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CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP INC.

P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608

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(1993)

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(Continued inside back cover)

A CANBERRA SIGHTING OF THE "ITALIAN" SPARROW

Nicola Clark

On 21 January 1992 I was sitting eating lunch at an open area just outside the Union Building at the University of Canberra. In the vicinity there were about 20 House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* feeding either from food deliberately thrown to them or accidentally dropped by other lunchers.

One of the sparrows attracted my attention since it looked like a normal male House Sparrow except it had a completely chestnut head including the crown. At first I thought it was a Tree Sparrow *P. montanus*, although there was something about the bird that was not quite right when comparing it with the memories of the Tree Sparrows I had seen in Wagga Wagga, NSW, and Melbourne, Vic.

The bird flew away after about five minutes and I did not see it again that day despite going back to the area a couple of times later for a few minutes each time. When I got home I checked to see if the bird was a Tree Sparrow. However, from memory it did not have a black spot on the side of the head and it had a larger black bib than I would have expected on a Tree Sparrow. I did not check the wing stripe(s) at this time.

I looked for the bird each lunch time after that but it was not seen again until 28 January when it was once more feeding amongst the House Sparrows. I then carefully checked the head and bib, and paid particular attention to the fact that it had a single and not a double white wing stripe. I reached the conclusion that it was not a Tree Sparrow, but some sort of unusual House Sparrow. It approached to within 2 m of me at one stage and although the chestnut crown made it appear at first glance neater, cleaner, and hence slightly smaller, than the House Sparrows, careful inspection revealed it to be identical in size and behaviour. Upon returning home that evening a search of the literature available to me (Peterson et al (1969). Heinzel et al. (1974)) revealed that the bird I saw was identical to the Italian Sparrow *Passer domesticus italiae* as depicted in the illustrations in those books (see also Figure 1).

The following day I returned to the area with my husband in the evening (1730 hrs) and we were eventually able to locate the bird again. We watched it for 15 minutes, again noting the bib, crown, head spots and wing stripes. The bird appeared less confident than the others, feeding on the edge of the group. It did not fly off with food as some of the other birds did (to feed nestlings?). Eventually it flew off in an easterly direction as it had on the previous two occasions.

One of the Collins New Naturalist series is a monograph on the House Sparrow (Summers-Smith 1963). This mentions (on p. 99) that plumage variants do occur. To quote the book "One of the commonest features is the appearance of chestnut-brown replacing black in the male; this is most frequent in the bib, which may be completely chestnut, though it occasionally occurs in the head feathers resulting in birds resembling the clearly marked sub-species *italiae*".

Obviously the bird that I had seen was an unusually plumaged variant of the House Sparrow that made it identical to the Italian Sparrow. A bird report form of the sighting has been submitted to The Rarities Panel to be filed with the COG records of unusual sightings. The number of sparrows in the area has decreased markedly and the bird has not been seen since.

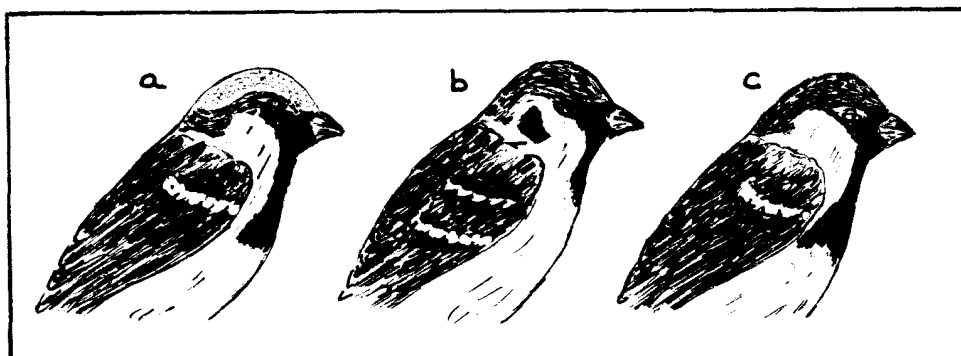


Figure 1. Sketch showing the main identifying features of: a) House Sparrow; b) Tree Sparrow; and c) the "Italian" Sparrow seen by me at the University of Canberra. Note the presence or absence of the black patch on the side of the head, and the presence of one or two stripes on the wing.

References

- Heinzel. **H.**, Fitter. **R.**, and Parslow, J. (1974). *The Birds of Britain and Europe*. (3rd edition). Collins: London.
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- Summers-Smith, J.D. (1963). *The House Sparrow*. New Naturalist Series. Collins: London.

