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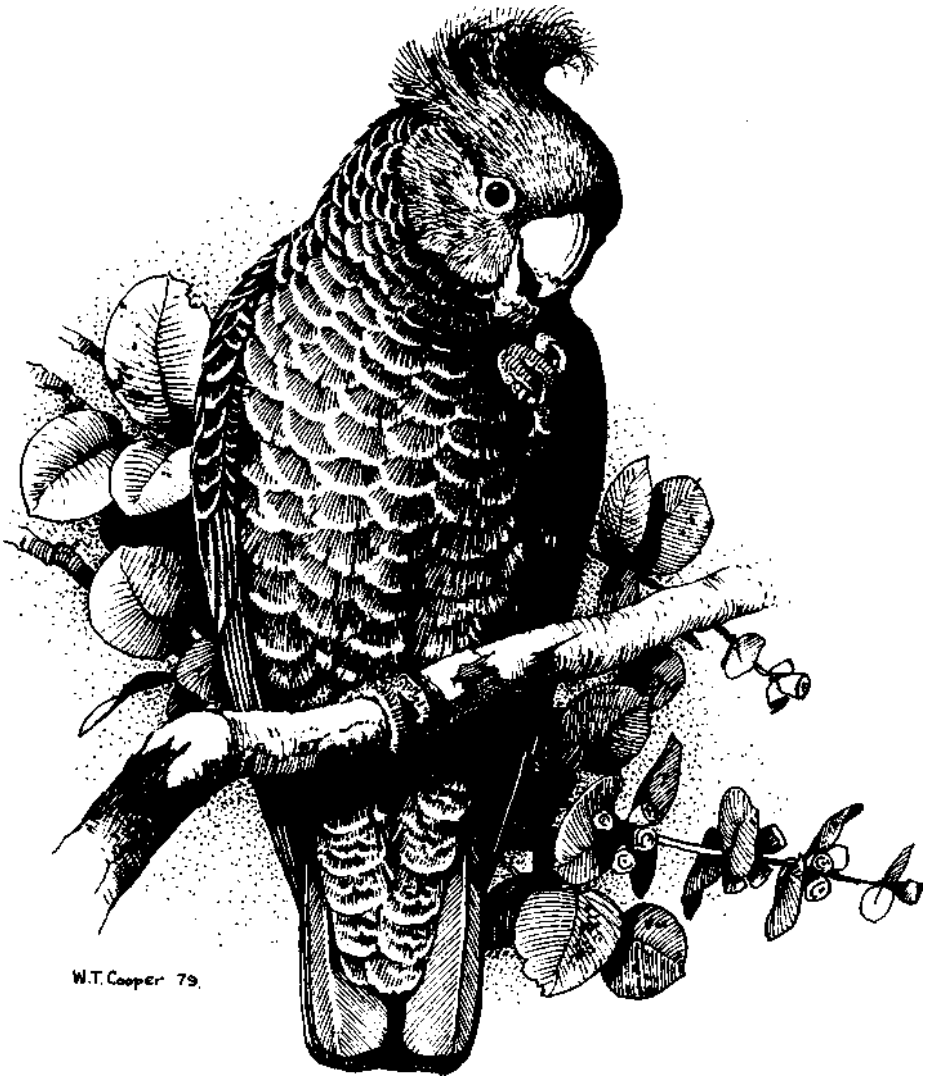


HONEYEATER MIGRATION THROUGH THE CANBERRA REGION
A PROJECT PROPOSAL

Chris Davey, Hew Prendergast, Ian Taylor

The autumn migration of honeyeaters is one of the most conspicuous and undoubtedly the most spectacular ornithological events of the year in Canberra. On suitable days, even in the very heart of the city, flocks of the dominant species, the Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops* can be seen passing low overhead in a continuous stream; the flocks occasionally halting briefly in the tops of trees. Large numbers of other species, especially the White-naped Honeyeater *Melithreptus lunatus* are often intermingled.

The migration of honeyeaters through the Canberra region has been known for many years and though much has been said about this phenomenon very little has been written about it.

Here we summarise published data relevant to our area, present ideas and preliminary work of our own and suggest a major project for 1985 involving the entire COG membership.

Published material on the local honeyeater populations and their migration is sparse and mainly arises from banding activities or from casual observations. These data have focused on three aspects of autumn honeyeater migration: (i) the number of birds involved; (ii) the species involved; and (iii) the direction of movement.

Most observations have taken place at points along the Murrumbidgee Valley. Between Casuarina Sands and Uriarra Crossing, Lamm and Calaby (1950) recorded a northward movement of about 4000 birds/hour. On one day, however, flocks were moving across the valley from west to east as a narrow belt at the rate of about 10000 birds/hour. At Pine Island, Murn (1963) estimated 10-12000 birds to pass during four hours of one morning, 95% being Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, the remainder being White-naped Honeyeaters.

Wilson (1963), at the same locality, saw Eastern Spinebills *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris,* Fuscous Honeyeaters *L. fuscus* and White-eared Honeyeaters *L. leucotis* as well, amongst the 10000 birds that he counted between 0905 and 1100 hours. Clayton (1979) briefly described migration at Point Hut.

