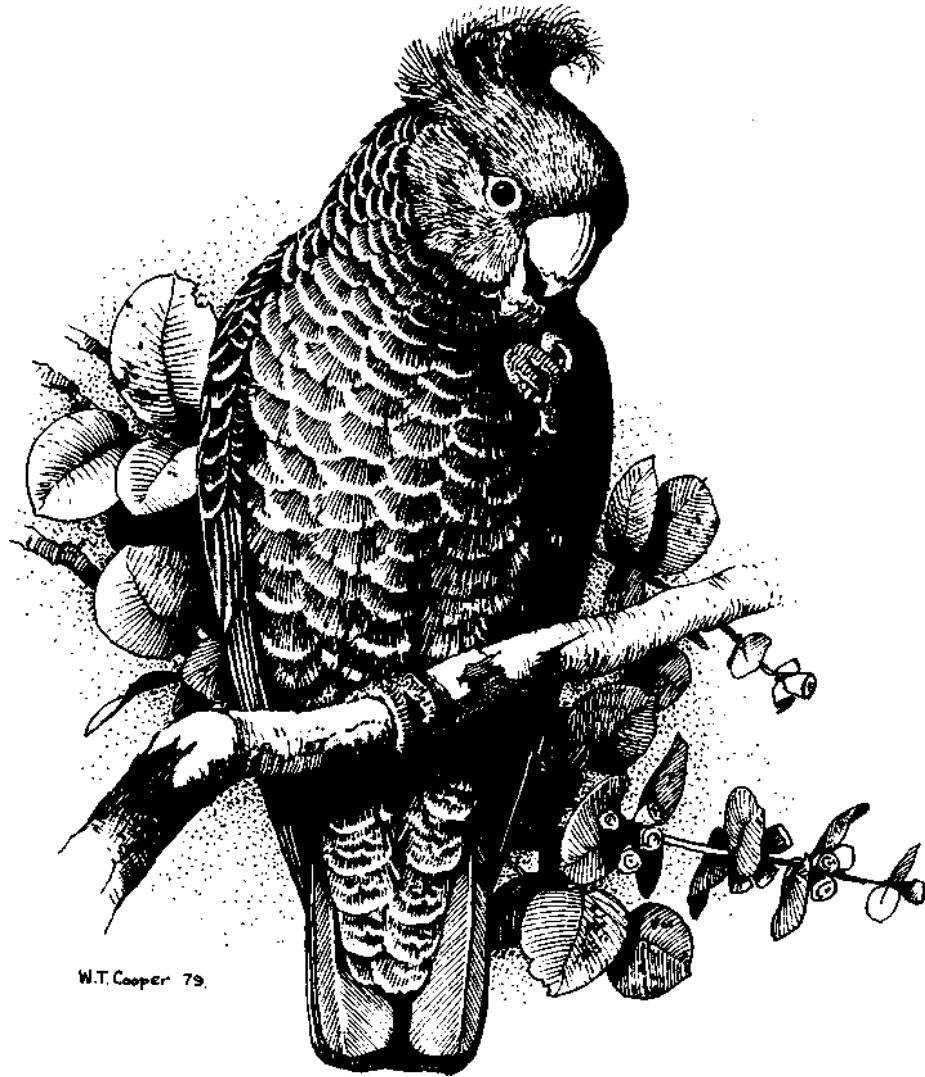


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POSSIBLE PIRACY BY AN AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE

Brendan J. Lepschi

At around 0930hrs on 13 February 1990 at "Cooinbil" homestead near Murrumbateman, NSW, I observed a pair of Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* pursuing a lone Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*; during the chase the raven dropped an object it was carrying in its beak (subsequent examination showed this to be a small piece of carrion), and continued flying; at this point both magpies gave up the chase. The male flew to a nearby tree and carolled, while the female flew to the ground and began to peck at and eat the carrion. Time restrictions prevented further observations.

Piracy (or kleptoparasitism) is the stealing of food by one bird from another; it involves the "pirate" individual harassing (often violently and for long periods) the "host" bird into giving up a food item it has obtained. According to Barnard (1985), piracy is most widespread in the Falconiformes, Charadriiformes (mainly the Laridae (gulls and terns) and the Stercorariidae (skuas)) and is of course characteristic of the Fregatidae (frigatebirds); it has also been recorded (rarely) among other groups, generally in species which are omnivorous and opportunistic feeders. Barnard also states that "[pirates] are most likely to attack when food carried by the host is large, visible, of high quality, or is scarce. and when the host is unlikely to escape."

The incident described above is probably not a case of true piracy, but rather an example of opportunistic feeding by the magpie, as the food carried by the raven was neither large or highly visible, nor of particularly high quality, and other food sources were certainly available (large numbers of grasshoppers and various flying insects were active at the time the observations were made); also the chase lasted only a few seconds (approximately 10 seconds) and no physical interaction was noted between the birds. Presumably the magpies regarded the raven as an intruder or possible threat and reacted accordingly, rather than attacking it with any intention of food stealing.

Reference

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HABITAT REQUIREMENTS OF TWO PAIRS OF HOODED ROBINS NEAR CANBERRA - A PRELIMINARY REPORT

Bill Graham

This is a preliminary report of a continuing study aimed at obtaining information on the habitat requirements and biology of the Hooded Robin.

Two pairs of Hooded Robins *Melanodryas cucullata* were studied for 27 weeks from 26 August 1989 through to 4 March 1990. The area containing the territories of these birds was located on the north-west slopes of Enchanted Hill (35°28'S., 149°8'E.), 1 km east of Theodore, in the Tuggeranong Valley, ACT. The territories were contained wholly within the study area and for the purposes of this paper are known as Site A and Site B (see Figure 1). These were the only locations where Hooded Robins occurred in the study area.

During the period of the study, the nearest known sightings of other Hooded Robins were of a single male 1.6 km to the west at the Theodore electrical sub-station (pers. obs.), and a pair that were seen 2.2 km to the west on the northern slopes of Tuggeranong Hill (P. Veerman pers. comm.).

