

canberra bird notes

ISSN 0314-8211

Volume 49
Number 2
December 2024



Registered by Australia Post 100001304

CANBERRA BIRDS/CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP, INC. [COG]
PO Box 331, Jamison Centre, ACT 2614

2024-25 Committee

President	Kim Farley
Vice-President	Julie Hotchin
Secretary	Margaret Robertson
Treasurer	Vacant
Acting Treasurer	Prue Watters
Member	Jenny Bounds
Member	Bill Graham

Email Contacts

General inquiries	cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au
President	president@canberrabirds.org.au
Canberra Bird Notes	CBN@canberrabirds.org.au; michael.lenz.birds@gmail.com
COG Database Inquiries	COG.database@iinet.au
COG Membership	membership@canberrabirds.org.au
COG Web Discussion List	canberrabirds-owner@canberrabirds.org.au
Conservation	conservation@canberrabirds.org.au
Gang-gang Newsletter	gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au
Garden Bird Survey Coordinator	duncan.mccaskill@gmail.com
Publications for sale	sales@canberrabirds.org.au
Unusual bird reports	rarities@canberrabirds.org.au
Website	cogwebmaster@canberrabirds.org.au
Woodland Project	cogwoodland@canberrabirds.org.au

Other COG contacts

Conservation	Jenny Bounds	
Field Trips	Sue Lashko	6251 4485 (h)
COG Membership	Sandra Henderson	6231 0303 (h)
Canberra Bird Notes		
Editor	Michael Lenz	6249 1109 (h)
Sub-Editor	Kevin Windle	6286 8014 (h)
Newsletter Editor	Zac Flegg, Gail Neumann	
Databases	Vacant	
Garden Bird Survey	Duncan McCaskill	6259 1843 (h)
Rarities Panel	Barbara Allan	6254 6520 (h)
Talks Program Organiser	Jack Holland	6288 7840 (h)
Records Officer	Nicki Taws	6251 0303 (h)
Website	Julian Robinson	6239 6226 (h)
Sales	Kathy Walter	6241 7639 (h)
Distribution of COG publications	Dianne Davey	6254 6324 (h)

Use the General Inquiries email for general enquiries. Current details of COG's Committee and other aspects of COG are available at: <http://canberrabirds.org.au/>

ARTICLES

Canberra Bird Notes 49(2) (2024): 85-90

OBSERVATIONS OF WHITE-THROATED NIGHTJARS IN THE ACT FEBRUARY-APRIL 2024

ZEBEDEE MULLER¹ AND LUKE DOWNEY²

[¹zebsphotography@gmail.com](mailto:zebsphotography@gmail.com)

[²parrotluke@gmail.com](mailto:parrotluke@gmail.com)

Abstract: This article documents observations of White-throated Nightjars (*Eurostopodus mystacalis*) in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) between February and April of 2024. A focused effort to survey for the species around Cotter Dam, driven by previous sightings in similar habitats, resulted in a notable count of 13 individuals in one night, with additional sightings across the area throughout the migration period. The findings highlight the potential for the species to occur regularly around the Cotter Catchment during the summer months and a need for further studies is suggested to better understand their habitat preferences and movement patterns in the region.



Figure 1. White-throated Nightjar at Concrete Road, Cotter Dam (Chris Chapman, 2024).

Introduction

On 22 Feb 2024, Luke Downey and Zebedee Muller went in search of White-throated Nightjars (*Eurostopodus mystacalis*) along Concrete Road on the southern side of Cotter Dam. We had a hunch White-throated Nightjars would be around the Cotter Dam after Zebedee had observed several nightjars along the edge of Lake Burrinjuck in the nearby Yass Valley, NSW shortly before this outing. Chris Chapman and James Churches also followed up at Lake Burrinjuck and found even more nightjars present there. The habitat surrounding Lake Burrinjuck is rather similar to that around the Cotter. On this first visit to Concrete Road, we observed seven nightjars in total, all of which were highly vocal and many were seen hawking overhead. We also wanted to cover the nearby area surrounding Cotter Dam to get a better estimate of the number of nightjars that might be present. We found a total of 13 White-throated Nightjars on this night. Due to time constraints, we could not stay out much longer that night, but we are certain that a longer night of spotlighting would have increased the total count of nightjars.

Description

The White-throated Nightjar [see]] is a mostly brown/grey nightjar with a small white throat patch. Their wings lack the larger white spots seen in Spotted Nightjars and Large-tailed Nightjars, the only other nightjar species found in Australia (both of which are far less likely in the ACT). In flight they appear rather dark, with a buoyant and fast flight. Their wings appear pointed (Cleere *et al.*, 2020; Elliott 1935).

The White-throated Nightjar is a nocturnal, migratory species occurring along the east coast of Australia, where they migrate as far south as Victoria, breeding there in the summer months. By late summer they have mostly left Victoria and migrate north along the east coast and the Great Dividing Range to north Queensland and New Guinea. Gatherings of large numbers in loose groups are not unusual during their migration. They are often most active around dusk and dawn. During the daytime they remain still and camouflaged, roosting on a branch or on the ground among rocks or leaf litter (Cleere *et al.*, 2020). In the ACT region they are

documented as being a rare summer visitor (Hermes 2021). Records are mostly few and far between, especially in recent years, however historical breeding was recorded in the ACT between Bendora Dam and Mt Tidbinbilla (Olsen 1994). They are distributed patchily in the region, favouring open Eucalypt forests in the south-east high country. Being a summer migrant, their breeding season peaks in December in NSW, and January in Victoria. Locally, most records are in November to December, and then again in February to March. These peaks seem to reflect the periods of migration and potentially also when the birds are most actively vocal (Hermes 2021).

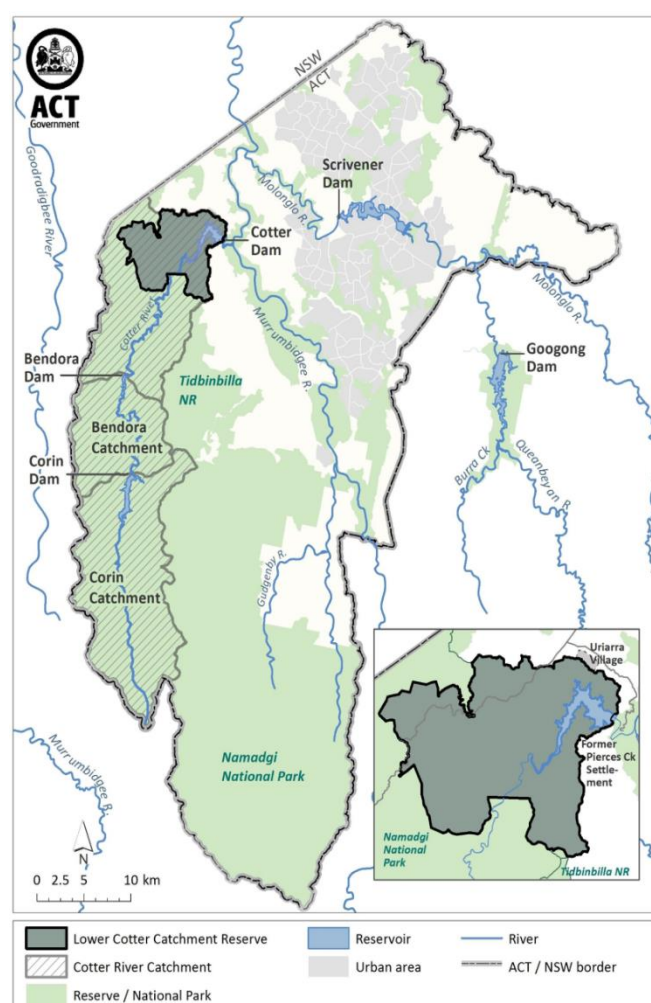


Figure 2: Map of ACT and the Cotter Catchment surrounding Cotter Dam (Lower Cotter Catchment Reserve Management Plan, 2017).

Methods

On the first night (22nd February) we went out specifically to search for nightjars by driving along roads surrounding the Cotter Dam and stopping approximately every one kilometre, where we used playback of the White-throated Nightjar advertising call two times. The birds typically respond nearly immediately which makes detection easy if they are in the vicinity.

Once we had a response, or if after a few minutes there was no response, we would continue on. The one-kilometre distance between these stops ensured that we did not pick up the same individuals more than once. This was subsequently repeated by Zebedee across a wider area adjacent to the Dam on subsequent nights.

Results

The survey area is indicated in the ACT map highlighting the Cotter Catchment (Fig. 2) and a detailed map of the Cotter Dam area with the locations surveyed (Fig. 3) shows both the sites where we recorded nightjars (stars) and sites where we had no response to nightjar playback (circles).

The nightjars were present in multiple areas around the Dam, though the highest numbers were recorded on the southern side. Most of the individual pins are from Zebedee's and Luke's outings, while other birders primarily targeted the birds at the two most accessible locations: Concrete Road and the intersection of Brindabella Road and East-West Road. All of the pins used are exact points where the birds were observed.

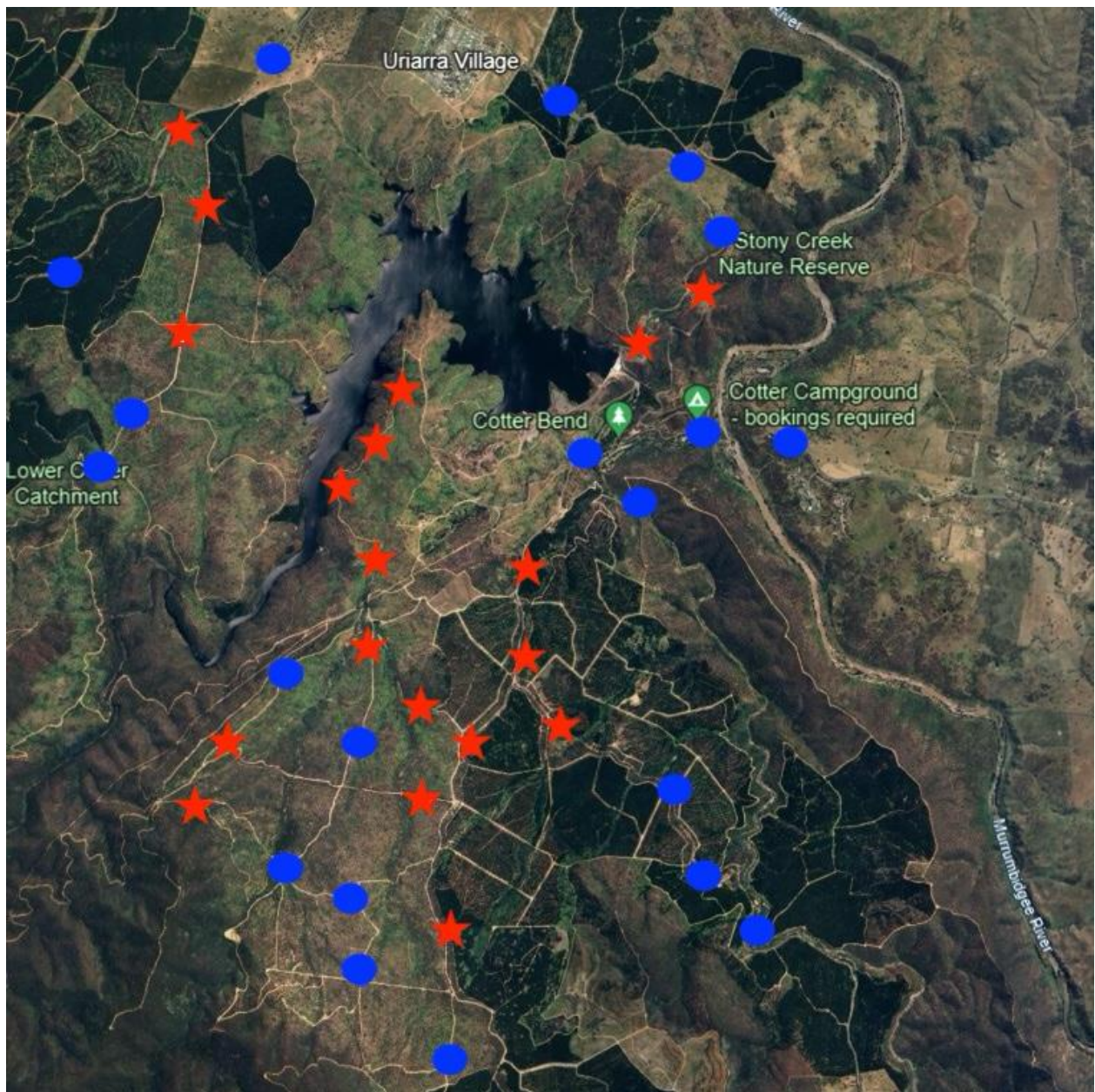


Figure 3: Map of the Cotter Catchment area taken from Google Earth (Google Earth, n.d.). Stars represent where White-throated Nightjars were observed. Circles represent where playback did not elicit a response from nightjars.

After our initial report, the White-throated Nightjars became highly twitched, with reports of them along Concrete Road and other nearby areas surrounding the Cotter Dam through from our initial observation until the last observation on 21 Apr.

Discussion

A minimum of 13 individual nightjars were detected in the Cotter Catchment area during this time. This was the highest number detected across all sites in a single night by us. However, it is very likely the actual number was higher, as this count was only from the southern side of the Dam and they were subsequently observed along the northern side and at more widespread localities around it. It is very difficult to substantiate a more exact count however, as the birds were quite mobile throughout the area, and as a further complication, this is also during their migration season.

Most observations of the nightjars at Cotter Dam along Concrete Road were from early March, following the initial reports in late February. They were seen continuously until late April, and whilst this fits their migratory patterns, the number of eBird checklists submitted in April and into May was lower following the initial rush of observers. Therefore, we are uncertain exactly when the nightjars left the area completely, as some may have remained in the area being less responsive after the breeding season was over.

There was potential for a larger area to be covered along nearby fire trails, and additionally sites further away from the Cotter Dam including along the nearby river catchments and also around Corin and Bendora Dam. This is something that could be undertaken in future years, especially if the birds are found to be present again. However, of note, the birds showed a strong affinity to the Dam, and at some distance away from it, their abundance seems to decline or cease (Fig. 3). This suggested affinity to the waterbody seems little studied, though the species is known to feed aerially over clearings, which include creeks, gullies and waterbodies (Higgins 1999). The affinity to the Dam may therefore reflect a preference for clearings to facilitate the species' aerial feeding habitats, complete with suitable wooded ridgelines adjacent to provide roosting habitat. However, the species does still appear to show a preference for large waterbodies in particular. This affinity to clearings, in particular bodies of water, is another important factor for consideration in further surveys. It is suggested that the nightjars may also be fond of the slopes of the Cotter Catchment due to the limited level of disturbance they would experience. Many of these slopes contain adequate leaf litter and trees to provide protective roost sites for the birds and are infrequently visited by people, including birders. Moving away from the Dam, the surrounding areas such as towards the Cotter Bend and Uriarra Village have higher levels of human disturbance, likely making them less favourable.

There are other large water bodies elsewhere in the ACT, such as Lake Burley Griffin. However, at these locations disturbance from humans would be significantly higher and they have fewer, if any, woodland roosting sites nearby. Zebedee also attempted to search for nightjars around Corin and Bendora Dam, without success, though given historical records in nearby areas (Olsen, 1994) it seems plausible these areas would also have nightjars present at some points. The infrequency of birding visits to these areas, especially at night, and in particular targeting nightjars, would also explain why the birds may have avoided widespread detection (aside from a few historical records) in the area prior to this point.

Conclusion

To have confirmation whether this (or any) number of White-throated Nightjars regularly move through the ACT on their migration, Cotter Dam should be visited in the spring-summer of this year (2024) and again in early 2025 towards the end of February. Other sites with large dams or clearings and surrounding leafy understory cover should also be checked so that we can have a better understanding of their habitat requirements in the ACT region. This would include Bendora Dam and Corin Dam, as they have similar surrounding slopes with leafy understory slopes and would also have limited disturbance.

The numbers and movement seen in Canberra in this past Autumn are likely to be part of the species' northerly migration as they gather and leave Victoria. There is the potential that some of the birds also reside and breed locally throughout the summer months. Though the question remains: is the Cotter Catchment on their main and regular flyway during migration, or was the area especially suitable this year as a result of conditions?

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Michael Lenz for inviting us to write this paper and for assisting with editing, Kim Farley for assisting with editing, and Chris Chapman for providing his White-throated Nightjar photograph from Concrete Road.

References

- BirdLife Australia (2023). White-throated Nightjar. [Text sourced from: Marchant, S. et al. (1990-2006). Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 1 to 7.] Birdlife Australia. <https://hanzab.birdlife.org.au/species/white-throated-nightjar/>
- Cleere, N., Kirwan, G. M., and Garcia, E. (2020). White-throated Nightjar (*Eurostopodus mystacalis*), version 1.0. Birds of the World. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.whtnig3.01species_shared.bow.project_name
- Elliott, A. J. (1935). Notes on the White-throated Nightjar. *The Emu*, 35(2), 129–132. <https://doi.org/10.1071/MU935129>
- Google Earth. (n.d.). [Cotter Dam Catchment Australian Capital Territory]. Retrieved May 28, 2024 from <https://earth.google.com/web/@-35.32850518,148.93319859,515.97477029a,8638.67769832d,60.27866756y,360h,0t,0r/data=OgMKATA>
- Haywood, B. (2008). First record of the White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis* in South Australia. *Australian Field Ornithology*, 25(4). <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.741455545834922>
- Hermes, N. (2021). *A photographic field guide to the birds of Canberra and the high country*. John Beaufoy Publishing Ltd., Oxford.
- Higgins, P.J. (1999) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Vol. 4 *Parrots to Dollarbird*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Lower Cotter Catchment Reserve Management Plan. (2017). YourSay ACT. <https://yoursayconversations.act.gov.au/lower-cotter-catchment-reserve-management-plan>
- Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. and Franklin, K. (2017). *The Australian Bird Guide*. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne

Olsen, J. (1994) White-throated Nightjar: A Breeding Record for the Australian Capital Territory, 15(5), 229. Informit.

Schodde, R. and Mason I. (1999) *Directory of Australian Birds: Non-Passerines*, CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.

White-throated Nightjar - eBird. (n.d.). ebird.org. Retrieved May 22, 2024, from <https://ebird.org/species/whtnig3>

Accepted 8 November 2024

AUSTRALIAN LITTLE BITTERN (*IXOBRYCHUS DUBIUS*) - BEHAVIOUR UPDATED

STEPHEN WALLACE

skcbf@bigpond.net.au

Abstract: Observations of the behaviour of Australian Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus dubius*) (ALB) made from 56 minutes of video of a female taken on 19 Mar 2024 at Kellys Swamp, Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve, Australian Capital Territory, are used to compare to, and update, the ALB behaviour described from the analysis of videos taken by me in 2012 (Wallace 2013). Similarities to 2012 were the habitat (Water Couch near Typha), the percentage of time spent standing in place (95.8% in 2024, 87.1% in 2012), the strike success rate (65% in 2024, 70% in 2012) and the quick consumption of prey (mostly less than 3.5 seconds). Differences to 2012 were the strike rate (58/hour in 2024, 26/hour in 2012), the average prey size (20mm in 2024, 16.5mm in 2012), the postures used, prey washing, and bill licking. The 2024 bird was also less responsive to other species. As all the prey in 2024 was Mosquitofish (*Gambusia holbrooki*), control of this pest species may have implications for ALB.

Introduction

The recording of 56 minutes of video of a female ALB taken on 19 Mar 2024 at Kellys Swamp, Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve (JWNR), Australian Capital Territory (ACT), permitted the behaviour of the bird to be compared to that described from the analysis of videos taken by me in 2012 (Wallace 2013). Habitat used, posture while foraging and striking at prey, prey taken, prey 'washing', neck sway, bill licking, and response to other species are covered.

A further 28 minutes of video of ALB taken in ACT on six days between 12 Jun 2014 and 12 Feb 2024 are used to make some additional observations.

Records of ALB in the ACT to September 2024 are also summarized.

Methods

Videos of ALB taken on 19 Mar 2024 were analysed using the same methods as described in my article (Wallace 2013), except for the addition of a new posture (squatting on tarsi), a new behaviour (bill licking), and more detailed analysis of the food. The 2024 videos were taken from Cygnus Hide in Kellys Swamp, JWNR, in similar habitat to those of 2012, about 100 metres from the 2012 location (see Fig. 1).

