *Alectoris rufa* and Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* were introduced (Ryder, 1905) at various times starting in the 1860's, but have not been successfully established as predation has been too great and the country afforded too sparse cover.

Decorative and singing bird escapees of insignificant status include the Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus safer,* Black- headed Mannikin *Lonchura malacca,* White-winged Wydah *Euplectes albonotatus* and Red Bishop *Euplectes orix.* Java Sparrows *Padda oryzivora* were introduced from 1863, but died out (Ryder, 1905). Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs* were released in 1863 *et seq* but were not successful as was the case of Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella,* Siskins *Carduelis spinus,* English Robins *Erithacus rubecula,* Ortolan Buntings *Emberiza hortulana* (1863), Canaries *Serinus canaria* (1864), Turtle Doves *Streptopelia spp* (1872) and Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos* (1875) (Ryder, 1905). The Rook *Corvus frugilegus* was introduced into Queensland in 1869, apparently with the blessing of Queen Victoria, but even this royal patronage did not foster success.

It is interesting to note that the Hedge Assentor, Yellowhammer, Chaffinch, European Greenfinch *Carduelis*

chloris, Song-Thrush *Turdus philomelos,* Redpoll *Carduelis flaminea* and Californian Quail were introduced with success into New Zealand and were quite common by the 1920's. This success can be largely attributed to the cooler, damper climate.

Successful Species

Cattle Egret *Ardeola ibis* (Map 1)

The Cattle Egret is the only one of the successful colonisers that appears to have come to Australia of its own volition. In 1933 twenty birds were imported from Calcutta by the Pastoralists Association into the Kimberley Division, Western Australia, and eighteen were released (Tarp, 1949). It was originally thought that these were the first arrivals. However, in 1948 large numbers of Egrets, some perching on buffaloes' backs were seen at Oenpelli by the Australian- American Arnhem Land Expedition (Tarp, 1949). Because of the large numbers it was postulated that Cattle Egrets had arrived in Australia long before 1933. The normal range of

the Cattle Egret is Africa, warmer parts of Asia, with a few colonies on the Iberian Peninsula. There has been an expansion of range during this century to other areas, first reports of which came from British Guiana in 1930, USA in 1953 and New Zealand in 1963. It would appear then that the movement of the Cattle Egret to Australia was part of the global trend.

There were unconfirmed reports of early sightings by settlers and aborigines in the Northern Territory prior to 1933. In 1952 there were reports of individuals from the Norseman area followed by an irruption in May 1959 south from Geraldton (Jenkins and Ford, 1960). Sixty-four were seen that year with buffalo on the South Alligator River flood plain (Hewitt, 1960). In 1961 some hundred were sighted on the Adelaide River, Northern Territory, with buffalo during the wet season.

Cattle Egrets were extending their range into New South Wales and Victoria during this period. In 1954 six pairs were breeding in a colony of 300 pairs of White Egrets near Grafton while 20 were seen at Mystic Park in north-western Victoria and there were sightings at Colac in southern Victoria. Since then Cattle Egrets have extended as far south as Tasmania in the east, while considerably expanding their area and numbers in Western Australia.

The introduction of Cattle Egrets to Western Australia in 1933 was carried out because it was then believed that they fed on cattle ticks and other parasites. This theory has since been partially refuted: the Egret is symbiotic with cattle and horses and feeds on insects disturbed by them when grazing, which fare may exceed parasites.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (Map 2)

The Mallard was first introduced (Ryder, 1905) from Britain in 1871 and 1872 to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne as an ornamental bird, though possibly with its sporting potential in mind. It was later introduced into other city parks and gardens and into some farms. The introduction was initially successful but the species was later found to hybridise with the Pacific Black Duck *A.superciliosa* (Ryder, 1905). In 1949 it was reported as feral on some Sydney lakes. Its distribution is now mainly confined to lakes and public gardens in the larger cities.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* (Map 3)

The Feral Pigeon was introduced to Australia in the early twentieth century, probably for sport. They have become feral

and by 1946 were common and a nuisance in the larger Australian cities. It was first reported in Canberra in 1930 and is now present in considerable numbers. It is a bird particularly at home in urban situations, where large buildings simulate the rocky localities of its ancestors. There is little to commend the Feral Pigeon, but on the debit side it disfigures buildings with its droppings and takes a toll of livestock food.

Spotted Turtle-dove *Streptopelia chinensis* (Map 4)

The Spotted Turtle-dove was introduced (Frith, 1976) from Asia, first to Melbourne in 1870, and then to Adelaide in 1881, Perth 1898 and from India to Brisbane in 1912 (Chisholm, 1918-19). It was reported as common around Hobart in 1918 but has not spread far and is uncommon elsewhere in Tasmania. The date of introduction to the Sydney area is not known, but by 1926 it was common in Sydney and extended to the Blue Mountains (Chisholm, 1926), while in 1932 50-100 pairs were present in the Royal Botanic Gardens. By 1945 it had extended to Innisfail and Cairns from local releases. In 1961 it had spread to the Mount Lofty Ranges and the Barossa Valley as a result of escapes from Adelaide in the 1930's, it is believed.

It was introduced as a decorative bird and on account of its pleasing calls. It is hardy, but prefers the warmer, higher rainfall areas of the continent, and has succeeded in extending its range as a free-feeder, mainly on seeds.

Laughing Turtle-dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* (Map 5)

Laughing Turtle-doves were first released in the Perth Zoological Gardens in 1898 (Frith, 1976) as a decorative addition to the local scene. Their spread has been limited mainly to the metropolitan area with a few colonies nearby. They have adapted well to urban conditions and are successful as free-feeders.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (Map 6)

Skylarks were released in Victoria in the early 1850's (Cayley, 1974), the first batch apparently near Geelong in 1950. There are records of them being released in Tasmania in the early 1860's, with successive importations from England from 1885-90 (Littler, 1901-02). In 1869 there was an unsuccessful attempt to establish them in Queensland with other species consigned on the sailing ship 'Flying Cloud'. No records are available of releases elsewhere, but unconfirmed reports indicate many have been present at the

Pilbara goldfields in Western Australia in 1908 and in Western New South Wales in 1936. In New Zealand it was common by 1921.

Skylarks were introduced to combat insect pests but probably more to remind the early settlers of their homeland.

Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* (Map 7)

The Red-whiskered Bulbul was first released in Sydney by the Zoological Society in the 1880's (Tarp, 1949) but did not become established then. Further specimens were introduced to Sydney from China in the early 1900's (Frith, 1976). Four or five birds were recorded in the Ashfield suburb of Sydney in 1915 (Chisholm, 1926). By 1926 it was fairly widely distributed around the Sydney suburbs and was first reported nesting in a Sydney garden in 1929. In 1930 the point was raised at the RAOU Congress that it was even becoming a pest around Sydney.

Besides positive introductions of the species, the population was no doubt swelled by escaped caged specimens, sometimes known as 'Persian Nightingales'.

The Red-whiskered Bulbul has proved to be a pest in urban gardens. It eats peas and bean flowers voraciously and attacks soft fruit and buds. On the credit side it feeds on vine moth caterpillars and other soft-bodied insects. On balance materially it appears to do more harm than good, but it is an attractive species and in its urban environment it is doubtful if it supplants any other species. It was indeed reported in 1945 to be foster parent to the Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus.*

Blackbird *Turdus merula* (Map 8)

The Blackbird was introduced from Britain first to Victoria where eighteen were released in the Royal Melbourne Botanic Gardens in 1864 (Ryder, 1905) or possibly earlier and in Adelaide at about the same time (Frith, 1976). These releases were followed by several others in Victoria. It was unsuccessfully introduced in Queensland in 1869 from a consignment of birds which was shipped out in the 'Flying Cloud'. Batches were released in Hobart in the 1860's (Chisholm, 1918-19) and were established successfully, but this was not the case later in Sydney in 1872. By 1949 it was fairly numerous around Melbourne and had extended over a wide area including Ballarat, Port Philip, Woomelang and Geelong. It was well dispersed in the Adelaide area and common in Tasmania, but **in** New South Wales was to be found only sparsely in the south-east. It was first recorded in Canberra in 1949.