Description and Recent Visits to the Study Area

The area is hilly with rocky outcrops and contains woodland and grassland. The woodland consists of Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* and other *Eucalyptus* spp. with an understorey of native shrubs and grasses. The grassland contains stands of Kangaroo Grass *Themeda australis*, and other native and exotic grasses. Also present in the grassland is the exotic Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus*. The area is lightly grazed.

A bushfire occurred in March 1985, leaving at least 20 fallen and dead eucalypts in the study area. These became an important factor in the robins' habitat.

During 1987, M. Soroka made 9 visits to Site B as part of the ACT Bird Atlas Project in Grid 89. In the July-October period he found a nest between the railway and Lamont's dam (see Figure 1) - unfortunately a more exact date cannot be obtained. One week later it had been abandoned after a period of cold weather that included a snow storm.

From July 1987 through to July 1989, also as part of the ACT Bird Atlas Project, I made about six visits to the part of Site A which was west of the railway line and in Atlas Grid 79. Either a pair of robins or a single robin were observed in the area.

Methods

During the 27 weeks covered by this paper, I made 31 visits to the study area. On each visit I attempted to record the location and movements of the robins. The robins were secretive and I did not observe them on each visit.

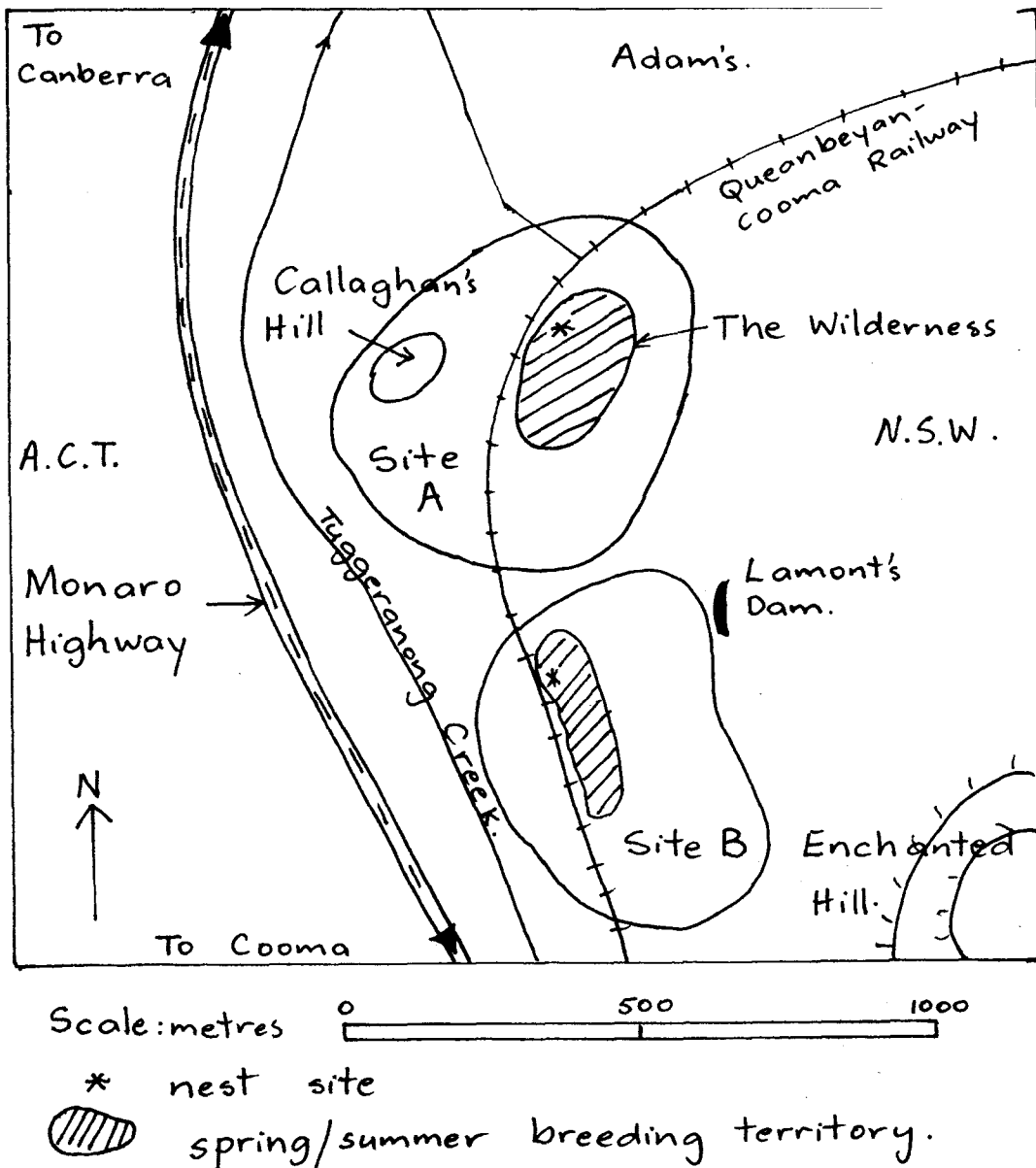


Figure 1. Sketch map of the study area.

However, I have no reason to suspect that they ever left the area. I also recorded details of behaviour, including perching, foraging, breeding, territorial aggression, and interaction with other species. On 4 November 1989 I measured 1 ha in Site A and prepared a map on which I plotted the locations of fences, logs, trees and rocky outcrops. This enabled more accurate estimates to be made of the distances flown by adults and juveniles.

Results

i) Perching Sites

The Hooded Robin is a ground feeder and perching sites often determine where it will forage. Boles (1988) describes it sitting on an exposed perch, darting to the ground "to pick up an insect or spider, returning to eat its prey". I found that it rarely returned to the same perch but moved on to a new one. In the open grassland it moved from one Great Mullein stalk to another (see Figure 2). It used the line of posts in a fence in the same manner. Tree stumps, fallen trees, rocky outcrops and exposed branches on trees also provided useful perches.

