



Canberra a bird notes

No.2 November 1968

EDITORIAL

We are pleased to announce that the first issue of "Canberra Bird Notes" received sufficient support in the form of \$1 subscriptions to ensure its continuation, for a year at least. Thank you for your interest. It is curious to note that only about half of our subscribers are A.C.T. Members of the R.A.O.U.

It will be our policy to keep the contents predominantly local in flavour. However, by "local" we consider it reasonable that the south-eastern corner of N.S.W. as well as the A.C.T. should be included. In addition, we shall print short notes, etc. of a more general nature which may otherwise go unpublished in our more established ornithological journals. So far, our request for material has met with only one response, "Birdlife in a Canberra Pinewood" by Anthony d'Andria, which we include in this issue. The next issue will be largely taken up with the Annual Bird Report for 1967-68, so making it an extra large part, but we are already looking for material for No. 4, so how about it.

As we have no more monthly meetings until February and the next issue of "Canberra Bird Notes" will not appear until late in the same month, we wish you a merry Christmas and good birding for the season.

BIRDLIFE IN A CANBERRA PINWOOD

By Anthony d'Andria.

During early 1966 I made a series of visits to the pine plantation at Majura Road, A.C.T. to survey the bird life present. The dates of my visits were as follows:

Jan, 7 and 21; Feb. 4 and 21; March 7 and 18; Apr. 1. Each survey was made in the afternoon between 1445 and 1545 hours.

This 388-acre stand of *Pinus radiata* is over 20 years old, having been planted between 1945 and 1947. The trees are now quite mature and all of uniform height - about 75 feet. They grow on both sides of Majura Road, rising up a gentle slope towards Mount Majura on the west. There is a sharp demarcation between the orderly rows of pines and the dense native vegetation higher up the slope.

A gravel road runs across the plantation as far as its western boundary, where it intersects the second of two cross-tracks. Each bird-count was made by walking quietly up the road as far as this intersection. Most birds were actually observed with 7 x 50 binoculars. Others were often identified by sound alone, e.g. Raven, Golden Whistler.

The range of avian habitat in a forest of this kind is relatively limited. There is no undergrowth the forest floor being littered with pine needles, dead tree-limbs and cones. Fungi of various kinds were noted here and there, growing out of dead wood or on the ground. The few clearings in the area are grassed, but even here a shrub layer is absent. In summer the water in the two dams is slimy with green algal growth.

The following is an annotated list of the birds observed in this area during the period referred to:

Brown Goshawk (Jan.7 & 21; Feb. 4). The three sightings were of one adult and two flying young of this species perched about 30 feet up in the trees. The young were streaked with dark brown on the underparts. They frequently uttered a musical whistling call, rising in pitch towards the end. The adult hawk was remarkably tame, and did not budge even when being viewed from the foot of the tree. It was closely barred on the breast and belly, and appeared small enough to be the male.

Wedge-tailed Eagle (Jan.7). Included on the strength of one bird seen flying across the plantation, above the tree tops. I have not seen this species in the A.C.T. since then.

Common Bronzewing (Jan. 21, Feb.21). The sightings were of three birds and a single bird respectively. All were flushed from the ground, then flew to perch in the pines.

Crimson Rosella Observed on every visit except Feb.21 and Mar. 18, The largest flock seen was of 12 birds, composed of ten adults and two immatures. On one occasion an adult was seen to pick seeds from a ripe cone.

Grey-crowned Babbler (Feb. 21) Two flew into pines uttering a musical double note. The white superciliary stripe, sharp bill and white-tipped tail were noted. The birds perched in the higher branches, and were very active.

Thornbill sp. (Feb. 21, Mar. 18). Between five and ten small, dark thornbills were flitting from branch to branch and warbling in the very tops of the pines. On both dates the light was too dull and the birds too active for good views to be had.

Southern Yellow Robin (Mar. 18). One was watched making sallies to pick insects off the roadside verge, within the plantation.