An extra 28 minutes of video of ALB taken in the ACT since 2012 were not analysed in detail but were examined to see if they showed anything noteworthy. These videos were of:

- a male at McKellar Pond on 12, 18, 19 and 23 Jun 2014 (total 25m19s)
- a female at Forde Pond on 13 Nov 2018 (2m08s)
- a juvenile at JWNR on 12 Feb 2024 (0m43s).

Analysis of 19 March 2024 videos

Twenty-three videos were taken on 19 Mar 2024, all of the same adult female. The bird was observed for a short period prior to the start of the first video, and left 66 minutes later. The bird spent most of this time foraging from Water Couch (*Paspalum distichum*), with a short period in Bulrush (*Typha* sp.). The videos captured 86% of the time the bird was foraging from the Water Couch [53.6 of 62.2 minutes] but only 65% of the time spent in Bulrush [2.4 of 3.7 minutes].

Fig. 1 shows the path taken. Most time was spent in the irregularly shaped white boxed area (94% of the time present) which is estimated to be less than 0.5 square metres. The bird only left the area and flew to the *Typha* after a Purple Swampphen moved into the boxed area, but it returned soon after the swampphen left, about four minutes later.

The time covered by the video numbers in Fig. 1 are:

- 1 – 1m48s. Gap between 1 and 2 – 0m7s.
- 2 to 14 – 37m46s with 31m25s captured. Gap between 14 and 15 – 4m32s.
- 15 – 0m12s. Gap between 15 and 16 – 0m44s.
- 16 – 2m13s. Gap between 16 and 17 – 0m34s.
- 17 to 23 – 22m33s with 20m24s captured.

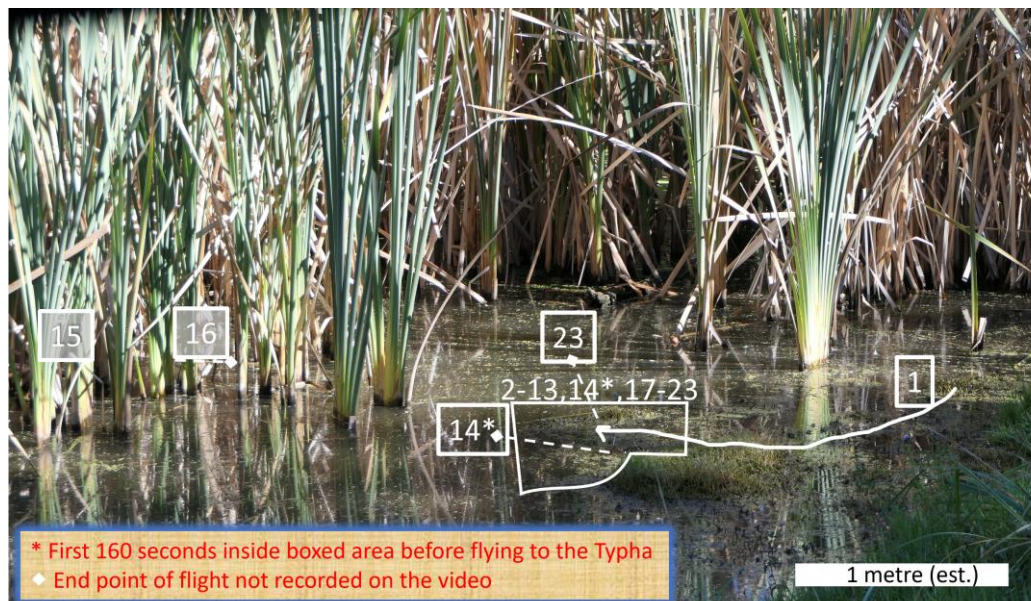


Figure 1. Habitat and the path taken by ALB on 19 Mar 2024. The numbers indicate the videos covering the path.

Habitat

As in 2012, the bird spent most of the time foraging from Water Couch growing near stands of Bulrush, to which it retreated when threatened (see Fig. 1). After the last 2024 record of ALB at JWNR, on 20 Mar, temperatures dropped and the *Typha* started to show signs of the winter die-down. The minimum temperature on 21 Mar dropped to 2.3 degrees, which was 5.5 degrees cooler than any of the previous days in March 2024.

Time of day

The 2024 videos were taken between 10:25 and 11:30am AEST, which is within the time range of the 2012 videos (8:45am to 2:18pm AEST) and my extra videos described above (8:20am to 1pm AEST). The focus on morning observations is more a reflection of my activity than that of the species. EBird records of ALB cover all of the daylight hours but none at night. The lack of records at night should not be taken as an indication that ALB is not active at this time of day but is more a reflection of the lack of people making nocturnal observations in suitable habitat in the ACT.

Posture

The bird in the 2024 videos spent such a long time squatting on either one or both tarsi (see [Wallace 2024a](#) for video showing squatting on tarsi), that it was included in the analysis and the 2012 videos reviewed for this posture. Squatting on tarsi is not included as a posture in Hancock and Kushlan, but it has been recorded in some herons, such as Eastern Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus coromandus*) and Plumed Egret (*Egretta intermedia*), and also in stone-curlews, Emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*), and some seabirds when on land (Marchant and Higgins 1990). Placing the tarsi on the ground or vegetation could be considered crouching, as it was in my 2012 analysis. However, it should be considered as a separate posture because the strike dynamics from the squatting position would be different (see later). The small amount of time spent squatting on tarsi in 2012 (1% on one leg; 2% on both legs) may be the result of the bird spending more time moving around and foraging in water.

The time spent in the different postures is summarized in Table 1. Peering over was not common in either year but was used slightly more in 2024 (5%) than in 2012 (0.2%). The time in the *Typha* was categorized as perched (3.7minutes) and not included in Table 1.

Table 1. Posture.

Excluding time perched, flying and unknown, with revised 2012 data to include squatting (PO = peering over).

Posture	2024				2012		
	Not PO (sec)	PO (sec)	Total	Total (%)	Total (%)	Not PO (sec)	PO (sec)
Crouched	1773	89	1862	58	78	2709.1	6
Squatted							
one leg	780	6	786	25	1	39.4	
both legs	194	44	238	7	2	80.5	
Upright	160	6	166	5	19	656.0	
Erect	136	0	136	4	0	9.0	
Total	3043	145	3188			3494.0	6
	95%	5%				99.8%	0.2%

Movement

The 2024 bird spent most of its time not moving around, as did the bird in 2012. However, compared to 2012, it spent less time walking, spending most of its time in a small area (see Table 2 and Fig. 1).

The bird was not visible for a significant part of the time it spent in the *Typha*, with only 65% of the elapse time captured. Even taking this into account, the time spent perched was considerably less than in 2012. This may be because the 2024 bird was less reactive to other species, only flying away once (see later).

Strikes at prey

The rate of strikes at prey in 2024 (58 strikes per hour) was more than double that in 2012 (26 strikes per hour) but the percentage of successful strikes was similar (65%, 70%). Of the strikes in 2024, 53 were made from Water Couch with only one made while perched on *Typha*.

Table 2. Movement (percent of time captured on video).

Movement	2024 (%)		2012 (%)
Standing	95.8		87.1
Walking slowly	3.6		6.8
Walking quickly	0.2		0.6
Perched	0.4		5.5
Flying	0.0		0.1

Table 3. Strikes at prey captured on video.

Details of strikes	2024	2012
Number of strikes	54	27
Number of successful strikes	36	19
Strikes per hour	58	26
Successful strikes per hour	39	18
Percent of successful strikes	65	70



Figure 2. ALB with captured fish and tongue caught in bill.

As in 2012, the prey was usually swallowed within a few seconds of capture, with 85% consumed in less than 3.5 seconds (82% in 2012) (see Table 4). The largest exception in 2024 was one occasion where the bird managed to catch both the prey and its own tongue, which was hanging out the side of its bill (see Fig. 2), when it took 13.1 seconds to swallow the prey. The fish was no larger than those previously captured, but the bird, unusually, wandered around before it was able to swallow it.

After a successful strike, the shortest time to the next strike in 2024 was 6 seconds (an unsuccessful strike). The fastest time for three successful strikes was 26 seconds (14 seconds between first and second, 12 seconds between second and third) – see [Wallace \(2024b\)](#).

Table 4. Time to consume prey, from capture to prey swallowed (2012 revised to 2024 categories)

Time to consumed (sec)	2024		2012	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<1	7	21	1	6
1-1.9	7	21	7	41
2-2.9	10	29	3	18
3-3.9	5	15	3	18
4-4.9	1	3	1	6
5-5.9	1	3		
6-6.9	2	6	1	6
7-7.9			1	6
13-13.9	1	3		

Unlike 2012 where the prey was ‘washed’ in three strikes, dunking of prey did not occur in 2024.

s in 2012, **head shakes** were observed most often between the strike and eating the prey. For all strikes, 66% of head shakes were observed in the three seconds after the strike. For successful strikes this was 59%. Even though most head shakes were observed soon after strikes, they were recorded up to 27 seconds later.

Head shakes were examined to determine if they were related to the bird’s head going underwater or the capture of prey. This could only be done for 45 of the strikes. Head shakes were observed after 40 of these strikes. Of these, the bird’s head was underwater at the strike in 31 (69%). Head shakes were observed even when the bird’s head did not go underwater. Five successful strikes were not followed by head shakes, and, of these, the bird’s head did not go underwater in four.

In 2012, data about **neck extension at strike** was presented including the head. For 2024, the data is presented as the extension of the neck only and the 2012 data revised to be consistent. The measurement is the length of the extension as a percentage of the strike length of the neck. The description in 2012 incorrectly described it as a percentage of the pre-strike length.

In 2024, the neck extension at strike was generally more than in 2012 (see Table 5). In 2024, most strikes showed a 60% or higher extension of the neck. Strikes without an extension of the neck (as described by Smith 1966) were rare in 2012 and not observed at all in 2024.

The neck of the bird was arched in 31% of the 42 strikes where this could be assessed and straight in 69%, which is the reverse of 2012 (67% arched and 33% straight).

Table 5. Neck extension at strike (length of the extension as a percentage of the strike length). Extension of head and neck presented in 2012 included for comparison.

Extension at strike (%)	2024	2012	
	Neck	Neck	Head and neck
0	0	5	5
10-19	0	0	5
20-29	0	5	0
30-39	0	5	16
40-49	4	11	21
50-59	8	21	37
60-69	28	16	16
70-79	28	37	
80-89	32	0	
Average	71	57	

Prey size and density

The estimated average prey size in 2024 (20mm) was slightly larger than in 2012 (16.5mm) but this gap was much greater when the 55mm carp is excluded from the 2012 data (13mm). The increased strike rate and lower movement indicates that the density of prey was higher in 2024. Small fish could be seen swimming past the bird on the 2024 videos. Because the prey was mobile, no estimate of prey density was made in 2024.

Table 6. Prey size estimate

Prey size (mm)	2014	2012	2012 (excluding 55mm carp)
Range	4-35	9-55	9-18
Average	20	16.5	13

Prey species

Unlike 2012, where the prey could not be identified, the prey taken in 2024 was identified as Mosquitofish (*Gambusia holbrooki*). Based on the estimated length of each fish taken, an estimate of the weight was made using a Bayesian length-weight relationship with $a=0.019$ and $b=2.927$ (Erguden 2013). The length of the prey was based on its size relative to the length of the bill. The bill averages 43.8mm with a range 41.1-48.2 mm and a standard deviation of 1.75mm (Marchant and Higgins 1990). Using this bill length range and allowing a 5% error in the estimate of the prey size relative to the bill length, the 36 *Gambusia* eaten in 2024 is estimated to weigh between 4.1g and 7.2g. Using the average bill length gives a weight range between 4.9g and 5.4g. Marchant and Higgins (1990) record the weight of ALB as 83.9g (59-120g) so the prey eaten is estimated to represent 3.4-12.2% of the weight range of the bird, or 4.9-8.6% of the average weight of the species.

As the bird left the area at the end of the videos, it is not known if it continued feeding.

Strike dynamics

Strike dynamics in 2024 were different to 2012, mainly because of the significant use of the squatting posture and the higher amount of body movement.

In 2024, for the 51 strikes where the posture prior to and at the strike was able to be assessed, the bird was in a squatting posture (either on one or both legs) prior to the strike in 20. Of the 15 strikes where the bird was on one leg prior to strike, it retained the squatting on one leg at the strike in 33%, while it moved into a crouching posture in the rest. Of the 5 strikes where the bird was squatting on both legs before the strike, only one (20%) maintained the squatting posture at the strike, with the rest moving to a crouching posture.

For a video of a strike starting from a squatting posture, see [Wallace \(2024a\)](#).

Fig. 3 shows the variation in position of the bird at four different strikes. The bird did not have to be straight on to the prey to strike, as shown in Figs. 3b and 3d. It was able to strike at full stretch (Fig. 3) and resume the starting position. While only observed once, the bird put a wing out at this strike, presumably for balance (see Fig. 3c).

There was more movement of the body at the strike in 2024. While 85% of strikes in 2012 showed little body movement (10% or less of body length), of the 31 strikes that could be assessed in 2024, only 35% showed little movement, with 29% moving 50% or more (see Table 7).

The legs were also extended more often at the strike in 2024 (see Fig. 3a).

Table 7. Body movement at strike.

Body movement (%)	2024		2012	
	Number of strikes	Percent of strikes	Number of strikes	Percent of strikes
5	8	26	14	70
10	3	10	3	15
20	4	13	1	5
30	3	10	1	5
40	4	13		
50	3	10		
60	2	6		
70			1	5
80	1	3		
90	2	6		
100	1	3		
Total	31		20	



3a. Full stretch



3b. Side strike



3c. Wing out



3d. Side strike – note leg position

Figure 3. Postures at strike

Neck sway

Neck sway was infrequent in 2024, only being observed 3 times, unlike 2012 where it was observed 25 times.

Bill licking

In 2024, the tongue was frequently moved over the bill. This behaviour has been observed in herons and bitterns (Wee 2017) and has been called bill cleaning or, as Wee suggested as an alternative, tongue cleaning.

Most often, the bird would extend its tongue slightly out of the front of the bill and then slide it down either side of the lower mandible towards the gape. Sometimes, the tongue would be pushed out the side of the bill rather than starting from the tip. It is unclear from the videos whether the upper mandible also touched the tongue as it moved towards the gape, but it is possible. Fig. 5 shows the usual sequence.

In 2024, bill licking was analysed by recording if it occurred within each second of the video. As bill licking was fast (0.36 seconds for the lick in Fig. 5), more than one lick could occur within each second.

Bill licking was observed in 276 seconds (8.6% of total time recorded), with 7 of these seconds also including a head shake. A review of the 2012 videos showed this action on 119 seconds (3.4% of total time recorded). While this action was most often used soon after a strike, the distribution of bill licking after a strike covered a wide time range (see Figure 4). While 62% were observed within 21 seconds of a strike, bill licking was also observed up to 93 seconds later. The highest number of successive seconds with bill licking after a strike was 24. Bill licking was higher after a successful strike (60% vs 37%) but was not observed when the bird had prey in its bill.

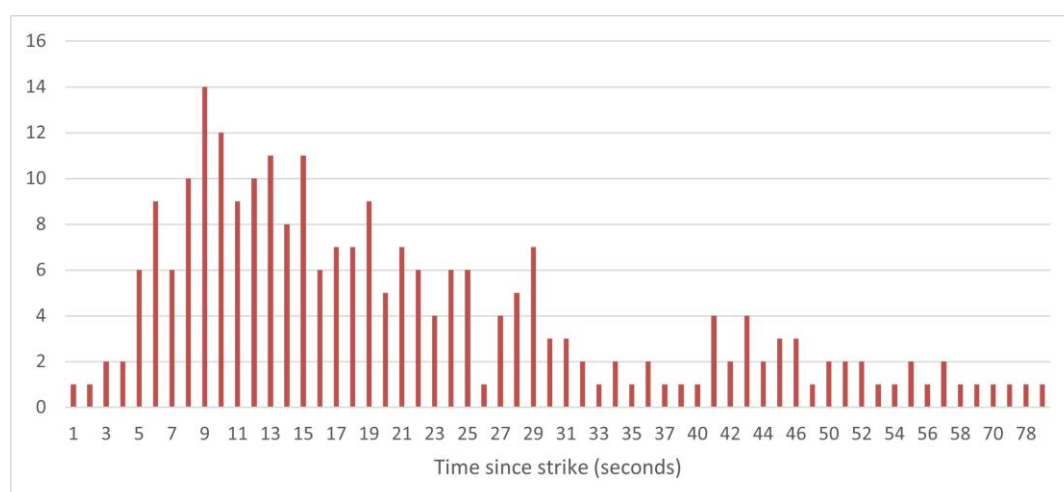


Figure 4. Bill licking distribution by seconds after strike.

Response to the approach of other species

The 2024 bird was less reactive to other species than the 2012 bird. Species which passed near to the 2024 bird (less than 1m) and did not prompt a significant reaction from the bird (adopting an erect posture or flying away) were Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio melanotus*), Dusky Moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*), Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*), Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*), Spotless Crake (*Porzana tabuensis*), a large European Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), which was feeding in the same area, and a Rakali (*Hydromys chrysogaster*) which swam past showing no interest in the bird. The bird took an erect posture when a European Carp came very close and moved the Water Couch on which the bird was standing. It also flew into the

nearby *Typha* when a Purple Swamphen walked towards it and ended up at the spot where the bittern had been standing. At this time there was also a large carp on the other side of the bittern, close enough for the swamphen to peck at the fish when it reached the same spot the bittern had occupied (see Fig 6).



Figure 5. Bill lick frame by frame. Left to right, top left to bottom right (0.36 seconds from first to last frame).



Figure 6. ALB with large carp nearby.

Reports of Australian Little Bittern in the ACT

My June 2013 report included a summary of ALB records in the ACT to the end of 2012. At that time, all records in the COG database were between November and March. Since then, there have been records from April, June and July in the COG Annual reports, but these annual reports only cover the period to the end of June 2019. Records in eBird also include records from September and October in the ACT. May and August are the only months without ACT records (Australian Living Atlas and Birddata also checked).

There are records from all months in NSW and Victoria in the Atlas of Living Australia so, given ALB has been recorded in the ACT in 10 months, including the depths of winter, it may also occur in the ACT in all months.

Area abbreviations used in Tables 8 and 9.

- A - Canberra Airport (Juvenile caught in airlock)
- B - Lake Burley Griffin/Commonwealth Park. Lake filled 1964
- C - Campbell
- F - Ford Pond
- G - Gungahlin
- J - Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR or would become Jerrabomberra Wetlands
- K - Cook – a small backyard pond about 2.5mx2m and 20-50cm deep (Farley)
- L - Lake Ginninderra/McKellar Wetlands/Giralang Wetlands
- T - Tidbinbilla NRW = West Belconnen Pond
- X - ACT/Canberra (exact location not specified)

Table 8. ACT Records for Areas by Year and Month from all sources
(see Area abbreviations above)

Reports from three successive months from the same area are bolded.

Red years (italics for b/w print) are drought years according to BOM.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1968	J											
1969	J											
...												
1972											C	
...												
1978	B											
1979	B											
1980												G
1981										B		BJX
<i>1982</i>		B									B	
<i>1983</i>		B										
1984	X	B	J							B	B	B
1985	B											B
...												
1987											B	B
1988	B											B
...												
1990		B										B
...												
1994											T	
1995			J									
...												
<i>2001</i>												J
<i>2002</i>	J										B	
<i>2003</i>		B										
<i>2004</i>	B											
<i>2005</i>											G	
<i>2006</i>										J		
<i>2007</i>	B											
<i>2008</i>	B	B										
...												
2012										J	J	J
...												
2014						L	L			K		
2015											B	
2016												J
<i>2017</i>	J	J		J					J	J		J
<i>2018</i>						J					JF	JA
<i>2019</i>	J	J										B
2020											J	J
2021	J									J	J	W
2022										L		
2023												J
2024	J	J	J							-	-	-

Table 9 Summary of Table 8 (see Area abbreviations above)

Area	No. years											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
A		6										1
B	7									2	5	7
C											1	
F											1	
G											1	1
J	7	3	2	1		1			1	4	4	8
K										1		
L						1	1			1		
T											1	
W												1
X	1											1
All areas¹	15	9	2	1		2	1		1	8	12	16
% of years	26	15	4	2		4	2		2	14	21	29
1968-2023												
All areas	14	8	2	1		2	1		1	8	12	16
% of years	25	14	4	2		4	2		2	14	21	29

¹ 2024 incomplete, missing Oct-Dec so only 56 years for those months.