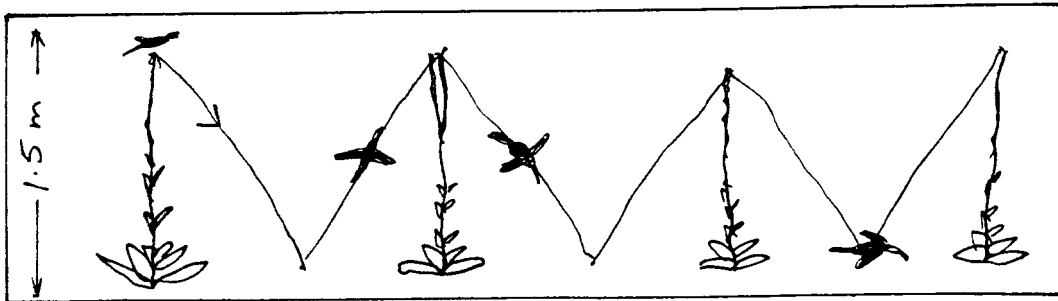


Figure 2. Feeding routine utilising Great Mullein stalks

Perches were also used to observe intruders. On almost every visit I made to a site, the resident adult male would fly up and observe me at a distance of 5 m from a perch about 4 m above the ground.

ii) Protective Cover

Protective cover in the form of a single eucalypt or groups of eucalypts was utilized to hide from predators or intruders. Strong flights of over 100 m were made when they left an area of foraging or observing. Thick cover was used skilfully to remain out of sight especially when the male was carrying food to the female on the nest. For example, at 1721 hrs on 17 October 1989,

the male in Site A caught a green caterpillar and, as I was between him and the nest site, spent nine minutes moving back and forth among the trees in "The Wilderness". When the food was delivered I could not locate the nest or the female.

The Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*, Grey Currawong *Strepera versicolor*, and Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo gigas* were frequent visitors to the area. Although they were potential predators the robins never attempted to chase them and relied on the avoidance strategies of silence and stillness.

iii) Breeding

Site A

The nest was in a mature Yellow Box and I was unable to locate it as the tree had thick foliage and was obscured by other trees. I thought the nest was about 4 m above the ground. On 21 October 1989 a juvenile (1-4 days out of the nest) was observed with both parents. It was clumsy, lacked direction in flight and could only fly about 2 m above the ground. The fallen trees with horizontal branches and trunks provided it with excellent perches and cover. The juvenile's colouring was a speckled dark grey, similar to that described by Rogers *et al.* (1986), and was cryptic against the dead trees. When the juvenile was approached by an observer, the adults performed a distracting display by flying to within 3 m of the observer, scolding loudly and making a "rubbing glass" (Coventry 1988) or squeaky door sound. They also moved over the ground, logs, and 0.5 m up the trunk of a tree puffing up feathers, extending and fluttering wings, and feigning injury (Frith 1969). I presume this juvenile died as it was not seen after 28 October 1989.

A second brood in this site was successful and one juvenile was seen out of the nest on 5 January 1990. Again, I didn't find the nest.

Site B

The tree cover was more sparse than it was in site A and consisted of a 10 m wide strip that followed the railway fence for about 400 m. The site contained many dead and fallen eucalypts that were left from the 1985 fire. The female was first sighted on the nest on 7 October 1989. The nest was 0.56 m above the ground in the horizontal fork of a fallen eucalypt. It was in an open position and completely exposed to the sky, but was almost invisible to within 2 m. It was constructed of fine bark strips that matched that on the dead tree, and fine grasses. Two juveniles were successfully reared.

Figure 3 shows the period between laying and hatching at each nest. As I did not find either nest in Site A, the details are based on a combination of my observations and ACT records by Courtney and Marchant (1971).

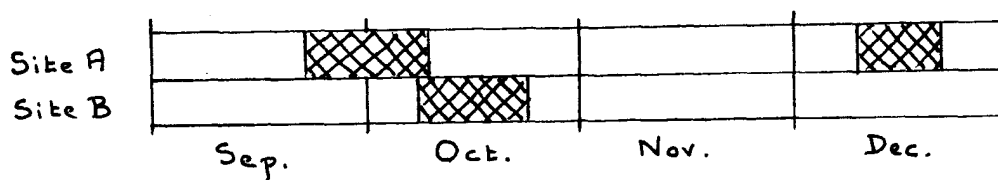


Figure 3. Period between laying and hatching at each nest

I found no evidence of communal breeding as observed by Bell (1984). However, this was not surprising as each territory contained only two birds at the start of the breeding season.

iv) Territories

For both pairs, the size of the winter territory was about 20 ha and the spring/summer breeding territory was about 5 ha. Bell (1984) found a similar situation with a pair of Hooded Robins near Armidale, NSW - they occupied a home range of about 6 ha during the breeding season, which expanded to about 30 ha during the non-breeding season. Rowley (1965) in his study of the Superb Fairy Wren *Malurus cyaneus*, found that territory size was smaller during the breeding season than it was during the non-breeding season.

No territorial aggression or overlapping of territories was observed between the Site A and B pairs. No other robin species nested in the sites. On two occasions the male in Site A was observed to vigorously chase Scarlet Robins *Petroica multicolor* from the territory: on 5 September 1989 it chased a female; and on 14 January 1990, it chased two adults and two juveniles from the site. The Hooded Robins chased other species, but not as vigorously as the Scarlet Robins were chased.

Discussion

The most important habitat requirements were found to be trees for protective cover, areas of grass that contain the insects and other invertebrates on which the robins feed, perching sites within these areas of grass from which the robins can forage, and trees (either standing or fallen) to provide sites for nesting. These requirements are met by drier woodland and grassland which are often given as being the habitat of Hooded Robins (Wilson 1969, Pizzey 1980, Boles 1988).