The success of the Blackbird can be attributed to several factors. It has shown adaptability in food, nesting sites and nesting material. It has a long nesting period from late August to early March and will lay up to twenty eggs in a season. Although it shuns arid habitat's it has extended its range much further than the Song Thrush due to its tolerance of warmer and drier conditions.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* (Map 9)

The Song Thrush was introduced first (Ryder, 1905) in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne in 1863 where its descendants can still be found. In 1869 it formed part of the avifaunal cargo of the 'Flying Cloud' to Queensland where it did not survive, nor did a consignment introduced in Sydney in 1872 (Ryder, 1905). In 1935 Song Thrushes were imported from New Zealand to Canberra, against protests made to the Minister of Internal Affairs. They bred at Red Hill in 1937, but were believed to have disappeared by 1939 (Lamm and White, 1950). There are reports of Song Thrushes on Norfolk Island in 1913 and Lord Howe Island in 1929. The Song Thrush was slow to spread in Australia but in 1949 it was common in parks and gardens in Melbourne and had extended to Sherbrooke Forest, Macedon, Geelong, Belgrave and Ararat. The Song Thrush was introduced for similar reasons to those of the Blackbird. It has proved to be a useful predator of slugs, snails and soft-bodied insects. Unlike the Blackbird it is not adaptable to heat and to dry conditions and prefers suburban gardens and moist woodland. This was evinced in its becoming a common bird in New Zealand by 1921.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (Map 10)

The Goldfinch was introduced into Victoria and New South Wales about 1863 (Ryder, 1905), and during the 1880's to Tasmania at Hobart and Launceston (Littler, 1901-02). By 1906 it was established around Melbourne and Geelong and in Tasmania (Ryder, 1905). It appeared in Queensland in 1918 (Chisholm, 1918-19), probably driven north by drought conditions. In Perth a small colony was established by escapee cage birds by 1933, but that has ceased to exist. In 1924 it was reported to be common around Armidale and Tamworth. Records show it to have been present in Canberra prior to 1929 and by 1936 it was common there. By 1921 it was a common bird in New Zealand.

nest in introduced trees. Cuckoos have been known to lay in Goldfinches' nests.

The reasons for introduction were probably as a decorative bird, caged or otherwise, and as nostalgic reminders to the nineteenth century inhabitants. It is a seed-eater mainly and is particularly partial to thistles as well as other introduced weeds and sunflowers (Campbell, 1905-06). It does little harm economically and is known to feed on scale-insects.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (Map 11)

The Greenfinch was apparently first introduced in Australia in 1863. In 1906 it was present in Melbourne and Port Phillip. There are reports of its introduction in Adelaide by the 1870's (Ryder, 1905). In the 1890's it was found in Sydney, but by 1926 had disappeared, although it was later reported in 1949 (Chisholm, 1926; Tarp, 1949). By 1930 it had spread to north and west Victoria. It was observed to breed in spring and early summer in west Victoria and then depart until August, probably to avoid the heat. Since 1924 it has been a common resident of Bathurst. It has by now reinforced its position in Adelaide and spread to Tasmania. The Greenfinch is mainly restricted to city areas as its favoured habitats include tall hedges, parks, gardens, orchards and conifer plantations. Its range is limited by its dislike of hot dry conditions.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Map 12)

In 1863, 120 House Sparrows were liberated in Melbourne Botanic Gardens, and a further 80 in Royal Park where they nested successfully the same year (Ryder, 1905). Further batches were released over the next ten years in Melbourne. House Sparrows were released in New South Wales the following year and spread rapidly using the railway lines as routes to follow man. It is not recorded when they reached Adelaide, but from Adelaide they were sent to Launceston in the late 1860's, in mistake it is believed, for the Tree Sparrow (Littler, 1901-02). Queensland imported sparrows direct from England on the 'Flying Cloud' in 1869 (Chisholm, 1918-19) but the introduction was unsuccessful and further birds were later released. By 1868 the Victorian Acclimatisation Society had distributed House Sparrows throughout most of agricultural Victoria and by 1906 they covered all Victoria, southern New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania (Lamm and White, 1950) and were spreading in Queensland by 1918.

In 1922 they were regarded as a fruit pest in the Murrumbidgee

Irrigation Area. A survey in 1949 showed that the House Sparrow had become common wherever there was human habitation excepting for Western Australia. Western Australia had been active against the introduction of exotic birds. In 1959 the House Sparrows were spreading across the Nullabor Plain along the railway line and were stopped only by vigorous action and putting the price of two shillings and sixpence on their heads (Jenkins, 1959).

The House Sparrow was probably first introduced as a reminder of home to the early settlers and later to combat insect pests. They were found indeed to be great destroyers of grasshoppers and aphids, and helped combat the caterpillars that made market gardening in Victoria almost impossible in the early days before insecticides. However, the predations they made on cherries around Ballarat as early as 1867 and subsequently on fruit elsewhere quickly indicated that their introduction to Australia had been a mistake.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (Map 13)

The first record of the Tree Sparrow in Australia was its introduction to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne in 1863 by the Victorian Acclimatisation Society (le Souef, 1958). It nested successfully in that year. Its spread has been slow and limited compared with the House Sparrow. By 1900 it had reached Junee (Chisholm, 1926), 1914 Wangaratta and by 1949 it was common at Albury and had spread to Tumbarumba (Tarp, 1949). In Melbourne it was quite common and in 1957 had colonised the Riverina, Wagga Wagga, Orbost and Cootamundra.

As in Europe and Asia the Tree Sparrow is more a bird of rural areas, while the House Sparrow is commensal with man. Its introduction to Australia was partially for its usefulness against caterpillars, but it has proved to be harmful in orchards.

Nutmeg Mannikin *Lonchura punctulata* (Map 14)

The Nutmeg Mannikin, or Spotted Munia,is a relatively recent arrival in Australia. They appeared in Brisbane in the 1930's and later in the Sydney area, probably as aviary escapees (Frith, 1976; Cayley, 1974). By 1949 there were small flocks in the Brisbane and Sydney areas. The Nutmeg Mannikin prefers high rainfall areas and in tropical and sub-tropical climates breeds throughout the year. This preference is evinced by its northerly spread from Brisbane. In 1951 it was reported in Ingham and Townsville, 1954 Innisfail, 1960 Cairns, and in 1961 Cooktown and still extending north (Bell, 1961). The reason for the Mannikin's success is its

ready adaptation to habitat. It is a seed-eater but as yet it is not present in large enough numbers to become the economic pest it is in the padi-fields of South-East Asia.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (Map 15)

There is much doubt regarding the original date of introduction of the Starling. In Volume I of the Emu (1900) there is a report that a Dr E L Crowther purchased 75 birds from New Zealand around 1800 and released them in Hobart (Littler, 1901-02). There were no further introductions apparently until the 1850's when there were releases is Victoria. In 1862, 44 birds were released in Melbourne (Rolls, 1973). By 1906 Starlings had spread over the whole of Victoria and much of Tasmania (Ryder, 1905). In 1869 14 birds were unsuccessfully introduced into Queensland (Chisholm, 1926) by the Queensland Acclimatisation Society with several other species which were shipped out from England on the 'Flying Cloud'; with later introductions Starlings were reportedly common by 1918. In 1932 between 75 and 100 pairs were counted in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

By 1922 the Starling had been declared a pest by fruit growers in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. In Sunraysia District Starlings attacked grapes on the vines and also drying on racks, and despite the good they did there in eating insects, there too they were condemned as a pest to viti-culture and agriculture (Lamm and White, 1950).