ALB has been recorded in the ACT for the months of November, December and January in 21 to 29 percent of complete years, 1968-2023 (see Table 9). Unsurprisingly, most records are from JWNr and Lake Burley Griffin, as these are areas visited by many observers. However, the number of records from smaller ponds indicates that there is suitable habitat outside these two areas. There are several periods over summer where there are reports for at least three months in a row (see bold area codes in Table 8) with breeding being recorded for most of these. The first breeding record was in February 1984, a dead immature bird, the second in November 1984, a live young bird, and the third in December 1987. Immature birds were photographed in January and February 2019 and February and March 2024.

From 10 Dec 2023 to 20 Mar 2024, there are 103 records of ALB on 47 days at JWNr on eBird and, from personal knowledge, not everyone put their records on that site; there is a record on Flickr for a day without a record on eBird, 15 Mar. Unfortunately, many of the sightings in December were not good enough to determine the sex of the bird. However, males were reported from 10 Dec to 11 Feb, females from 30 Dec to 20 Mar and juveniles from 18 Jan to 16 Mar.

Breeding birds may have a red blush at the base of the bill. As described by Holland (2016), the red blush is found in both sexes and is only a temporary condition in response to particular situations, such as meeting a partner at the nest. Breeding birds do not always have a red blush. At JWNr, the 10 Dec 2023 record appears to be a male with some red blush at the base of the bill from the description but there were no photographs to confirm this. It was not until 27 Dec that another ALB, a male, was sighted and heard. The first photographs of a male were posted on 28 Dec. There is a suggestion of the red blush in one of the photographs, but the photograph is blurred. None of the clear photographs of male birds taken from 28 Dec to 11 Feb showed the red blush at the base of the bill. None of the photographs of females show a red blush.

While most observations of ALBs made at JWNR are in or near Bulrush, they have been reported from a wide range of the ACT water bodies, from a small backyard pond to the edges of Lake Burley Griffin, in a range of vegetation. The taller water vegetation at other sites, other than the backyard pond, includes a range of rushes, reeds and sedges. The backyard pond had a dense grassy and shrubby surround on two sides of the pond and contiguous shrubby trees nearby (Farley 2021).

The winter records of a male ALB at McKellar Wetland (11 Jun to 9 Jul 2014) were in spike-rush species (Tall Spike-Rush *Eleocharis sphacelates*, Common Spike-Rush *Eleocharis acuta*). The pond at McKellar Wetland has a variety of other water plants including *Bolboschoenus caldwellii* and *Carex appressa*. *Typha*, while not growing in this pond, does grow in a waterway where it enters the pond. A further winter record at nearby Giralang (18 Jul 2014) did not describe the vegetation. The only other June/July record, made on the boardwalk at JWNR on 26 Jun 2018 of a calling bird, also did not describe the vegetation. At this time of year, *Typha* beds have died down whereas spike-rush remain green. Whether the state of the vegetation is significant in the habitats occupied in winter is not known.

Discussion

Some points I made in Wallace (2013) will not be repeated here.

When I wrote my 2013 paper, I commented on the lack of quantitative information on ALB. This situation has not changed in the intervening eleven years, with little additional information other than the presence of ALB reported via checklists.

The many observations of ALB foraging during the day in the ACT continue to support diurnal activity of this species. This does not mean that ALB are only active during the day as there are insufficient nocturnal observations. It is also possible that diurnal activity of ALB is higher in the breeding season, resulting in higher reporting at this time.

There are similarities in the behaviour recorded in 2024 compared to 2012 but there are also differences.

The similarities to 2012 are:

- the use of water Couch for launching strikes
- the high percentage of time spent standing in place
- the similar strike success rate
- the quick consumption of prey.

The differences to 2012 are:

- the higher strike rate
- the lower reaction to other species
- the reduced neck sway
- the higher average prey size
- the lack of prey 'washing'
- the higher occurrence of bill licking
- the increased body movement at strikes
- the higher level of neck extension at strikes
- the neck shape at strikes (percent arched or straight) was reversed

- the higher use of the squatting on tarsi posture.

While there are differences in behaviour between 2024 and 2012, these may be the result of differences in the behaviour of individual birds, the prey taken and the behaviour of the prey.

From an ecological perspective, the important results are:

1. Water Couch is a suitable base for foraging.
2. High numbers of Mosquitofish can be taken in an hour.
3. Rapid feeding is possible (about 1 strike per minute over an hour), with the weight of food consumed in an hour estimated to be at least 3.4% of the weight of the bird.
4. The lack of records after 20 Mar was not a result of reduced water levels.

The high number of Mosquitofish eaten raises the question of how dependent ALB are on this species, especially for breeding. If ALB have become dependent on this pest species, any attempt to control it could also impact the ALB population, unless a suitable replacement food is available to them. More work is required to determine the importance of Mosquitofish in the diet of ALB.

As well as diet, other environmental factors, such as vegetation and temperature changes, also need research to understand what is required for ALB.

The 2024 observations were made after the breeding season in early autumn, whereas the 2012 observations were in spring. In spring, the *Typha* was regrowing after the winter die-down; in autumn, it is starting to die down. The state of the swamp may have had an impact on the behaviour observed, as could the length of time the bird had been at the swamp. As the 2024 bird had most likely been present since October/November (breeding), it may have been more familiar with the best foraging spots and the need to be less responsive to other species in the area.

The presence of ALB in April, June and July extends the months in which the species has been recorded in the ACT, and shows it is capable of being present at an altitude of about 600m at the coldest time of year. The minimum temperature at Canberra Airport between 12 Jun and 9 Jul 2014 was between -4.9 and +7.5 degrees Celsius, with 12 days below zero and eight of these below minus two degrees (BOM). While Melba is warmer than the airport, the temperatures would have been below zero on, probably, eight days. This is the highest altitude and coldest temperatures for June/July records of ALB in Australia. With the Melba bird reported for nearly a month, it was clear it was not just passing through.

The last 2024 record at JWNR was on 20 Mar. It has been suggested that the birds from inland move on because the areas dry out (Mattingley 1928). While this may be the case in some areas, it was not the reason the birds left the JWNR as the water level was not reduced at the time of the last record, or for months after it. However, the sudden drop in overnight temperature of 5.5 degrees signaled cooler weather, with the resulting changes to the vegetation and prey. The *Typha* started to show signs of the winter die-down soon after the last record. The behaviour of the prey may have also changed as the temperatures cooled. Pyke (2005) suggests that it is unclear if lower numbers of Mosquitofish in winter are the result of population decrease or sheltering behaviour, including becoming less mobile and moving to deeper water as the water temperature drops. After 20 Mar, Mosquitofish were not seen swimming past the hide, as they were when the videos were taken.

The end of breeding could also have triggered the 2024 birds to leave.

I am not aware of any other published information, other than my previous article, on the strike rate and success of ALB. There is some limited information for other bitterns and herons. The successful strike rate (65% in 2024 and 70% in 2012) is slightly higher than that reported by Holmes and Hatchwell (1991) for Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*) (56%). However, the strike rate was much higher for ALB in 2024 than that reported by Holmes (58/hour for ALB in 2024, 68 in 2.5hours=27/hour) for Little Bittern but similar to that in 2012 (26/hour). It is similar to that reported by Recher and Holmes (1982) for White-necked Heron (*Ardea pacifica*) and Plumed Egret (64.4%, 67.5%) but not Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), Pied Heron (*Egretta picata*) or Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) (23.6%, 87.9%, 54.5%).

The strike rate in 2024 (58/h=0.97/m) is also most similar to White-necked Heron and Plumed Egret strike rates reported by Recher and Holmes (0.6, 0.7 strikes per minute). However, the 2012 strike rate (26/h=0.43/m) was much lower.

Given the large number of people visiting Kellys Swamp at JWNR, and submitting checklists to eBird, and the distinctive call of ALB in the breeding season, it is likely that most breeding in Kellys Swamp has been detected. However, there is suitable habitat for breeding in other areas of JWNR that are not as easy to visit as Kellys Swamp.

Due to the cryptic nature of ALB, it is highly likely that many are missed, as the following description from the COG Chatline by Mark Clayton indicates:

When COG was surveying for the then proposed site for the National Museum at Yarramundi Reach, which I assisted in, I asked if anyone bothered to check the reed beds for Little (now Black-backed) Bitterns. When told “NO” I proceeded to wade chest deep through the reeds and successfully flushed a couple.

The first ACT record, in 1968, was after the filling of Lake Burley Griffin in 1964 and near the end of the 1965 to 1968 drought in eastern Australia (BOM). Wilson considered that there was little suitable habitat in the ACT prior to the filling of the lake. As ALB appears to be water-dependent, droughts would have a significant impact, and the more drought-resistant water bodies could be expected to be important. The 1982/83 drought was one of the most severe, according to BOM, and the millennium drought from 1997 to 2009 had long periods without major wet episodes. Further analysis is required to determine any link between records of ALB in the ACT and droughts on the east coast of Australia, and the importance of man-made water bodies, such as Lake Burley Griffin and JWNR.

More study of the elusive ALB is required. ACT data suggests that the winter distribution, habitat use at different times of the year, impact of droughts, and behaviour of ALB require more investigation. The recent extension of the months ALB has been reported in the ACT suggests that the species may be present in all months but perhaps not in all years.

References

Atlas of living Australia. <https://www.ala.org.au/> Accessed 30 June 2024.

BOM. Previous Droughts. <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/knowledge-centre/previous-droughts.shtml> Access 16 Oct 2024.

- Erguden S.A. (2013) Age, growth, sex ratio and diet of eastern mosquitofish *Gambusia holbrooki* Girard, 1859 in Seyhan Dam Lake. *Iranian Journal of Fisheries Sciences* 12: 204-218.
- Farley, K. (2021) Australian Little Bittern at a suburban garden pond in Cook, ACT, in 2014. *Canberra Bird Notes* 46: 230-232.
- Hancock, J and Kushlan, J. 1984. The Herons Handbook. Croom Helm, Sydney.
- Holland, D. (2016) *Cranes, Herons and Storks of Australia*. Bloomings Books.
- Holmes, P. R., Hatchwell, B. J. (1991) Notes on the ecology of the Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* at Haigam Rakh, Kashmir, India. *Forktail*. 6: 25-33.
- Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (Co-ordinators) (1990) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Vol. 1, part B *Ratites to Ducks*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Mattingley, A.H.E. (1928). Little Bittern. *Emu* XXVII 201-203.
- Pyke, G.H. (2005) A review of the biology of *Gambusia affinis* and *G. holbrooki*. *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries* 15: 339–365 - Springer 2006 DOI 10.1007/s11160-006-6394-x
- Recher, H.F., Holmes, R.T. (1982) *The foraging behaviour of herons and egrets on the Magela Creek flood plain, Northern Territory*. Supervising Scientist for the Alligator River region, Tech. Mem. 4.
- Smith, F.T.H. 1966. Little Bittern near Melbourne. *Aust. Bird Watcher* 2: 217-18.
- Wallace, S. (2013) Australian Little Bittern behaviour. *Canberra Bird Notes* 38: 119-133.
- Wallace, S. (2024a) Australian Little Bittern video. Macaulay Library.
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/616242426> Accessed 30 June 2024.
- Wallace, S. (2024b) Australian Little Bittern video. Macaulay library.
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/620397451> Accessed 30 June 2024.
- Wee, Y.C. (2017) Grey Heron – tongue, feeding behaviour. Bird Ecology Study Group.
<https://besgroup.org/2017/12/15/grey-heron-tongue-feeding-behaviour/>. Accessed 23/5/2024.
- Wilson, S. (1999) *Birds of the ACT: two centuries of change*. Canberra Ornithologists Group, Canberra.

Accepted 16 November 2024

NOISY MINERS AND COMMON MYNAS IN SUBURBAN CANBERRA IN SPRING 2024

GEOFFREY DABB

geoffrey.dabb@gmail.com



*Noisy
Miner*



*Common
Myna*

Author's summary: Local trends with respect to these two common species were the subject of a project by the author in Spring 2024. Considered with earlier observations and published material, this confirmed that the Noisy Miner was increasing in numbers and expanding its range as a breeding resident of Canberra suburbs. In establishing foraging areas, miner communities prefer, and may require for breeding, proximity to lerp-affected eucalypts. Subject to that condition, the species is now well-adapted to Canberra gardens. As elsewhere, large and defensively strong miner communities exclude from their foraging area several other bird species, including the Common Myna. The observable suburban occurrence of the Common Myna appears to have changed since introduction of trapping, and the spread of the Noisy Miner. Mynas are unlikely to be found to be resident within the increasing and strongly defended Noisy Miner communities.

Introduction

(a) The project

In early September 2024, while walking around Canberra suburbs, I noticed unusual numbers of juvenile Noisy Miners. I decided to devote the following few weeks to gathering information about the apparent increase of the species, including any effect on Common Myna numbers. This entailed visits to places with miners to learn the extent and location of breeding and the number of dependent young (dy), and to see if Common Mynas were present in those places.

(b) What is suburban Canberra?

The phrase as used here does not refer only to residential spaces. Canberra suburbs are designated areas used or intended for various kinds of development (government institutions and offices, residential, commercial, light industrial). Most are laid out on former grazing land, generally with few trees, but in some places with remnant or regrowth woodland.

Next to developed spaces are some extensive areas of eucalypt woodland that as a planning matter are left to natural regeneration, examples being Mount Ainslie/Campbell Park, Callum Brae, Red Hill, Farrer Ridge, Gorooyaroo, and Black Mountain. The COG woodland surveys were directed to those areas, being reserves or rural leaseholds selected for holding examples of Yellow Box/Blakely's Red Gum grassy woodland.

For present purposes, the extensive areas of woodland, mainly but not all reserves, might be labelled ‘broad woodland’ to distinguish them from eucalypt patches in built areas. Such patches might be found in, for example, picnic and playground areas, neighbourhood parks, golf courses and margins of sporting fields. They might develop from ornamental plantings of eucalypts around offices or public buildings, as we see around the National Gallery or the National Parliament or the National Film and Sound Archive. Differences between suburban woodland patches and broad woodland are that the former are smaller in area and are often mixed with plantings of shrubs and exotic tree species. Generally, the landscape setting is managed and the grass mown. This note is concerned with gardens, street plantings and other examples of those suburban patches, rather than broad woodland. Undoubtedly, bird movement occurs between the two kinds of habitat.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (‘c myna’)

The c myna was introduced to Canberra in 1968. The species is usually found near human habitation, nests being made in crannies and crevices of buildings as well as tree hollows. A paper by Davey (1991) described a survey in July 1990 which indicated the main suburbs where the species was present, and identified a then expanding population of about 1220. A voluntary group known as CIMAG was set up in 2006 to promote the trapping and reduction of mynas. This was reported to have led to capture of 28,800 mynas in the first four years. A CIMAG bulletin in 2021 gave a cumulative capture total of 76,036 mynas.

Detailed information about the species in Canberra, to 2013, may be found in Grarock (2013). This major study concluded that high intensity culling was effective in small areas, but that too few birds were being removed overall to have a long-term effect on the total population.

It was concluded from the COG woodland surveys program up to 2019 (Bounds 2021) that despite some fluctuation the species was in an ‘overall downward trend’. The downward trend was less marked in Garden Bird Surveys.

Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala* (‘miner’)

Perceptions of the local occurrence of this species have varied. Here are four comments on historical occurrence:

Urban development and establishment of shrubby gardens and a denser tree canopy do not appear to favour this species. However, where open woodland areas are retained within or adjoining suburbs small resident populations persist. (Status of birds of Canberra and district, *Canberra Bird Notes* 1976 3: 6)

In our area it is most typical of grazing country where few trees remain in the paddocks and where native shrubs have given way to pastures. It is also found in fairly open forest country. Some slight, local movement is evident as during several recent winters flocks have moved temporarily into open parkland in Canberra suburbs (Wilson 1984).

They show little tolerance for densely populated suburban areas, but can still be found in some suburban parks and reserves (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992).

At 0.2% of total birds, it is not a major part of Canberra’s suburban avifauna (Veerman 2002).

Bounds (2021) classified this as an ‘ACT woodland-dependent species’. That analysis was based on 10,728 surveys at 142 broad woodland sites between 1998 and 2019. It concluded: ‘Noisy Miners showed a significant six-fold increase in reporting rate over the analysis period’.

In 2014, because of a tendency to become ‘over-abundant’ and exclude other native bird species, the Noisy Miner was declared to be a ‘threatening process’ pursuant to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth.).

The species is an obligate cooperative breeder. Assisting feeders are nearly always male, up to 22 having been recorded at a single nest. Parents of nestlings are usually one breeding pair. Assistants are usually not closely related to the breeding pair (Higgins *et al.* 2001).

A complex social structure has been described in Higgins *et al.* (2001), drawing on Dow (1979). This uses the following concepts. COLONY (‘from a few to several hundred birds’, membership and location stable year-round, although dispersal and immigration are possible). Within a colony are both male and female ACTIVITY SPACES. Males form COTERIES (membership most stable during non-breeding season, males may wander during breeding season), and COALITIONS (transitory flocks of roosting or mobbing males, perhaps from more than one coterie).

Without a colour-banded population, it is difficult to apply those concepts to miners in Canberra. In Narrabundah-Griffith-Red Hill, is there one colony or several? What boundaries exist, or movement occurs, between colonies? Accordingly, this note will avoid the term ‘colony’ and refer to numbers of miners at a location as ‘communities’ or ‘groups’ in a non-technical sense.

The COG (‘Canberra Ornithologists Group’) Garden Birds Survey

This is an important source of information about species trends in Canberra suburbs. Sites are selected by participants, being areas within 100m of residence or place of work. The sites usually contain suburban gardens but may include a range of habitat types, streets and verges, woodland (broad and other), grassland, parkland, mown areas, water features. As sites are adopted and abandoned, the suburban locations represented, and main habitat types, can vary from year to year.

Table 1. Garden Bird Survey Abundance (A) and Frequency (F%) for Common Myna and Noisy Miner, with species rank for each category.

GBS year	C Myna (A) Average numbers - rank	N Miner (A) Average numbers - rank	C Myna (F%) Percentage of sites - rank	N Miner (F%) Percentage of sites - rank
1989	1.17 - 15	0.09 - 47	45.00% - 36	21.67% - 56
1995	3.16 - 8	0.10 - 51	86.00% - 18	12.28% - 74
2000	4.53 - 6	0.16 - 47	98.00% - 6	14.29% - 74
2006	4.97 - 3	0.53 - 24	97.06% - 10	33.82% - 43
2011	1.64 - 15	0.77 - 24	79.75% - 18	41.77% - 42
2015	1.37 - 18	1.35 - 19	69.12% - 26	57.35% - 34
2018	1.76 - 17	1.44 - 20	83.65% - 16	67.27% - 30
2021	1.27 - 21	1.35 - 19	73.91% - 22	65.22% - 30
2022	1.89 - 16	1.44 - 21	77.50% - 23	70.00% - 29
2023	1.70 - 16	1.82 - 15	78.38% - 20	70.27% - 26
2024	1.28 - 18	2.12 - 11	80.65% - 21	77.42% - 22

Each week, participants record maximum number of each species seen. Two of the measures presented in the annual summary are ‘A’ (for Abundance, the average number of individuals of a species recorded at a site for each week over the full GBS year), and ‘F’ (for Frequency, the number of sites at which a species was recorded, which might be expressed as a percentage (F%) of the total number of sites for the year). The annual summary assigns a rank for the relative abundance and frequency of each species.

It can be seen that as a ‘garden’ species the miner has increased steadily in numbers (abundance) and in the number of sites where recorded (Table 1). Over the last twelve years the c myna has been fairly stable in numbers and sites recorded, but, as suggested below, might have changed in its local distribution (Table 1).

There is some evidence that, as might be expected, the occurrence of c mynas in GBS sites, as distinct from native bird species, is not affected by distance from native vegetation (Davey 2009).

Recently, because of the popularity of eBird recording, the number of GBS sites has declined significantly. This raises a question about how future trends might be monitored.

Making use of eBird data

As a practical matter, this source of information has replaced COG’s paper record ‘general survey’. (For example, 2018/19 total Annual Bird Report records: COG 5840, eBird 209,239.)