Further publications relevant to our area are listed with the references.

Despite 22 years of banding honeyeaters within the ACT the very low number of band returns has told us little about the migration of honeyeaters through our region. Between April 1961 and June 1983 a total of 28597 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were banded in the ACT. Of these, only nine were recovered

at distances in excess of 20 km from their banding place (seven were recovered at distances between 21 km and 40 km, one at 190 km, and one at 240 km) (Purchase, in press).

From casual observations made over the years there appears to be general agreement about the timing and direction of movement within the region. The birds, assumed to be those breeding in the Brindabella Ranges, begin to move around the end of March, the exact date said to be governed by the first frosts. Whilst the general direction is east/north-east the routes chosen appear to be governed by distinct topographical features such as ridge lines and river valleys.

We know very little of the conditions which influence the honeyeater migration. Frosts appear to initiate the autumn movements. Fogs, common in autumn, certainly delay them but many apparently suitable days with clear and calm conditions may pass with no substantial movement at all.

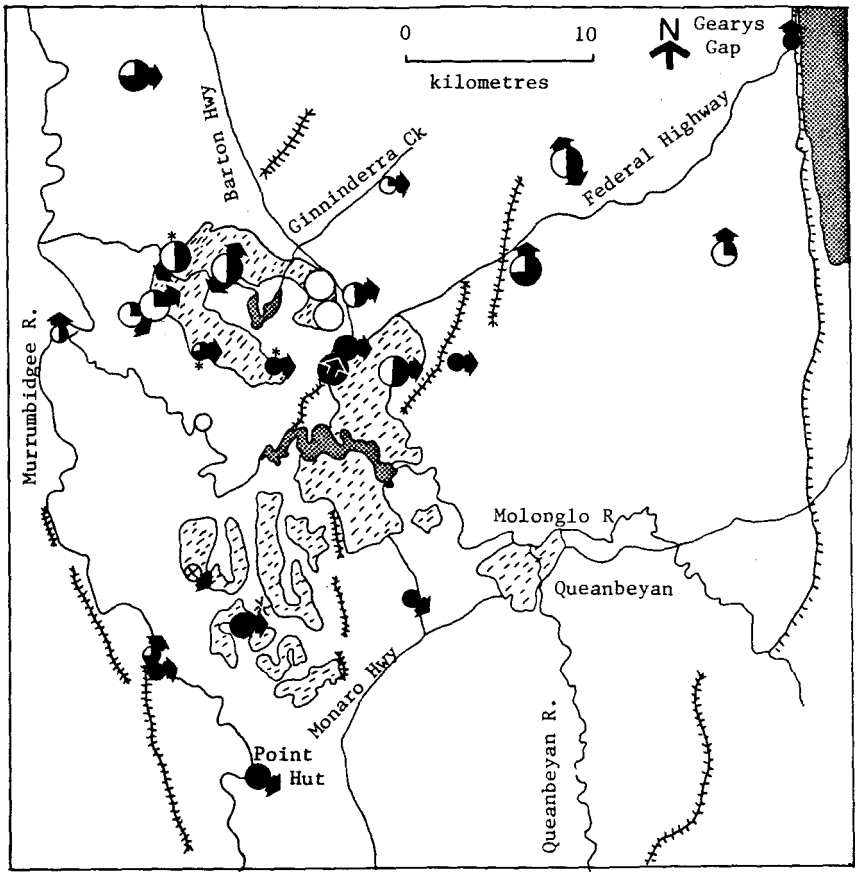
During the 1984 autumn migration the first attempt was made to collect recordings by a number of observers. Very few observations were systematic and only occasionally were the birds accurately counted. An attempt to summarise all of these observations is shown in Fig 1. Additional observations from previous years have been included where no records exist for 1984; Macgregor observations 1979-82, Hawker and Aranda observations 1982. Little was gleaned from a preliminary analysis of Yellow-faced Honeyeater records from the Garden Bird charts.

From the data presented in Fig 1, it appears that there may be at least three main migration routes across the Canberra area. The northern one leaves the Murrumbidgee for Hawker, Aranda and Lyneham and crosses Mt Ainslie-Mt Majura ridge before descending to near Cherryburn Homestead. The second route passes via Kambah and crosses the Cooma Road after skirting Mt Taylor. The third route heads eastwards from Pt Hut. Whether birds following these routes are the same as those which fly north along the Lake George escarpment is unknown.

In an attempt to obtain a more detailed picture of the movement patterns over the Canberra area and what factors influence these movement patterns we would like to collect further data during the 1985 autumn migration in the following ways:

1. a data sheet will be sent to all COG members before the start of the 1985 autumn migration. The sheet will consist of rows and columns designating half-hourly intervals for each day during the honeyeater migration period. Birds moving overhead will be counted, identified and their

FIGURE 1: Observations of honeyeater migration near Canberra



Relative Abundance
- No record
- None
- Few
- Some
- Many
- Very many

Observation Frequency
- One day
- Scattered
- Reasonable

Direction

Built-up areas

direction determined, the information to be put into the appropriate box on the data sheet. If during a half hour period no honeyeaters are seen then this must be noted. This information will hopefully give us an idea of the general movement patterns over the area.