Starlings were introduced to eat caterpillars which made market gardening nearly impossible in the days before insect-icides. They do destroy caterpillars, wireworms, grubs and other noxious insects and are great predators of grasshoppers - but they deplete the beneficial insects as well. Another point against the species is that they occupy and even take over nesting holes that would be used by native species. Overall it is deemed the Starling does more harm than good, but they have colonised so successfully that they would be a difficult species to control.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Map 16)

The Common Myna was first introduced from Asia to Melbourne in 1862 (Cayley, 1974) and further introductions in Victoria followed (Ryder, 1905). In 1883 a number were trans-ported from Melbourne to Townsville and the area of the Herbert and Johnstone Rivers to combat locusts and cane-beetles on the sugar-cane properties (Chisholm, 1926). They thrived in Queensland and extended north to Innisfail and Cairns. By 1949 Mynas were common in Sydney, south of the Harbour, very common in the Melbourne metropolitan area,

plentiful along the Queensland coast from Mackay north, but not present in Tasmania.

The Myna was initially introduced to deal with cater-'pillars and other insect pests to market gardeners. It has performed this functionwell, but has itself become a minor pest to fruit growers. The Myna is also a scavenger and is appreciated as such in the urban areas it appears to favour.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

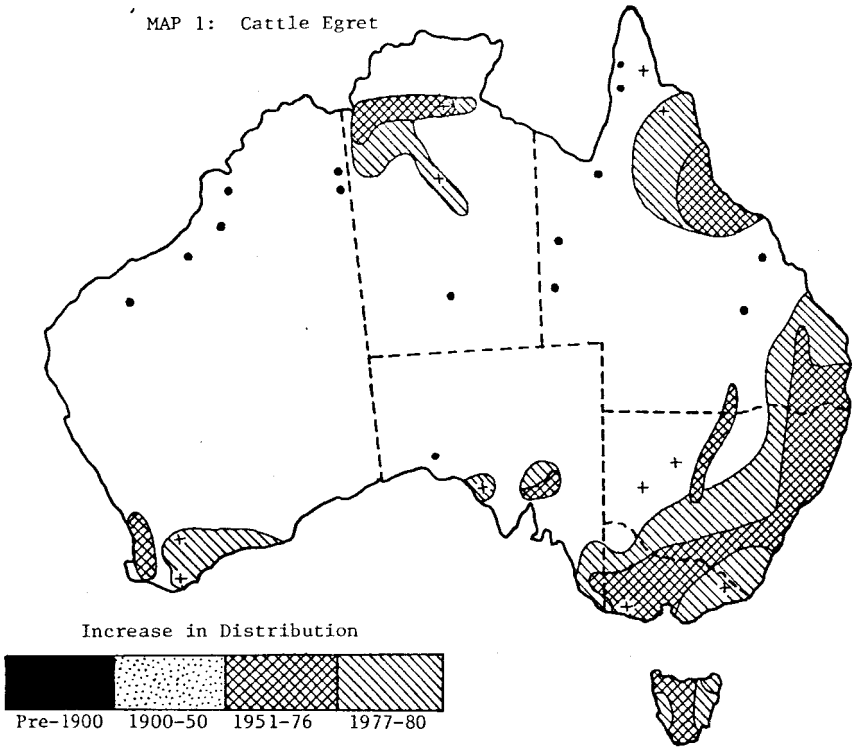
Those species that have succeeded can be seen to be generally hardy species, several of which have been successful in colonising other parts of the world. The main reasons for success appear to be:

- omnivorous or wide-ranging diets;
- secure nesting sites and nests *per se;*
- of use to or tolerated by humans;
- adaptability to climate

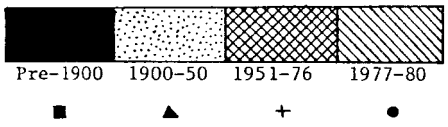
Many introduced species adapt to settled and urban areas

Species \ 1° squares observed/breeding	Pre-1900		1901-1950		1951-1976		1977-1980	
	O	B	O	B	O	B	O	B
Cattle Egret	-	-	3	-	95	6	162	13
Mallard	1	-	4	-	25	2	77	12
feral Pigeon	-	-	24	10	161	36	282	66
Spotted Turtle-dove	3	-	29	5	75	17	93	24
Laughing Turtle-	1	-	5	1	24	7	37	12
Skylark	4	-	27	6	79	18	109	29
Red-whiskered	1	-	7	1	8	3	12	4
blackbird	2	-	35	12	85	33	114	66
Song Thrush	2	-	5	2	12	5	26	9
European Goldfinch	8	1	65	18	118	48	125	72
European Greenfinch	4		15	7	41	15	65	18
House Sparrow	7	2	99	25	241	76	309	169
Tree Sparrow	2		4	-	35	16	46	19
Nutmeg Mannikin	-	-	3	1	25	5	37	17
Common Starling	9.	1	104	31	184	81	234	145
Common Myna	2	-	8	4	34	9	62	20