Published eBird records enable the reader to see when, where, and how many, miners and c mynas were reported by participants since 2016. While not always brought out in eBird numbers, contributors who are experienced observers are likely to have useful information on bird species trends in their area. For example, for her local site Christine D (Flynn) has regularly made eBird reports of small numbers of c mynas. However, on 11 Sep 2024, 14 c mynas were in her reporting area, the high number later explained (pers. comm.) as probably due to an artificial food source. Moreover, a miner reported in the garden on the same day was the first observed there – a significant record. The point is that inquiring beyond the numbers reported in eBird can lead to helpful information.

Table 2. Broad woodland counts of Noisy Miners and Common Mynas.

Broad woodland	Date in 2024	N Miner	C Myna
Goorooyarroo	16 Oct	18	0
	14 Oct	25	2
	14 Sep	20	1
Callum Brae	3 Nov	52	0
	26 Oct	40	COG outing 0
	17 Oct	20	0
	28 Sep	36	0
Farrer Ridge	13 Nov	56	4
	12 Oct	44	at entry point 2
	17 Sep	42	2
Mount Majura	26 Oct	21	0
Mount Ainslie-CP	12 Nov	40	0

Examples of recent broad woodland counts by experienced observers are given here as relevant background (Table 2). The counts are taken from eBird, where details of these and other counts can be found. Note that these reports all relate to Spring. A comparison with high counts for next Winter could be informative.

As eBird participants are free to choose the occasions and the locations on which they report and the amount of effort applied, care is needed in extracting trends from this source. To supplement the species maps, I sought access to eBird data for c mynas and miners in the ACT for 2024 ('eBird Basic Dataset' – EBD). Initially I received sets for January-August 2024.

For the c mynas, 1184 reports (about 70%) were of one or two individual birds, no doubt partly due to the brevity or small area of many surveys. However, 9 reports were of 30 or more individuals. Of those, four were at the National Zoo, two were the Jack Holland roosts mentioned below, one was at a woodland site near Mitchell, one by Lake Tuggeranong. The ninth, a remarkable photo-verified report of 80 individuals, was from a site at Hume.

Just in time to be included in this note, eBird datasets for the ACT for the month of October became available. Total species reports including duplications were: c myna 364, miner 720. The reports with the highest counts for each species are given in Table 3.

Table 3. High counts, from eBird, for the month of October 2024, for each species. Details relating to each count may be found in eBird Species Maps. Distance in kms travelled is given for each count.

Common Myna			Noisy Miner		
Count	Location, distance		Count	Location, distance	
33	Zoo	3.3	54	Lake Tugg	6.7
21	Zoo	1.0	48	Lake Tugg	7.0
14	COG Blitz Denman	1.5	44	Farrer Ridge	4.5
14	McQuoids Hill NR	2.5	40	Callum Brae	5.9
9	Hume	6.5	37	Lake Tugg	7.3
8	Casey Wtlds	0.53	32	Mt Ainslie NR	4.8
8	Pinnacle NR	7.0	30	Lake Ginn	1.0
8	McQuoids Hill NR	0.57	27	Callum Brae	6.8
7	Kambah P Rd	2.6	26	Goo NR	1.0
7	Flynn	2.8	25	(several locations)	
7	Pt Hut Rd dam	2.9	25	(several locations)	

For miners, eBird can be of help in finding where large communities now exist. EBird reports confirm observations reported here that a strong community of miners exists around the National Gallery, and that c mynas are unlikely to be found there – no reports of the latter since September 2023. A similar state of affairs exists at the ANU. (The size and strength of the ANU population in 2010/2011 is addressed in Lenz 2014.) With respect to a site not visited in this project, eBird reports suggest a strong community of miners at Federal Golf Course, with no c mynas. Observations at the Belconnen golf course at Holt show this has suitable conditions for miners, but not c mynas, as confirmed by eBird records.

Observations by the author for a Narrabundah/Griffith area since 1988

In 1988 I began to reside at my present address in Narrabundah, near Rocky Knob Park. There was no significant presence of Noisy Miners there until 2015. My report to the COG chatline on 12 September 2015 included a photo of an active miner nest, and said:

The small neighbourhood park of Rocky Knob has long been free of Noisy Miners except for a small number of transients that would sometimes appear for a few days in winter. Last Autumn a group of 4 or 5 arrived and has remained since, becoming more intrusive and aggressive.

Before 2015, the increasing presence of miners had been noted, although the expansion had been uneven across suburban Canberra. Michael Lenz had estimated the adult population at the ANU campus in 2010/2011 as at least 172 to 258 (Lenz 2014). The increase was reflected in the Garden Bird Survey (Butterfield 2012). Between GBS years 2014 and 2015, the percentage of sites with recorded miners rose from 43.66% to 57.35%. However, conversely, in 2015, 42.65% of sites had not recorded a single miner over a full year.

The influx to Rocky Knob Park was possibly from Callum Brae (broad woodland) where numbers had increased over previous years following colonisation of that rural lease (now a nature reserve) from Mount Mugga. However, it is possible that the influx was from Red Hill, a broad-woodland ridge that adjoins Mount Mugga. The Rocky Knob occupation has been present year-round since 2015, numbering about a dozen birds, more recently as many as 20 or more. About five years ago, the small nearby park known as Griffith Woodland ('GW') was colonised. At the same time the number of small birds in the area has collapsed. In Rocky Knob Park and nearby streets, it is now unusual to see a bird smaller than a Noisy Miner, except for swallows, or the fleeting presence of an Eastern Spinebill in a flowering shrub in winter.

The two parks mentioned have large mature eucalypts, a few being old Yellow Box. In the course of a year the miners exploit a variety of food sources, nectar from flowering eucalypts and from garden shrubs (native and exotic), lerps from the eucs, and other arthropods from foraging at all levels of vegetation, and on the ground and in the air.

Before the appearance of the miners, two pairs of c mynas were resident in the Rocky Knob area. These are now gone, presumed to be excluded by miners.

The 2024 Noisy Miner breeding season

In the first week of September, three miner fledglings, barely able to fly, appeared in the street adjoining Rocky Knob Park. Over the next two weeks their usual location was the edge of the park, nearby street trees and my (overgrown) front garden. Their presence was easily monitored by their continual 'chip-calling', the persistent chipping sound dependent miners use to attract feeding adults. This monotonous sound is unlike contact calling or alarm calling by adults.

After fledging, miner chicks are relatively immobile for the first few days. By day 12 they can follow adults from tree to tree and imitate foraging. By about day 25 ('older dy') they can forage by themselves, but are regularly fed. By day 35 they are similar to adults except for noticeably shorter tails and slightly laboured flight. However, they still make chip-calls and might be fed occasionally. (Author's observations. See also Higgins *et al.* 2001).

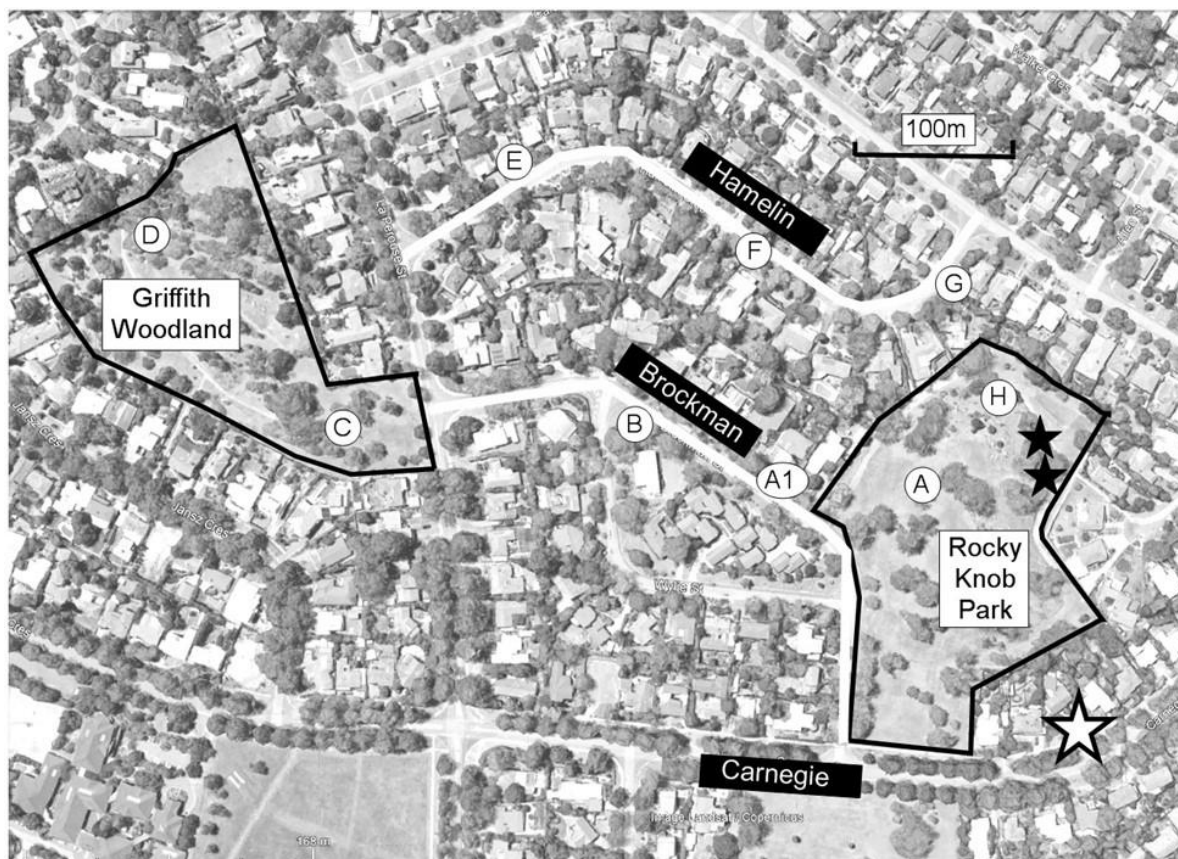


Figure 1. A miner community extended over most of the suburban area shown in the above image, and beyond it. The circled letters indicate locations of 8 dy broods in September/October 2024. The broods became mobile, but could be separated by differences in size/age of chicks. Adult miners foraged in street and garden trees along the length of Hamelin Crescent and Brockman Street, both being lined by eucs, in contrast to other streets in the area with deciduous trees. Black stars indicate two nests active in October, additional to the fledged broods. At left is a fledgling on 3 September, apparently out of the nest for only a day or two. It is sitting on garden mulch at A1 in above.

In the Rocky Knob-GW area I saw more miners in Spring 2024 than at any previous time. Feeding adults were flying relatively long distances carrying food, sometimes >150m. It was not possible to suggest a boundary that would take in the foraging area for all members of the community. Fig. 1 shows an area that contained at least eight broods of chipping young during September/October. All the broods were associated with adults feeding in eucalypts. Adult miners foraged along Brockman Street and Hamelin Crescent, both streets being lined with the aging remains of eucalypt street plantings. Nearby streets with deciduous trees, mainly Pin Oaks, did not attract miners initially (Carnegie, La Perouse, Jansz). However, by 21 Oct, with presumed dispersion in progress, chip-calls could be heard from deciduous trees in Carnegie, La Perouse and Caley.

I visited other representative locations to investigate miner breeding behaviour and to look for Common Mynas. The following summary notes refer to miners. They represent only a selection of sites, but aim to give a picture of the extent of miner breeding across a range of suburban settings. Photos are available for most observations. Undated observations were in September, with follow-up observations in brackets.

Griffith shops. Trees & shrubs E of shops. 2-3 present, repeatedly chasing nesting ravens. No chip-calling. [30 October, chip-calling coming from enclosed garden. 6 Nov, 2 older dy ground-feeding at N end of shops indicating a small breeding community.]

Near Narrabundah shops. One foraging in conifer, no chip-calling. [10 November, cnr Kootara/Anembo, dy chip-calling, following adult.]

Kootara Cres, Narrabundah, near community gardens. One brood in street eucs chip-calling, dy being fed. dy fed some bread offered by a resident to adult miners.

Meehan Gardens, Narrabundah. 2 present, initially no chip-calling. [30 October, one brood dy chip-calling, reports received of 2 nests (Rob Parnell).]

Carnegie Crescent, Red Hill, western end, 6 adults in eucs near tennis courts. Chip-calling heard. [10 November, group range and intruder-swooping extended to Red Hill school grounds.]

Fairbairn Golf Course car park. At least one brood chip-calling, dy being fed. [24, 29 October – 3 broods dy observed around the golf course.]

Telopea Park. One brood chip-calling, dy being fed. [Followed by 30 min walk through Barton residential area as far as Brisbane Ave. Nil recorded there.]

King's Park, near King's Ave. 3 present, no chip-calling (windy day).

Old Parliament House. One chip-calling brood in front of building, another in large eucs at rear.

New Parliament House (NPH). A notable site from a habitat viewpoint (NPHX) was in dense planted native vegetation on slopes west of north corner of NPH. Faint chip-calling was heard, before I was confronted by 7 scolding adult miners, suggesting a nest nearby with small young. No miners found during remainder of circuit in the dense veg on slopes below NPH, but several wattlebirds, several small bird species. [6 October, dy were being fed at site NPHX.]

Corner Krefft St/Southern Cross Drive, Florey. 3 miners present, no chip-calling.

Kippax Fair (shopping complex). One miner foraging on ground in car park.

Black Mountain Peninsula Park. A reliable location for numbers of miners. At least three broods chip-calling, dy being fed. Another brood in a nest. Estimated 25 adult miners. [3 October: nest found vacated or predated, another nest begun nearby.]

Weston Park. English Garden precinct. 2 present. No chip-calling. Near lake, active nest with 6 adults attending. [3 October: nest unsuccessful (predated?) – another nest begun, 10m away]

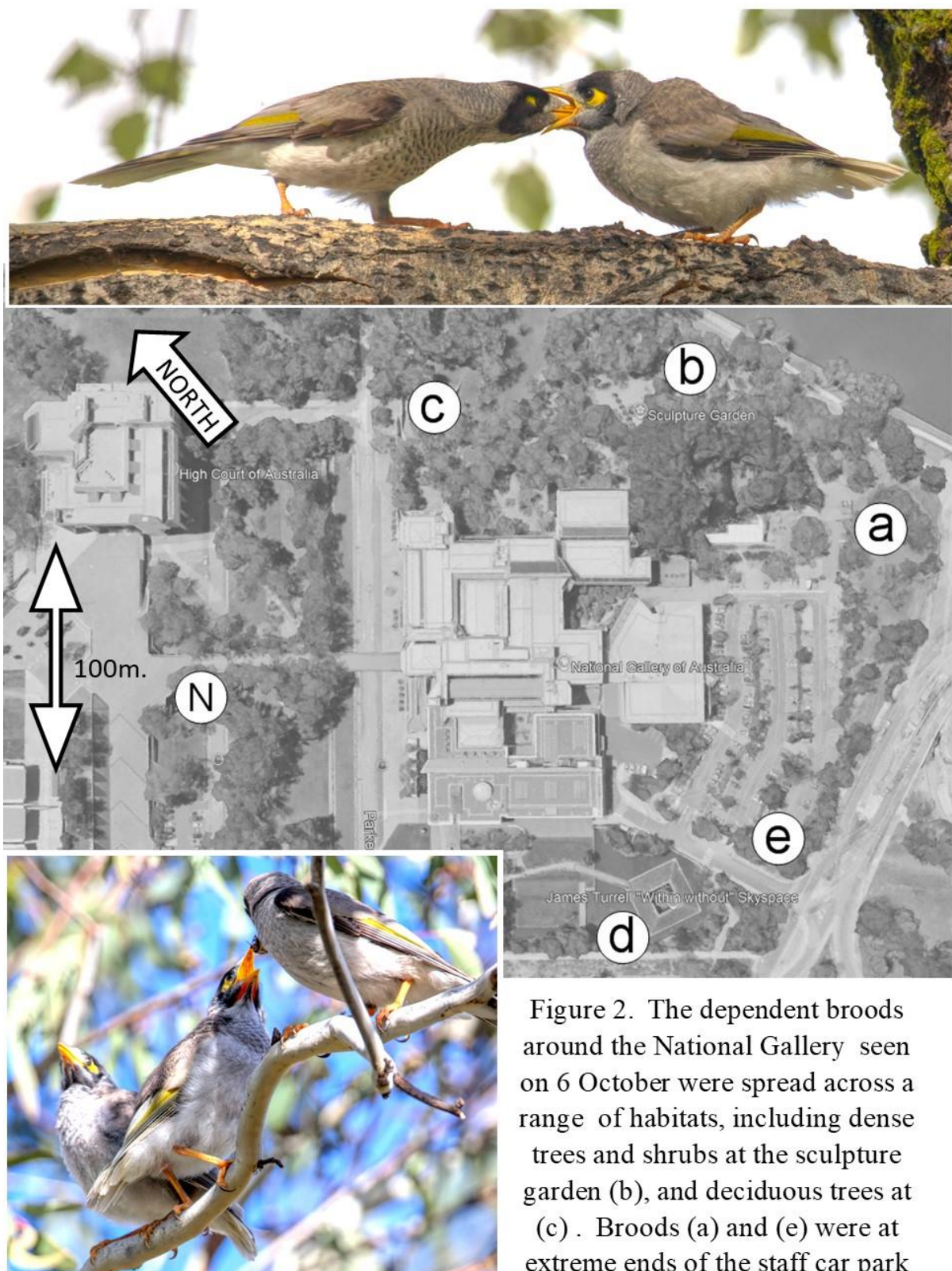


Figure 2. The dependent broods around the National Gallery seen on 6 October were spread across a range of habitats, including dense trees and shrubs at the sculpture garden (b), and deciduous trees at (c). Broods (a) and (e) were at extreme ends of the staff car park where adults foraged.

Photos show a fledgling based on the solid limb of a Silver Poplar at (c), and young being fed at (a). An active nest was at N.



Figure 3. Scenes from ANU, 7 Oct. A - an older dy, about 35 days after leaving nest. B, B1 - dy about ten days younger.



The tree used in C, C1 as a feeding base stands in front of the Linnaeus Building. The lerp-laden tree at left is immediately behind the RN Robertson Building, one of the homes of the Fenner School of Environment & Society.



Figure 4. Another eucalyptus-related food source at CSIRO, Black Mountain. Up to seven miners repeatedly came to this tree next to the building housing the National Insect Collection. They appeared to be feeding on a sticky substance exuded by scale insects *Eriococcus* sp. The birds flew across Clunies Ross Street to and from ANU campus.

5 October 2024: I walked around the plantings surrounding the National Gallery of Australia (Figure 2). By following the chip-calling, I found five broods of dependent young and one nest with young. This has become a flourishing community, with an estimated >25 adult miners present.

7 October: I took advantage of the Monday public holiday to walk around part of the ANU campus (about 7ha.). I found five broods of dy, two based in small prunus trees (Figure 3).

11 October: Swinger Hill. One brood dy found by chip-calling. 4 adults attending.

15 October: Walked through small park areas near pedestrian underpass, Perry Drive, Chapman. One dy brood of 3 initially in single tree (with nesting frogmouth). Nest under construction about 30m from frogmouth tree.

16 October: Walked around 3 ha. of John Knight Memorial Park by Lake Ginninderra. Three broods of chipping dy and one nest (in *Allocasuarina*) with sitting adult.

20 October: Visited park west side of Lake Tuggeranong, suburb of Greenway. Within 3ha at least 3 broods of dy chip-calling and being fed.

21 October: Walked through Yerrabi Pond Park, Gungahlin, for more than 2 hours, covering about 12ha. Heard almost continuous chip-calling from 6 broods mainly older dy. Estimated at least 30 miners.

23 October: David St. parkland, O'Connor. Three broods dy in eucalypts distinguished by size/age about 14 days to 40 days after fledging. At least 7 adults.

26 October: Walked around CSIRO precinct, lower slopes Black Mountain (10ha). No miners recorded until 7 were found feeding in a single tree near Clunies Ross St, which was infested with scale insects exuding a sticky substance. No chip-calling or food carrying. (Figure 4.)

27 October: Haig Park. The conifer plantings do not attract miners, but one brood dy found in eucs along street on north side. The brood occasionally flew to nearby cedars in park, where fed with lerps from the eucs.

28 October: Walked around north-east part of Belconnen golf course (8ha.). Counted 10 miners including one brood dy being fed lerps.

9 November: 3 sites in Wanniassa. (a) grounds of Wanniassa Hills Primary. 4 broods dy. (b) Wanniassa Junior School, 2 broods dy in street eucs. (c) Sternberg Cres near Early Childhood Centre. 7 adults, possibly a breeding group, flying across street between eucs (c mynas also present).