From personal observations and data from the ACT Bird Atlas Project (I. Taylor pers. comm.) the Hooded Robin's distribution in the ACT is restricted to habitats away from urban areas that contain a mixture of woodland and grassland. In this habitat, dead and fallen trees provide an important source of perching and breeding sites. The expansion of urban areas

and the removal of dead timber for firewood is likely to result in a reduction of Hooded Robin numbers in the ACT.

Perching sites may be essential to the feeding routine of the Hooded Robin. The loss of these alone may be sufficient to make otherwise suitable habitat unsuitable for Hooded Robins.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to H.J.P. Adams. B. Lamont and the ACT Department of Agriculture for permission to work on the land under their control, and to my son Alan for help with measuring the site.

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ALBINISM IN THE LAUGHING KOOKABURRA

David McDonald and Brendan J. Lepschi

On the morning of 14 January 1990, one of us, David McDonald, observed an albinistic Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae* in open woodland at the foot of Castle Hill, ACT. Upon first sighting the bird, at a distance of perhaps 200 metres, the observer believed it to be a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita*, the only large, white bird found in woodland in that locality. A normally-plumaged Laughing Kookaburra flew into the tree in which it was perched, landing close to the white bird; the observer's attention was attracted when no altercation ensued. More careful inspection, even from such a

distance, revealed that the white bird was an albinistic Laughing Kookaburra. The bird was studied for more than twenty minutes as it moved around in the area, on occasions approaching to within 20m of the observer. Observations were recorded immediately on a pocket dictaphone.

It was generally snowy white in colour, but not completely albino, having some of the normal pigmentation of the Laughing Kookaburra. The eyes were black, the bill a grey/pink colour, the feet and legs pale yellow and the upper surface of the tail feathers a light caramel colour, with darker (though not deep brown) horizontal bars, a lighter version of the normal tail plumage.

The bird exhibited familiar Laughing Kookaburra vocal behaviour: quiet "chuckling" and one full "laugh" during which the tail was raised. Approximately eight other kookaburras were in the vicinity, but none seemed to interact, at that time, with the albinistic bird.

The exact nature of the plumage aberration in this bird is difficult to classify, although it would appear to be a form of albinism (referred to as "incomplete albinism" by Sage (1962)) in which normal plumage is present in various degrees and the soft parts, with the exception of the irides, sometimes affected, as in this bird.

Lepschi (in press) in a review of Australian literature published to 1986, located 14 records of albinistic plumage variants for the Laughing Kookaburra (albinism, leucism and schizochroism being grouped under "albinism" for the purpose of analysis) making it the third most commonly affected species (along with the Blackbird *Turdus merula*). The relatively high frequency of albinism in the Laughing Kookaburra has been noted by earlier authors (eg Buzacott 1966, Haines 1945 and Robinson 1954) but this may be largely because it is a common, familiar species often found near human habitation which, as stated by Sage (1963), gives it a greater chance of being seen and reported.

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THE OCCURRENCE OF THE PEACEFUL DOVE IN THE CANBERRA DISTRICT

Grahame Clark and Kay Hahne

This paper outlines the distribution of the Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida* in New South Wales and summarises recent records in the Canberra district. It suggests that the species must continue to be regarded as rare in the Canberra district.

Distribution and status in New South Wales

The distribution and status of the Peaceful Dove in New South Wales is described by Morris *et al.* (1981) as "Abundant. Resident. Eggs August - April. All Regions. Least numerous Tablelands. Mainly dry sclerophyll forests, woodlands and tall shrublands.", and by Frith (1982) as "most abundant on the coast but is in good numbers on the western slopes to the western edge of the wheat belt". Both descriptions can be interpreted to mean that Peaceful Doves are uncommon in the eastern ranges of New South Wales, including the Southern Tablelands.

This assessment of lesser numbers on the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales is supported by the results of the Atlas of Australian Birds which was compiled under the aegis of the RAOU from 1977 to 1981 (Blakers *et al.* 1984). In the atlas, Peaceful Doves are recorded in each of the 1-degree squares in New South Wales. However, in the five 1-degree squares which cover the area that includes the Southern Tablelands, the reporting rate was shown as being under 11% - which is less than the rate for most other squares in New South Wales.

These five 1-degree squares contain an aggregation of data collected by observers in 180 10-minute squares. Of these 180 squares only 12 (7%) contained Peaceful Dove records.

The RAOU's Pilot Atlas Scheme from March 1973 to September 1974 covered the area to the east of Canberra (from Jervis Bay south to Bermagui and inland to a line running from Lake George south to Nimmitabel). The results (Disney 1979) show Peaceful Doves occurring only along the coastal areas. There were no records from the tablelands.

Status before 1974 in the Australian Capital Territory

A number of accounts have been published of the birds of the Australian Capital Territory prior to 1974. Jones (1929) did not record Peaceful Doves in the Canberra area during the period 1913-1928. Mathews (1943) did not include Peaceful Doves on the list that he prepared. During the period

September 1947 through to September 1949, Lamm and Calaby (1950) made 37 trips along a 10km stretch of the Murrumbidgee River from Cotter to Uriarra Crossing. They found the Peaceful Dove to be uncommon, observing it on only four of the trips. Lamm and White (1950) clarify these four sightings by stating that "a single bird found along the Murrumbidgee by Lamm on March 21 1948 remained in a relatively small area and was seen regularly through August 1948." This one bird presumably accounts for all four records. Lamm and White do not provide further records of Peaceful Doves in the ACT, but do say "others have been found close to the ACT", but do not say where, or how many.

Frith (1969) describes the status of the Peaceful Dove as "quite rare in the high country, although small colonies do exist throughout. It is rarely seen in the Australian Capital Territory but is abundant on the coast a few miles to the east." Anon (1971) indicates the status to be "irregular in occurrence." Anon (1974) describes the Peaceful Dove as being "Rare, vagrant?" and adds "Although common on the south coast, this species is seldom observed in the higher tableland areas".