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NOTES ON THE USE OF NEST BOXES BY ROSELLAS AND AN OBSERVATION OF AN EASTERN ROSELLA FEEDING YOUNG CRIM- SON ROSELLAS

Peter Jorm

We are intermittent feeders of parrots and hence our house in Pearce is considered well worth checking out by lots of parrots. In 1990 We tried to encourage rosellas to nest by putting up two bird boxes in our trees. The design of the boxes was based on information provided by our daughter and a leaflet prepared by the Bird Observers Club of Australia (McCulloch and Thomas 1989). The dimensions and other construction details of our boxes are:

- Manufactured from marine 5-ply wood.
- 15 cm square in cross-section. . 45 cm deep.
- Entrance hole 6.5 - 7.5 cm in diameter.
- Hinged lid overhanging entrance hole. . Hinges made from an old belt.
- Perching platform the width of the hole and 7.5 - 10 cm below it.
- A "ladder" on the inside of the box for the young to exit. (We used plastic garden trellis which can be bent to fit the box.)

The boxes were attached to trees in the garden 6 m to 7 m above ground level - one with its entrance facing north (Box 1) and the other with its entrance facing east (Box 2).

Box 1.

Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* nested in this box in 1990-91 and again in 1991-92, but we were unsure of the outcome.

However, 1992-93 was an eventful year. In September 1992 a pair of Eastern Rosellas *P. eximius* moved in but again we did not know the outcome. Their departure was followed by occupancy by a swarm of bees. The bees were removed by an apiarist and we took the opportunity to make the roof of the box hinged and to put the whole thing on a pulley and rope (with a separate rope attached to the base of the box to steady it and assist in its lowering). After the removal of the bees a pair of Crimson Rosellas immediately nested in the box.

For the first time we have been able to observe the young as we can see heads bobbing at the entrance hole to the box and occasionally one will emerge and sit perched on the entrance. The two or three young are mottled green and red - typical immature Crimson Rosella colours.

An interesting observation we have made is that a solitary Eastern Rosella, a regular feeder in our backyard and easily identifiable because its tail feathers are

missing, is also feeding the young Crimson Rosellas. We have seen him on a number of occasions entering the nest box and on others regurgitating food to the nestlings (who are now bigger than he is).

How can it be so?

He could be one of the original pair of Eastern Rosellas which nested in the box early in the season. Alternatively, he could have lost his nest elsewhere (and his mate?) to natural causes or predators and is now responding to the feeding calls of the young Crimsons Rosellas.

He is remarkably aggressive for an Eastern Rosella and we have seen him get the best of a pair of Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla* in competition for food. He is not the most adept flyer owing to his lack of a tail. Whether this is a defect or the result of an encounter with a car or predator we don't know.

The departure of the young rosellas was not without trauma. On three occasions over two days we found one of the young (fully feathered but apparently not able to fly) on the ground below the box. I am unable to say whether it was the same bird each time. On two occasions I put the young bird back into the box. I did this using a ladder much too short for safety. I was not willing to use the pulley which had been installed after the episode with the bees for fear that, if I did not position the box exactly as it had been before, the adults might abandon the young. This might have been a needless fear, but how is one to know?

On the third occasion I decided I was *pushing* my luck with the ladder and, after consultation with an officer of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, placed the young bird in a carton on the roof of our garage. The theory being that the parents would likely to continue to care for it. This worked perfectly and the young was gone within twelve hours.

This year Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* have been taking an interest in the box, but with the box now on a pulley and rope I can easily discourage this and other unwanted species from using it.

Box 2.

No birds have nested in this box. We are told that in the UK some birds will nest only in boxes that have the entrance facing in a particular direction. We have had parrots rolling on the ground fighting for the box with the north facing entrance (Box 1), but this box, which has an east facing entrance, has been ignored by all species since it was erected in 1990. As an experiment we intend to move this box so that its entrance also faces north.

Reference

McCulloch, E., and Thomas, R. (1989). Nest boxes for Australian birds. (3rd edition). Bird Observers Club of Australia: Melbourne.

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COMMON MYNAS DISPLACE EASTERN ROSELLAS FROM NEST HOLE

Frank Peters and Audrey Peters

We have lived on the Reef ridge between Curtin and Lyons since 1967. Our block is next to a reserve which contains a number of mature Yellow Boxes *Eucalyptus melliodora*. These trees have hollows and knot holes which have been used for nesting by Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla*, Eastern Rosellas *Platycercus eximius*, and Crimson Rosellas *P. elegans*. A wide range of other birds have nested elsewhere in the trees.

We have developed a shrub and small tree garden which over the years has provided nests for small birds such as Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis*, Yellow-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, and Superb Fairy-wrens *Malurus cyaneus*.

About five years ago we saw the first Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* in the area. One of us (FP) took part in the survey of Common Mynas which was undertaken in July 1990 (Davey 1991). Since that time there has been a veritable explosion of mynas in our area.

In 1990, the mynas drove out the Eastern Rosellas which used to nest in a hole about 7 m above ground level in a Yellow Box straight outside our dining room window. In 1992, we saw the mynas harassing Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata* which were trying to build a nest on the branch above the hole the mynas had taken over. The wattlebirds gave up, and we do not know where they nested. This year for the first time in over 20 years, there were no small birds' nests in the garden.

