



Canberra bird notes

No. 13 Price 25c.
October 1971

EDITORIAL

This issue marks the end of the first volume of Canberra Bird Notes. Two factors are responsible for the unlikely figure of 13 numbers for Vol. 1. One was the irregular publication of the first few issues. The second was an early decision to publish consecutive numbers, without volumes. This decision has been reversed since many readers have stated they would like to have their Bird Notes bound. Subsequent volumes will be of eight numbers each, beginning with Vol. 2 No. 1 in January 1972. The accompanying index to Nos. 1 to 13 indicates the wide diversity of material being in published Canberra Bird Notes. Contributions from members have once again dwindled of late, and I am soliciting articles for publication. Our membership includes several professional ornithologists yet their names have still to appear as contributors in this journal. Amateur bird watchers have been my mainstay, and may I say here that their efforts are very much appreciated. The equation is simple: no copy = no journal.

HIRUNDINE ROAD CASUALTIES

Ellen M, McCulloch

In the July 1970 issue (CBN No. 8) some details of dead birds found on roads. Below are observations.

As well as finding food on the road itself and on the roadside verges, some species sun themselves on the surface, and some shelter there in windy weather if the road is in flat country and is protected by high grass.

Late one afternoon I saw 30 or more Welcome Swallows Hirundo neoxena sunning themselves on a gravel road. When cars approached they flew off a few feet, then returned, and during the next hour there were always some birds on the road, in a stretch of about 100 yards. It was not a busy thoroughfare, and I did not see any casualties (avian or otherwise).

On January 23, 1971 I noticed a number of Fairy Martins Petrochelidon ariel flying about a culvert under the road to Waratah Bay, on the southern Victorian coast. Investigation showed they were nesting inside the culvert. Strong gusty winds blew continually and all the martins flew low.

Later in the week I stopped to watch, and saw three bodies on the road. A number of individuals perched low on the wire fence, and I could see many were young birds - with paler heads, lighter backs and wings and greyer breasts. On examining the bodies I found all three to be juveniles with flesh-brown legs and beaks and yellow gape 'hinge'.

The next day on the way home we found another four young birds dead, plus one adult. As we watched we saw that numbers of young birds (no adults) were squatting on the sandy road, facing into the wind, presumably there because it was warmer. When cars came along, the birds usually flew off for about five minutes, then returned to the same few square yards of road. Obviously some were not quick enough off the mark.

So many martin colonies breed in culverts and drains under country roads that this cause of mortality may be exceptionally high in this species.

6, Bullen Avenue, Mitcham, VIC.

COMPOSITION AND SIZE OF KING PARROT FLOCKS

Val Jenkins, Peter Gowland,

Tony Stokes

We experienced a beautiful spectacle from 1430 to 1440 hrs on April 26, 1971 in a row of five trees below the Cotter Dam spillway, A.C.T. Some 120 to 130 King Parrots Aprosmictus scapularis were congregated there forming a huge flock and allowing approach to within 20 metres. Possibly because of the overcast and showery weather they were fairly tame, with some feeding on the ground but the majority preening in the trees. The size of the flock was arrived at by counting it in strips. It was checked three times, and the result was not more than 15 more or less than the number given. Most of the birds appeared to be in tail moult.

cont/-

The lack of adult males was most noticeable a group of about 60 individuals we counted only 11. This gives a ratio of males to females (and immature?) of about 1:6.

Forshaw (1969) says of this species: "...in Autumn immatures tend to band together in flocks of to twenty or thirty "birds."

It is generally known that these birds will attack certain crops in numbers large enough to create an economic liability. S.J. Wilson (pers. comm) has seen flocks of up to 1000 birds in maize crops near Bateman's Bay on the N.S.W. South Coast.

The species has been recorded in the A.C.T. only in the winter months, and its status here is generally given as uncommon. The largest flock seen in the territory and reported to Wilson comprised 42 birds.

One of us (T.S.) counted 54 King Parrots on a nature strip near the Yarralumla shopping centre, A.C.T. at 1415 hrs on July 23, 1971. In this instance there was only one adult male.

Reference

Forshaw, J.M., 1969. Australian Parrots. Melbourne - Landsdowne Press.

116, Badgery Street, Macquarie, A.C.T.

FIELD RECOGNITION OF TWO WARBLERS

S.J. Wilson

Little Thornbill Acanthiza nanaBrown Weebill Smicrornis brevirostris

These two small birds are very difficult to tell apart by sight alone, even with binoculars. The best diagnostic features are the voice and habits, which are outlined below.

	<u>Little Thornbill</u>	<u>Brown Weebill</u>
Length	10 cm.	9 cm
Upperparts	Dull olivegreen	Dull olivebrown
Underparts	Yellow	Yellowish buff; white tip to tail.
Bill	Thin and long.	Thick and blunt.
Habitat	Prefers wattles; open forest and scrub.	Prefers eucalypts; open forest.
Habits	Works through the upper branches.	Hovers in taking food from outer leaves.
Call	A quiet 'tin-tin' little variation.	Very loud, often harsh, leading to the typical call 'Winnie-weildt'; variable.

Scott Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

ORNITHOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHIES

Sir,

With the cooperation of 'bird people' everywhere, I hope to compile brief biographies of those who have made a contribution to Australasian ornithology. To give the work added value it is also proposed to include bibliographies of work published, building upon them as the occasion arises in order to keep them up to date. This file would then provide a valuable source of reference material to anyone requiring the information.

I plan to continue H.M. Whittell's "The Literature of Australian Birds" (Peterson Brokensha, Perth, 1954), taking up in 1950 where he left off, and carrying it through to 1975; thus adding 25 years to the work.