The evidence suggests that prior to 1974 Peaceful Doves appeared to be uncommon and rarely seen in the Canberra district.

Status after 1974 in the Australian Capital Territory

The sightings of Peaceful Doves recorded in the Australian Capital Territory since 1974 are shown in the table. There have been about 32 sightings in 16 years - although many may have been of the same groups of birds. These sightings have been extracted from Bird Report forms held by the Canberra Ornithologists Group.

There were no sightings of Peaceful Doves during the Murrumbidgee Corridor Survey which was undertaken between July 1985 and June 1986 (Taylor 1987) - the area included that surveyed by Lamm and Calaby (*op. cit.*).

Discussion

In discussing the status of the Peaceful Dove, three factors have to be borne in mind:

1. It is kept in aviaries. During the course of his studies of pigeons and doves, Frith (1982) became familiar with the avicultural scene and found that Peaceful Doves were "common in captivity" and breeding "can be prolific". Shephard (1989) in his comprehensive review of Australian aviculture, states that it "is a very popular aviary bird and freely available throughout Australia" and "breeding will take place

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
1974			Campbell 1								Narra bundah 1	1
1975	Aranda 1											
1976												
1977												
1978									BMP 1			
1979												
1980												
1981												
1982		BOTG 1										
1983					Parke-1 LBGE-2	LBGE 4			Parke 2			Holt 1 CYC 3
1984				Parke 1						CYC 1		
1985				CYC 3								
1986			Kirawin 6 - 12	CYC 2						CYC 2	Watson-1 Natex-1	
1987	CYC-1 Cot Rd-3								Hall 1			
1988	Cot Rd 1							Cot Rd 4		CYC 1	Cot Rd 1	CYC-1 Cot Rd-2
1989				Gungahlin 1	Watson 1							
1990	Cot Rd 1											

Occurrence of the Peaceful Dove in the Canberra district showing locations and numbers of birds

throughout the year". Therefore, as Peaceful Doves are so common in captivity, it is possible that they may be released, either accidentally or deliberately (as happened during the course of a burglary in a pet shop in Canberra in the early 1980s).

2.

It is one of the species that man deliberately introduces to areas around the world. Long (1981) listed 18 places in the world where it was introduced. One of these places was Kangaroo Island, SA, where it is not native. It was released on Kangaroo Island in 1937 and 1940 and was last seen there in 1942 which shows that it can survive at least two years in the wild as a result of introductions. The last known introduction of a bird species to Canberra was the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* which was released from 1968 to 1971 (Gregory-Smith 1985).

3. Although it is thought to be sedentary it may undertake more extensive movements than are generally realized. Frith (1982) states that "virtually nothing is known of the movements of individual birds. In most places they give the impression of being sedentary and sudden fluctuations in numbers certainly do not occur". However, Blakers *et al.* (1984) state that "winter flocking has been observed" and "In Darwin there is some evidence of movement towards the coast in the dry winter season". A Peaceful Dove banded as an adult at Kingston-on-Murray, SA, on 29 August 1965, was recovered 13 months later at Tintinara, SA, a distance of 192km (Purchase 1969). In addition, the fact that there are only two races of the species in Australia (one in the Pilbara, WA, and one everywhere else (R. Schodde pers. comm.)) suggests that there has been a regular gene flow between populations through the movement of birds.

It can be seen from the table that from 1974 to 1983 only sightings of single birds were recorded. These could well have escaped from aviaries. Since 1983, however, there have been sightings of groups of birds in four areas:

1. East end of Lake Burley Griffin/Parkes. Sightings of from one to four birds were seen between May 1983 and April 1984.
2. Canberra Yacht Club. Sightings of from one to three birds were seen in this area from October 1984 to January 1987, and a single bird again in October and December 1988.
3. Kirrawin Homestead (35km NE Canberra). A group of at least six individuals were located in March 1986 (Taylor 1986).

- 4 Horse agistment paddocks near Mt Stromlo on the Cotter Road. Three birds were seen in January 1987, four in August 1988, one in November 1988, two in December 1988, and one in January 1990.

In addition, since 1983 there have been sightings of single birds at: Watson, 1 November 1986 and May 1989; National Exhibition Centre, 7 November 1986; Hall, September 1987; and Gungahlin, April 1989. The sightings at Watson and the National Exhibition Centre in November 1986 may have been of the same individual.

Although it is not possible to be completely confident about their origins, it is suggested that the Peaceful Doves in Canberra and its environs are a mixture of locally escaped (or released) aviary birds, and birds that have moved into the area from elsewhere. The single birds may be those that have escaped or been released and the groups may be those that have moved into the area. However, they could also be the descendants of escaped or released birds.

There appear to have been three populations of Peaceful Doves in and around Canberra in recent years: one at Kirrawin Homestead; one around Lake Burley Griffin (initially at the east end and now near the Canberra Yacht Club); and one around the horse paddocks on the Cotter Road. In addition, single birds appear from time to time around Canberra. These may, or may not be from aviaries.

Frith (1982) mentions two factors that may affect the future numbers of Peaceful Doves in the local area: i) they favour a habitat that is "open, grassy, and lightly wooded"; and the number present in an area can vary over a period. Therefore, there is a possibility that Peaceful Doves may increase in numbers in Canberra and its environs, especially along watercourses which may act as their "roadways" into new areas e.g. the Murrumbidgee, Molonglo, and Yass Rivers.

Alternatively it might be that a factor in the local environment (perhaps winter temperature?) means that the Peaceful Dove is at its environmental limits locally and can only be an ephemeral member of the local avifauna.

The status of the Peaceful Dove in Canberra must continue to be regarded as rare because of the few records during the last 15 years, and there is a need to record all sightings so that the status of this species can be monitored in the future.