Six visits were made to a site at Hume where both species had been recorded over several years. This is described below (see also Table 4).

A site in the suburb of Hume: 'West Hume woodlands and wetlands' (WHWW).

Hume is technically a suburb, designated for commercial and light industrial purposes. It is situated on former grazing land, between, but several kms from, residential suburbs of Canberra and Queanbeyan (NSW). The site discussed here is about 2 kilometres from the Mugga Lane tip and from horse paddocks. The main part of the site is a fenced area (about 17ha.) of mixed vegetation, east of Monaro Highway. It includes tussocky grassland with clumps of blackberry, briars, some old eucalypts, and plantings of exotic trees. A few open spaces are heavily grazed by kangaroos. There are eucalyptus plantings along the Monaro Highway.

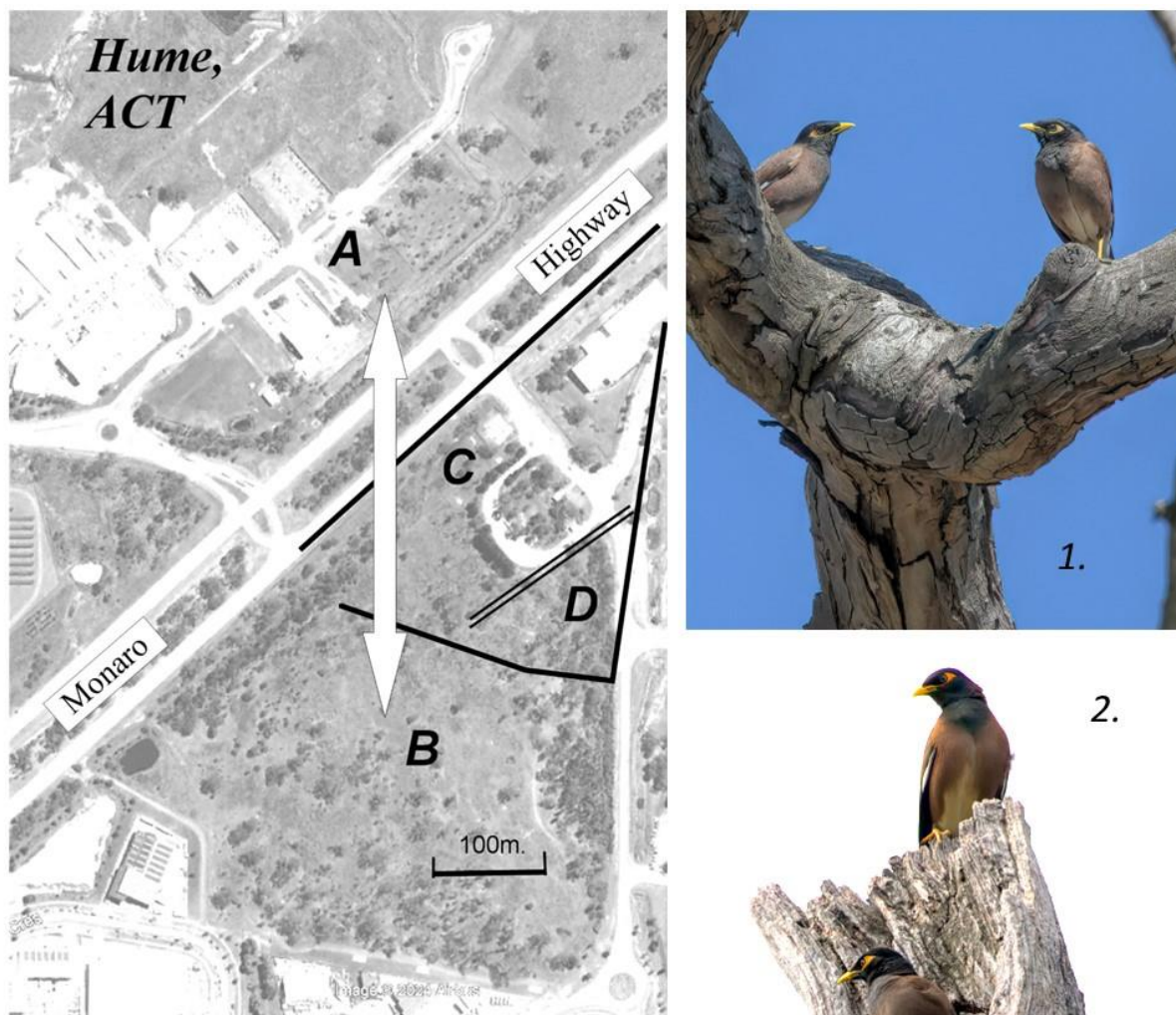


Figure 5. The Hume site. Above map - see text.
 1. Mynas in 'woodland' at B. 2. Mynas in possession of hollow at A. 3. Scolding miners at C.



Table 4. Mynas and Miners at the WHWW site since January 2021, eBird counts of 10 or more.

Date	C Myna	Date	Miner
25/08/24	20	25/08/24	16
24/08/24	25	16/03/24	11
10/12/23	17	01/04/23	14
29/04/23	45		
27/02/23	14		
14/01/23	15		
23/10/22	13	17/07/22	10
15/04/22	12	06/03/22	11
14/03/22	13		
06/03/22	22		
16/01/22	10		
01/01/22	12		
14/11/21	12		
20/09/21	32		
08/05/21	30		
08/04/21	10		
26/01/21	12		
07/07/16	21	20/02/16	13

The attached sketch map (Fig. 5) is based on observations made on six visits in October and November. West of the highway is a small number of eBird sites taking in a waste recycling precinct (John Cory Road – ‘A’) with remnant eucs between the recycling operations and the highway. It was here that seasonal high counts of c mynas were made (80, 34) in 2024. As indicated by the arrow, c mynas fly between both sides of the highway (Deb and Rod Ralph, Sandra Henderson, pers. comms.). B is an area used by c mynas, while miners tend to remain within area C. D was found to be a contested area where miners attacked c mynas if they were in the trees rather than ground foraging. (Poor photo available.)

Initially, while the miners at this site engaged in flutter-swooping and scolding behaviour, no chip-calling or food carrying was observed. However, on 2 November two nests at early stages were found within area C.

Typically, the c mynas in Hume foraged on the ground but flew into trees on observer approach. Usually these birds, whether on ground or in trees, would not accept a direct approach closer than about 25m. This contrasted with behaviour of the species elsewhere (*e.g.* in Narrabundah 20 years before, and current behaviour of human-habituated c mynas at Majura Park, which allow an approach to 5m). This raises the possibility that this is an example of behavioural change in light of trapping pressure. It is possible that one reason fewer c mynas are being seen is that much of the local population has become more wary, with the removal of the boldest individuals, and has learnt to avoid dangerous situations (King 2010, 2013; Diquelou 2018).

Other recent presences and absences of Common Mynas (Figure 6)

During Spring 2024, in contrast with the scene 20 years ago, relatively few c mynas were seen around Canberra streets and parks. With few exceptions c mynas were not found in places with



breeding miners. Exceptions were the suburb of Hume, and Perry Drive, Chapman, where a pair had a nest in a tree hollow within the miner foraging area, and at Wanniasa (c) where 3 pairs of c mynas were defending possession of a tree with hollows in a miner foraging area. A pair was sometimes on a roof just outside the foraging range of the Meehan Gardens miner community (Rob Parnell), and a pair, possibly the same one, was seen in November at south end of Griffith shops.

However, c mynas were seen where miners were absent. I came across up to 10 c mynas whenever visiting the Majura Park shopping complex. Other sightings: (a) 7 in Boolimba Crescent, Narrabundah; (b) 3 at Paddy's Park, Ginninderry; pairs in (c) Jansz Crescent, Griffith, (d) Newcastle St., Fyshwick, (e) the golf centre, Narrabundah, (f) Allchin Cct, Kambah.

Night roosts are a poorly understood aspect of c myna presence. They can form where there is little or no daytime presence of c mynas. Daryl King has mentioned an earlier record of a night roost at Florey shops where the Pin Oaks had hosted about 150 roosting c mynas (pers. comm.).

Jack Holland has submitted incidental reports to eBird of seasonal roosts in Rafferty St., Chapman: 30 May 2024, conservatively 50 in large Pittosporums; 16 June 2024, 15 (same roost), a further 20 nearby, total reported 35. The same observer had counted a roost of 120 in another Chapman street in 2023.

My own recent observations are as follows. At dusk on 10 Sep I noticed small groups of c mynas flying into trees on the west side of the Griffith shops. When the movement had settled, I estimated about 50 individuals in the trees. On 13 Sep I took a photo that captured 27 birds close together, with as many again estimated to be in the vicinity. Subsequent observation has been difficult with the deciduous trees acquiring dense foliage, but my impression on 3 October was that there were fewer birds. I was only confident of about 20. No c mynas were seen on daytime visits to Griffith shops, despite at least four visits each week, except for one pair in November.

Myna roosts have been found to be 1.3 to 1.8km apart (Pell and Tidemann 1997). If a radius of about 700m represents the catchment area of the Griffith roost, both eBird observations and my own are failing to reflect the extent of the c myna resident population of the Griffith area, and presumably of other suburban areas. This points to the possibility that we have an unknown number of wary and unseen c mynas using undetected 'refugial' nests (King 2013).

Noisy Miners - food sources (Figures 4, 7, 8 and 9)

Areas of suburban Canberra inhabited by Noisy Miners, including the Rocky Knob-GW community, have eucalypts that carry lerps, some a large number, some only a few. These are excretions on the leaves from a species of psyllid (in Canberra *Glycaspis* spp., possibly others (NatureMapr)). The insect uses the excretion as a protective cover. In all the locations with dy miners mentioned in this note, adult miners were seen foraging in eucalypts, usually seeking lerps. From photos it was often possible to see the food passed to young. The main food was lerps, presumably with the associated psyllid nymph, where captured.

Lerps and psyllids are important food items for birds. In his chapter 'Forests that Exude Energy', Tim Low (2014) discusses the occurrence of psyllids and lerps on Australian eucalypts and reliance of some honeyeaters, including miners, on this food source. He draws a link between the exploitation of this food source and the aggression and complex social structure of the Noisy Miner, described as 'the Ultimate Aggressor'.





Figure 8. Some food items, other than lerps, fed to young.

1. Moth plucked from wall of old Parliament House.
2. A photo from same place (by old Parl House) in September 2019, aphids gathered from rose bushes.
3. Another moth, from lawn, ANU.
- 4., 5. Adults with barely-visible arthropods for presumed (later confirmed) nestlings at new Parliament House (site NPHX).



Figure 9. Examples of food and feeding at Yerrabi Pond Park.
 1. Young were frequently fed on ground. 2. Larva (of moth?) plucked from *Allocasuarina* and carried more than 100 m to begging young.
 3. Similar larva about to be fed to young.
 4, 5. Small lerps (arrows) being harvested by Superb Parrots..

Unidentified arthropods gleaned from eucalypt leaves or captured by ground foraging were also fed to young. The frequency with which adults forage on ground, although varying between locations, suggests suitable ground-foraging conditions are an important part of miner habitat.

The sites visited showed some variation in the feeding patterns supported. The Yerrabi Pond site had some differences from other sites used by miner communities. It had fewer lerp-bearing eucs than available to other communities, and a mixture of tree and shrub plantings. It had a weedy but mown grass cover. Lerps were sometimes carried to the young but a main food seemed to be ground pickings and an assortment of foliage gleanings including insect larvae. The available lerps were relatively small, perhaps after harvesting earlier in the season. (On 21 Oct, a flock of Superb Parrots was seen feeding on these, more efficiently than miners could. A miner lunged at one of these, briefly interrupting its feeding. That example of aggression could have been due to near presence of miner dy rather than competition for the food source.)

My own observations of reliance of miners on lerps relate to the nesting period. Outside the breeding season, the species might be found in areas without eucalypts, sometimes scavenging, in a similar manner to c mynas, for food scraps. This leads to its appearance in closely-built areas, including around suburban shops.

Noisy Miners - use of 'gardens' (Figure 10)

Low (2014) wrote that 'in Canberra [miners] dominate many parks but stay out of gardens'. That comment might have been prompted by the often-remarked absence of the species from the much-visited Australian National Botanic Gardens. ANBG aside, miners now readily enter almost any kind of 'garden' when it is within the foraging area of a community. In Canberra, they feed in shrub plantings of any height or size, sometimes near human traffic close to buildings *e.g.* in those hardy *Camellia* varieties favoured by landscape contractors.

Fig. 1 gives an idea of the extent of available garden areas in a well-planted suburb. Food items from shrub plantings do not include lerps, a food source of importance in the nesting period, as noted.

Miner nests are found fairly easily, because they are likely to be attended by several adults during the nesting period, which might be taken as 40 days (Lenz 2014). Only two nests in eucs were found for the Rocky Knob-GW community, the earlier one producing fledged young on about 12 Oct. Eight broods had been recorded before that. It is likely that some of the unlocated nests were in nearby gardens, in shrubs or shrubby trees. Adult miners were seen flying into shrubby garden trees in the nesting period. A resident in Hamelin Crescent reported that active miner nests had been found in a *Pittosporum* and in a *Photinia*.

During his survey at ANU 2010/2011, Michael Lenz found nests in hedges at hip height, and in shrubs, as well as in eucalypts. An example of a suburban hedge nest in 2024 was in *Camellia sasanqua*, at shoulder height beside a deck in an enclosed backyard, Meehan Gardens (photo by Rob Parnell, Fig. 10). An inquiry directed to the COG chatline led to reports of other garden nests: two in Wanniasa, in a Medlar tree and *Camellias*; one at Greenway, shrub next to a townhouse driveway; one at Latham, at 2.2m in *Prunus* shrub. A reasonable conclusion is that miners now nest in Canberra gardens.



Figure 10.
 'A Garden Species'
 From top - nest in
C. sasanqua, Meehan Gdns
 (Rob Parnell);
 adult nectar-feeding on
 Japonica shrub,
 Narrabundah;
 dy on garden hose,
 Wanniasa schoolyard;
 fledglings in a garden
 conifer, Griffith.

Exclusion of other bird species by miners.

There will be different views on which species are no longer seen as a result of miner presence. Observations here relate to the Rocky Knob-GW community in Spring 2024. 'Other species' were affected in various ways, for example the Australian Raven, often chased by miners, was not 'excluded' but tended to avoid foraging on the ground.

Excluded: Small passerine spp., Common Myna, Red Wattlebird, Crested Pigeon, Magpie-lark, Satin Bowerbird.

Not excluded: Parrot and cockatoo spp., Australian Magpie*, Pied Currawong*, Grey Butcherbird* (*overlapping nesting territory).

As a result of exclusion of wattlebirds, the Eastern Koel was generally absent from what had been a prime area for koel activity in earlier years. This is discussed in Holland (2020). At end of Nov 2024 a wattlebird nest, as in previous years, was active in Carnegie Crescent (white star in Figure 1). At time of writing, it was not possible to see whether this contained a koel nestling.

Grarock (2013), which was concerned with impact of c mynas on native bird species, did not assess influence of miners on other native bird species as a cause of other species reduction. However, it was noted that such influence was likely. In 2013, the expert committee under the EPBC Act noted: 'The causal link between the presence of a noisy miner colony and effects on the remainder of the bird assemblage has been established through many separate studies.' However, it concluded:

A national-scale threat abatement plan is unlikely to be a feasible, effective and efficient way to abate the process as it would necessarily be broad in scope and coarse in resolution. Rather, the Committee considers that the process would be more effectively abated via the development of a threat abatement advice drawing on the ongoing research into the process and tailored to specific circumstances.

Conclusions

Miner numbers and areas occupied are increasing (GBS data, woodland survey data, Lenz 2014, incidental reports (*e.g.* Liang 2024), and the successful 2024 breeding season reported here). This trend can be expected to lead to an increase in size of communities (numbers and space occupied), as well as the formation of new breeding aggregations that enter new areas. If that process continues, it can be expected that it, and its effect on other bird species, will become obvious even to casual observers of the local bird life.

Miner habitat preference and behaviour in Canberra suburbs suggest that a precondition for establishment of a large breeding community is access to lerp-bearing eucalypts. Widespread eucalypt plantings allow the miner to make use of that food source while having access to nearby gardens. The area occupied by a breeding community needs to meet the food requirements of a concentration of both adults and emerging young. 2024 might have been an exceptional year as regards food availability.

The observable local distribution of the Common Myna has changed, probably affected by trapping, new behaviours, and spread of the Noisy Miner. The areas that c mynas have remained in or moved to will not include areas occupied by strong miner communities like those at ANU or Rocky Knob-GW.

A pattern that might be expected to continue is that miners will move into or increase in suburban areas that meet their feeding requirements, while c mynas will move from those areas to suburban areas that do not support miners,

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jack Holland and Michael Lenz for encouragement and advice. Duncan McCaskill provided updated GBS data not yet published. Kim Farley, ACT eBird reviewer, gave advice on possibilities for making use of eBird data. Daryl King gave comments from the viewpoint of his own years of myna research. He also provided background about the Florey shops as a c myna site, and pointed me to useful sources. Michael Mulvaney, NatureMapr administrator, gave advice on psyllids and scale insects. Rob Parnell was a great source of information about bird events at Meehan Gardens. Information or other help was provided by Christine D, Deb and Rod Ralph, Sandra Henderson, Anne Hall, Isobel Crawford, John Bundock, Brian Jones. Ebird material was explored to find what can be learnt from this popular avenue for recording of observations. No doubt it will be more useful with more expert treatment than has been applied here. Google Earth images were the basis for the sketch maps in Figures 1, 2 and 5.