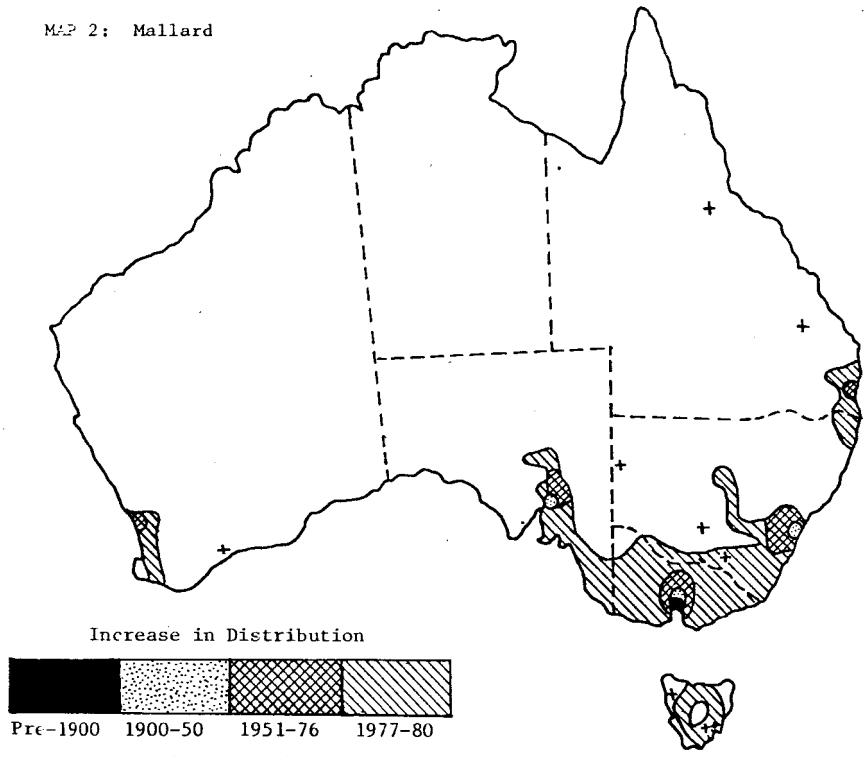
MAP 1: Cattle Egret



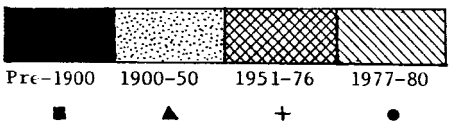
Increase in Distribution



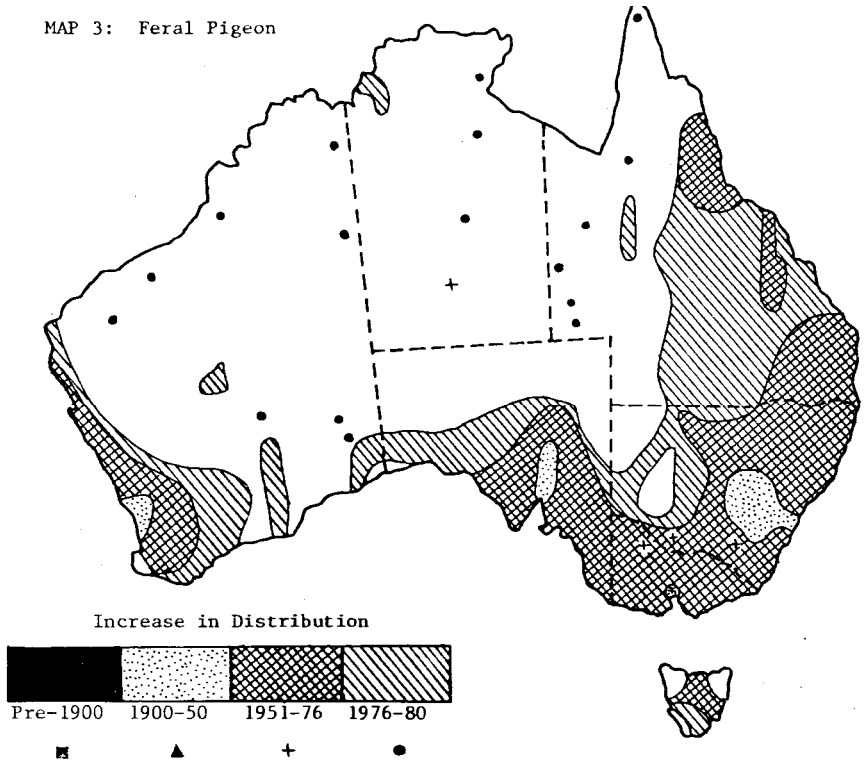
MAP 2: Mallard



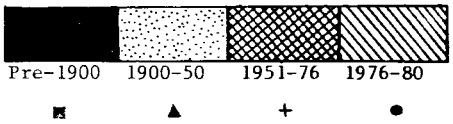
Increase in Distribution



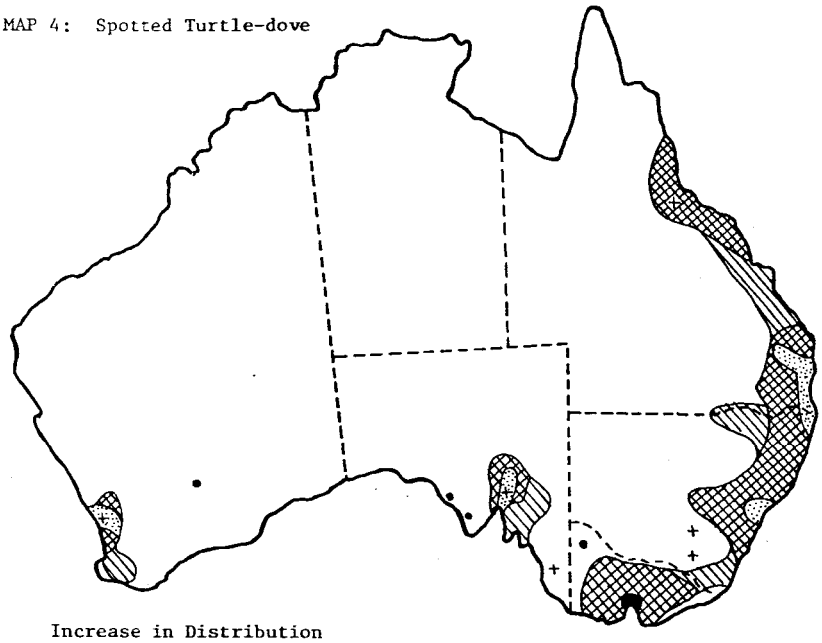
MAP 3: Feral Pigeon



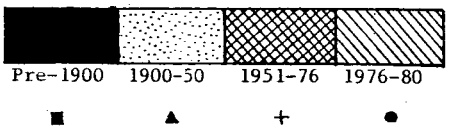
Increase in Distribution



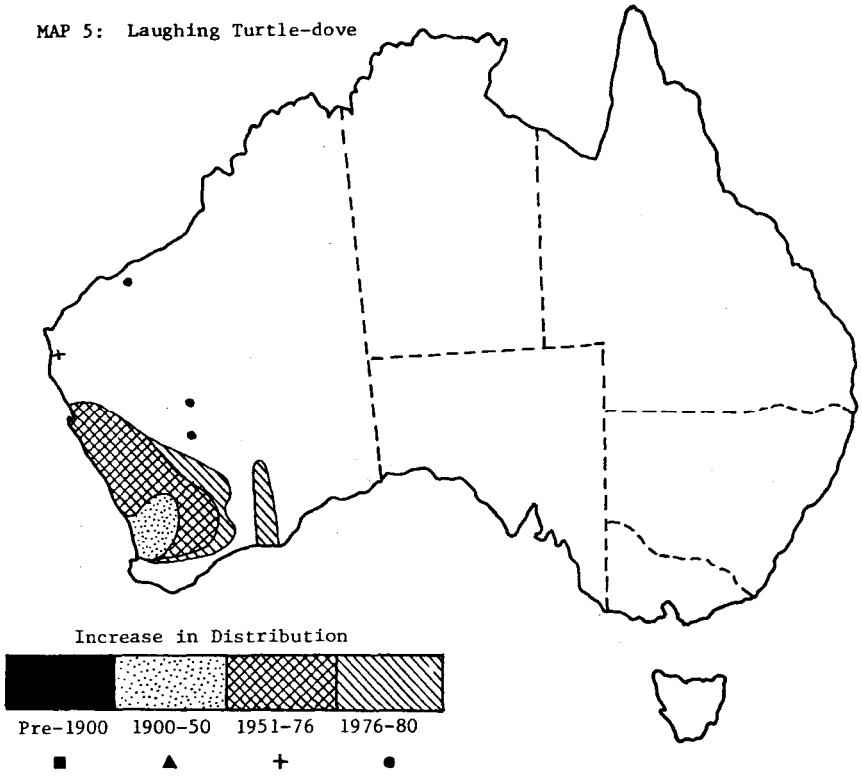