2. To obtain a detailed picture of movements one day we hope to have a series of 'blitz' days, with observers located at strategic points around the region. As with 1, observers will be counting and identifying honeyeaters but additional information will also be sought on numbers and sizes of flocks.

3. Given enough observers we should like to establish a full time watch at one or more favoured localities such as Gearys Gap, Point Hut.

Combination of these three approaches should give a good idea about local honeyeater migration. We stress, however, that as in all studies, the results will undoubtedly raise as many questions as they answer and 1985 will, in this sense, be purely a preliminary to 1986. We should like to hear not only from anyone interested in participation in the project but also from those who have ideas that could contribute to its success.

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ODD OBS

RESTLESS FLYCATCHERS ROB SPIDER-WEBS *Ian Taylor*

A pair of Restless Flycatchers *Myiagra inquieta,* resident at the Coombs Building in the ANU, found a novel way to supplement their meagre winter diet. They discovered that an easy meal was to be had by robbing the cobwebs that adorn the window sills and eaves around the building.

Hovering before the windows, uttering their curious buzzing call, the birds systematically worked the building, sill by sill, now and then darting down to snatch their prey from a web.

Not only did the flycatchers benefit from this arrangement - resident academics had a perfect opportunity to observe this unusual and elegant creature at close quarters.

YELLOW ROSELLA AT UNIVERSITY HOUSE *Ian Beveridge*

During the last 4 years that I have been living at University House, a bird that appears to a Yellow Rosella *Platycercus elegans flaveolus* has often come to eat sunflower seeds on my balcony. I believe it is a female and is mated to a Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans.* The latter is larger than her and bullies her. He won't allow her to take seeds, but on one occasion I saw him feeding her by regurgitation. In at least 2 years they have raised young. About January and February the young have come to my balcony with their parents. Their colouring differs from that of immature Crimson Rosellas in that much of the green has a yellowish tint and there are some yellow patches. Even after 4 years, the yellow bird is much shyer of me than are Crimson Rosellas.

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CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP

STATEMENT TO THE PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE ACT 31 MAY 1984

Alistair Drake and Bryan FitzGerald

On 31 May 1984, a delegation from COG, consisting of Bryan FitzGerald (President), Chris Davey (Conservation Officer), Alistair Drake and Henry Nix, appeared before the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the ACT, which was considering the 82nd series of variations to the city plan.

COG's evidence related to the alignment which the National Capital Development Commission has proposed for the Diary Flat section of the Lake Burley Griffin cycleway. Other evidence relating to the proposal has been given to the Committee, at a number of recent sittings, by officers of the NCDC and of the Parks and Conservation Division of the Department of Territories and Local Government, and by Mr T R McGhie of Farrer, who had made a submission opposing the proposed alignment. COG's written evidence consisted of two letters we had sent to NCDC. These expressed our opposition to the alignment and gave detailed reasons for our objections.

Our oral evidence consisted of a prepared statement, read by Alistair Drake, and answers to the Committee's questions:

'The Jerrabomberra Wetlands area is a part of Canberra that has been of particular interest and concern to our members for many years, indeed ever since the wetlands were formed as Lake Burley Griffin filled. We have frequently drawn the attention of those concerned with Canberra's development to the value of the wetlands as a bird habitat, and we have emphasised both the importance of the area as a refuge for the waterbirds of the whole of the lake, and the opportunities for environmental education and recreation which such a centrally located site presents for the sympathetic planner. It has been very pleasing for us to find that our views on the value of the wetlands, and our suggestions for their future, have met with wide acceptance, so that continued management of the area as a waterbird habitat has now become a feature of the city plan. It has given us particular pleasure to see our rather vague proposals turned into detailed and practical plans by the National Capital Development Commission, which has generally shown a commendable degree of imagination and environmental awareness in its planning for this area.

It is therefore a matter of considerable regret to us that NCDC has now made a proposal for the wetlands area which we find that we cannot support. The cycleway alignment that has now been put forward is, in our view, located much too close

to the core area of the wetlands, and we fear that disturbance of the waterbirds by cycleway users will result in a significant decrease in the value of the area as a refuge. We have made our concern known to NCDC both in writing and in discussion, and as your committee is already aware of the arguments we have put it is not necessary to repeat them here. NCDC appears to remain convinced that the moat they are proposing to construct will form an adequate barrier between the cycleway and the wetlands. We agree that the moat will have a significant barrier effect, and we acknowledge that, given what we regard as a fundamentally unsatisfactory alignment, NCDC's planners have made a good job of reducing the adverse environmental effects of the cycleway. However, even when the effect of the moat is taken into account, we find it impossible to endorse an alignment which both cuts the wetlands in two and presses so uncompromisingly against the entire length of the wetlands' core area and the southern bank of Molonglo Reach.