Some thought is also being given to recording the present location of field notebooks, manuscript material, early photographs and other relevant archival matter, held by individuals and institutions. I would be most grateful to hear from anyone holding such material.

465 Murray Road,

West Preston,

Yours,

VIC 3072
Archivist.

(Mrs) Tess Kloot, RAOU

BOOK REVIEW

Index to Current Australian Ornithological Research

Douglas De Dow (Editor). RAOU, Melbourne

The expressed purpose of this Index is to provide a ready guide to ornithological research currently being undertaken in Australia by amateurs and professionals alike. It is hoped that its wide circulation would promote contact between ornithologists with common interests, and avoid duplication of research projects.

The Index was compiled from questionnaires sent to all persons in Australia known to be studying birds, as well as to overseas workers whose research is relevant to this region. The bulk of it consists of entries in alphabetical order, setting out the name, address, the species or other taxa being studied, research interests and current projects of each individual. This is cross-indexed wherever possible. The style is somewhat variable - some entries being rather conversational and spoken in the first person.

The seven appendices that supplement the main Index are very comprehensive, and a credit to the editor. They include Orders and families, and the scientific and vernacular names of the birds under study - the first in taxonomic order, the others alphabetically; an index to research interests and types of investigation; a list of contributors grouped by region; and a bibliography of the publications in which results of research have been written up.

cont/-

Obviously, a publication such as this "Index has built-in obsolescence, and would need to be constantly revised and brought up to date. A 'next edition' is mentioned briefly in the Introduction, but no definite dates are given.

One hopes that this well-conceived project will not lapse through lack of finance or other causes, for it is assuredly a very useful indicator of what is going on in Australian ornithology. Every serious student of birds should have access to one, especially those who are inclined to reside in ivory towers.

The Index contains 112 pages.

AHD

JAMES FISHER MEMORIAL APPEAL

Seabirds and their island homes were the great passion of James Fisher, who died tragically in a car accident in England a short time ago. In his memory, his friends throughout the English-speaking world and the organisations with which he was associated are launching an appeal to provide money to purchase or safeguard an important seabird island off the coast of the British Isles.

All those who recognise the value of his work are asked to send a contribution to the James Fisher Memorial Appeal, c/o The World Wildlife Fund (J.F.), Plumtree Court, London, E.C.4

C.O.G. ACTIVITIESJuly 14

Dr Harry Recher of the Australian Museum gave a talk on the Lord Howe Island Survey now being conducted by biologists at the request of the Island Board in anticipation of major tourist development there.

He illustrated the talk with slides of the scenery, fauna and flora of Lord Howe, Ball's Pyramid and nearby islets. Detailed studies are being made of the vegetation, spiders, insects snails and birds. Maps of their distribution are being prepared in order to determine which areas should be protected.

The island has suffered from the introduction of mice, rats, cats, dogs, pigs, goats, owls and several kinds of trees, shrubs and weeds. The goats are being shot out and the rats are being controlled by poisoning. Much remains to be done to prevent further ravages by man and introduced pests, so that the island's native charm may be retained.

August 18

Bird-handing in Asia is still at a very undeveloped stage, and future prospects have not become any brighter since the recent winding-up of the Migratory Animal Pathological Survey - an international effort which has banded birds in sites ranging from the top of a rugged mountain range in the Philippines to a crowded main street in Tokyo.

cont/-

The main objective was to discover a relationship between bird movements and the distribution of certain diseases. Secondary studies have established what segments of avian populations migrate and how far they move; the specificity of many species of ectoparasites, and other important facts.

Dr H. Elliott McClure, a visiting American scientist, gave a well illustrated talk on the operations and achievements of MAPS. He showed slides of banding, activities in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Thailand. The banders in the audience were all eyes- and ears as some novel trapping techniques were illustrated. 1

September 15

Dr Vernon Harris of the ANU Department of Zoology gave a talk on the seabirds of Skokholm, a small island off the coast of Wales. He explained that he had stayed at the Edward Grey Institute's bird observatory there to collect *Harpecticoides* - and only he knows what these are. He showed some coloured drawings which looked like rather flamboyant Trilobites.

After slides of the landing, the observatory and scenery, Dr Harris showed studies of the following sea-birds and their nesting habitats: Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Herring Gull, Lesser Blackbacked Gull, Kittiwake, Razorbill, Guillemot and Puffin. We were also shown slides of the nest and egg of a Storm Petrel, and of the Common, Black-headed and Greater Blackbacked Gulls.

These birds are threatened by the nearby development of large oil refineries, and by the sonic booms of the Concorde.

The lecture ended with tape-recordings of seabird calls.

September 19

The 12 members and friends who took part in the outing to Molonglo Gorge were treated to spectacular scenery and some rock clambering. But the bird list was poor - the main interest being a flock of about 20 Red-browed Finches which were observed at close quarters!

A kestrel soaring above the gorge was soon under scrutiny through a barrage of binoculars.

The presence of carp and an Eastern Water Dragon in Molonglo River indicated that it is not as hopelessly polluted as is generally thought. Moorhens, however, which are common a few miles downstream, were absent!

COMING MEETINGS

October 13 Mr Donald Trounson will speak on the Photo Index of Australian Birds and his own techniques in bird photography

November 5 Mr Arnold McGill will give a talk on "Gulls and Terns." Mr McGill has written several bird guides for the Bird Observers Club and is widely known for his latest book -Australian Warblers. Note: This meeting is on the first Friday in November to take advantage of Mr McGill's presence in Canberra.

Both the above meetings will be held at the CSIEO Lecture Theatre, Black Mountain, at 8 p.m.

November 6 An outing to the Brindabella is being organised. Further details may be obtained from Mark Clayton (telephone 489737 a.h.)

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All contributions for publication should be addressed to the Editor.

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