References

- Editions of Canberra Bird Notes may be found at <https://canberrabirds.org.au/publications/canberra-bird-notes/>
- ACT Legislative Assembly. Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity (2024) *Inquiry into Petition 17-23 – Indian (Common) Myna Control*. https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/2577153/Inquiry-into-Petition-17-23-Indian-Common-Myna-Control-Report.pdf
- Bounds, J., Davey, C., Taws, N., Evans, M. J. and Rayner, L. (2021) *Long-term Trends in ACT Woodland Birds 1998-2019*. Canberra Ornithologists Group, Canberra.
- Butterfield, M. (2012) Noisy Miners in the COG Garden Bird Survey. *Canberra Bird Notes* 37:130-136.
- COG Annual Bird Reports (relating to Noisy Miner) to 2019. *Canberra Bird Notes* vols 38-45
- Davey, C. (1991) Numbers and Distribution of the Common Myna in Canberra in July 1990. *Canberra Bird Notes* 16: 41-50.
- Davey, C. and Nicholls, A.O. (2009) Preliminary analysis of the relationship between GBS site species richness and Google Earth derived environmental data. *Canberra Bird Notes* 34: 149-157.
- Diquelou, M. C., MacFarlane, G.R. and Griffin, A.S. (2018) Investigating responses to control: a comparison of common myna behaviour across areas of high and low trapping pressure. *Biological Invasions* 20: 3591-3604.
- Dow, D. D. (1977) Indiscriminate interspecific aggression leading to almost sole occupancy of space by a single species of bird. *Emu* 77: 115-121
- Dow, D. D. (1979) Agonistic and spacing behaviour of the noisy miner *Manorina melanoccephala*, a communally breeding honeyeater. *Ibis* 121 423-436.
- eBird Species Maps <https://ebird.org/map> ; eBird Basic Datasets for Noisy Miner and Common Myna in Australian Capital Territory 2024
- Grarock, K. (2013) The introduction, spread, impact and control of the common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) (Ph D thesis) <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/items/7ae1abf3-5277-4f65-b3dc-cc508b5ca7a8>

- Grarock, K., Tidemann, C. R., Wood, J. T., and Lindenmayer, D. B. (2014) Are invasive species drivers of native species decline or passengers of habitat modification? A case study of the impact of the common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) on Australian bird species. *Austral Ecology* 39: 106-114
- Higgins, P. J., Peter, J. M. and Cowling, S. J. (Eds.) (2001) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Volume 5: *Tyrant-flycatchers to Chats*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Higgins, P. J., Peter, J. M. & Steele, W. K. (Eds.) (2006) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Volume 7B: *Boatbill to Starlings*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Holland, J. (2020) The 2018-2019 Eastern Koel season I. Adult and fledgling behaviour in Chapman/Rivett and Narrabundah. *Canberra Bird Notes* 45: 111-124.
- King, D. H. (2010) The effect of trapping pressure on trap avoidance and the role of foraging strategies in anti-predator behaviour of Common Mynas (*Sturnus tristis*). *Canberra Bird Notes* 35: 85-108.
- King, D. H. (2013) A presentation for CIMAG on Common Myna refugial nesting. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjfve5NQUPg&ab_channel=CanberraIndianMynaActionGroupInc
- Lenz, M. (2014) How prolific are Noisy Miners? The 2010 breeding season on the campus of the Australian National University, Canberra. *Canberra Bird Notes* 39: 140-146.
- Liang, D. (2024) March of the miners. Presentation to COG, summary in *Gang-gang*, June 2024.
- Lindenmayer, D. B., Claridge, A., Hazell, H., Michael, D., Crane, M., MacGregor, C, and Cunningham, R. (2003) *Wildlife on Farms: how to conserve native animals*. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood.
- Low, T. (2014) *Where Song Began: Australia's birds and how they changed the world*. Viking/Penguin, Melbourne.
- NatureMapr <https://canberra.naturemapr.org/>
- Pell, A.S. and Tidemann, C. R. (1997) The ecology of the common myna in urban nature reserves in the Australian Capital Territory. *Emu* 97: 141-149
- Taylor, M. and Canberra Ornithologists Group (1992) *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory – an Atlas*. Canberra Ornithologists Group, Canberra.
- Threatened Species Scientific Committee under EPBC Act 1999 (2014) Listing Advice for Key Threatening Process – *Aggressive exclusion of birds from potential woodland and forest habitat by over-abundant noisy miners (Manorina melanocephala)* <https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowkeythreat.pl?id=22>
- Veerman, P. A. (2002) *Canberra Birds: A Report on the First 18 Years of the Garden Bird Survey*. Self-published, Canberra.
- Wilson, S. J. in Frith, H. J. (Ed.) (1984) *Birds in the Australian High Country* rev. ed. Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

Accepted 3 December 2024

EVIDENCE OF POLYGAMY IN THE TAWNY FROGMOUTH

STUART RAE

Division of Ecology and Evolution, Research School of Biology, The Australian National University, Australia

stuart.rae@anu.edu.au

Abstract: *I have been studying the Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) for 18 years and recently observed the first brood of five young fledging from a nest, which was attended by a male and two females. This note provides an overview of clutch and brood size of frogmouths in the Australian Capital Territory, and details of the recent observation. This is the first report of the occurrence of polygamy in this species, possibly the first for the Family Podargidae or any of the Caprimulgiformes.*

The observations detailed below were made while monitoring Tawny Frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*) as part of a long-term study of the species' breeding ecology in the Australian Capital Territory (Rae 2009, 2013, 2017). The nest used by the birds described was set in secure triple fork of the main stem of a Red-stringy Bark (*Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*) in Dry Sclerophyll Forest on Black Mountain. It was first found on 14 Oct 2024, when the male was on the nest and the two females were in trees nearby. Male Tawny Frogmouths in south-east Australia are predominantly grey (Fig 1) and the females have more tawny or brown colouring on the side of the head and on the wing (Higgins 1999). The two females were separable by their different plumage patterns (Figs. 2 to 4).



Figure 1. An adult male Tawny Frogmouth sits between five fledglings. The oldest fledgling is on the far left, the next oldest is next to it, the third oldest is fourth from the left, the fourth oldest is third from the left and the youngest is on the far right next to the tree trunk.

On 14 Nov, the male was observed on the nest covering an indiscernible number of chicks. Then a brood of five chicks was observed fledging on 16 Nov 2024. One young bird had left the nest and was perched with an adult female (A) in a nearby tree (approximately 20m away) and four other fledglings were on the nest branch with the adult male. A second adult female (B) was perched in a nearby tree, adjacent to the tree female A was in. Both females were seen to roost with chicks on subsequent days, giving them daytime protection from predators and weather.



Figure 2. The two adult female Tawny Frogmouths, perched on the same branch on 29 November. Female A is on the right, female B on the left.

On 17 Nov, the male was with three chicks on the nest branch, female A was with two chicks on the same branch as before, and female B was in the same nearby tree. On 18 Nov, the male was with three chicks on the branch where female A with chicks had been, and she was with two chicks in an adjacent tree, female B was in the same tree as she was in previously. On 24 Nov, the male was with all five chicks on one branch approximately 70 m uphill from the nest, the females were in separate adjacent trees. On 26 Nov, the male was with four chicks in the same tree, female A was with one chick on a fallen limb and the female B was on the same branch, one metre away. On 29 Nov, the male was with all five chicks on one branch in a tree approximately 100m downhill from the nest (Fig 1), both females were on one branch in an adjacent tree (Fig 2).

Overall, in 719 nest records in the long-term study (2007-2024) there have been 551 successfully fledged broods: 158 of one chick (28.7%), 349 of two (63.3%), 43 of three (7.8%) and one of five (0.2%). There have been no records of broods of four chicks reared in the study. The mean brood size for all years was 1.8 chicks fledged per successful pair, 1.1 for all breeding attempts. The mean brood size was similar to that found in national nest records, 1.4 (Higgins 1999) and in a study of urban Tawny Frogmouths, 1.33 (Weaving *et al.* 2016).



Figure 3. Female A. She is overall more grey than female B. There is less rufous colouring around the face and less prominent streaks on the breast.



Figure 4. Female B. She is overall more rufous, especially on the wing coverts and around the face. Her breast is more obviously streaked.

The typical clutch size for Tawny Frogmouth is 1-3 eggs (Higgins 1999). Cleere (1998) stated that clutch size was occasionally 4 or rarely 5, but this was challenged by Higgins because it was not supported by primary sources. Cleere seems to have accepted the criticism and his later updated book (2010) gives the clutch size as 1-3 eggs. The current study did not count clutch sizes, although the minimum number of eggs laid per nest could be calculated from the number of chicks seen per nest. Nor was it known if one or both females laid the eggs in the clutch in this instance. Given that frogmouths usually lay 1-3 eggs it appears that both females in this instance laid eggs and this was a polygamous relationship consisting of a breeding trio.

To date in the current study, there have been seven instances of trios of Tawny Frogmouths breeding, 1.0% of breeding attempts. All were of a single male and two females.

Previously, breeding in Tawny Frogmouths has been considered to be mostly solitary in simple pairs (Higgins 1999) or they have been described as non-cooperative breeders that form solitary pairs (Kaplan 2018). There has been a previous record of three birds seen regularly together (Tarr 1976). However, the status of the birds in that group was not determined and the frequency of trios in the species is unknown at a population level. Tawny Frogmouths are well

known to be inconspicuous and any third bird could be easily overlooked if observers were not aware of the possibility of such a bird's presence.

The breeding biology of the Caprimulgiformes is poorly known and they are generally thought to be monogamous (Cleere 210). This report gives confirmation of a brood of five young being reared by a trio of Tawny Frogmouths and an estimate of the frequency of occurrence of this behaviour. It is the first report of the occurrence of probable polygamy in this species, possibly the first for the Family Podargidae or any of the Caprimulgiformes.

Acknowledgments

This work was done under permit from the Ethics Committee of the Australian National University. Previous drafts of this manuscript were greatly improved by comments from Diana Tracy, Rob Magrath and Penny Olsen.

References

- Cleere, N. (1998) *Nightjars: a guide to the nightjars, nighthawks, and their relatives*. Yale University Press.
- Cleere, N. (2010) *Nightjars, potoos, frogmouths, oilbird, and owlet-nightjars of the world*. Princeton University Press.
- Higgins, P.J. (Ed.) (1999) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds, Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Kaplan, G. (2018) *Tawny Frogmouth* (2nd Ed.). CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South.
- Rae, S. (2009). Comparisons between nesting densities of Tawny Frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*) in open- and closed-canopy woodlands. *Emu* 109: 327-330.
- Rae, S. and Rae, D. (2013) Orientation of Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) nests and their position on branches optimises thermoregulation and cryptic concealment. *Australian Journal of Zoology* 61: 469-474.
- Rae, S. (2017) Breeding success of Tawny Frogmouths in relation to rainfall. *Canberra Bird Notes* 42: 140-145.
- Tarr, H.E. (1976) Addendum to "The tawny frogmouth of Blackburn Lake Reserve Victoria". *Australian Bird Watcher* 6: 329.
- Weaving, M. J., White, J. G., Isaac, B., Rendall, A. R., and Cooke, R. (2016) Adaptation to urban environments promotes high reproductive success in the Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*), an endemic nocturnal bird species. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 150: 87-95.

Accepted 6 December 2024

NOTES

Canberra Bird Notes 49(2) (2024): 136-138

A FOREST KINGFISHER VISITS CANBERRA

CHRISTINE DARWOOD

christine.d9933@gmail.com

The Forest Kingfisher (*Todiramphus macleayii*) is a small to medium-sized Kingfisher, quite similar to our familiar Sacred Kingfisher (*Todiramphus sanctus*), being predominantly blue above and white/cream below, with a large strong dark bill, a thick black line below the eye, and a white collar. The differences are, rather generally, that the Forest Kingfisher is slightly smaller, a darker blue (navy rather than greenish) above and brighter white below. More distinctively, however, the Sacred Kingfisher has buff loreal spots compared to the bright white loreal spots on adult Forest Kingfishers. Also, in flight the Forest Kingfisher has a distinctive white patch in the centre of the wing. Another difference is that the female Forest Kingfisher has a broken white collar, *i.e.* it has a dark nape.

The Forest Kingfisher's range includes east Papua New Guinea and coastal North and North-east Australia. It has been reported on rare occasions to the South of Port Macquarie, and eBird shows only two distinct sightings in the Sydney region (Camden on the 28 Nov 2020, and an adult male was seen numerous times on the 9 and 10 Oct 2024 at Randwick).

Amazingly, eBird also has two records of a Forest Kingfisher observed and photographed at Wynyard in Tasmania, on the 25 and 27 Jun 2015.

However, to date there do not appear to have been any confirmed sightings of this species within a 200km radius of the ACT. This is despite many of us birders over the years trying to turn our Sacred Kingfisher sightings into Forest Kingfishers (Wilson 1999; Canberra Ornithologists Group 2017, Hermes 2021).

On the 13 Oct 2024, a warm sunny Sunday afternoon, I decided to drive over to a small dam on Point Hut Road, after seeing a report of two Australian Shelduck (*Tadorna tadornoides*) by Andrew Francis. It was a pleasant drive, and the Shelduck were not difficult to locate, so there I was, quite far from home with some time on my hands. I decided to drive home via Tidbinbilla, but on a whim I drove up Corin Road, and set off along the Gibraltar North trail, entering the Gibraltar Forest through Gate 1 on Corin Road. I had walked about 300m, just past a dam on the right-hand side of the road, when in some trees up ahead I spotted a small blue bird. My initial thought was Sacred Kingfisher, of course, and the sun was directly in my eyes, but I thought the bird looked a very deep blue. I crept closer, and on a few occasions the bird flew down to the ground, and then flew a bit further on before perching again.

As I got closer, I noticed that the loreal spots looked very white, but I knew that we did not get Forest Kingfishers in the ACT. So I just kept edging closer, and tried to take a few photos as I went. As I got even closer, and watched it perch, search, and dive to the ground a few more times, my heart was pounding as I became more convinced that this might indeed be a Forest Kingfisher. I was quite happy with the photos I had, thinking they should be enough to confirm the species, so I left the Kingfisher to its foraging, and headed back. But I did not want to report

a mega find if it was not bona fide, and I had never actually seen a Forest Kingfisher before. So I reached out to a few birdy friends and colleagues, and eventually got the confirmation that yes, this was indeed a Forest Kingfisher. Yay, a lifer for me!



After a little research and closer look at my photos, I also realised that this was a female, as the collar was very distinctly broken at the back of the neck. Of the other wandering Forest Kingfisher photos that I had seen, I believe they were all male birds, I don't know if that is significant, but it does show that both males and females of this species can wander far beyond their usual range.

After news of the vagrant spread, there was quite a lot of interest by other birders to see the little bird, and quite a few twitchers were out and about over the following few days. Many of those who went out on the Monday were able to find the bird, but from the reports to hand, no one actually saw it after that day.

I wonder where it went, and I wonder why it arrived in that place. It was a great thrill to be able to see this lovely little bird, seemingly going about its foraging in a relaxed manner, but so far from its home. I hope it was able to find its way back to other Forest Kingfishers.

References

Canberra Ornithologists Group (2017) *The Canberra Ornithologists Group annotated checklist of the birds of the Australian Capital Territory*. Canberra.

eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Ithaca, New York. Available: <http://www.ebird.org>.

Hermes, N. (2021) *A photographic field guide to the birds of Canberra and the High Country*. John Beaufoy Publ. Ltd., Oxford, England.

Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. and Franklin, K. (2017) *The Australian Bird Guide*. CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South.

Wilson, S. (1999) *Birds of the ACT: Two centuries of change*. Canberra Ornithologists Group, Canberra.

Accepted 3 December 2024

COLUMNIST'S CORNER

Canberra Bird Notes 49(2) (2024): 139-142

East is East, and so is West sometimes: the usefulness of directional bird names

This note considers the use of directional bird names, being those with an adjective that refers to a compass direction. The subject deserves consideration in view of continuing discussion about what kinds of English names for birds are appropriate at the present time.

The directional names of some bird species

About a dozen bird names in the list published by COG for the ACT area contain a directional adjective, for example 'Eastern'. That was not always the preferred approach. The popular little volume published by Dr Leach in 1911, *An Australian Bird Book*, gave the species names accepted by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union. Only one of the dozen species in the COG list was listed by Leach with a directional name. In 1911, what is now called a Western Gerygone was the 'Southern Flyeater'.

While we can argue about many English names, there is a satisfying logic in those names that contain 'Eastern' where the species is found in the eastern part of the Australian continent with a counterpart ('Western') species on the other side. Thus we have Eastern Rosella, Eastern Spinebill, Eastern Whipbird, and Eastern Yellow Robin. In the same category is 'Eastern Shrike-tit', yet to be taken up in the ACT list following the split of the Crested Shrike-tit into 'Eastern', 'Western' and 'Northern' members.

A directional adjective ('Eastern', for example) can be used without a counterbalancing so-named Western species. We have a 'Southern Whiteface' but no 'Northern', and a 'Western Gerygone' but no 'Eastern'. The western species was named by Gould for its occurrence in the colony of Swan River. It is now known to be found across Australia but is rarely reported east of the Great Dividing Range.

The ACT list gives 'Eastern Koel', which will not be found in eBird, a recording system which prefers 'Pacific Koel'. It is possible that the directional adjective will be lost in a future revision. However, the adjective 'Pacific' is not particularly apt. It has been applied quite loosely to some other species, for example 'Pacific Golden Plover'.

The species designated 'Eastern Curlew' in the ACT list needs some comment. Before 1975, *Numenius madagascarensis* had been known as 'Far Eastern Curlew' in its breeding range, Far East Russia, and northern China. However, the 1978 recommendations adopted 'Eastern Curlew', as 'a reasonable contraction'. That name was adopted by Christidis & Boles and in the early versions of WLAB. However, later global lists reverted to 'Far Eastern'. HBW adopted that in 1996. By v.12, IOC had fallen in line: 'Change English name to Far Eastern Curlew to reduce confusion with the eastern race of the Eurasian Curlew, and to align with [other global lists, including Clements]'.

In version 3, in 2019, WLAB changed to 'Far Eastern'. However, some confusion has continued in the transitional period. 'Eastern' remains the name not only in the ACT list but in the English (Australia) version of eBird, although not in English (United States). It might be noted that 'Far Eastern' is not really a directional adjective but a reference to the breeding

region of this species. Under Commonwealth legislation, where it is listed as critically endangered, the sensible course is taken of giving both English names, 'Eastern Curlew' and 'Far Eastern Curlew'.

The 1978 recommendations had proposed 'Southern Boobook' for *Ninox novaeseelandiae*, a species regarded as extending from Timor through New Guinea to Australia and New Zealand. Following revisions, the present mainland Australian species (*N. boobook*) does not contain the most southern species, which are those in Tasmania (now *N. leucopsis*) and New Zealand (*N. novaeseelandiae*). Therefore, the IOC list has adopted 'Australian Boobook' for *N. boobook*. This suggests we shall soon see yet another change in the English name of this common owl.

The ACT list points out that the Mallard of the northern hemisphere, *Anas platyrhynchos*, has not been reported in our area. Instead, we have domestic variants, designated *Anas platyrhynchos domesticus*, and Pacific Black Duck hybrids *Anas superciliosa* x *Anas platyrhynchos domesticus*. Unfortunately, the English name 'Northern Mallard' is given. That was the name used by BirdLife Australia in WLAB v.1 and v.2. This was almost certainly an error, given that there was only one Mallard. At the time, 'Northern Shoveler' was being included as a new species. The name in the present BirdLife list (WLAB v.4.3), and in earlier lists and global lists, is just 'Mallard'. In the meantime, the longer name had appeared in *The Australian Bird Guide* and some other places, and as a result continues to have some currency. Outside Australia, there is an instance of use of 'Northern Mallard', but in an unusual connection. The term is used in hunting circles in North America to refer to large brightly coloured Mallards, which some believe to represent a distinct northern variety. <https://www.ducks.org/conservation/waterfowl-research-science/the-myth-of-the-northern-mallard>

Directional names for bird subspecies

When it comes to subspecies, the list of English names is liberally sprinkled with points of the compass. This is because the English names are usually recent inventions, and one subspecies is most conveniently distinguished from another by reference to a part of the species range.

It is now customary to give an English name of some kind for any subspecies of concern from a conservation viewpoint. This is useful for information purposes, and perhaps to help engage the interest of the public. In the hefty conservation work published in 2000, *The Action Plan for Australian Birds*, two subspecies of interest were referred to as follows:

Scientific Name *Rallus pectoralis pectoralis*. Common Name Lewin's Rail (eastern)

Scientific Name *Melanodryas cucullata cucullata*. Common Name Hooded Robin (south-eastern)

By way of example, three of the subspecies listed under Commonwealth legislation are referred to as follows:

Melanodryas cucullata cucullata South-eastern Hooded Robin, Hooded Robin (south-eastern)
Endangered 31 Mar 2023

Calyptorhynchus lathami lathami South-eastern Glossy Black-Cockatoo Vulnerable 10 Aug 2022

Climacteris picumnus victoriae Brown Treecreeper (south-eastern) Vulnerable 31 Mar 2023

In an attempt to promote a uniform approach to how English names of subspecies are constructed, BirdLife Australia's WLAB gives revised English names for all listed subspecies. Since version 2, these have been in the form 'South-eastern Brown Treecreeper' rather than 'Brown Treecreeper (south-eastern)'. These are used in *The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2022*, a volume that has grown to significantly greater thickness than its predecessor.

A useful account of the background to BirdLife Australia's WLAB, and the subspecies names in particular, is the 2018 article by Glenn Ehmke and others. This argues the case for providing English names for subspecies. Ehmke was the author of the range maps used in *The Australian Bird Guide* (ABG). The article is accompanied by the list that was published as WLAB v.2 (2016).

The article mentioned also includes a table that analyses 'epithet types'. In the species names, 181 (19.7%) are regarded as 'geographic' and 442 (48.1%) as depending on colour. By contrast, in the subspecies names 977 (92.8%) are 'geographic' and only 21 (2.0%) relate to colour. For present purposes it might be noted that more than 400 of the geographic names are 'directional'. (Count by this columnist.)

Anyone who has puzzled over the plumage colours of different subspecies of Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis* might appreciate the relative simplicity of geographic names. According to the ABG the nine subspecies 'differ slightly in size, the intensity of yellow in chin and throat, the intensity of rufous in the flanks, and the presence or otherwise of a grey saddle'. Rather than attempt English names based on colour, WLAB v4 assigns geographic names to all nine, four of them of a directional nature. The Canberra area has *westernensis* (or if you prefer 'South-eastern Silvereye') and the migratory *lateralis* ('Tasmanian Silvereye').

However, geographic names, including directional ones, are no better than other approaches to naming in coping with changes in taxonomy. The Striated Heron *Butorides striata* is found in different parts of the world, and can sometimes be seen at the NSW south coast. WLAB v2 gave 3 subspecies in Australia: *macrorhyncha* ('Eastern'), *stagnatalis* ('Western'), and *amurensis* ('East Asian' – here as a vagrant).