In earlier discussions with NCDC we frequently explained that, with careful design, it would be possible to enable interested members of the public to obtain good views of the wetlands' birdlife, and our suggestions for how this could be done have been incorporated into the design of the viewing area along Jerrabomberra Creek. We also emphasised the threat to the area presented by human disturbance, and we thought that it was understood that large numbers of people should not be brought into close proximity to the wetlands in an unsupervised way. In those discussions, cycleway alignments that kept well away from the wetlands, at least for most of their length, were being tentatively proposed, and these were regarded as acceptable by our Group. The alignment now being proposed appears to constitute a major deviation from earlier design concepts for the wetlands area, and for us this apparent change in direction is a matter of considerable concern. We would like to repeat here our view that, just as roads in residential suburbs are now planned to minimise through traffic, so the cycleway alignment should be chosen to minimise disturbance of the waterbirds by cyclists, joggers and others who are simply passing by.

The alignment which we most favour would follow the present Dairy Road south from Molonglo Reach. It would pass to the east and south of Kelly's Swamp and cross Jerrabomberra Creek just north of the sediment trap before running along the southern edge of the viewing and interpretation area to Mundaring Drive. A spur to Fyshwick could readily be incorporated if desired, the junction being located in the vicinity of Kelly's farmhouse.

We suggest that the area between the Dairy Road section of the path and the core area of the wetlands could best be developed as a model farm. This would not only be a most attractive educational facility for the city, but it would also form a very effective buffer zone for the wetlands and provide an attractive environment for users of the cycleway, especially if motor traffic along Dairy Road is reduced following construction of the Eastern Parkway.

Finally we wish to emphasise to the committee the great importance of having a buffer zone between the cycleway and the wetlands core area, especially as the development of additional recreational facilities in this part of Canberra, and the continuing growth of the city as a whole, can only increase the pressure on the waterbird habitat.

In our view, the main merit of NCDC's current proposal is that the buffer zone, although reduced to a simple barrier, is both well defined and incorporated into the development plan. In any consideration of alternative alignments, it is essential that effective buffer zones are included in the plans. We most strongly urge your committee to ensure that cycleway development, along any alignment, does not occur until an adequate buffer zone has been both formally declared and made effective.

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1982-83 ANNUAL BIRD REPORT

As organiser of COG waterbird surveys, Michael Lenz provided waterbird survey data and notes for incorporation in the 1982-83 Annual Report, CBN 9(3).

This was not mentioned in the waterbird survey section introduction.

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It is well known that the Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae* was once common in the area around Canberra (Frith 1969), but no attempt has hitherto been made to document the decline and subsequent reintroduction of this species.

This article considers the history of the Emu in the Canberra area by dividing it into three periods. A large population was present before the arrival of Europeans in the 1820s. Numbers then declined rapidly and by 1860, the species was locally extinct, leaving only a small remnant population in the Kiandra area. Over one hundred years later, in 1964, ten Emus were released in the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve where the species has since flourished. There is now evidence that the species may attempt to re-establish itself in the wild, in spite of official attempts to prevent this from happening.

Before the arrival of the white man, the Canberra region provided an ideal habitat for the Emu. Much of the country consisted of open grassland dominated by tall native grasses and savannah woodland where scattered eucalypts of medium height were the main feature.

The Emu was a source of food for the local Aborigines. Bennett discovered bones of the Emu in a cave on the Murrumbidgee south of Yass on 11 October 1832. He also sheds light on how the Aborigines ate the bird:

> 'Among a quantity of dust were several loose bones, which had at first been described to me as fossils, but which were the breast bones and tibiae of the emu, and skulls and other bones of dogs, which no doubt had been placed there by the natives, for the tibiae of the emu (here called Bereban by the blacks) had a hole at the upper and anterior part; this perforation is made, as many of them afterwards told me, to enable them more readily, by admitting air, to suck out the rich marrow from the lower end, which was broken for that purpose.' (Bennett, 1834, pp 289-290).

Tribal law prohibited all but adult males from eating Emu flesh (Helms, 1895, p 393) and among the Aboriginals of the Tumut area, uninitiated males were not even permitted to eat the eggs (Howitt, 1904). These taboos were enforced to prevent the indiscriminate slaughter and long-term depletion of the Emu population. Emus apparently played a role in the ceremonial life of the local tribes as they feature prominently in the cave paintings which were discovered recently at Rendezvous Creek and Yankee Hat in the Namadgi National Park (Flood, 1980, pp 130-136).

Reports of the first European explorers in the area provide interesting descriptions of the species and it is evident that Emus were present in considerable numbers in all suitable habitats.

Joseph Wild, the first white man to venture into the area, explored the banks of Lake George in August 1820. He remarked that Emus were 'very plentiful and seen in small flocks' (Cambage, 1921, p 260). Some two months later, Governor Macquarie toured the area and left the following record of Emus south of Goulburn on 23 October 1820:

> 'We saw several flocks of fine large emus and some fine large turkies [Australian Bustard *Eupodotis australis]* and hunted some of the former, but the dogs being rather shy did not kill any. The first flock of 4 emus which we saw were distant from us about 400 yards. The moment they perceived us they halted to look at us. We also pulled up our horses to look at them. After they had reconnoitred us for a few minutes, they advanced towards us in a very bold majestic manner, at first walking smartly but slackening their pace as they came nearer to us until they had actually advanced within 15 yards of us. They then halted and looked at us, and we might have shot them all with the greatest ease had we either guns or pistols, but . we had neither, nor had we even the dogs with us. On slight movement of one of our horses and after they looked at us halting for a few seconds, they took the alarm and galloped off in a fine style. This was one of the prettiest sights I ever saw.' (Macquarie, 1956, pp 152-53).