Grey Fantail (Feb.21). One seen in the higher branches of a pine.

Golden Whistler. Seen or heard on every date except Feb.4 and Mar. 7. Clear views were had of a male singing on a pine branch some 25 feet high. Each burst of song was preceded by a subdued "pee-wit" call. Other calls were "too-ee" and "too-wee-wit" the latter ending abruptly on the last note. It seemed that at least two pairs were present within the study area.

Grey Shrike-thrush (Mar.18). One was watched as it flitted about a dead eucalypt within the plantation, picking insects off the bark. On flushing it flew into a pine tree.

Yellow-faced Honeyeater (Jan.7). Two were observed feeding on insects in the abovementioned eucalypt, as well as in the adjacent pines.

White-winged Chough (Jan.21. Mar.7) Both sightings were of a party of 12 (the Apostles?) foraging in the thick litter of pine needles.

Black-backed Magpie (Feb.21. Mar.7). Seen both on the ground and at the tops of the conifers. This species was very common in the cleared paddocks along Majura Road.

Raven (Jan.7. Feb.4. Mar.7). Single birds were seen each time. The first one was chased right out of the plantation by the adult goshawk.

Discussion

Pawsey (1966) summarised observations made over 15 years at a pine plantation near Millicent, S.A. He recorded 21 species there in 1965 as against species in 1950, and suggests that more insectivorous forest birds were adapting to pinewoods as their insect populations increase.

Pawsey's 21 species were the following:

Common Bronzewing; Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo; Crimson Rosella; Fantailed Cuckoo; Horsfield Bronze Cuckoo; Blackbird; Ground Thrush; Brown Thornbill | Yellow-tailed Thornbill; White-browed Scrub Wren; Superb Blue Wren; Scarlet Robin; Southern Yellow Robin; Grey Fantail; Golden Whistler; Grey Shrike-thrush; White-throated Tree-creeper; Goldfinch; Red-browed Finch; White-winged Chough; Black-winged Currawong.

Considering the short span of my own study, it is interesting to note that more than half the number of my recorded species were also observed by Pawsey. His belief that the Grey-crowned Babbler was a potential pine-haunting species has been confirmed.

Reference

Pawsey, C.K., 1966. The South Australian Ornithologist. 24(5): 93-95

R.A.O.U. 1926 CHECKLIST - REPRINT

In Canberra Bird Notes No. 1, it was stated that the reprint of the 1926 Checklist did not incorporate the latest amendments. We wish to correct that statement. All the amendments to date are supplied bound in a cover separate to the actual copy of the Checklist, both items being supplied for the price of \$4.00.

RECENT MEETINGSAugust 14th

Mr, J. M. Forshaw spoke on "Extinction within the Psittaciformes". He outlined what is known of the processes of extinction and then described how the generalisations applied to each of the 16 totally extinct forms of parrots.

A species becomes extinct when its mortality is continually greater than its recruitment. There are two processes of extinction.

- (a) Natural decline - an intrinsic part of evolution,
- (b) Unnatural decline - decline not directly attributable to the failure of the species.
Man is the most destructive force.

Unnatural decline may result from either direct or indirect extermination.

1. Direct Exterminations animals are slaughtered for food, skins or feathers, sport, etc, or because they compete with crops or domestic animals. The extinction of the Passenger Pigeon was described as an example of direct extermination.
2. Indirect Exterminations brought about through destruction of habitat, by introduction of exotic enemies or competitors, by the spread of domestic animal diseases, by the effects of insecticides and so on.

In most cases of extinction all of the above factors - natural and unnatural decline, direct and indirect extermination - have been closely interwoven and the resultant complex has acted upon the species to bring about its extermination. Another

important feature of the patterns of extinction is the susceptibility of insular populations; the reasons for this were outlined. All but one of the extinct forms of parrots formerly inhabited islands. The world distribution of the parrots was divided into three geographical "distributions" and an account of the extinct forms from each was given. Some forms were illustrated by slides.