Six subspecies appear in v.4.3, with the ranges indicated more precisely in the English names. *Stagnatalis* has become 'Carpentarian', and *macrorhyncha* is 'Eastern Australian'. The name 'Western' is attached to a new species, *rogersi*. Given the world-wide range of the species, 'Western' is a questionable choice, and a clearer name from a global perspective might have been 'Western Australian Striated Heron'. However, using the name of the State would create confusion with the 'Kimberley Striated Heron', also found in Western Australia. The choosing of names is not the easy process that some might think.

As for 'Eastern Woodlands Western Gerygone', the name contains the information that the subspecies is to be found in 'Eastern Woodlands', if you know what those are. However, rather than deserve criticism, the name must be accepted, and perhaps commended, as a brave attempt to avoid 'Eastern Western Gerygone'.

It is a geographical rather than directional term, but 'South Mexican Wild Turkey' deserves a comment. That is an attempt to provide an English name for the feral turkeys found on a few Bass Strait islands. Rather than treat these as examples of feral domestic turkeys, they are allocated to the original subspecies from which the domestic strain originated. This is believed

to be *Meleagris gallopavo gallopavo* which had a small range in the south of today's Mexico, hence 'South Mexican Wild Turkey'.

References

- Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.
Threatened Species under the EPBC Act.
<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/species>
- BirdLife Australia *Working List of Australian Birds* v.4.3 available at (1 April 2024)
<https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/whats-in-a-name>
- Christidis, L. and Boles, W. E. (1994) *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*. RAOU, Hawthorn East.
- Christidis, L. and Boles, W. E. (2008) *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds*. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood.
- Hoyo J. del and Collar, N. J. (2014) *HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World Vol.1 Non-passerines*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.
- eBird A project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York.
<https://science.ebird.org/en/use-ebird-data/citation>
- Ehmke, G., Fitzsimons, J. A. and Garnett, S. T. (2018) Standardising English names for Australian bird subspecies as a conservation tool. *Bird Conservation International*. 28: 73-85. doi:10.1017/S0959270916000538
- Garnett, S.T. and Crowley, G. M. (2000) *The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000*. Environment Australia, Canberra.
- Garnett, S. T. and Baker, B. (Eds,) (2021) *The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2020*. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.
- Gill, F. B. and Wright, M. T. (2006) *Birds of the World: Recommended English Names*. Christopher Helm, London.
- IOC World Bird List Master List v.14.1 <https://www.worldbirdnames.org/new/ioc-lists/master-list-2/>
- Leach, J. A. (1911) *An Australian Bird Book*. Whitcombe & Tombs, Melbourne.
- Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. and Franklin, M. (2019) *The Australian Bird Guide* (rev. ed.) CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South.
- RAOU (1978) Recommended English Names for Australian Birds. *Emu* vol 77 Supplement

Stentoreus

Birding in Cyberspace, Canberra Style

A huge number of birding podcasts can be found in cyberspace, including quite a few from Australia. A popular one, from the Melbourne-based Kirsty Costa, is the **Weekend Birder** <https://www.weekendbirder.com/>:

Kirsty Costa, a bird lover and educator, created Weekend Birder podcast in 2022 to help people discover the benefits of birdwatching. Inspired by her own love of nature, Kirsty aims to make birding accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

Weekend Birder celebrates the stories and smarts of everyday people and their unique connections to birds. Independently produced and featuring short engaging episodes, the podcast equips listeners with the knowledge and skills they need to identify birds, understand their behaviours, and enjoy spending time outside.

At the time of writing, 89 podcasts in the series were available online. Their length varies, with some as brief as 15 minutes and others lasting nearly an hour. The most recent podcast, from 13 November 2024, was Kirsty's interview with Dr. Michelle Wille, a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Pathogen Genomics, University of Melbourne. The podcast is titled 'Avian Influenza - with Michelle - Get a gentle understanding of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)'. Other recent issues include 'Brush-turkeys' with Dr Ann Göth, 'Two Birders Two Bikes Return' with Leo Norman and Cezary Carmichael, and 'Where Song Began' with Tim Lowe. Closer to home, no. 79, on 5 June this year, was Latham's Snipe with Dr Birgita Hansen.

A set of birding hints is listed on her website under the heading 'How-Tos', and includes ID birds by sight, Use binoculars, Buy binoculars, Do a local big year, et cetera. 'What's on' and 'Places' pages may also be found at the Weekend Birder website. The podcasts are available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Pocket Casts, as well as online.

The **Atlas of Living Australia** continues to grow apace and improve the accessibility of its contents. As I have mentioned in previous columns, from time to time they host one-hour webinars on their website. One you may find particularly interesting was broadcast on 6 September 2024 titled **Exploring next-gen biodiversity detection technologies** <https://www.ala.org.au/blogs-news/ala-webinar-exploring-next-gen-biodiversity-detection-technologies/>. The speakers were Christine Chivas from Macquarie University, Matthew Luskin from WildObs at the University of Queensland, and Paul Roe from Queensland University of Technology:

Access to high-quality biodiversity data is more essential than ever in understanding and responding to changes in our natural environment. This information is used for informing planning, policy and decision-making and delivering research. Through the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA), more than 135 million species occurrence records are available as open data, with rich information accompanying these records such as images, location, spatial, genetic and related data.

By enhancing traditional methods to monitor species with novel technologies, a more comprehensive view of Australia's biodiversity can be developed. To celebrate Biodiversity Month in September, hear from three speakers as they discuss their use of ecoacoustics, eDNA and camera trapping as innovative methods to enhance our ability to detect and monitor biodiversity in Australia.

Turning to the global level, and staying on the theme of open-source big data, I was interested in the recent promotion of the **BirdLife International Data Zone** <https://datazone.birdlife.org/home>. It is an extensive online resource offering detailed information on bird species, their habitats, and conservation efforts worldwide. It serves as a central hub for data on:

- Species: comprehensive profiles of bird species, including their conservation status and distribution
- Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs): information on critical sites for bird conservation, identified using scientific criteria
- Country Profiles: summaries of bird conservation data and initiatives for various countries and territories, and
- Case Studies: examples of conservation projects and their outcomes.

One can request a download of species distribution data for non-commercial use in geodatabase format for use in GIS mapping software.

This platform supports researchers, conservationists, and policy-makers by providing access to up-to-date scientific data essential for informed decision-making in bird conservation. Some may find it a useful complement to the online Birds of the World <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home> and HANZAB <https://hanzab.birdlife.org.au/>.

Most Canberra-region birders would be aware of the Canberra Nature Map, part of the broader **NatureMapr** <https://naturemapr.org/>. Canberra Birds has long been one of its financial supporters. In mid-year, Aaron Clausen, NatureMapr's Co-founder and Platform Lead, posted the important news 'NatureMapr feed to DCCEEW Biodiversity Data Repository now live':

We are excited to announce that NatureMapr ACT based data has started to feed into the new Biodiversity Data Repository (BDR) being established by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

We are super proud of the fact that NatureMapr expert-verified biodiversity data is trusted as a high quality, reputable data source suitable for ingestion by the new BDR ... This new feed to the BDR represents yet another incremental achievement in NatureMapr's mission to empower anybody to report plant or animal information and ensure the information gets to the people that need to know about it - this is yet another pathway for your data to find its way directly to decision makers who will be also able to trust it.

The team responsible for the BDR (known as Environment Information Australia) are taking a really open minded and collaborative approach to its design and development and have been a pleasure to work and partner with. NatureMapr sees the BDR as a very important step forward for Australia.

If you haven't heard about the BDR before, you can check it out here <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/publications/biodiversity-data-repository>.

The full NatureMapr team of staff and volunteers are to be congratulated for the way they have not only developed the database and attracted contributions to it, but have also demonstrated its importance to a range of state and national data custodians, into whose repositories the Canberra Nature Map data are now being fed.

Acknowledgement: AI tools were used in the creation and drafting of this article.

T. alba

This column is available online at <http://canberrabirds.org.au/publications/canberra-bird-notes/>. There you can access the web sites mentioned here by clicking on the hyperlinks.

To join (subscribe to) the CanberraBirds email discussion list, send an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@lists.canberrabirds.org.au. To unsubscribe, either permanently or temporarily, send an email message to canberrabirds-unsubscribe@lists.canberrabirds.org.au. If you wish to re-subscribe after being unsubscribed temporarily, simply follow the 'subscribe' instructions above.

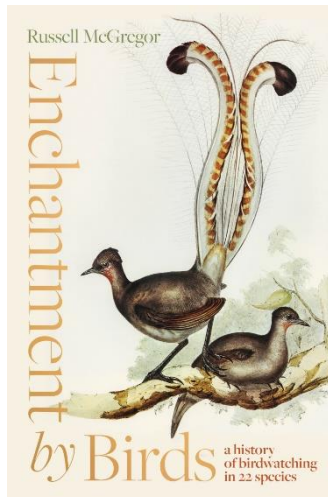
The CanberraBirds list's searchable archive is at <http://bioacoustics.cse.unsw.edu.au/archives/html/canberrabirds>

BOOK REVIEWS

Canberra Bird Notes 49(2) (2024): 146-148

***Enchantment by Birds: a history of birdwatching in 22 species.* By Russell McGregor.** Scribe, Melbourne, London, Minneapolis, October 2024, ISBN: 9781761381447, Paperback, 302 pp, A\$ 39.99.

Reviewed by KEVIN WINDLE, Pearce, ACT (Kevin.Windle@anu.edu.au)



The title and subtitle of Russell McGregor's book might lead one to expect treatment of birds and birdwatching world-wide, but a glance at the contents quickly reveals that that is not the case. While there is much in it to interest readers anywhere, its focus is firmly on Australian birds and the pursuit and study of them. The twenty-two species in question are all to be found in Australia, and most of them nowhere else. The work will be of particular interest to Canberra readers: we learn from the opening lines of Chapter One (p. 13), that the book had its genesis in the National Library of Australia, whose ornithological riches are 'almost overwhelming', like the city's bird life: 'Canberra must be the most bird-blessed national capital in the world.' It is 'the 'capital city of parrots', boasting a wide range of *Psittacidae*; the author notes our increasing numbers of Superb Parrots, and the fact that, while Gang-Gangs have been declared endangered in NSW, they remain 'common garden birds' in the ACT (p. 14). Canberra-based birders figure prominently in the text and the references.

McGregor brings much breadth of knowledge to his subject, having previously written a history of Australian field guides and a biography of Alec Chisholm, an early authority on the avifauna of the continent. Drawing on a large body of published sources, he brings together much fascinating material related to birds and ornithology in Australia, amateur and professional. The book is both a celebration of bird life and an investigation of birdwatching as a pastime in our part of the world. It is, as the subtitle foreshadows, a 'history', but a history without chronological structure, and at the same time more than a history. The genre, but not the method, owes something to analogous accounts of birdwatching and bird study in Britain and the USA. It adopts a novel approach: taking a selection of species in turn and using each one as a peg on which to hang a tale. The tales take us down many bird-related byways and offer a miscellany of historical and sociological material and reflections, reaching beyond the ornithological framework.

Some sample chapter headings with brief summaries will illustrate the method and the topics raised: 'Galah: Beauty' (Chapter 1) quotes Joseph Forshaw on the spectacular increase in numbers of this species in the ACT, where it was uncommon until urban and suburban development took hold. In some parts of the country it has been seen as an agricultural pest, so its innate beauty is often underappreciated. In the birdwatcher's mind's eye, aesthetic appeal and scarcity go hand in hand, which means that the charm of locally common species is apt to go unnoticed except by visitors.

'White-throated Gerygone: Melody' (Chapter 2) explores the music and magic of birdsong, taking its cue from the vocalisations of a species which has inspired musical compositions (p.

29), and once had the ‘dreadful moniker’ White-throated Flyeater (pp. 24-25). The author uses this chapter to remind us of the uniqueness of much Australian birdsong, once derided by British immigrants, and discuss the difficulty of representing it on paper. Systems such as sonograms and musical notation, along with verbal descriptions, are less than fully adequate for the purpose.

‘Paradise Parrot: Tragedy’ (Chapter 8) surveys the history of that species’ decline into extinction, and the effects of loss of habitat and human activity more broadly. It records Chisholm’s sterling efforts to protect endangered species, and takes up the historical question of the use of ‘skins’ versus sight records to authenticate records of rarities.

‘Jacky Winter: Names’ (Chapter 13) deals with vernacular nomenclature, a subject which perennially generates much heat, and changes often encounter resistance. In the case of the Jacky Winter, the previous ‘Australian Brown Flycatcher’ (discarded by the RAOU in 1926) may not have been widely lamented, but McGregor tells of some ornithologists who decried ‘childish names’.

‘Blue-faced Parrot Finch: Twitching’ (Chapter 15) examines the human sub-species now known as ‘twitchers’, to whom birdwatching is a competitive sport, and the history of a phenomenon made famous by the authority on the subject, Sean Dooley.

‘Rainbow Lorikeet: Feeding’ (Chapter 18) summarises the ongoing debate over the rights and wrongs of providing food for wild birds, a question which has a long history in Australia, as elsewhere.

‘Superb Fairy-wren: The Wild Near Home’ (Chapter 21, the concluding chapter) takes us back to Chapter 1 and the avian assets we tend to overlook, with a reminder that much dazzling bird life may be found on our urban and suburban doorsteps. One does not need to travel to remote corners of the continent to connect with nature. Neville Cayley’s ‘feathered jewels’, the various fairy-wrens easily found in the parks and gardens of Australia’s capital cities, amply exemplify this point, and McGregor reproduces Cayley’s painting ‘Spirit of Sydney’, of a Scarlet Honeyeater at its nest in suburban Sydney (1932).

This wide-ranging book is probably unique as a source on Australian bird study, its leading proponents, ornithological literature and organisations. Birdwatching is a fairly recent recreational activity; the term was coined only in 1901 (p. 59) and the pastime has its origins in the study of natural history in late Victorian days, a time when experts in the field were also avid consumers: bustards and broilgas made excellent eating, and some observers relished the eggs of Mallee Fowl and muttonbirds (pp. 54-55). In that brief historical span the evolution of birding has been rapid and the field of study itself has undergone much change, along with the bird life of the continent. McGregor provides an engaging survey, noting the advances of ornithological science and the contributions made by what is now known as ‘citizen science’, that is, by amateurs of varying stripes.

In the not-too-distant past, the scientific study of birds required ‘skins’, which entailed reducing the wild population, particularly of scarce species. McGregor tells of an RAOU ‘campout’ in 1935, when a ‘collector’, a museum curator, ‘shot a nesting Scarlet Robin in full view of the campers, ‘who [...] had been admiring the bird carrying out its parental duties’. Controversy continued to surround collecting much later in the twentieth century. A hundred years ago, tastes in fashion and home-furnishing led to great depredations, such as the mass slaughter of

egrets for their plumes, while stuffed specimens of many species, in domed glass cases, decorated homes and pubs. Happily, this is no longer so, and the once-popular pastime of egg-collecting has declined in recent decades. The ‘collectors’ of yore have been replaced by less predatory ‘hunters’: photographers armed with digital cameras and movie cameras.

McGregor describes the varieties of human encountered in the bird-fancying world, past and present, from collectors, taxidermists, aviculturists, photographers and travelling list-obsessed twitchers to professional ornithologists. He is, however, at pains to emphasise that this taxonomy is unsatisfactory and the terms ‘slippery’ (p. 11), because the categories overlap, along with the motivation of the sub-types, whose aims may diverge, but often coincide. Few twitchers lack appreciation of the object of their interest; the photographers may prioritise aesthetics, while accumulating much valuable bird lore beyond the reach of other observers; and many professional ornithologists developed their scientific interest having first succumbed to the ‘enchantment’ of McGregor’s title. And few categories, including the scientists, are immune to some degree of anthropomorphism, which is no longer viewed as sternly as it once was.

The many illustrations are chosen to serve particular purposes: some are representative of bird-related art, of which Australia can claim some outstanding practitioners; others show us masterpieces of avian photography (the work of Raoul Slater, for example); yet others display the evolution of bird portraiture in field guides for purposes of identification.

Few angles of a vast subject are left unexplored. Some of the apparently unlikely sites favoured by eager birders are featured, with mention of the ‘romance of the sewage plant’ and Sean Dooley’s ‘car park lorikeet’ (p. 258). Space is allocated to such imponderable questions as the bird’s eye view of the human observer. ‘What does the Galah see? [...] We’ll never know quite what the bird makes of us. [...] Galahs – like all birds – will remain forever other to we [sic] humans. That’s part of their attractiveness’ (p. 23).

It is perhaps unfair to try to indicate omissions, as these may extend beyond the author’s intended scope. However, had the 22 species of the title been increased by one, a fuller account of the saga of the Night Parrot would have been welcome. It is summarised in a few sentences (pp. 114-115), and the main protagonist, John Young, appears in Chapter 19, ‘Golden-shouldered Parrot’ (p. 230), but not in the paragraphs on the Night Parrot. Perhaps the view was taken that little remained to add to the investigation of that controversial story by Canberra’s own Penny Olsen.

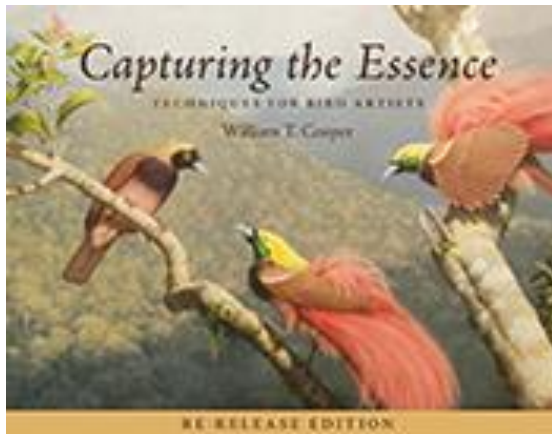
Bird-banding, which might be considered important, involving both scientists and licensed amateurs, is conspicuous by its absence.

These matters aside, the author and his publisher have left the reviewer little opportunity to cavil. At occasional points, Scribe’s copy-editor might have effected small grammatical repairs, and the index would have benefited from some amplification. At first sight it appears comprehensive, as it needs to be, but searches reveal lacunae: nests, eggs and related topics (egg-collecting, nest-robbing) are covered in the text (pp. 37-39, 52-54, 76-78), but neither ‘nests’ nor ‘eggs’ can be found in the index. Recourse to related terms will lead to ‘Oology’ and ‘Collecting, ornithological and oological’, but some readers might prefer a more obvious route. The aforementioned John Young and Penny Olsen, present in the text and notes, are not listed in the index. Such quibbles, however, can easily be remedied in a revised edition, and they detract little from an extremely rewarding and thought-provoking volume.

A re-release of William T. Cooper's guide for aspiring wildlife and nature artists

***Capturing the Essence: Techniques for Bird Artists.* By William T. Cooper.** CSIRO Publishing June 2024. ISBN 9781486318612. Hardback, 128pp, AU\$59.99

Reviewed by KIM FARLEY and MARION FARLEY, Phillip ACT 2606
(kimlouisfarley@gmail.com; mfarley653@gmail.com)



William Cooper and Canberra Birds share a special link. Our logo and the cover of *Canberra Bird Notes* feature Bill's charming drawing of a Gang-gang Cockatoo, created for us in 1979.

Beginning his career as a sea and landscape artist, William Cooper later turned his considerable talents to birds, his first love. His skill in sea and landscape art always informed his bird work, with his beautiful and accurately painted birds appearing in equally beautiful and accurately painted habitats. By the time of his death in 2015, William Cooper was one of the world's foremost

bird painters and illustrators, the author of many books and the painter of very beautiful art works of birds. His work has been purchased by institutions and collectors around the world.

Capturing the Essence: Techniques for Bird Artists, was first published in 2011 and has been re-released this year. It includes a tribute to William Cooper from Peter Marsack, himself a highly talented painter of Australian birds.

What makes this book different from a general work on painting and drawing is Bill's very wise advice to artists to spend time really getting to know their bird subjects. Watching and learning how different species move, their postures and behaviour will, says Bill, produce artwork that will be more true to the unique character of the species. This advice could just as usefully be given to new birders – "learning" birds being one of the many pleasures of birding.

The book is divided into two parts. The first covers the basics of bird painting, including art materials, principles of painting, bird anatomy for artists and ideas for building skills through sketching from life. The second part is a series of "how to" chapters, each chapter showing how a painting is created, with examples in watercolour, acrylics and oils. Each stage of each work is described and illustrated.

These reviewers loved the sections on how to draw feet, bills, wings and feathers, with multiple types of feet, bills, wings and feathers painted and drawn in exquisite detail. Another section covers the backgrounds to bird art and gives tips for painting and drawing habitats, fruits, flowers, branches and lichens.