During the period October 1992 through to March 1993, except for two periods, the mynas were continuously taking food to the hollow and it appears they produced three broods. We do not know how many young were fledged. Long (1981) states that Common Mynas will produce up to three broods a year and up to six eggs are laid. With this rate of reproduction it is not surprising we are experiencing a veritable explosion of Common Mynas.

Except for three Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* that come to be fed twice a day, the only birds in our garden now are the mynas.

While we cannot say definitely it was the mynas that have driven the small birds away, we can say quite categorically the mynas have displaced the rosellas from their hole, and drove the wattlebirds away,

Reference

Davey, C, (1991), Numbers and distribution of the Common Myna in Canberra in July 1990, *Canberra Bird Notes* 16: 41-50,

Long, J.L. (1981). *Introduced birds of the world*. Reed: Sydney.

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CRESTED SHRIKE-TIT: NESTING ACTIVITY

Elizabeth Truswell and Jane Truswell

This note has been prompted by the comment in the ACT bird atlas (Taylor and COG 1992) that there are no recent reports of nests or eggs of the Crested Shrike-tit *Falcunculus frontatus* in the ACT. In the second week of December 1992 at Campbell Park, we observed a pair of Crested Shrike-tits busy with a nest in the canopy of a c. 15 m high Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis*. Although the nest was too high for us to see any detail, it appeared quite large, with an oval cup shape, and was a curious pale yellowish-green colour. This may have been a result of lichens or eucalypt blossoms being used in the construction.

We watched a lot of feeding activity for several days, until eventually we could see the heads of the young appearing above the lip of the nest. From the ground we could see at least two young, but there may have been more - from the ground it was difficult to see. The last time we saw the young was 30 December. When we visited the nest site about two weeks later the parent birds were still actively coming and going from the nest although we could no longer see the young.

Other nesting activity observed in the area during December included White-throated Gerygones *Gerygone olivacea*, Brown Treecreepers *Climacteris picumnus*, Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*, and Dusky Woodswallows *Artamus cyanopterus*. A pair of Diamond Firetails *Emblema guttata* were energetically attempting to build inside a large mistletoe, but didn't seem to bring their efforts to a successful conclusion.

Reference

Taylor, M. and Canberra Ornithologists Group (1992). Birds of the Australian Capital Territory - an atlas. Canberra Ornithologists Group and National Capital Planning Authority: Canberra.

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FOR SALE

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.

Available from Natural History Shopfront, Room G5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic, ACT, or at monthly meetings.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 1992

Dear Members.

I regret that I will be unable to present my final report as President of COG in person, as I will be overseas at the time of the AGM.

I think it is fair to say that 1992 was probably the most eventful in COG's history. It was certainly a year in which we passed a number of important milestones.

The Atlas

The most significant event was, of course, the completion and publication of the Atlas (*Birds of the Australian Capital Territory: an Atlas*). The Atlas was launched on 26 October by the Member for Fraser, Mr John Langmore MP (a COG member and Atlas sponsor) at a ceremony in the Australian National Botanic Gardens, attended by more than 100 COG Members, guests and the media. The event and the publication were well publicised, with the *Canberra Times* printing both a detailed report and subsequently a favourable review, two long interviews on ABC radio, reports on local commercial TV news and a front page article in the *ANU Reporter*. This publicity along with the first rate appearance and high quality of the Atlas itself, and the marketing expertise of Tony Lawson, resulted in sales well beyond the Committee's most optimistic predictions - the initial print run of 1250 was sold out in just over four weeks! The committee found itself having to make urgent arrangements for a further run of 1000 copies which was delivered late in December. The 1992 committee have not been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Market Forecasting.

I would like to place on record COG's gratitude to everyone who contributed to the project. McComas Taylor (co-author with COG) originated the concept, managed the data collection phase, and wrote and prepared the text of the Atlas for printing. His was an enormous task over more than six years. Muriel Brookfield and an Editorial Sub-committee comprising Grahame Clark, Chris Davey, Michael Lenz, David Purchase and myself spent hundreds of hours reviewing and commenting on the text. The National Capital Planning Authority and its predecessor, the National Capital Development Commission provided funding for the various stages. COG also obtained an ACT Heritage Grant and additional financial support from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. COG Members were generous in their support for the Atlas through sponsorship of pages, and in various fund-raising activities. Many COG Members contributed through submission of data, fund-raising, and other tasks. I believe the Atlas has done a great deal to promote the image of COG as a hard-working and professionally competent organisation, and one which is making a very positive contribution to the community.

The Natural History Centre

COG's other big step in 1992 was the opening of its first ever shopfront. The shopfront now known as "The Natural History Centre" was opened by ACT Environment Minister Bill Wood on 27 September. It is located at the Griffin Centre, and is

run in association with the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra and the ACT Herpetological Association. The new shopfront has required a great deal of organisational effort by the three associations, although the major financial responsibility at this stage has been COG's. Sarah Thomas has done a splendid job in its planning and setting up, and in rostering and training volunteer staff. Jenny Bounds and Robyn and Grahame Elliott have also been very active. The Centre has operated for several hours on four days a week since its opening. It has attracted a steady stream of visitors, and has succeeded in helping us represent our organisations to the public. The shopfront has also been a major retail outlet for the Atlas.