On his return journey eight days later, the governor bought some Emu chicks at a place on the Cockbundoon River for his son:

> 'I purchased four very pretty young emus (hatched at the same time and about 2 months old)...as presents for my beloved Lachlan. I have also brought on a young swan for him...all which I hope will get safe to Parramatta, and must prove highly acceptable.' (Macquarie, 1956, p 162).

The next Europeans to explore the area were Mark John Currie, a captain in the British Navy and Major Ovens. Their first record of Emus was made at Lake George on 26 May 1823:

> 'Killed three emus on a plain near the lake, which afforded excellent coursing, equal if not surpassing the same sport with the hare in England; and which were very acceptable, for having calculated on them and kangaroos, as the principal part of our food, and the whole of that of our greyhounds; we had provided ourselves with but little salt meat.' (Currie, 1825, p 371).

They explored as far south as Bredbo then returned to Sydney via Lake Bathurst. In addition to the birds killed at Lake George, they reported a further seven Emus at Tuggeranong, Michelago, Bredbo, Bungendore and Lake Bathurst (Currie, 1825, pp 374-380).

Alexander Cunningham, King's Botanist, made this record in the Bungendore area on 8 April 1824:

> '[The reedy channel], from the impressions, had been the general resort of Emu; the drought however of the last summer and the present season had exhausted this resource of those gigantic birds.' (Havard, 1956, pp 8,9).

The following day, however, he sighted two birds:

> '[We] saw two of these birds on the far side of the plain, too distant to give chase to them and they had a covert to retreat to.' (Havard, 1956, p 9).

Cunningham proceeded to the heart of modern Canberra where he camped on the banks of the Molonglo near the foot of Black Mountain on 18 April 1824. He reported that:

> 'On these Downs [I] observed several groups of emus feeding on the flats to the eastwards of [us], perfectly unconscious of danger, and not in the least regarding [our] movements within half a mile of them. The man, being without dogs to secure any of them, exemplified the fable of the fox and the grapes, by not caring to approach them, they were too old and tough to afford an acceptable change of diet.' (Havard, 1956, p 16).

The following day, Cunningham and his party travelled north across the plain that is now the industrial suburb of Mitchell where they made the area's first breeding record:

> '[We] had passed small groups of emus, feeding on the open plains, that retired towards the margins of the forest lands on [our] near approach evidently shewing they were coupling.' (Havard, 1956, p 17).

The first naturalist of any calibre to travel in the area was George Bennett, mentioned above. Enthusiastic, articulate and observant, he visited the area on two occasions in 1832 and he left detailed descriptions of the flora, fauna and aboriginal people he met.

The impact of the white settlers on the Emu population was already in evidence. Barely a decade after Wild first arrived in the area, Bennett remarked on the decline of the species:

> 'The Emu, or New Holland cassowary...were abundant about this part of the colony, more particularly at a place not far distant, called 'Naganbilly' [Adjungbilly?]. It is, however to be regretted, that the birds are becoming rarer as settlements advance, as they could be readily domesticated.' (Bennett, 1834, p 296).

Bennett describes the uses to which the settlers put the carcass of the bird.

> 'The emu is principally valued for its oil. The natives in this part of the colony call them 'Gorin' or 'Berebine'. The skin of a full-grown bird produces six or seven quarts of oil, clear, and of a beautiful bright yellow colour: the method for extracting or 'trying' the oil, is to
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> pluck the feathers, cut the skin into pieces, and boil it; but the aborigines prefer the flesh with the skin upon it, regarding it, as the Esquimaux do the flesh of whales and seals, as a highly luscious treat. The oil is excellent for burning; it produces no disagreeable smell: it is also considered a good liniment for sprains or bruises in horses and cattle, either alone, or when stronger stimulating properties are required, mixed with turpentine. The flesh is eaten by Europeans, and preferred by some to the kangaroo: the rump part is considered as delicate as fowl; the legs coarse like beef, but still tender.' (Bennett, 1834, p 296).

Bennett also found numerous Emus on the Blowering Plain, now the Blowering Dam, south of Tumut in December 1832 (Bennett, 1832, p 281).

Lhotsky who travelled from Sydney to the Snowy Mountains in 1834 recorded the aboriginal name for Emu as 'biddibang' (Lhotsky, 1839, p 161), but did not mention the bird in his detailed account of the journey published in 1835.

The last confirmed record of the Emu in the area is contained in a list of the birds of Queanbeyan compiled by W Davis Wright. The list itself, subject of a separate study currently being undertaken by this writer, is rather cryptic but appears to date from 1837 (Wright, 1923, p 20).

Speared, hunted, coursed, shot and boiled into oblivion, the Emu was extinct around Canberra by 1860, at which time Bennett lamented, 'the Emue is seen there no more' (Bennett, 1860, pp 216-217).

None of the other chroniclers or travellers such as Shumack, Gale or McFarland recorded Emus in the Canberra area attar the middle of the last century, although Emus appear to have been kept as curiosities by the landed gentry in the middle of the last century. (See illustrations of Canyon and Yarralumla in Fitzgerald, 1977, p 23 and Martin, 1978, p 47). By the early years of this century when the first modern ornithologists, Jones and Barrett, came to Canberra, the Emu was long gone.