The address concluded with a resume of the facts relating to the status of Australia's two rare parrots - the Paradise Parrot (*Psephotus pulcherrimus*) and the Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*).

September 14th

Major H. Bell spoke on "New Guinea Birds" following is a summary of his lecture.

The Papuan Sub-region (the mainland of New Guinea and certain adjacent islands) has more species than the whole of Australia. The North Melanesian and South Melanesian Sub-Regions, which contain the islands under Australian control (New Britain, New Ireland, Manus & Bougainville) have a depauperate version of the New Guinea avifauna, with possibly 100 additional endemic species. Such a wealth of bird life in so small an area is probably equalled only in the Andes of South America.

To understand New Guinea birds one must appreciate the geography of the country. The rugged terrain has barriers which impose isolation on bird populations, leading to diverse speciation. The central cordillera leads to differences between birds of north and south New Guinea. The high altitudes lead to differing bird species at each level of vegetation change. The higher mountain tops and isolated ranges (e.g. Vogelkop, Finisterres, etc,) lead to isolated & distinct populations. The many large islands also contribute their quota and the two "islands"

natural savanna, the Trans-fly and Moresby, have many Australian savanna species.

There are probably more endemic species yet to be discovered, the last "new" bird being a *Sericornis* found in 1962. The Golden-maned Gardener *Amblyornis flavifrons* has never been located having been described from a trade skin last century. Two bower bird species' bowers are yet to be undiscovered and there is even a bower for which a bird has yet to be found. At least 250 endemics have their nests and eggs undescribed. On top of this, it is estimated that at least 50 and probably many more seabirds, waders and Palaearctic migrants have yet to be recorded. The field for bird study is obviously very wide open.

The avifauna is closely allied to that of Australia with strong Oriental influences in lowland areas (e.g. Hornbills, Mynas, Flowerpeckers). Some montane species are conspecific or closely related to Australian temperate-zone forms (e.g. *Orthonyx*, *Climacteris*, *Neositta*, *Cacomantis pyrrhophanus*). Some important groups are Birds of Paradise (43 sp.), Pigeons (39), Kingfishers (19), Flycatchers (49), Honeyeaters (65), Bowerbirds (12), Megapodes (7).

Bird migration in New Guinea has been little studied but is likely to prove a fruitful field of future investigation. Many species have resident populations and migratory Australian-breeding populations often with quite differing habits,

Conservation is almost non-existent but there are heartening signs of progress in this field, in particular the defeat of a bill to institute the export of plumes, a move to which many indigenous leaders were strongly opposed. In spite of a projected population of 8 million by the end of the century, and massive development plans, it is hard to visualise any species of bird in danger of complete extinction this century. Those that will be threatened first are island species

and certain Birds of Paradise confined to small mountain-top areas.

A plea is made for any visitor to T.P.N.G. to contact the New Guinea Bird Society (P.O. Box 635, Port Moresby). Any observation on New Guinea ornithology, however seemingly trivial, is most welcome.

COMING MEETINGS

Wednesday, November 13th

8.00 p.m. CSIRO Lecture Theatre, Black Mountain. Mr. S. Marchant will speak on "Breeding Seasons at Canberra".

Note:

Following last year's practice, there will be no meetings held in December and January.

Wednesday, February 12th

8.00 p.m. CSIRO Lecture Theatre, Black Mountain. Dr. Peter Fullagar will speak on "New Zealand Birds".

THE POCKET LIST OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS - NEW EDITION

We are pleased to announce that the second edition of the "Pocket List" is in the final stage of preparation and should be printed before Christmas. The first edition of the "Pocket List" sold out over the Congress period. This revised edition will once again be the only complete list available of all the birds at present recorded in Australia and as such, is invaluable for all sorts of ornithological jottings, bird lists, etc. All orders please to Mr. S. Marchant, 36 Arthur Circle, Forrest, A.C.T. Prices: 6 for \$1.00 or 200 each plus postage.