This book would make a lovely present, and is suited to beginner bird artists as well as artists experienced in other subjects but new to bird art. Highly recommended.

Canberra Bird Notes 49(2) (2024): 150-151

Living with Wildlife: A Guide for Our Homes and Backyards. By Tanya Loos. CSIRO Publishing, November 2024. ISBN 9781486311486316946, Paperback, 208pp., RRP \$39.99.

Reviewed by DENISE KAY, Giralang ACT 2617 (denisekay49@gmail.com)



Tanya Loos is an inspiring ecologist from central Victoria and commentator on Australian Wildlife who has published in Cosmopolitan Magazine, Wildlife Australia and Australian Birdlife.

She dedicates this wonderful book ‘to our Australian Wildlife, navigating the challenges of our shared landscape and to all those people working to care for them.’ It is full of practical advice and guidance from the beginning.

For every animal covered in this book Tanya provides location, season and species. She discusses perceived risks and offers practical, achievable solutions.

There are three sections to the book. It starts in the house, with bats and possums in the roof. Many Canberrans will have fond memories of possums romping above them while trying to get to sleep. This section features frogs in the toilet, birds hitting windows, wombats under the house, and cockatoos eating the eaves. Spiders and rats are also discussed, and the consequences of poisons explained.

The second section deals with the backyard: the old cockatoo with feather loss (beak and feather or psittacosis), flying foxes and possums eating fruit, blue-tongued lizards, bandicoots and kangaroos. Advice is given on protecting chickens from predators and venomous snakes, on looking after baby birds out of the nest, as well echidnas in the yard.

These are all Canberran experiences. Many members of the public are terrified of blue tongues and want them removed, not to mention snakes.

The third section deals with wildlife in trouble and how and when to help. It covers injured, orphaned and unwell animals, including injuries caused by fruit-tree netting, and the pros and cons of feeding wildlife. There are recommendations concerning extreme weather and how to help wild animals in the parks surrounding our houses.

As our Australian wildlife now live in habitats that are shrinking daily, if we value what is left of this ancient country, we need to encourage our wider community to embrace the uniqueness of this continent. I really do not know if this can be done but I think this little guide will provide our community with some tools to deal with to protect the uniqueness and beauty of our superb wildlife.

It is a Canberra book. We all know someone who will love it. I would love to make it compulsory reading for everyone.

The following endorsement from Dr Phil Tucak, Wildlife Outreach Vet, is eloquent:

Every household in Australia would benefit from reading this brilliant book to optimise how we can all live successfully alongside wildlife. Wherever you live in Australia, our wildlife is often nearby – and sometimes right outside, or even inside our homes. Embracing interactions with wildlife can be wonderful, from birds flying by, to possums climbing above, and wombats, lizards or bandicoots wandering through.

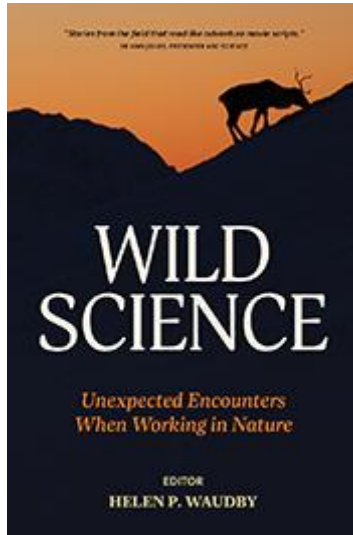
Living with Wildlife: A Guide for Our Homes and Backyards provides practical information and advice on common wildlife encounters, explaining animal behaviour, potential risks to be aware of, along with actions and science-based solutions to ensure we can all co-exist positively – as our shared environment is their habitat too.

Advocating for a wildlife-friendly approach, the information in this delightful book will inspire and educate – whether you're wanting to learn more about the species living around our homes, or to gain valuable insights into assisting wildlife that may be injured or displaced.

Canberra Bird Notes 49(2) (2024): 152-153

Wild Science: Unexpected Encounters when Working in Nature. Edited by **Helen P. Waudby**. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne. November 2024. ISBN878148317639, Paperback, 216 pp., RRP A\$36.99.

Reviewed by **STEVE HOLLIDAY**, Ainslie ACT 2602 (pruesteve@inet.net.au)



Time in the field is something birders do as a matter of course but what if field work is part of your job? This new collection from CSIRO Publishing is a set of essays by twenty-five different scientists relating interesting, amusing and occasionally alarming anecdotes that have occurred while they have been in the field. The majority are from those studying animals, although there are also single stories from fungi and carnivorous plant researchers. Mammals form the basis for the bulk of the stories but birds, reptiles, frogs, fish and invertebrates also feature. While some stories focus on the study organisms, others concentrate on events, sometimes dangerous, that have impacted time in the field, such as getting bogged, floods, or incidents involving other humans. The landscapes involved are equally varied, from urban parks and gardens to the East African savannah, from coral reefs to the sandstone escarpments of the

Kimberley and much more. Indigenous viewpoints, the importance of citizen science, how to do field work with small children tagging along, and how to properly plan for any eventuality are all discussed. Andrew Derocher from the University of Alberta particularly stresses the latter, understandable given his study subjects are Polar and Grizzly Bears!

Although this is an Australian production, and many of the researchers and their subjects are Australian, there are also tales from New Zealand, the UK, the Arctic, Amazonia, Africa, India and the USA. I was interested to learn that ANU's Rob Heinsohn, whom I know from his work on birds such as White-winged Choughs and Eclectus Parrots amongst other species, did his PhD in the Serengeti, studying lions. His rather alarming tale relates to a couple of narrow escapes while he was there. Chris Dickman is a familiar name from his work on Australian mammals, but here, due to visa issues, he returns to the UK (his country of birth) to complete a PhD studying the diet of foxes and hedgehogs in suburban Oxford. The resulting anecdotes are very funny. You won't believe some of the stuff that foxes will eat.

David Watson's (of Charles Sturt University) story involves a trip to Amazonia studying birds. A disturbing encounter in a river gets him pondering the varying detectability of animals, and how to increase detection rates of cryptic species, an incident that he says changed the way he thought about his science. Sometimes the search might fail to find what you are looking for but turn up something almost as interesting, as frog expert Jodi Rowley finds.

Bird stories are few but entertaining. The species in question are birds with character: Erika Roper relates stories of encounters with cockatoos; Lydia McLean's study subject, the New Zealand Kea, provides predictably amusing material. I was especially taken by Isabel Castro's stories of some other New Zealand endemics: the Hihi (Stitchbird) and Tieke (North Island Saddleback) have some fascinating behaviours and sound like good subjects for a whole book. Kiwis also feature in her story.

I did have a couple of slight misgivings. On more than one occasion I felt I was only getting the tip of the iceberg and wished that the story had been longer. Although we do get a very brief biography of each contributor, I would have liked a short list of references relevant to each person's research, as it would be good to read more about the results of some of this work. These are minor quibbles however. Overall *Wild Science* is a very enjoyable and enlightening read. Despite the issues that can arise in the course of being in the field, people are doing what they love and it shows in their writing.

.

***Plantabulous! More A to Z of Australian Plants.* By Catherine Clowes. Illustrated by Rachel Gyan.** CSIRO Publishing. June 2024. ISBN: 9781486317202 Hardback. 64pp. AU \$29.99. Also available as ePDF ISBN: 9781486317219 and ePUB ISBN: 9781486317226 from eRetailers.

Reviewed by JANETTE LENZ, Lyneham, ACT 2602 (lenz.michael.janette@gmail.com)

PLANTABULOUS!
 MORE
A T O Z O
 AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

WRITTEN BY CATHERINE CLOWES
 ILLUSTRATED BY RACHEL GYAN

- Packed with fascinating facts about Australian native plants.
- Provides a *Plantabulous Activity* for each featured species.
- Explains traditional indigenous uses for some plants.
- Includes common plants with wide distributions to help in discovering more about local flora.
- Includes bright and beautiful illustrations for easy identification of plants out in the wild.
- Is a fabulous companion book from the amazing team behind *Plantastic – A to Z of Australian Plants*.

After the Contents there is a useful section on How to Use this Book and a map at the end shows which plants might be found in seven specific ecoregions across Australia. The scientific basis for each of these ecosystems (eg. montane grasslands, tropical and subtropical shrublands, sclerophyll forests) is not explained. On the other hand, each plant's scientific name is given along with phonetic pronunciation and also a list of many of the Indigenous names. The Glossary does contain many useful definitions.

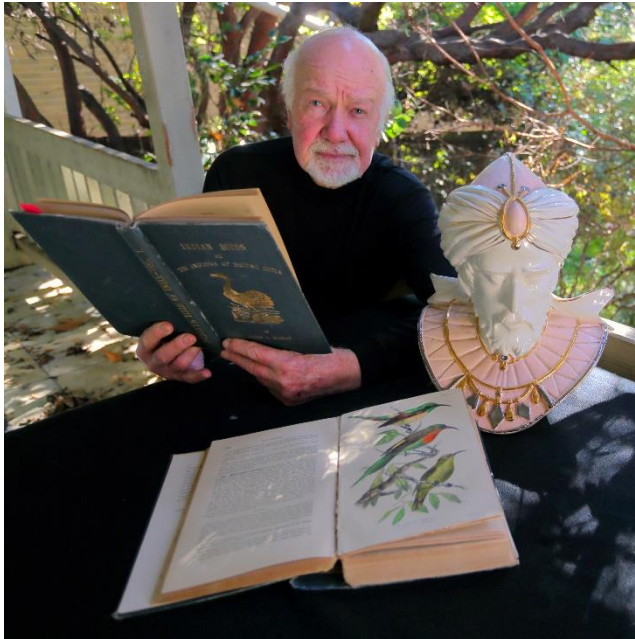
As someone with an interest in botany, I enjoyed this book, but I did wonder that the recommended reading age is 6-12. Even with the rider that reading age is often not delineated by actual age, the relatively small print size and complexity of the text did not seem to match the 'picture book' format. The book seemed to be a somewhat uneasy juggling of information with 'quirky' facts to maintain the interest of young readers.

Catherine Clowes is a biodiversity officer specialising in systemic botany and her interest and obvious wish to pass on her knowledge of Australian native plants is evident in the way the writing tries to be inclusive.

However, the illustrations are what makes me recommend this book. Rachel Gyan is (quote) “passionate about artful storytelling”. The textually important parts of the plants are drawn simply and colourfully, which could allow a budding botanist to name them, even if information on their relative size or growth habit is missing and a ‘fabulous’ fact is given instead.

THE 2024 RECIPIENT OF THE STEVE WILSON MEDAL – GEOFFREY DABB

At the General Meeting on 13 November 2024 Geoffrey Dabb was awarded the Steve Wilson Medal, following assessment by the Steve Wilson Medal Committee (Neil Hermes, Sue Lashko, Jack Holland)

GEOFFREY DABB

Geoffrey joined COG in 1989 with some background in bird matters having been a member of the New Guinea Bird Society and the Chevy Chase (Washington DC area) chapter of the Audubon Society. Over the years since then he has given help to successive COG committees on a number of legal and procedural issues.

He has also been a representative of community interests on the committee of the Canberra Birds Conservation Fund.

After retirement he took a keen interest in the early possibilities of digital video to capture bird action, and his video productions with informative commentary have been shown to COG audiences and many groups around Canberra, for educational purposes. His imaginative value-adding to still photos has led to the less serious side of bird study being appreciated by a wide public.

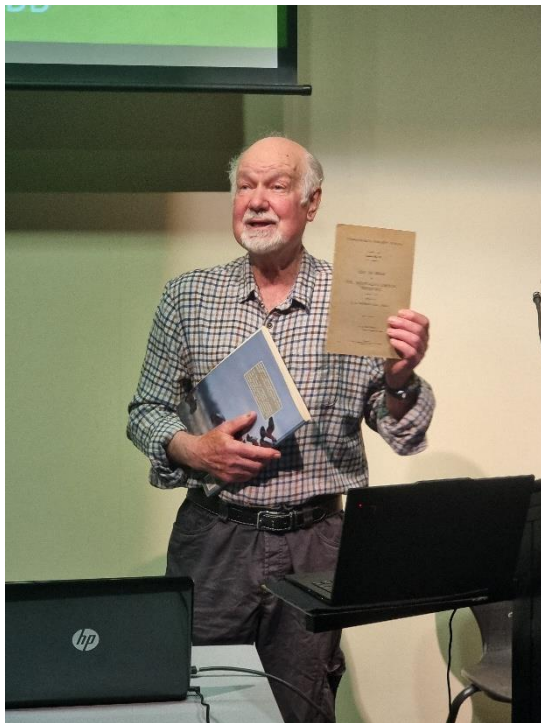
His contributions by way of talks (many to COG/Canberra Birds audiences, often at short notice) and written contributions have drawn on his long-standing interest in bird names, and his time as convenor of the BirdLife Australia English Names Committee.

It has been rumoured that Geoffrey has also been responsible for contributions to Canberra Bird Notes as the columnist 'Stentoreus', but the editor and Geoffrey himself have a firm position of 'neither confirm nor deny', so that remains only a possibility that cannot be confirmed at the present time.

Photos:

Top: Photo made available by Geoffrey Dabb to the Selection Committee;

Bottom: Geoffrey Dabb speaking after having received the Steve Wilson Medal (Photo: Julie Hotchin).



RARITIES PANEL NEWS**ENDORSED LIST 105, DECEMBER 2024**

The undoubted highlight of this report is the observation and photographing of a female Forest Kingfisher at Gibraltar Forest in October. Initially reported on ebird by Christine Darwood (see also this issue, pp. 136-138), the bird was subsequently seen and photographed by many. The Rarities Panel has received a number of reports of Forest Kingfishers over the years but has not endorsed any until this one. Most relied on colour, and indeed the Forest's upperparts are generally a darker and more vivid blue than those of the closely related (and more common here) Sacred Kingfisher. Seen in flight, the white patches on the inner primaries of the Forest Kingfisher are diagnostic. What this bird was doing here is a mystery as Canberra is well out of its normal northern coastal summer range.

The Pacific Golden Plover is a rare, non-breeding migrant to the ACT. Steve Wilson in his *Birds of the ACT: two centuries of change* reported that the first observation of the species in the ACT was at Jerrabomberra Wetlands in 1966, where most subsequent observations have been made. This particular bird was seen and photographed by many birders for a number of weeks (see photos, p.158).

A Black-tailed Native-hen was again reported from Mulligans Flat on 2 November and was still there in early December. Reports also came from Ginninderra Creek and Franklin Ponds. Being a dispersive and irruptive species, it can and does turn up in our area from time to time.

One highly unexpected species was drawn to the Panel's attention – the possible sighting of a vagrant Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* at Googong Dam on 12 November. This was referred to Birds Australia's Rarities Committee.

Other species on the Panel's rarities list have been reported in the previous six months but have not been singled out for comment as they are becoming obviously less "rare" and will in all probability be removed from the list at its next revision. Examples are the Blue-faced Honeyeater and the Channel-billed Cuckoo.

ENDORSED LIST 105, DEC 2024**Pacific Golden Plover** (*Pluvialis fulva*)

1, 11 Nov 24, Elliot Overs, Fyshwick Sewage Treatment Plant (see photos p. 81)

Black-tailed Native-hen (*Tribonyx ventralis*)

1, 2 Nov 24, M. Nikulin, Mulligans Flat NR

Forest Kingfisher (*Todiramphus macleayi*)

1, 13 Oct 24, Christine Darwood, Gibraltar Forest

Barbara Allan (allanbm@bigpond.net.au)

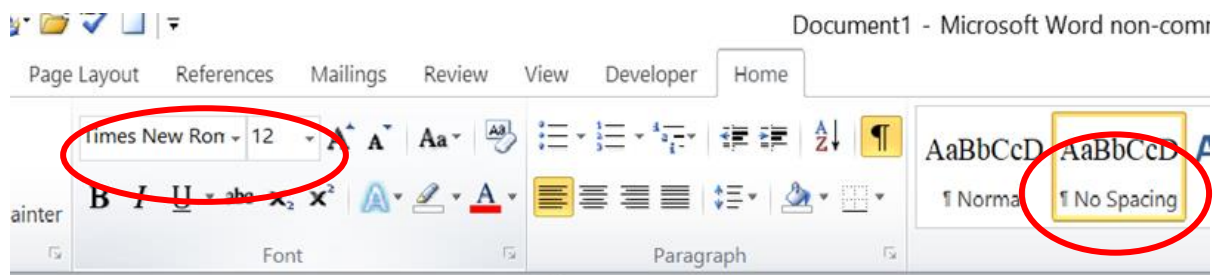


Pacific Golden Plover, Fyshwick Sewage Treatment Plant, 12 Nov 2024. The bird often kept company with some Masked Lapwings (all photos by John Hurrell).

Canberra Bird Notes

Canberra Bird Notes is published three times a year by the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc. and is edited by Michael Lenz and Kevin Windle. Major articles of up to 5000 words are welcome on matters relating to the biology, status, distribution, behaviour or identification of birds in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding region. Please discuss any proposed major contribution in advance. Shorter notes, book reviews and other contributions are also encouraged. All contributions should be sent to one of those email addresses: CBN@canberrabirds.org.au or michael.lenz.birds@gmail.com

Please submit contributions in *Times New Roman*, with 12-point Font Size and 'No Spacing' (see illustration below):



Please note that the views expressed in the articles published in *Canberra Bird Notes* are those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Responses to the views expressed in CBN articles are always welcome and will be considered for publication as letters to the editor.

Information specifically for contributors to Canberra Bird Notes regarding copyright and dissemination of contents COG publishes CBN in digital formats, including as pdf files on COG's website, as well as in printed format. Copyright in the contents of CBN is retained by individual contributors, not by COG as publisher. In addition, COG has entered into an agreement with EBSCO Information Services for CBN to be included in the international online journal database Academic Search Ultimate (<https://www.ebsco.com/products/research-databases/academic-searchultimate>) available to libraries and others. This provides increased exposure of CBN articles to Australian and international readers. Contributors of material published in CBN are requested to provide written permission for their contributions to be indexed by EBSCO Information Services. Enquiries can be directed to cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au. version 2: 25 August 2022, published 31 August 2022 Version 3: 21 September 2023 Copyright in the contents of CBN is retained by the individual contributors, not by the publisher, the Canberra Ornithologists Group, Inc. (COG). COG publishes CBN in digital formats, including as pdf files at COG's website, as well as in the printed format.

In addition, COG has entered into an agreement with the firm EBSCO Information Services for them to include CBN in their international online journals database Academic Search Ultimate. Information on this database is available online at <https://www.ebscohost.com/academic/academic-search-ultimate>. This means that the contents of CBN are indexed by EBSCO Information Services and included in the databases that they make available to libraries and others, providing increased exposure of its contents to Australian and international readers. Contributors of material published in CBN are requested to provide written permission for their contributions to be indexed by EBSCO Information Services.

We refer to ‘contributors’ rather than ‘authors’ as sometimes we publish photographs, as well as written content.

CANBERRA BIRD NOTES 49(2) DECEMBER 2024

Observations of White-throated Nightjars in the ACT February-April 2024

Zebedee Muller and Luke Downey 85

Australian Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus dubius*) – behaviour updated

Steven Wallace..... 91

Noisy Miners and Common Mynas in suburban Canberra in spring 2024

Geoffrey Dabb 108

Evidence of polygamy in the Tawny Frogmouth

Stuart Rae 132

Notes

A Forest Kingfisher visits Canberra

Christine Darwood..... 136

Columnist's Corner

East is East, and so is West sometimes: the usefulness of directional bird names

Stentoreus 139

Birding in Cyberspace, Canberra style *T. alba* 143

Book Review

Enchantment by Birds: a History of Birdwatching in 22 Species. By Russell McGregor

Kevin Windle..... 146

Capturing the Essence: Techniques for Bird Artists. By William T. Cooper.

Kim Farley and Marion Farley..... 149

Living with Wildlife: A Guide for Our Homes and Backyards. By Tanya Loos

Denise Kay 150

Wild Science: Unexpected Encounters when Working in Nature.

Edited by Helen P. Waudby

Steve Holliday..... 152

Plantabulous! More A to Z of Australian Plants. By Catherine Clowes. Illustrated by Rachel Gyan

Janette Lenz 154

The 2024 recipient of the Steve Wilson Medal – Geoffrey Dabb..... 156

Rarities Panel News and Endorsed List 105..... 157