The high plains and the Monaro country tell a slightly different story. It appears that a number of small bands have survived in the Cabramurra and Kiandra areas (Frith, 1969,

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The high plains and the Monaro country tell a slightly different story. It appears that a number of small bands have survived in the Cabramurra and Kiandra areas (Frith, 1969,

p 38). Gall and Congmore reported three birds at Dead Horse Gap in December 1971 (Gall, 1978, p 191). These were all that remained of a once common species.

A new chapter in the history of the Emu in the Canberra area opened in the mid-1960s when ten Emus were introduced into the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. At first, they were confined to a special enclosure and their eggs were incubated artificially. By 1974, the few birds which has been released were prospering, and the others were set free to range within the reserve. They have bred prolifically and there are now about eighty Emus at Tidbinbilla.

In 1976, three of these birds were transferred to the Gudgenby Valley where they were subsequently recorded by a COG member (Cenz, 1980, p 6). Two later died and the third

was removed in accordance with a change in conservation policy. It was decided that the establishment of birds from Tidbinbilla in the wild was to be discouraged, because they could upset the gene pool of the remnant bands at Cabramurra and Kiandra if the two populations came into contact.

A solitary Emu was sighted on the Corin Dam Road in 1976 (McKean, 1977) and a number of birds from Tidbinbilla have colonised the neighbouring property of Birigai. In spite of official attempts to contain the spread of the Emu, it is possible that the birds from the reserve may become established in the wild in the future.

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Ian Taylor, 69 Tyson Street, AINSLIE, ACT, 2602

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DEAD SILVER GULLS ON CAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN

Murray Lord

At 0945 on 2 June 1984 I found two dead Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* on the northern shore of Cake Burley Griffin near the Captain Cook fountain. The birds were within 10 m of each other. Both had ice on their backs, and were freshly dead. I presume they died during the night.

M.K. Lord, 8 Goodhart Place, SANDY BAY, TASMANIA, 7005

LONG-BILLED CORELLA AT KAMBAH

Felix Schlager

While eating my breakfast at home on 4 April 1984 I heard the screech of a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* coming from the back yard. Although this was nothing unusual, I went outside to investigate the number of birds present as I participate in the Garden Bird Survey.

There were two white birds perched on the powerlines and one was obviously the cockatoo which had called. The other, sitting 2-3 m away, was not a cockatoo but a corella. A quick dash inside to get my binoculars confirmed that it was in fact a Cong-billed Corella *Cacatua tenuirostris.*

Both birds remained for 15 minutes, allowing time for me to take several photographs, using a zoom lens at a maximum focal length of 260 mm, from a distance of about 20 m. The

prints clearly show the orange-scarlet forehead and upper breast of the bird, and also the slender, long, horn-coloured bill.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were observed in the area in low numbers throughout the following winter and spring but I made no more sightings of the Corella.

I am unaware of any other records of Long-billed Corella in the Canberra area.

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F E Schlager, 80 Boddington Crescent, KAMBAH, ACT, 2902

NUTMEG MANNIKIN AT THE BOTANIC GARDENS

Ray Pierce

At the entrance to the National Botanic Gardens in Canberra on 15 March 1983, I found a Nutmeg Mannikin *Lonchura punctulata* foraging with two Double-barred Finches *Poephila bichenovii* in short grass. The mannikin was completely brown above, paler on the tail and much darker on the head and especially the throat (extending to upper breast) which appeared brownish black. From distances greater than 35 m the entire head gave the impression of being black. The breast, flanks and sides had a pale background, but were heavily speckled with brown, indicating it was an adult. There was no sign of any bands
on the legs. When approached too closely (15-20 m) the bird flew firstly to tall grass where it clung to a vertical
stalk which collapsed. It then flew to 3 m high shrubs within the gardens, but returned within a matter of seconds and perched on the wire fence. Time: about 1000. When I returned

with my camera about 1400 I could find neither the mannikin nor the finches. The Nutmeg Mannikin is a species with which I am familiar from previous trips to Queensland, where I saw it again in May and June 1983.

Ray Pierce, Glenmore Station, LAKE TEKAPO, SOUTH ISLAND, NZ

W*.**********

AVIARY ESCAPEE IN ARANDA?

Kay Hahne

For 5 weeks, from 13 May 1984, my husband, my neighbour Rosemary Kennemore, and myself frequently heard and observed a 'new' species of parrot in our adjoining back gardens. It was not to be identified from Slater's *A Field Guide to Australian Birds* or Frith's *Birds in the Australian High Country.* I had two excellent views of it for several minutes at a time. On 13 June 1984 at 0800 this bird was tight-rope walking on the electricity cable over our back fence. I got a clear view, with binoculars and the naked eye, as I was watching from a high window at eye level with the cable, and there were no branches or leaves to obstruct the view, The bird was placing one foot over the other (not edging side-ways),and appeared to be 'scooping' up the frost and melting ice drops with its lower beak for an early morning icy drink.