MAP 4: Spotted Turtle-dove



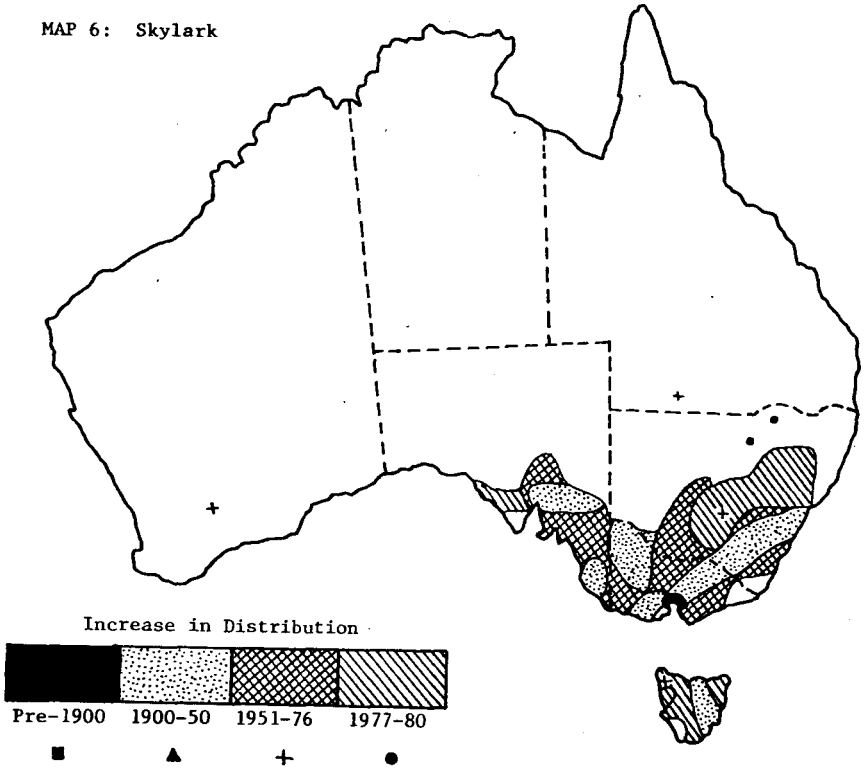
Increase in Distribution



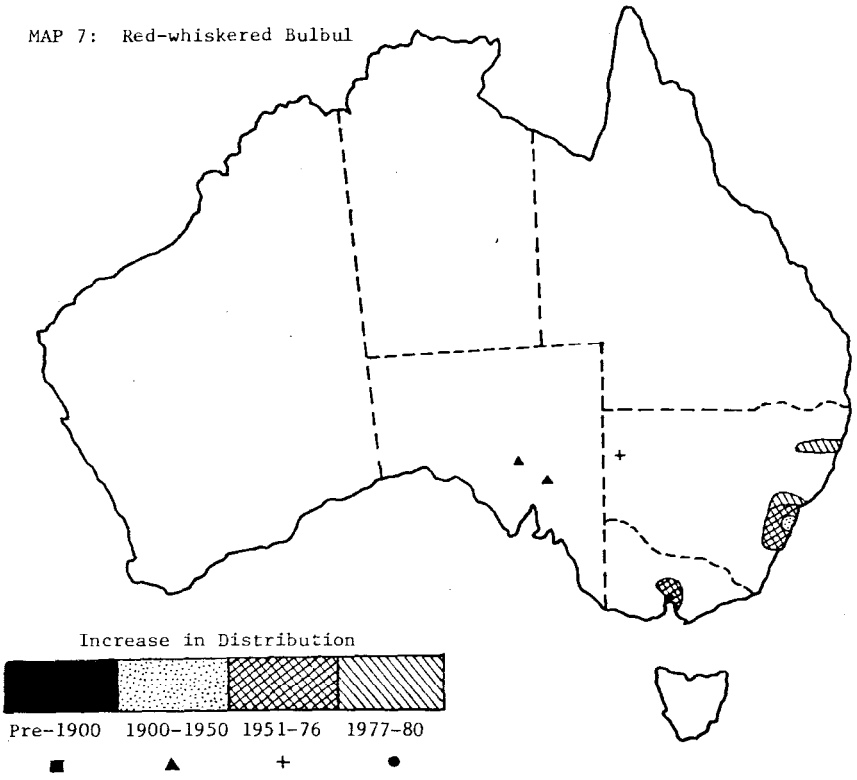
MAP 5: Laughing Turtle-dove



MAP 6: Skylark

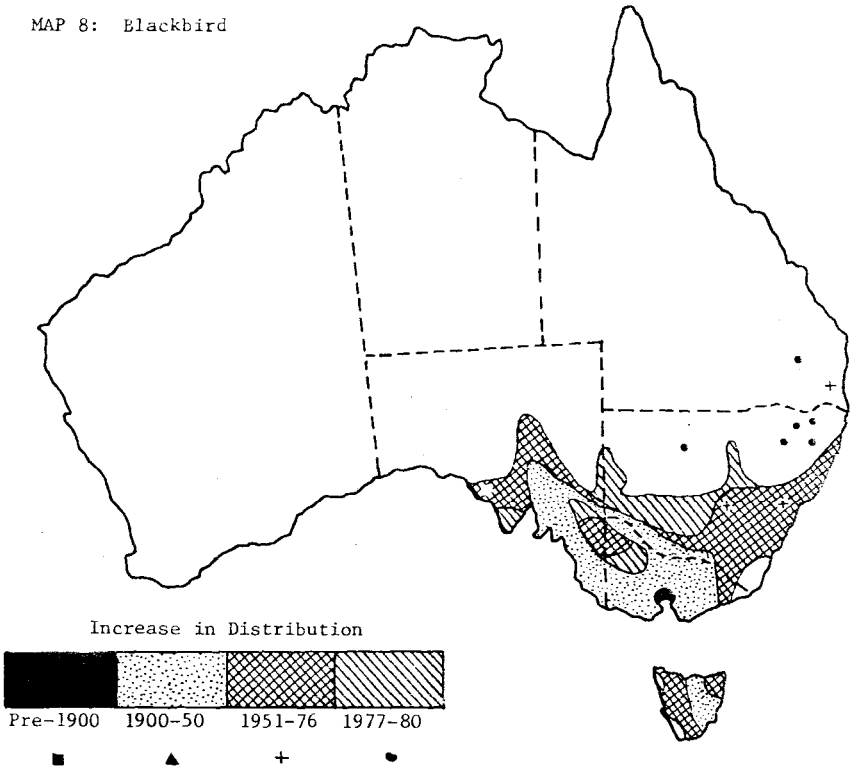


MAP 7: Red-whiskered Bulbul

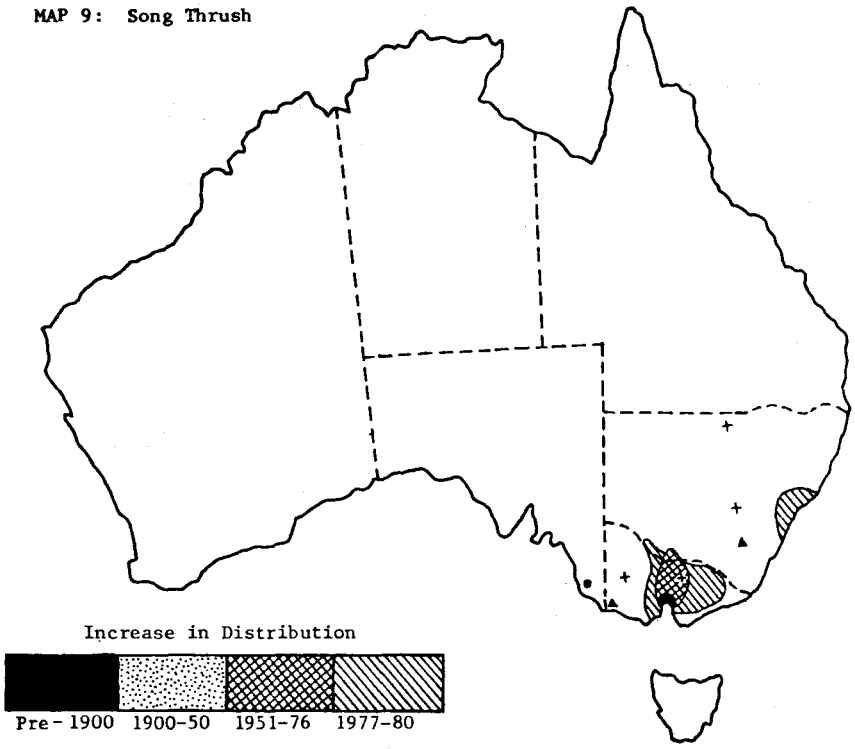


NOTE: Recent reports indicate the Red-whiskered Bulbul is no longer present in South Australia or western New South Wales