Acknowledgement

This paper would not have been possible without the Bird Reports submitted by members. We would like to thank all members who have taken the time to complete the report forms and thereby help increase our knowledge of the local avifauna.

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A SECOND NOTE ON BILL-SNAPPING IN AUSTRALIAN BIRDS

H.D.V. Prendergast

Introduction

Previously in *Canberra Bird Notes* I discussed and provided observations of bill-snapping in Australian birds (Prendergast 1987). This note lists a further 14 observations made by me of bill-snapping in birds. The observations were made in New South Wales (1 observation) and southern Northern Territory (13 observations).

Results

i) *List of Species*

Under each species the data are presented in the order: date, behaviour, location.

HIRUNDINIDAE*

Tree Martin *Cecropis nigricans*
17/07/89, Insect hawking, Trephina Gorge NT

MUSCICAPIDAE

Rufous Whistler *Pacycephala rufiventris**
10/07/89, Insect hawking, Near Jessie Gap NT

MALURIDAE*

Superb Fairy-wren *Malurus cyaneus*
25/12/86, Aggression towards Superb Fairy-wren, Brindabella NSW

MELIPHAGIDAE

Yellow-throated Miner *Manorina flavigula**
14/07/89, Aggression towards Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*, Near Jessie Gap NT
03/08/89, Aggression towards Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*, Near Deep Well NT

Grey-fronted Honeyeater *Lichenostomus plumulus**
16/07/89, Aggression towards Grey-fronted Honeyeater, Trephina Gorge NT
16/07/89, Aggression towards Willie Wagtail, Trephina Gorge NT

White-plumed Honeyeater *L. penicillatus*

10/07/89, Aggression towards Willie Wagtail, Near Jesssie Gap NT
17/07/89, Insect hawking*, Trepina Gorge NT

Brown Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta*
01/07/89, Insect hawking*, Near Ti Tree NT

GRALLINIDAE

Australian Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*
01/08/89, Aggression towards Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*, Near
Deep Well NT

ARTAMIDAE*

Black-faced Wood-Swallow *Artamus cinereus*
03/08/89, Aggression towards Black-faced Wood-Swallow, Near
Deep Well NT

CRACTICIDAE

Pied Butcherbird*
07/08/89, Aggression towards Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* or Brown
Falcon *Falca berigora*, Trepina Gorge NT

Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*
31/07/89, Aggression towards Brown Falcon, Near Ewaninga NT

*Family, species, or behaviour not recorded in Prendergast (1987).

ii) Aggression

Eight species, of five families, were recorded bill-snapping whilst pursuing other birds (of either the same or another species). Five of these species, and two of these families, were not recorded previously by me.

iii) Insect hawking

Four species, of three families, were heard bill-snapping whilst hawking for aerial insects. All of these species, and two of these families, were not recorded previously by me.

Reference

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A FURTHER OBSERVATION OF THE USE OF WET SOIL IN PREENING BY PIED CURRAWONGS

David Eastman

I once had a similar experience to that described by David Purchase (1990, *Canberra Bird Notes* 15:11) of observing a Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* using mud for preening.

About three or four years ago I saw a Pied Currawong behaving strangely in the Hawkesbury sandstone gully in the National Botanic Gardens. The bird was standing on the bank of the gully under a shaded overhang, picking bits of moist red soil out of the bank and rubbing the soil into its feathers. The bird was so engrossed in this apparently insane activity that I was able to observe it up close.

The bank was pock-marked over a large area, suggesting that several birds had shared the same odd fascination. The bird picked up bits of soil carefully, sometimes discarding one piece and then selecting another, until apparently satisfied with the consistency, and then vigorously rubbed the soil under and over the wings. The bird then made a twitching motion, as if tickled by the sensation of the moist soil - then the search for another choice bit of soil would begin all over again.

This went on for several minutes until finally the bird flew away. I did not see any evidence of the bird subsequently washing the soil out of its feathers, but I noticed that this particular gully has a small rivulet running through it, which is a popular bathing area for many species of birds, including Pied Currawongs.

I can only speculate that the bird may have been using the moist soil as a sort of detergent, to help remove parasites, or to remove stale oil from its feathers, prior to preening with fresh oil.

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ODD OBS

HOODED PLOVERS AT BULL-PUP BEACH

Bryan FitzGerald

On 9 January 1990, I saw two adults and one juvenile Hooded Plovers *Charadrius rubricollis* on Bull-pup Beach, near Bawley Point, NSW. It was

particularly nice to see these birds as on a visit the previous summer I failed to find them. I have been visiting Bawley Point each summer since 1986/87 and the summer of 1988/89 was the only one during which I had failed to find Hooded Plovers on Bull-pup Beach.

Bryan FitzGerald, 36 Winnecke Street, AINSLIE ACT 2602

STARLINGS AS CHIMNEY SWEEPS

Delia Johnson

Twice this summer an inquisitive juvenile Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* has managed to get down the metal chimney of our free-standing wood-stove. The diameter of the chimney (c.16cm) was too narrow for the bird to fly up and out again. Therefore, after much scrabbling and falls of soot, it ended up the following day in the firebox. When rescued (in a butterfly net) it seemed quite clear of soot and flew away squawking.

I have heard similar reports of starlings falling down chimneys and wonder how frequently this happens. I also wonder whether other species meet with this type of accident. Perhaps a reader can answer these questions.

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AUSTRALIAN HOBBY TAKES AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE-LARK

Delia Johnson

On the morning of 19 March 1990 I was hanging out the washing when I heard a mixture of bird calls. I looked up and saw, flying past low, an Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis* clutching a squawking, flapping Australian Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*, closely followed by two other magpie-larks and a cloud of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*. The hobby and its prey, which was almost as big as its captor, disappeared through gum trees together with its mob of pursuers.

In their review of the Australian Hobby, Czechura and Debus (1986, *Aust. Bird Watcher 11*: 185-207) provide a list of recorded prey items and include the Australian Magpie-lark. This is based on a record made by North (1912, *Nests and Eggs of Birds found Breeding in Australia and Tasmania*, vol 3, Australian Museum: Sydney).