Outings and Meetings

Vice-President Jenny Bounds produced a much revamped outings and campout program which included several visits to new birdwatching hotspots. Jenny also organised a workshop to train new outings leaders.

Barbara Allan continued her program of organising some quite outstanding speakers. It is very satisfying to be able to count between 100 and 120 members at most of our monthly meetings - a statistic which speaks for itself. I would like to offer particular thanks to Dick Schodde, who gave several highly interesting and entertaining "Bird of the Month" talks, and topped off the year with an invitation to members to visit the Australian Wildlife Collection (of which he is Curator) for our Christmas Party.

Exhibitions

Ann McKenzie assumed the mantle of Exhibitions Officer in 1992, and has attacked the job with great enthusiasm. COG participated in six exhibitions during the year, and is planning to be involved in the first ever Australian Science Festival to be held in Canberra in March/April 1993. Ann McKenzie was also a very willing participant in the organisation of the three major launch functions in 1992.

Publications

Barbara Allan edited our monthly newsletter *Gang-gang*, once again meeting a high standard. as did David Purchase and Grahame Clark with *Canberra Bird Notes*. Barbara gave *Gang-gang* a new look format in 1992. Malcolm Fyfe and a group of volunteers again did a high quality job on the Annual Bird Report.

Hotline

The ACT Birdwatchers Hotline has remained in the competent and enthusiastic care of Richard Thomas. The hotline has continued to attract good support from members and the public. Bird clubs in Sydney recently decided to adopt the idea, and consulted COG for advice on setting up their own hotline.

Environment and Conservation

COG played a major role in the preparation and presentation to the ACT Government of a wide ranging submission entitled "The Natural and Cultural Significance of Mulligan's Flat, Gungahlin ACT: A Nature Reserve Proposal". The high quality "glossy" report covered plants, birds, reptiles, frogs, mammals, invertebrates, geology, soils, archaeology and history of Mulligan's Flat, and was submitted by seven groups under the umbrella of the Conservation Council of the South-east Region and Canberra.

The report recognised Mulligan's Flat as one of the most outstanding remnants of its particular type of ecosystem in the region and argued very strongly for its preservation as a large regularly shaped nature reserve. The report was presented to the ACT Minister for the Environment, senior officials and the media at a launch ceremony on site on 27 July. Both the *Canberra Times* and local TV stations gave good coverage to the launch.

The ACT Government has reacted positively to the proposals and has undertaken to increase very significantly the area previously proposed for reservation. I have subsequently visited the area with the ACT Chief Planner, Director of the Conservation Council, and senior ACT Parks and Conservation Service officers. On this visit agreement in principle was reached on boundaries for the area. The result of this campaign is that a large and regularly shaped nature reserve will be declared at Mulligan's Flat in 1993. It will continue to be one of the very best bird watching sites in the Canberra region.

In 1992, the ACT Government closed a trail-bike area in eucalypt woodland at Mt Stromlo which was the subject of strong submissions from COG and other natural history groups in 1990 and 1991. COG will continue to consult with ACT authorities on the future use of the area.

COG provided a written submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the National Capital, which was enquiring into "Protecting and Managing the National Capital's Open Spaces". COG's submission argued strongly for the preservation of remnants of lowland forest, open woodland and native grassland. I was called upon to appear as a witness to give evidence to the Joint Committee. The Joint Committee's final report "Our Bush Capital" made several references to COG's submission and evidence (including several verbatim quotations) and took into its recommendations COG's major points.

COG also made a submission to and attended a discussion seminar with the ACT Planning Authority on the new Draft Territory Plan. COG's main arguments again were directed towards the preservation of areas of lowland woodland, forest and native grassland, the provision of natural corridors in urban areas and the greater use of native plants in public areas.

COG has continued its association with TESAL (Towards Ecologically Sound Australian Landscapes), an information group of organisations and individuals aimed at promoting the greater use of Australian plants in landscapes. TESAL has produced a paper promoting preservation of, and native planting in, corridors in urban areas.

Due primarily to other priorities, several conservation issues are being carried forward into 1993. The most important of these is the preparation of a conservation policy statement.

As in previous years, the cooperation with other groups has been critical to success of COG's representations on important environmental matters. The Conservation Council of the South-east Region and Canberra is the key organisation in these projects. Speaking as it does for almost 40 associated groups, and with an excellent information base, contacts and lobbying skills, the council is able to open doors and to keep pressure on issues in a manner than a single group like COG would find impossible. The council has no autonomous funding base, is frequently short of funds and deserves continuing strong support from COG.

Projects

The Projects Subcommittee continued to pursue a busy program under the stewardship of Malcolm Fyfe. Twelve meetings were held during the year.

The most important project was the consultancy undertaken for COG by CSIRO Division of Wildlife & Ecology to develop a database program and to purchase appropriate computer hardware and software to enable COG to input, process and output the now vast amount of bird survey data COG has continued to assemble.