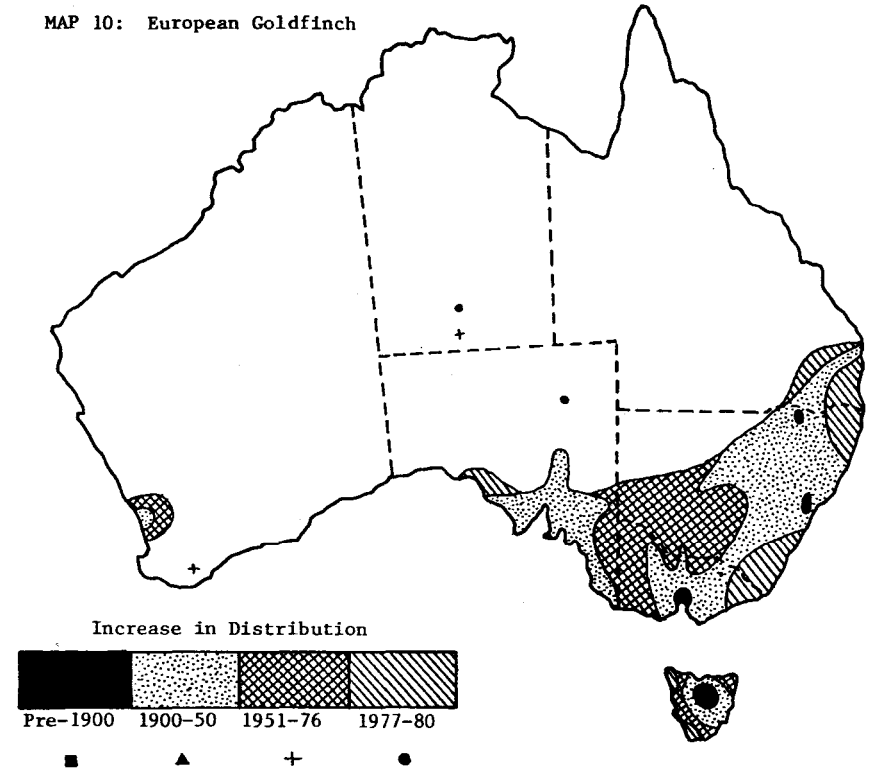
MAP 8: Blackbird



MAP 9: Song Thrush

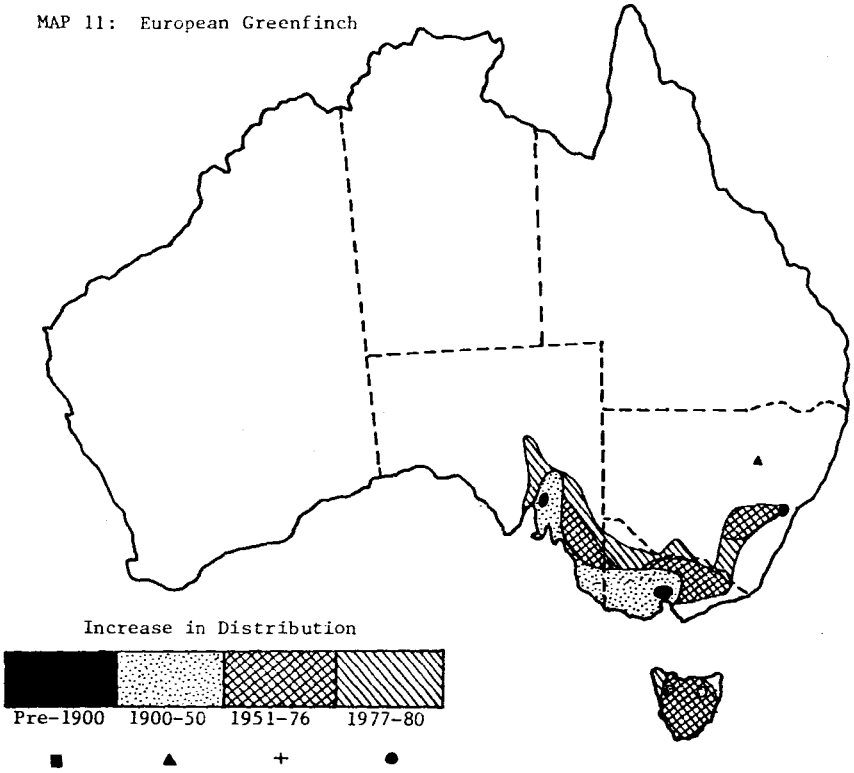


MAP 10: European Goldfinch



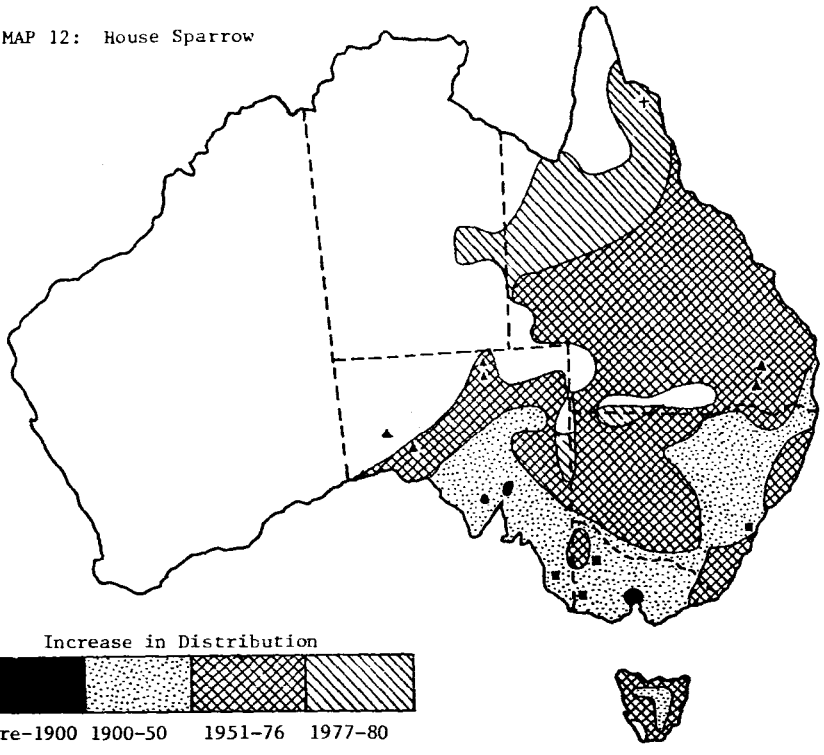
NOTE: There are no current reports of this species in Western Australia