This is the fourth time that I have seen an Australian Hobby in my garden since 1 July 1989.

The local magpie-larks raised four chicks this summer and had already lost one to a cat next door.

Delia Johnson, PO Box 3285, WESTON CREEK ACT 2611

JUXTAPOSITIONS

David McDonald

In a period of two weeks I observed two fascinating bird juxtapositions. The first occurred at Castle Hill, ACT, on 14 January 1990. I was closely observing a flock of Little Lorikeets *Glossopsitta pusilla* feeding in a Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* when a largish, dark bird entered my binoculars' line of vision. It turned out to be a Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia*. It is not often that one sees, in one tree and at the same time, two species classified by COG as Category 3 status, i.e. rare enough in COG's area of concern to require a report to the Rarities Panel! Two other Regent Honeyeaters were seen in the area shortly afterwards. (They say it never rains but it pours - the following weekend I observed Regent Honeyeaters at the same locality (the same birds?) and, the weekend after that, observed the same species at Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park near Corryong, Victoria.)

The following sightings, recently brought to my attention, suggest that it may not be unusual for the two species to be together. In January 1970, Grahame Clark (pers. comm.) observed about 50 Little Lorikeets and three Regent Honeyeaters (one of them a juvenile) feeding in flowering eucalypts on the Gundaroo Road near the NSW/ACT border. During December 1966 and January 1967, Mark Clayton (G. Clark pers. comm.) observed both species in eucalypts on the old Weetangera Road near where South Bruce now stands.

The second bird juxtaposition occurred on 28 January 1990, also at Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park. There I observed a Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa* and a Rufous Fantail *R. rufifrons* together, perched on a low tree in a creek bed within 50 cm of each other. What a photograph it would have made!

D. McDonald, PO Box 1355, WODEN ACT 2606

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

RAVENS ATTACK PIED CURRAWONG

7 May 1990

The series of articles on the Pied Currawong in the March *Canberra Bird Notes* reminded me of an occurrence on the Mount Ainslie foothills last year.

A Pied Currawong was harassing a pair of Australian Ravens perched in a tree. One raven that was perched about 3m above the ground jumped/dived on the currawong as it passed underneath and forced it to the ground with its feet. There it stood on the currawong, holding it firmly to the ground. The second raven joined the fracas and made a determined pecking attack on the helpless currawong. The currawong looked a "goner" and deserves full marks for survival. It managed to wriggle free and departed the scene at more than top speed towards houses in the nearby suburb.

Bryan FitzGerald, 36 Winnecke Street, AINSLIE ACT 2602

REVIEW

Birds International (vol. 1, no. 1 (January/March 1989)). Publisher's address: PO Box 206, Turrumurra, NSW 2074. \$28 for 4 issues (one year).

Birds International is an exciting new journal devoted to the birds of the world. It is produced in Australia and edited by an internationally renowned and Canberra-based ornithologist, Joe Forshaw. He is probably best known to COG members for his books, illustrated by William Cooper, on parrots and birds of paradise.

A bird watching ambition that I have is to go on one of the many tempting overseas tours that are on offer. All that is needed is the time and lots of money - and a good excuse to leave the rest of the family behind! I thought that this journal might be the poor man's substitute, but instead I found that it whetted my appetite for travel. It would be wonderful to follow in Robert Ridgely's footsteps to the border of Brazil and Bolivia in order to see the beautiful Hyacinth Macaws in the wild.

The layout and illustrations seemed good to my untrained eye, though perhaps fewer and more enlarged photographs might be preferable.

The first copy of the magazine lines up to its world-wide perspective with articles on South America (Hyacinth Macaw), North America

(Roadrunner), Europe (Greenland White-fronted Goose), Mauritius (Pink Pigeon), Africa and elsewhere (Bee-eaters) and a photographic essay on Antarctica.

Perhaps reflecting its Antipodean antecedents, there are three articles on Australasian birds (Comb-crested Jacana, Golden Bowerbird and Kakapo). The journal is rounded out with notes and news from around the world, including conservation material from the ICBP. The conservation message is an important element of editorial policy.

I found all of the articles interesting, but particularly so where they combined exotic (in the traditional sense of the word) birds and exotic locations.

If the journal is to achieve its aim of catering for an international audience it will have to take care to ensure that its material does not focus too narrowly on one part of the globe. The share of articles on Australia and New Zealand seems rather high. But perhaps our part of the world is of as much interest to overseas birdwatchers as it is to tourists generally.

Magazine publishing is a risky business. I hope that this venture is a commercial success. As far as I know, it is tapping a new market. A subscription would make an ideal present for a birdwatcher with an interest in birds of the world.

Tony Lawson

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

A well-kept secret is that some of the best wilderness areas in Australia are owned by the Department of Defence. These contain the training areas and bombing ranges used by the defence forces. I have often wondered why the department does not make more of the fact that they do have a role in preserving wilderness areas. I think it is a shame that Jervis Bay was not turned into an extended ammunition depot. The "buffer zones" required around it would have ensured that it stayed in a wild state for some time to come. Instead, no doubt, the country will be "opened up" so that developers may promote leisure activities.

Perhaps next time the Department of Defence are looking to acquire land for training areas they should enlist conservationists to help by explaining how the department has a role to play in retaining wild areas.

An article published during April in the London newspaper *The Times* has revealed that the Crane *Grus grus* has returned to breed in Britain for the first time since the end of the 16th Century. This return has been the most closely guarded wildlife secret of the last decade. I say decade deliberately because a small group of the birds has attempted to breed every year since 1981 and has been successful three times. Up to date only four young have been raised as they are highly vulnerable to disturbance and predation for 10 weeks after hatching. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said "We cannot stress too highly that the birds are enormously vulnerable to disturbance and we urge the general public and birdwatchers in particular not even to try to locate them. Please, leave them alone."