The consultancy work was undertaken for CSIRO by Ian Baird (who is also a COG member) and was completed in November 1992. COG now has a powerful facility which will accommodate data collected in bird surveys within a large area known as the "COG Area of Concern" (refer to a recent copy of COG's Annual Bird Report for details of the area). The new database currently accommodates ACT Atlas data and data from the new data sheets, but will be extended to include the Waterbird Survey, Garden Bird Survey, and the (national) Australian Bird Count. This is a big step forward for COG, and I would like to suggest to the incoming committee that once the database program is running properly and the backlog of data entry is overcome, a major effort be mounted to increase the number and area coverage of data sheets being submitted.

The Projects Subcommittee is also drawing up a list of bird survey projects which might be undertaken by COG members.

The Subcommittee has undertaken a detailed review of the Garden Bird Survey, and will make recommendations to the committee in 1993 on the future of the study.

Since late 1991, COG has cooperated closely with the NSW branch of the RAOU which was set up in that year. One of the main objectives of the NSW branch has been to increase cooperation between groups on bird studies, and upgrade work on bird studies in NSW and the ACT. Chris Davey and Jenny Bounds attended a weekend seminar in Newcastle in July. In November COG hosted a weekend workshop at the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology, Gungahlin, which was attended by the RAOU, numerous NSW based bird groups, and representatives from Federal, NSW and ACT government parks and wildlife organisations. This was organised by Chris Davey. COG's project and studies and the expertise behind them are in almost all respects ahead of other clubs and organisations. Some of COG's studies have been going on for more than a decade. Representatives of other organisations expressed considerable interest in the new COG database project and one group has already adopted a garden bird study similar to COG's. These state and nation wide studies are important to provide essential information on birds to facilitate their longer term conservation. Many of the ACT's birds are migrants, and preservation of bird habitat in COG's area alone will not result in their conservation.

Malcolm Fyfe, Grahame Clark, Chris Davey, Michael Lenz and David Purchase have worked splendidly on the subcommittee. The results speak for themselves.

Finance and Management

The management of COG's finances increased in work content and importance in 1992, due in particular to the atlas, shopfront and Mulligan's Flat projects. The outstanding skills of Noel Luff dealt with all of these matters.

The husband and wife team of Robyn and Graham Elliott performed splendidly as Secretary and Assistant Secretary, and with Jenny Bounds and Sarah Thomas did much of the background work on the shopfront. We wish the Elliotts well, following their recent transfer to Brisbane.

Education

The committee position of Education Officer was unfilled in 1992, and with the resignation of all three teacher members from the 1991 committee, this important area of activity largely fell by the wayside. I would like to suggest to the 1993 committee that a joint natural history youth education program be developed by COG with the Field Naturalists and Herpetological associations.

Special General Meeting

An ad hoc Special General Meeting convened in January 1993 confirmed the committee's expulsion of a member who had made several abusive and offensive telephone calls to COG committee members and excursion leaders.

Conclusion

I would like to thank all those members who have served on the committee and as volunteers in the shopfront and for numerous other tasks. In particular, those members who through their field surveys, sponsorships or other assistance brought the atlas to fruition, must feel it was all worthwhile. Other people, such as members of the Rarities Panel and Cedric Bear (who compiles COG's membership records) do a great job away from the public side of COG.

The smaller committee, and the greater delegation of tasks to subcommittees and working groups worked well in COG in 1992. It was our busiest year ever.

1992 was the third and final year that I served as President of COG. It has been an exciting and stimulating time, and one in which COG has changed appreciably. I regret that I cannot be present for the handover to my successor.

Bruce D. Lindenmayer, 16 January 1993

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

The views expressed in "Out and About" do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

First of all an apology. In the last issue I mentioned my concern about a tendency for bird-banding to be used so that "casual observers can see (and hold) birds in the hand". It has been brought to my attention that this could be considered as a personal affront to Mark Clayton who has demonstrated banding techniques in the National Botanic Gardens on behalf of COG and the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Schemes.

This was not intended and I unreservedly apologise to Mark. I am aware that bird-banding has *been* undertaken in the National Botanic Gardens for about thirty years, and data on the bird life is still being gathered under strictly controlled conditions.

I was instead trying to raise the issue of trapping and banding birds which are not the subject of formal studies, the purpose, often under a variety of pretexts, is simply to allow people to see birds in the hand - it is not done for the purpose of learning more about the birds themselves. Sometimes the birds are simply trapped. Handled, and released. It is a different matter entirely to encourage interested people to

participate in on-going studies which involve the use of bird-banding. In such cases the essential role which banding plays in these projects can be clearly demonstrated against the background of the study itself.

I have been concerned about this issue for many years, see for example my comments in "Out and About" concerning the use of mist nets on a COG outing to the Cocoparra Ranges in 1976 (*Canberra Bird Notes* 3(10)).