MAP 11: European Greenfinch

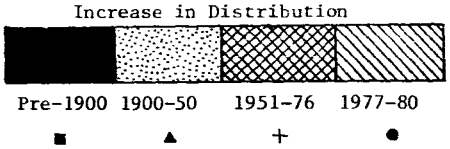


Increase in Distribution

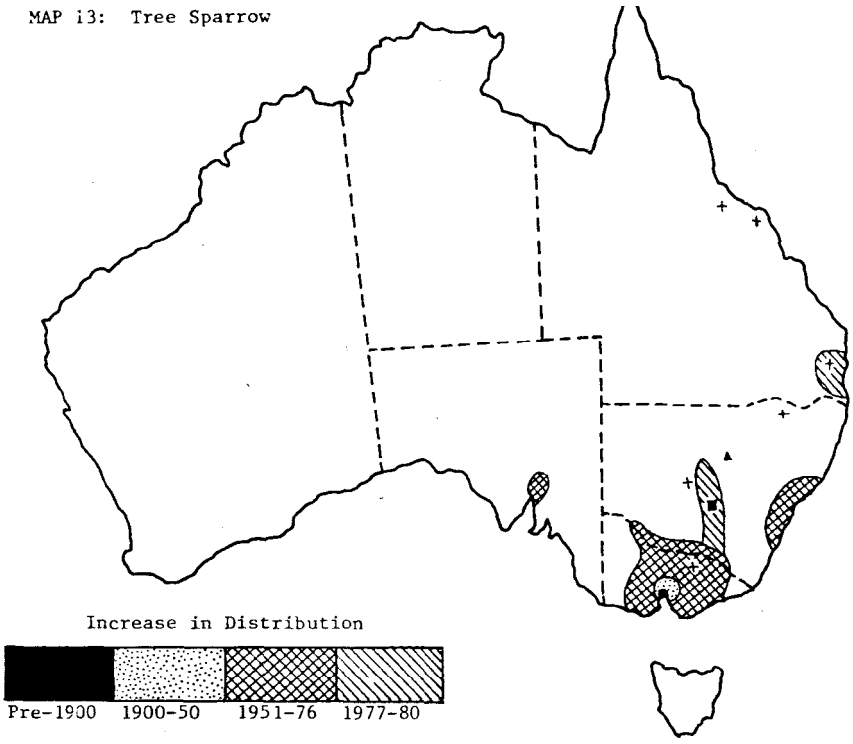
MAP 12: House Sparrow



Increase in Distribution



MAP 13: Tree Sparrow

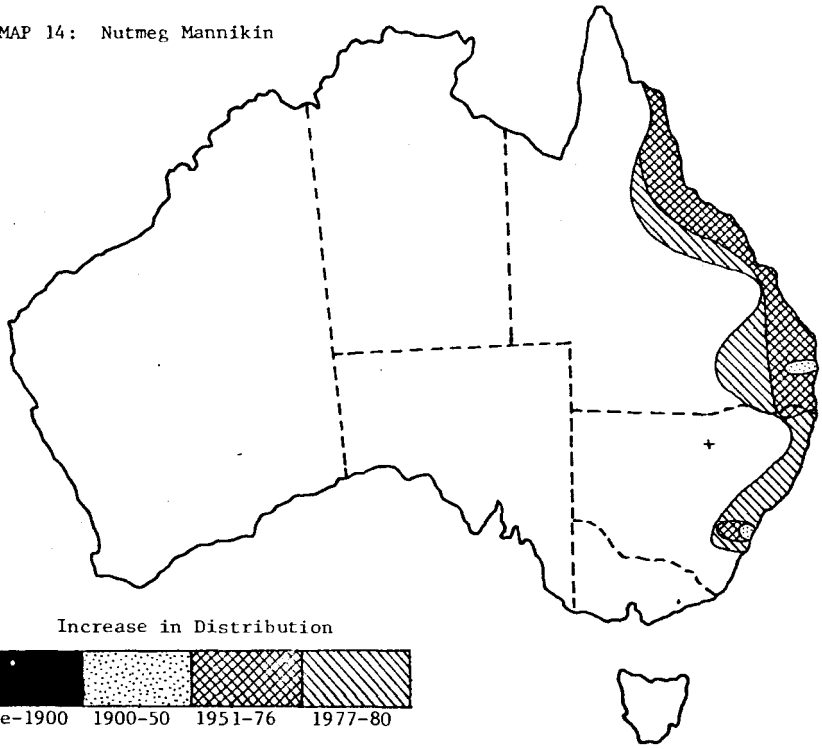


Increase in Distribution

■ ▲ + ●

NOTE: Recent reports indicate the Tree Sparrow is no longer present in the coastal belt around Sydney.

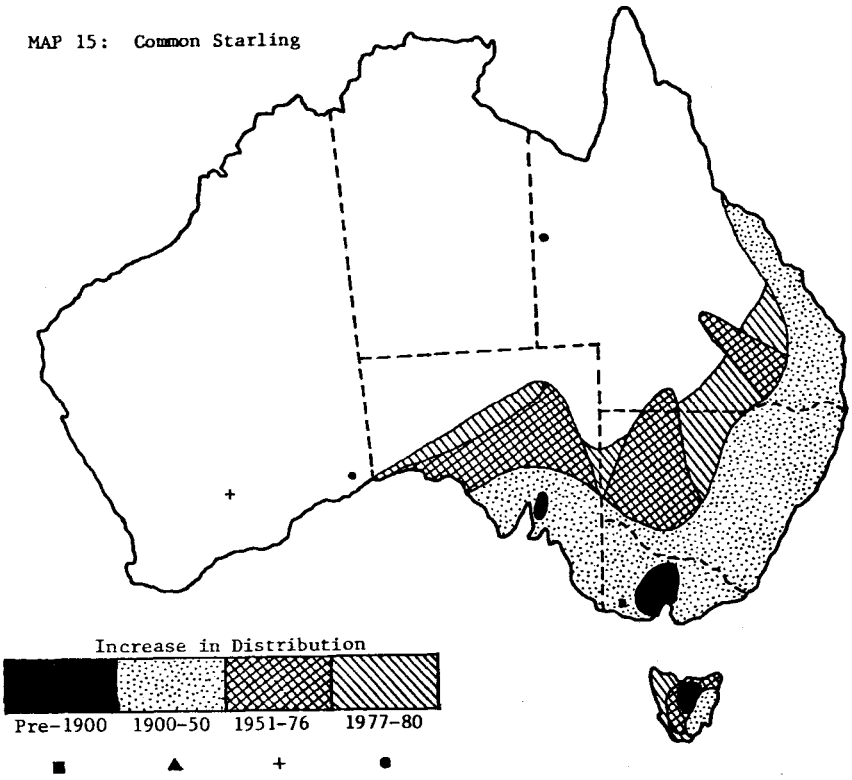
MAP 14: Nutmeg Mannikin



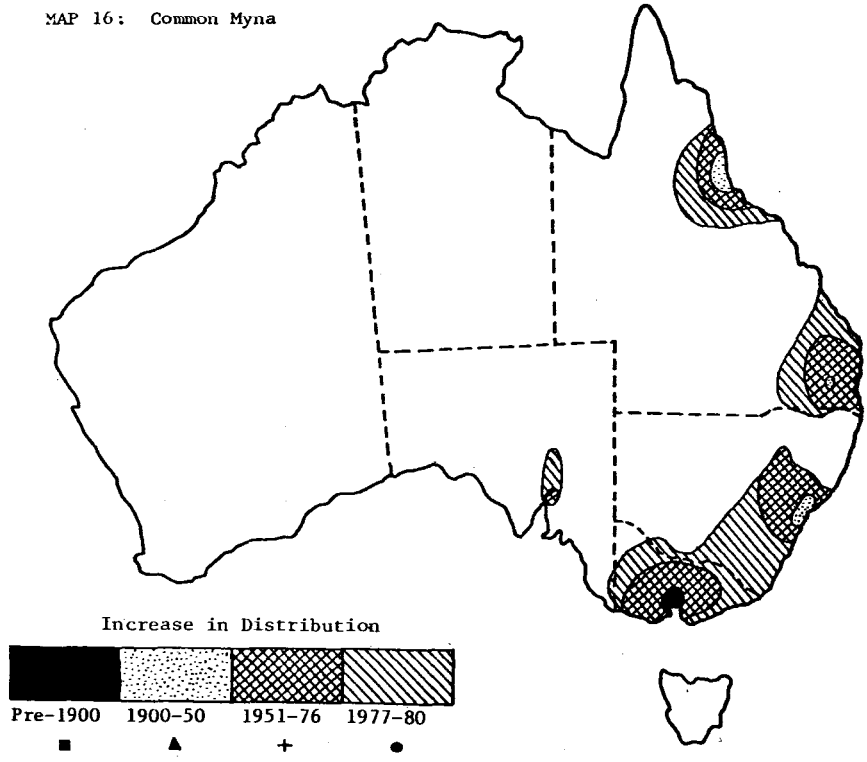
Increase in Distribution

■ ▲ + ●

MAP 15: Common Starling



MAP 16: Common Myna



REFERENCES

Bell, H L 1961, *Introduced Spice Finch in N E Queensland,* Emu 61:94-96.