This parrot was slightly longer than a crimson rosella and more slender, with a very long, pointed tail. The overall colour was bright yellow-green, with more yellow in the breast and under the tail. The back of the tail had a slight turquoise tinge. The upper beak was coral-red, the lower beak darkish black; legs and feet very pale; iris orange-pink. No markings were evident around the eye or throat area. Its call was very raucous and piercing, the bird usually first heard, then seen. Upon describing it to a friend who has an aviary, he thought it to be an escaped female Indian Ringneck. From Joe Forshaw's *Parrots of the World* my husband and I identified the bird as a female (or possibly immature) Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* of the India and Sri Lanka region. Another phone call to my friend with the aviary to ask him the scientific name of the Indian Ringneck, and it was one and the same, *Psittacula krameri.* (He has heard that escapees of this species are very hardy and likely to colonize, and that there seems to be some worry that this species may possibly become more numerous and eventually a pest.)

Kay Hahne, 5 Gingara Street, ARANDA, ACT, 2614

ODD OBS

OF MICE AND MAGPIES

Kay Hahne

On Sunday afternoon 24 July 1984, about 1400, my husband and I were walking around Lake Ginninderra. As we were approaching the bridge on Ginninderra Drive by McKellar, we heard a tiny, high-pitched squeaking. We turned to see a female Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* in the grass with a kicking, squealing mouse in its beak. The bird dropped the mouse (small, brown with long tail) which moved slightly add was Immediately snatched up again around its middle and with much kicking and squealing. The Magpie then walked across the bicycle path a few steps in front of us, dropped the mouse again but it no longer made any sound or movement. The Magpie then proceeded to peck at the mouse, tearing bits off it and eating it there and then in front of us! At this point we continued on our journey, noting that the mouse population had gone down by one and surprised that it was killed and eaten by a Magpie. Is this a common part of a Magpie's diet?

Felix Schlager

At 0755 on 10 September 1984, while travelling by bus through Kambah, I saw a Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* in grassland by the road with a mouse in its bill. The mouse appeared to be dead, and the bird was holding the mouse as though it were about to swallow it head first. The ACTION timetable prevented me from seeing the outcome of this encounter.

GULLS OVER FRASER

Dennis Ayliffe

Over the past five months or so (March-July 1984) I have quite regularly heard flocks of Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* passing over my house in Fraser at night. These flights seem to occur between 1930 and 2130 and the direction of flight is from west to east. There is no continuous calling - just a few contact calls every 5 seconds or so. I can only assume the gulls are making their way from the Belconnen rubbish tip to a roost site near Cake Ginninderra, although Fraser is well north of a line between the two. Another resident from the western side of the suburb has also mentioned hearing the flocks to me.

BIRDS IN POETRY

Talk by A D Hope to COG, Wednesday 8 August 1984

Report by Jon Prance

Alec Hope was Professor of English at the ANU from 1951 to 1968, and has been Emeritus Professor since then. He has written verse for over 50 years, winning many poetry prizes. It was a great pleasure to hear 'Australia's foremost poet', to quote H.C. Jaffa of New York University (1). The evening was memorable for three reasons: for the wealth of Alec Hope's scholarship, for his quiet humour, and for the readings from his own verse. The following covers just a few points in the lecture.

Poetry is full of birds, said Prof Hope, but often one finds them used as ornaments rather than natural creatures. In the ancient world, they were closely finked to religion and prophecy, being the basis of augury, or divination by omens. Birds occur frequently in Homer, both as natural and mythical creatures, sometimes in rather risque incidents; for example, the pursuit of Hera by Zeus, who turned himself into a cuckoo and flew under Hera's dress! Birds also had close connections with the world of the dead, while among the pre-Islamic Arabs, the soul of a recently dead person was visualised as a bird leaving the mouth of the deceased. But in ancient times exact knowledge of birds was either lacking or mixed with fancy, for instance the belief that swallows spent the winter underground, or even under water.

In Christianity, the dove is the symbol of the Holy Ghost, as for example in Milton's 'Paradise Cost'. In the Middle Ages, the owl stood for purity and wisdom, but the nightingale appears in Christian verse as inciting the faithful to lust. Some poets used birds as instruments of satire, an instance being the political poem by John Skelton (1460-1529), 'Speak, Parrot'. Prof Hope read us a few lines by Skelton, followed by some from his own poem of the same title (2). Parrots in

Skelton's time, owing to their longevity and beautiful plumage, were considered immortal and called 'Birds of Paradise'. By the 16th and 17th centuries, birds were being treated more as real creatures. But in the 19th century, symbolism once more tended to outweigh observation. Though Meredith's skylark was a real bird, Shelley's skylark was almost lost under the romantic images. (Here Alec Hope recalled how the majestic language of Shelley had prepared him for a complete chamber orchestra at least, but on reaching England he heard what sounded like the unoiled wheels of a tea-trolley!) And Keats, in his splendid 'Ode to a Nightingale', assumes like so many poets that the female sings, whereas it is the male, for the

quite practical reason of marking his territory. Prof Hope then read part of his own poem 'A Nightingale to Mr Keats (and Poets in General)' (3).