In the last edition of "Out and About" I asked if anybody could enlighten me about the recent reported sightings of the Paradise Parrot *Psephotus pulcherrinus*. In a recent *Wingspan* (December 1992) more details of the sighting were reported. The sightings were of five parrots seen at or near the homestead of a pastoral property in the Dawson Valley, Qld, from late February to mid-April 1990. The description of the birds were exceptionally precise and included "a burnt sienna-vermillion red band across the forehead and wings". The presence of the red on the forehead separates this species from aviary-bred hybrids of Golden-shouldered and Mulga Parrots. The birds were seen in the same general area where Gilbert (1844) saw them and Lumholty (1880) reported them. In August 1992 ten observers patrolled some 134 square kilometres in a week without success. However, if you are in the Dawson River area you may wish to have a look in some of the native forest areas for yourself. You may be lucky!

The issue of remnant vegetation is one I have raised before in the context of Travelling Stock Routes and old cemeteries. Other examples of remnant vegetation are old school sites and railway (especially disused ones) and road corridors. A recent issue of *Victorian Naturalist* (August 1992) concentrated on the way that road and rail reserves can be used as wildlife corridors and how sensitive management can improve the way that the habitat of linear corridors can help in conservation of native flora and fauna. For those interested in the subject of remnant vegetation I recommend you try and obtain a copy of the journal.

An interesting point to come out of the articles was the way local authorities in Victoria are helping in the appropriate management of pockets of remnant vegetation.

Still on the subject of habitat conservation I notice at the entrance to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve there is a quite lot of improved pasture actually in the reserve. Perhaps this land could *be* managed in such a way that some savannah woodland is recreated? If this type of management is felt to be appropriate, it may be an opportunity for interested non-government bodies (including COG?) to cooperate and offer their services (mainly labour) to the managers of the reserve to help transform this area of land.

People who provide artificial food to birds in their garden can get details of a vitamin supplement from Nekta-Vite. PO Box 41, Malvern Victoria 3144, tel 008 335 952. Nekta-Vite can be used as the basis of a non-fermenting nectar, a solid cake mix or a vitamin/seed cone. Also available is a catalogue of various feeders including models that exclude unwanted species.

REVIEWS

Australian Waterbirds: A Field Guide by Richard Kingsford (1991). Published by Kangaroo Press (PO Box 75, Kenthurst, NSW 2156): Sydney. Pp 128, 88 colour plates, 210 X 132 mm, paperback. \$14.95 (plus \$3.50 postage within Australia).

The author is a researcher for the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service who completed his Ph.D. on the reproductive ecology of the Maned Duck.

The book is designed to help people who know relatively little about waterbirds and is small enough to be readily carried around. It is organised on the basis of where a species is most likely to be observed rather than in taxonomic groups like most field guides. This can be confusing for the experienced bird watcher but helpful for the novice. The species covered are limited to those found in inland wetlands.

The text, unlike most reference books, is readable and interesting enough to be read like a novel. However, it does not provide the level of detail of other field guides to help in identification, distribution and calls. The illustration of favoured habitat and preferred food types is an excellent feature. and the list of wetlands to visit is a good idea.

The photographs of most species are good quality and show the key identification features of the species although the book has been badly let down by some poor photographs of the less common species.

Summary - a very good publication suitable for both the novice and expert ornithologist at a reasonable price.

Reid McLachlan

Birds of the Australian Capital Territory: An Atlas by McComas Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group (1992). Published by Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc and the National Capital Planning Authority: Canberra. Pp. 227 + xviii, A4 format softcover. \$25.00.

This book, as participating COG members would be well aware, is the culmination of three years of listing birds in the 165 grid cells (each 2.5 minutes of latitude and longitude) that encompass the ACT. About 250 observers combined to achieve excellent coverage, with the initial goal of one record sheet per season per grid cell exceeded in the first year. The revised goal of one sheet per cell in each month of the year was also easily exceeded for virtually all cells except a few remote, peripheral ones which nevertheless attained up to 15-20 sheets in total, covering at least eight calendar months. A minimum of about 30 sheets per cell is needed for calculation of reporting rates, and this was reached or easily exceeded for almost half of the cells, mostly in the northern half of the ACT. Another 15 cells, many in the southern half, achieved the high twenties. This effort, and the resulting publication, says a lot for the enthusiasm and dedication of a small band of bird-watchers in a city the size of Canberra, and in a country that still thinks ornithologists are a bit eccentric.

The book itself is also a fitting tribute to a project that was essentially an amateur undertaking - in the sense of "done for the love of it", though by no means lacking in professionalism! Though commissioned by a government authority, and assisted by other government and professional agencies, *Birds of the ACT* is the product of a citizens' special-interest group. This contrasts with the other comparable regional atlas, the *Atlas of Victorian Birds* (Emison et al 1987. Vic Dept Conservation. Forests & Lands. Melbourne), which was an undertaking by a government department although it did use the observations of amateurs. The resulting ACT book is one of which COG members can be justifiably proud.