67TH R.A.O.U. CONGRESS & CAMP-OUT

Judging from the many messages of congratulation we have received, the 1968 Congress held in Canberra during October was a great success. Certainly numerically, the attendance of approx. 80, one of the highest on record, was an inspiration to the local committee who started the organising seven months beforehand.

Leading ornithologists from all parts of Australia attended and the high daily attendances at the seminars and lecture sessions rather than the afternoon outings attested to the popularity of a lecture programme. The Exhibition of Ornithological Art was perhaps the finest collection of Australian bird art seen under one roof for many years and some very promising young artists were notable amongst the more well known names.

A guide was prepared for all those who registered for the Congress which included abstracts of all lectures and papers, a guide to the Art Exhibition, programmes, list of members attending & annual reports. Extra guides were printed for those who were unable to attend Congress and these may be obtained from the A.C.T. Branch Secretary for \$1 post paid.

Thirty five members attended the camp-out at the Round Hill Fauna Reserve and those who stayed the full period were rewarded with the full list of mallee species excluding the Mallee Fowl. We were unlucky to experience an unusual spell of hot and windy weather and this, combined with a plague of bush flies, made things very trying. We intend to print a detailed report of the camp-out very soon and this will be distributed free to campouters and made available to others for a small fee.

AN A.C.T. RECORD OF THE RED-CHESTED QUAIL

On 28 September 1968 a Red-chested Quail (*Turnix pyrrhothorax*) was noted in the vicinity of the library building at CSIRO, Division of Wildlife Research, Gungahlin, ACT. It was instantly surrounded by H.J. Frith, W.B. Hitchcock and W. Poole. After a little excitement, V. Poole managed to capture the bird.

The bird was assumed to be an escapee but on later inspection the one and only Red-chested Quail held by CSIRO was found to be securely locked in its pen. The Red-chested Quail is a rare bird in captivity and it is unlikely that any others are held in captivity in Canberra. There was nothing to indicate from the bird's appearance that it was anything but a wild specimen.

Since the live bird was caught at Gungahlin, a further specimen, an adult female, was collected at Bungendore on 14 November last.

In the field, the species is practically impossible to distinguish from the Little Quail, *Turnix velox* and it is likely that some local sightings of that species could well refer to *Turnix pyrrhothorax*.

The species' previous claim to a place on the local list is a record of a nest found near Braidwood in 1863.

ATTENTION R.A.O.U. MEMBERS!

"The Emu" is now up to date (at last). Prompt payment of your 1969 subscriptions of \$6 will greatly help honorary officers in keeping to the schedule in the coming year.

RECENT OBSERVATIONS

An intrusion of "western" species is occurring this season in our area, a phenomenon rather difficult to explain considering how good the season is at present in western NSW. In the woodlands near Lake George, small flocks of Budgerigahs are not uncommon. A small flock of Cockatiels was seen there also and another, numbering 7, turned up at O'Connor on Oct.22. There are two recent sightings for the Pied Butcherbird; one at Reid and one at Tuggeranong. The Little Friarbird has also been seen twice. The Crimson Chat has fairly exploded over south-eastern Australia this year. Two records from Harden have been reported and they are common at Temora and Griffith, so keep an eye out for any strays locally. The species only exists on the local list at present on the basis of a clutch of eggs from the Queanbeyan area in 1957.

A lone Tawny-crowned Honeyeater was recorded by Steve Wilson in his front garden feeding on Grevillea flowers on Sept. 6 and 7. This is only the second local sighting, the coastal heathlands being the normal habitat of this species.

Three species of egrets were seen at Jerrabomberra Ck. on Nov.10. There were Little (1), Plumed (2) and Large (1). A dozen Glossy Ibis were also present. Next issue we shall print a key to the field identification of the egrets for those who are in doubt.

Two Indian Mynas were seen by Graeme Clark in a backyard at Lyneham on Nov.17. They flew off in a northerly direction. This is the first record for Canberra. They occur at Mittagong 80 miles south of Sydney. Does anyone know if they occur in Goulburn?

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