Chisholm, A H 1918-1919, *Introduced Birds in Queensland,* Emu 19:60-62.

Chisholm, E C 1929, *Birds Introduced into NSW,* Emu 25:276-279.
Campbell, A G 1905-06, *Fruit Eating Birds,* Emu 5:68-72.
Cayley, N W 1974, *What Bird is That? A Guide to the Birds of Australia,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney.

Frith, H J (ed) 1969, *Birds in the Australian High Country,* Reed, Sydney.

_____ , (ed) 1976, *Complete Book of Australian Birds,* Reader's Digest, Sydney.

Hewitt, J M 1960, *The Cattle Egret in Australia,* Emu 60: 99-102.

Jenkins, C F H 1959, *Introduced Birds in West Australia,* Emu 59:201-207.

_____, and J Ford 1960, *The Cattle Egret and its Symbionts in S W Australia,* Emu 60:245-249.

Lamm, D W and D White 1950, *Changing Status of Avifauna in the ACT,* Emu 49:199-204.

le Souef, J C 1958, *The Introduction of Sparrows into Victoria,* Emu 58:264-266.

Littler, F M 1901-02, *European Birds in Tasmania,* **Emu** 1:121-124.
Pizzey, G 1980, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia,* Collins, Sydney.

Rolls, E C 1973, *Running Wild,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney.
Ryder, C S 1905-06, *European and Other Birds Liberated in Victoria, Presidential Address,* Emu 5:110-119.
Sage, B L 1957, *Remarks on the Taxonomy, History and Distribution of the House Sparrow Introduced into Australia,* Emu 57:349-352.

_____. 1957d, *The Starling in the Sunraysia District, Victoria, Part IV, Roost Sites,* 269-284.

_____, 1957e, *The Starling in the Sunraysia District, Victoria, Part V, Nesting,* 325-337.

Wheeler, J R 1962, *Observations on the Cattle Egret in Eastern Australia,* Emu 62:192-193.

R Gregory-Smith, 13 Astelia Place, RIVETT, ACT, 2611

****

CHANNEL-BILLED CUCKOO SIGHTINGS

Henry Nix

The Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scytheops novaehollandiae* is a rare summer vagrant to the Canberra region. Although regularly recorded on the adjacent south coast, the numbers of Channel-billed Cuckoos appears to fluctuate markedly from year to year, as might be expected of a migrant species near the limits of its range. On 25 and 26 October 1981 these cuckoos were present in some numbers at Kioloa on the South Coast, where I recorded their calls. Some days later, after returning to Canberra, I was awakened at 0530 hours on 5 November by the characteristic, raucous, 'korrk' of the Channel-billed and was able to sight a single bird flying southwards across Barry Drive in the direction of the National Botanic Gardens. On 9 December 1981, I had a telephone call from Mark Clayton who had sighted a single bird flying southwards from Kaleen towards Black Mountain earlier that morning. The fact that only single birds have been seen on every occasion that this species has been recorded locally (Mt Tidbinbilla 8 September 1960; Lake George 26 November 1966; Black Mountain 17 February 1969; Gungahlin 10 December 1978; O'Connor 5 November 1981; Kaleen 9 December 1981), when it normally occurs in small to large flocks suggests that we are seeing stragglers or vagrants. The bird seen on 17 February 1969 was a juvenile.

H A Nix, 22 Syme Crescent, O'CONNOR, ACT, 2601

****

EDITOR'S NOTE

For those of you who didn't notice the obvious (as the Editor failed to do prior to publication) the April 1983 issue of Canberra Bird Notes was of course No 2 of Vol 8 not of Vol 5 as appeared on that issue's cover.

THE AVIAN BALL THIEVES

F J Gay

Since about the beginning of April this year members and associates of the Royal Canberra Golf Club have been suffering their annual raids by marauding birds which swoop on, and carry away, golfballs. These birds, generally referred to by the golfers as 'crows' (often prefixed by an obscene or rude adjective) are, however, the Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides.* These ravens are present around the course throughout most of the year, but appear to restrict their ball stealing activities mainly to the autumn and early winter.

The general pattern of this behaviour is for one or two birds to patrol a limited number of adjacent fairways, generally at a distance of 100-200 metres from the trees, and to pounce on a ball while its owner is some distance away. Shouts, curses, whistles and waving of arms or clubs has little or no effect, and the triumphant bird flies to a nearby tree or shrub to display its trophy before flying off, secure from any reprisal.

The extent of these depredations can reach quite aggravating proportions; sometimes two, or even three, balls from a foursomes group can be taken on the same fairway, and reports of balls lost in this manner may exceed 10 in a single day. An interesting new development has followed the recent introduction of coloured balls. These balls are bright yellow or red and appear to be preferentially taken as against the conventional white balls, by the ravens; there is some indication that the red balls are more attractive than the yellow.

From the golfers' point of view these losses are doubly frustrating, firstly each ball costs a minimum of $2.50, and secondly, under the Rules of Golf, unless the golfer actually sees the bird pick up the ball and fly off with it the ball is considered lost, and a penalty of one additional stroke and loss of distance is incurred.

Most golfers familiar with this problem consider that the reason the ravens take the balls is that they mistake them for eggs and, as such, a welcome addition to their diet. However, this may be merely another part of the mystique which surrounds the game.

The problem is not a new one on the RCGC course (nor possibly on other courses in the ACT). I remember such attacks in the 1950's, when the course occupied much of the

area now under Lake Burley Griffin. Two recollections spring vividly to mind:

A frustrated golfer, who had suffered several losses from raven predation, painstakingly tracked the offending birds back to their base on the lower slopes of Black Mountain. He found a cache of almost 3 dozen balls - unfortunately not a single ball was usable because of the severe roughening and puncturing of their covers by the strong beaks of the birds.

The second incident concerns a golfer who was about to complete his round and was aghast to *see* his ball being snatched from the 18th green, alongside the clubhouse. Shouting and gesticulating, he ran toward the green only to see the raven fly off with the ball to the top of an electric light pole in the adjacent car park. The bird surveyed the infuriated golfer from its perch, and then deposited the ball on top of the pole and flew away. Because of the weathered condition of the top of the pole, the ball defied all efforts to dislodge it by jarring the base of the pole. How long it stayed there I cannot recall, but eventually it disappeared. Possibly the rapacious raven returned to reclaim what it regarded as its rightful reward.

F J Gay, 9 Gooreen Street, REID, ACT, 2601

****

PUBLICATIONS

The Secretary holds a large but incomplete stock of Canberra Bird Notes from Volume 1 onwards. These are available at 50Q each. He also has volumes 74 to 82 of the RAOU journal 'The Emu' for sale to the highest bidder (Telephone: 495545).

The bird index for volumes 1 to 4 of Canberra Bird Notes is available from Ms Julia Headford, Publications Officer (Telephone: 731377(H)) at $3.00 plus 60Q postage. The Pocket List of Australian Birds is still available from Julia at 50Q each plus 30Q postage, or at a discount for quantities.

****

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. The subscription rates are: Student (under 18) $4.00; Single $8.00; Family $10.00, all with one copy of CBN; Institutions $10.00.

EDITOR: Mr P M Davidson, PO Box 301, CIVIC SQUARE, ACT, 2608

RARITIES PANEL: C Bear (583169); G Clark, B Baker, R Gregory-Smith

CONTENTS *PAGE*