Birds of the ACT is generally in the format now familiar to bird-watchers, who will have read *The Atlas of Australian Birds* (Blakers et al 1984, RAOU, Melbourne University Press) and perhaps the *Atlas of Victorian Birds*. However, the main body of the book has some interesting departures and innovations. It is divided into "major species" and "minor species", as well as supplementary lists of aviary escapees and

releases (Appendix 2) and very rare vagrants (Appendix 3). This is possible in a small region, where it is appropriate to categorise birds in this way, and also of assistance to beginners: if a suspected species is on the rare vagrant or minor species list, then perhaps one's identification should be checked.

The section on major species is in the usual format of distribution map, showing recording frequency (reporting-rate class) in each cell, with descriptive text covering habitat, local distribution, foraging, movements, breeding, any threats/pressures, and an indication of local population size. Additionally, each species is headed with a concise summary of its numerical and residence status (e.g. "common breeding resident"), the categories "uncommon", "rare" etc being defined in relation to reporting rates. For some species, supplementary maps (Appendix 1) show local winter distribution where this differs from summer distribution. Bar graphs show reporting rate in each month, reporting rate in each ACT province (landscape type), and breeding season. The last-named shows the months (or thirds thereof) in which each type of breeding behaviour (building, eggs, nestlings, dependent young) was seen: an improvement on simply showing the months of unspecified breeding activity. A "hotspot" location is usually given, for the benefit of birders who want to "tick" a particular species. For minor species, too few data were obtained for such analyses. Instead, a spot map is given for each showing its recorded distribution in cells during the ACT atlas, and a brief paragraph on its occurrence in the ACT.

The rationale for the COG atlas, and its goals, methods, findings and related environmental issues, are provided in an introductory section that is amply supplied with maps, climatic graphs and habitat descriptions. This section fully explains how the data were collected and presented, including calculation of reporting rates and their presentation as contour maps. It was a sensible move to place the glossary and abbreviations at the beginning, so readers familiarise themselves with the terms before launching into the species texts. I was also pleased to see the treatment of "confidential" records - those sensitive and potentially threatened species for which details were withheld in order to prevent undue pressure on them. This should forestall the pernicious practice of busloads of "twitchers" descending on a site, wreaking havoc on landholders and possibly the bird(s) for the sake of a 'lick", and giving ornithology a bad name.

After the main text come ten appendices which include a plant list (scientific names of plants mentioned in habitat descriptions), gazetteer, COG annual bird reports cited in full, a list of references cited in the text, and an index of species entries. A loose, single-page transparent overlay has four maps (grid cells, altitude, rainfall, and vegetation and land use) which can be superimposed on the distribution maps of major species. This enables one to tell at a glance whether bird distribution correlates with any of the environmental attributes. The overlay maps are not a perfect fit, but they are close enough. (This overlay is no longer available. eds)

In the texts and maps on major species I found many points of interest, for instance: Whistling Kite possibly declining locally; Collared Sparrowhawks living in urban Canberra; Wedge-tailed and Little Eagles having almost complementary/ local

distributions; agreement with my own experience on seasonal calling frequency of nocturnal birds. I noticed only two typing errors, and an error in a breeding graph: the Australian Hobby text says dependent young in December and nest with young in early January, but the graph for these is a month out (showing January and early February, respectively). I have a couple of slight differences of opinion with the text: the "wealth of detailed" published information on sparrowhawks in Canberra is perhaps overstated, in relation to what could have been achieved with more disciplined note-taking; Veerman's discussion (1986, *Canberra Bird Notes* 11: 123-124) on Powerful Owl habitat and prey is perhaps rather superficial and speculative. Oddly, the Metcalfs' contribution to knowledge of the Australian Hobby in Canberra (1989, *Aust. Bird Watcher* 13: 20-29) was not listed! It seems carping to point out these minor matters, which detract little from what is a well produced and attractively presented book.

It was a little disappointing to see a repeat of the illustration used in *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, but perhaps understandable given budget and time constraints. These vignettes were used only for major species in the COG atlas, meaning that we are spared having the Black Kite printed upside down again (or had COG members noticed this in the RAOU atlas?) I must admit that the RAOU vignettes are a reminder that the ACT is a microcosm of the "big picture": local aspects must be seen in a broader regional, national and indeed global perspective. However, the smallness of the ACT has in no way resulted in a bird atlas of lesser standard than the national one. *Birds of the ACT* follows the fine tradition established by *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, and detailed comparison is inappropriate because of the vastly differing scales and consequences this has for resolution of detail.