The interesting point about this statement is the **particular** people asked to leave them alone are birdwatchers. We have now reached the point, where some birdwatchers (presumably of the 'twitcher' species) are actually dangerous to birds. I wonder what we would do if a Bustard attempted to breed in Canberra? Would we 'twitch' it away? What do our readers think?

Recently a book called "The Illustrated Dictionary of Australian Birds by Common Name" written by J.D. Macdonald was brought to my attention. It is a fun book worth a remaindered price and lists the derivations of bird names and some local names used for birds. I noted it did not include "midget magpie" for the White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii* which is one of my favourites having suffered the attentions of a breeding male triller.

One interesting fact was that the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* derives its name from the Hindi word *main* which means the ability to speak back or mimic. This is a characteristic of the mynas especially the Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa* and is the reason they are kept in captivity.

Our own Noisy Miner *Manorina melanocephala* is supposed to have derived its name from maina via myna and mina.

The book has upset one of my basic beliefs. The word Emu is not an Australian aboriginal one as I thought. It is instead derived from the Arabic word for Ostrich which is written as *Na-amah* in our script. During the Arab expansion into the Iberian Peninsular, the word became *ema* in Portuguese and was applied to the European Crane. From there the Portuguese took the word to the East Indies and applied it to the cassowary. The next move was to Australia via the Dutch or English and its application to the dry-country cassowary-type bird. For the full details of this story you should read the book.

And finally for a joke. What goes "oom, oom"? Upon being asked this question I gave an erudite explanation touching on bronzewings, frogmouths and painted quail. My questioner looked at me curiously and at the small piece of paper in her hand and said "No, you are wrong - its a cow walking backward" ... Collapse of my ego!

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

For the third list in a row we have records of both the Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* and the Common Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*. The first two koels were reported in the summer of 1985-86. The summers of 1986-87 and 1987-88 produced only one report but the next two summers 1988-89 and 1989-90, have produced sixteen reports (but of how many birds?). The situation with the Regent Honeyeater is less clear. The analysis of these records would be an interesting exercise and they can be made available to any member wishing to undertake the task.

The "twitchers" highlights are the Red-backed Kingfisher *Halcyon pyrrhopygia* (first record since 1981) and the Chestnut-rumped Hylacola *Sericornis pyrrhopygius* (not often recorded from our area). Note the scientific name of *pyrrhopygius* (or *pyrrhopygia*) means "fiery rumped" in both species.

The largest flock of Brown Quail *Coturnix australis* reported so far was seen in long grass at the northern edge of Isabella Plains Road, Tuggeranong. The Brown Quail tends to flock more than other quail.

The "old" records of the Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida* were provided as data for the review of the status of the bird published in this issue.

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST No 26

Category 3

White-bellied Sea-Eagle

1;4 Mar 90; P.Veerman; Kambah Pool area

Brown Quail

12-15;25 Feb 90;B .Graham & M. Wright; Isabella Plains

Peaceful Dove

4;14 Aug 88; H.Wright; Agistment Paddocks Cotter Road
1;20 Nov 88; H.Wright; Agistment Paddocks Cotter Road
2;10 Dec 88; H.Wright; Agistment Paddocks Cotter
Road 1; 6 Jan 90; H.Wright; Agistment Paddocks
Cotter Road

Common Koel

1M;17,19,22 Nov 89; J.Whatman; Fisher
1M;4-8 Dec 89;R.E & T.A. Clayton; O'Connor

Red-backed Kingfisher
1;5 Oct 89;B.Jones & B.McMurtrie; Acacia Inlet
Singing Bushlark
2;30 Nov & 2,4,7 Dec 89;J.Whatman; Bonython
1;25 Feb 90;J.Holland; Point Hut Retention Pond
Chestnut-rumped Hylacola
1/2;23 Feb 90; I.Taylor; Rolley's Flat, Upper Cotter River
Regent Honeyeater
1;12 Feb 90;J.Gibson, Holt

Possible Escapees

Little Corella
2;26 Feb & 6,12,14 Mar 90; G. & R.Elliott; Holt
Musk Lorikeet
1;25 Feb 90; B.Lepschi; Weston

Escapees

Peaceful Dove
1;7 May 89; C.Philpot; Watson

FOR SALE

The following are available from Canberra Ornithologists Group, PO Box 301, CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608:

A POCKET LIST OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS

Price 50c

This booklet lists the names of all bird species recorded in Australia. Alongside the names are ten columns that can be used to tally the species seen in different localities or on different days. It greatly simplifies the recording of field lists.

A FIELD LIST OF THE BIRDS OF CANBERRA AND DISTRICT

Price \$3

This booklet lists the bird species found in the Canberra region with indications of the frequency of occurrence, time of breeding, preferred habitat, localities where they may be found, and nest details. It is designed to provide supplementary local detail to larger publications which need to be consulted for identification.

BIRD SONGS OF CANBERRA

Price \$10

This cassette contains recordings of the songs and calls of 73 birds that are commonly heard in Canberra gardens and parks. The majority have been recorded in Canberra or the surrounding area. Seasonal variation in songs have been included where appropriate.

GARDEN BIRD SURVEY CHART

Price 50c

This is the means of contributing to our Garden Bird Survey and keeping track of what happens in your area.

ACT BIRDWATCHERS HOTLINE

Telephone 247 5530

An up-to-date five minute recorded message with interesting news such as returning migrants, rarities, meetings, outings, and bargains for birdwatchers in Canberra. Twenty-four hour service up-dated every Sunday.

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Contributions are welcome. These should fit into one of the following categories: major articles (up to about 3000 words); short notes and "Odd Obs" (up to about 300 words); reviews of books and articles (up to about 500 words); and where to watch birds (up to about 800 words). The articles and notes should cover matters of the distribution, identification, and behaviour of birds in the Canberra region (i.e. New South Wales coast north to Jervis Bay, and west to the Riverina). Contributions can be sent to the editors c/o David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 258 2252).

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