The climax of the evening came with the reading of perhaps his most famous poem, 'The Death of the Bird'. Before this, however, we were given an insight into the kind of experience that might have led to such a poem. Many years ago, Alec Hope was staying on the coast of America. One day when out walking he saw a flock of migrating birds fly over. Trailing behind came a single bird. This bird failed to reach the main group, and flew round and round, as if disoriented. Then a second flock approached, and, perhaps in fear, the single bird suddenly flew away from the coast and out to sea, where it must eventually have drowned. Prof Hope added that his poem is

out of date in its treatment of migration as based on geographical features, bird navigation now being known to depend more on orientation by the sun and stars.

This great poem was composed in 1948, and first appeared in 'The Wandering Islands' in 1955 (4). It has often been reprinted, for instance in 'The Penguin Book of Australian Verse' (5).

- We reprint it below, with permission of Angus and Robertson, from A.D. Hope's book *Collected Poems, 19301970,* (1972).

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THE DEATH OF THE BIRD
By A.D. Hope

For every bird there is this last migration;
Once more the cooling year kindles her heart;
With a warm passage to the summer station

Cove pricks the course in lights across the chart.

Year after year a speck on the map, divided
By a whole hemisphere, summons her to come;
Season after season, sure and safely guided,
Going away she is also coming home.

And being home, memory becomes a passion
With which she feeds her brood and straws her nest,
Aware of ghosts that haunt the heart's possession
And exiled love mourning within the breast.

The sands are green with a mirage of valleys;
The palm-tree casts a shadow not its own;
Down the long architrave of temple or palace

Blows a cool air from moorland scarps of stone.

And day by day the whisper of love grows stronger;
That delicate voice, more urgent with despair,
Custom and fear contraining her no longer,

Drives her at last on the waste leagues of air.

A vanishing speck of those inane dominions,
Single and frail, uncertain of her place,
Alone in the bright host of her companions,
Cost in the blue unfriendliness of space,

She feels it close now, the appointed season:
The invisible thread is broken as she flies;
Suddenly, without warning, without reason,
The guiding spark of instinct winks and dies.

Try as she will, the trackless world delivers
No way, the wilderness of light no sign,

The immense and complex map of hills and rivers
Mocks her small wisdom with its vast design.

And darkness rises from the eastern valleys,
And the winds buffet her with their hungry breath,
And the great earth, with neither grief nor malice,
Receives the tiny burden of her death.

BOOK REVIEW

'North's Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds', Vol 1, by Alfred J North. Oxford University Press. 1984. Facsimile Edition RRP $80.

A J North's great work 'Nests and Eggs of Birds Found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania', originally published between 1901-1914 by the Australian Museum, has long been regarded by the serious bird student as probably the most useful of all the source books on Australian birds. Seventy years later, North's descriptions are still the best available.

This, the first of four volumes to be produced over the next couple of years, is a fine facsimile, printed on good quality paper and well bound. It offers the student and bird lover alike an ideal opportunity to acquire one of the greatest works on Australian birds for a fraction of the price now fetched by the original.

North's descriptions of the birds, their nests and eggs are very detailed and accurate. His accounts also include a lot of life history matter, much of it relayed from his various country correspondents, and this alone makes hours of interesting reading.

My only criticism of this book is that it is a pity that one of the rare coloured copies was not used. There are only seven plates of eggs in this volume and they are reproduced in sepia tones, as were most of the original printing. One wonders about the original reasons for this decision because, as such, the plates of eggs are of limited use and, aesthetically, of little interest. Presumably the original decision was dictated by cost, and no doubt the more recent decision, likewise, but at $80 per volume (we hope Vols II, III and IV will also be $80 each) surely the extra cost of printing 7 plates in colour would not have increased the price a great deal. Undoubtedly, it would have greatly increased the appeal of the book. On the other hand, probably I should applaud Oxford's decision to publish in this form. This is essentially a reference book. Certain other publishers whom we all know well probably would have produced the inevitable leather-bound, numbered, coloured (but not signed!) edition at a price few of us could afford

Graeme Chapman

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LETTER

Grahame Clark has passed on the fetter printed below, from the Director of the Canberra and District Historical Society. Any member with **further** information about this intriguing idea can telephone **Grahame** on 541279 or write to:

P **Falkland**
Director
Canberra and District Historical Society
PO Box 40
CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608

'The Society's attention has been drawn to a statement at page 221 (Vol 2) of the autobiography of David Starr Jordan, entitled 'Days of a Man', that 'the strangest of Australian birds is the *canbara,* a great, grey kingfisher - *Damao gigas* - appropriately known as the 'laughing jackass'... The new 'bush capital' arising in the inhabited district on the boundary between Victoria and New South Wales is called Canbara after that incredible fowl.' The date is 1907.

Jordan was first president of Stanford University for something like 21 years and a famous scientist especially noted for his careful classification of all the species of fish in the world. Presumably therefore he was a careful note-taker and not given to fantasising.

As it so happens, a member of the Society has lately been investigating the origin of the name Canberra. His research is incomplete but he had no knowledge of the assertion made by Jordan nor has he come across anything of this kind as a possible origin, despite having dug up a great number of interesting speculations.

I would be glad to know whether your organisation can throw any light at all on Jordan's statement.

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