Some comparison with other regional bird atlases is inevitable. The *Tasmanian Bird Atlas* (Thomas 1979, University of Tasmania) and *A Bird Atlas of the Adelaide Region* (SAGA 1977, Adelaide) were unsophisticated, early or pilot attempts showing only distribution within cells. *A Bird Atlas of the Melbourne Region* (Aston & Balmford 1978, VORG, Melbourne) was a pilot atlas that did show reporting rates in ten-minute cells, with graphs of seasonal occurrence, and was similarly limited in area; it provided no species texts. The *Atlas of Victorian Birds* is most similar to the ACT atlas, but goes into more habitat detail in terms of physiographic zones and plant alliances within each zone (its Table 1 and Appendix 2 are very useful). However, the ACT atlas is visually more appealing, and the process used to generate maps of reporting rates is more sophisticated, with the resultant gradients more realistic. In both these regional atlases, the presentation of absolute reporting rates is more realistic than the use of relative reporting rates as in the RAOU atlas. In the RAOU atlas, reporting rates for a species are shown as a proportion of the highest reporting rate recorded in a cell for that species: the maps create a false impression of abundance for rare species, unless one has read the full explanation on two difference pages! In the regional atlases, absolute reporting rates (frequency in relation to the number of record sheets) convey some impression of relative abundance, and enable comparison between related species, provided one allows for behaviour and other differences.

I am confident that *Birds of the ACT* has achieved, and will achieve, all that it was designed to. I can do no better than endorse the words of Sir Ninian Stephen in his foreword, and the authors in their preface and synopsis, on the value of such a project. This book will become a valuable tool in sensible planning, and in the resolution of impending environmental conflicts, as an expanding Canberra threatens to gobble up its precious natural habitats. The book is an invaluable compendium of knowledge on the birds of the ACT, and the system adopted for the grid cells means that the data are compatible with national and state bird atlases. This means that ACT data will also fit neatly into a wider context.

It seems superfluous to try to "sell" *Birds of the ACT* to COG members. I fail to see how any bird-watcher living in, or visiting, the ACT could be without it. It would also be invaluable to bird-watchers in surrounding parts of New South Wales, and of interest to ornithologists at similar altitudes elsewhere in south-east Australia. For instance, many of the environmental principles, and their consequences for bird movement, apply to the Northern Tablelands of NSW. Therefore, *Birds of the ACT* will be a useful reference during compilation of the NSW Bird Atlas, when that project is nearing publication. *Birds of the ACT* is a worthy model for other Australian states and territories which lack a published, regional bird atlas of that standard. Currently, this means all of them except Victoria!

Stephen Debus

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

A mixed bag of sightings this time. The most unusual was the Black-faced Monarch *Monarcha melanopsis* at Mulligan's Flat in December. Also recorded at Mulligan's Flat were two Little Friarbirds *Philemon citreogularis* and a Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia*. Regent Honeyeaters were also recorded in suburbia - during late September through to early October in Curtin, and January in Weetangera.

There was a record of a Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae* on 31 January in Kaleen and on 20 February in Hawker - was this the same bird? The one at Hawker was trying to get at captive birds in an aviary.

Another dark morph White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis* was seen at Kingston Boat Harbour in September. Are these birds a rare winter migrant to our area or a passage migrant?

The only Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea* record this time was of six birds at Binalong. What has happened to all the corellas that were being reported from Canberra - are they still here and not being reported, or have they taken off for their natural habitat on the western plains passing through Binalong on the way?

Finally, one of our oldest records for some time - a Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster* from "Gungahlin" in 1975. Remember it is never too late to submit a record which can then be incorporated in the COG Database of birds of this region.

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO 35

Category 3

Emu

1; 28 Dec 92; B. Lepschi; west shore Lake Bathurst near old boat shed

Freckled Duck

8; 22 Aug 92; B. Lepschi; south end Lake George c. 3.5 km south of Silver Wattle Point

Whistling Kite

1; 9 Sep 90; M. Fyfe; south slope Mt. Mugga Mugga
1; 8 Nov 92; M. Fyfe; south end Wollogorang Lagoon
1; 8 Nov 92; M. Fyfe; north end of Lake George

Grey Goshawk

1 (white morph); 10 Sep 90; G. Clifton; Moreshead Drive adjacent to Mt. Pleasant Nature Park
1; 31 Jan 93; M. Clayton; Maribymong Ave. Kaleen
1; 20 Feb 93; B. Whitworth; Woolner Crt, Hawker

White-bellied Sea-Eagle

1; 20 Sep 92; M. Butterfield; Coppins Crossing
1; 16 Oct 92; M. Moffat; Kelly's Swamp
1; 23 Dec 92; J. Bissett; Molonglo River south of Canberra Airport

Brown Quail

6; 12 Feb 91;/ 2; 25 Feb 91;/ 12; 27 Feb 91;/ 4; 29 Apr 91;/
4; 13 May 91; D. Purchase; west side Lake Ginninderra Peninsula

Spotless Crake

1; 1 Sep 90; M. Clayton; ponds at CSIRO "Gungahlin"
1; 30 Jun 91; J. Holland; Point Hut

Red-necked Avocet

1; 8 Aug 92; M. Butterfield; dam off Lake Road, Bungendore

Marsh Sandpiper

1; 16 Dec 90; S. Chittick, D. Drew, J. Holland; Lake Tuggeranong

Peaceful Dove
 1; 27 Jan 91; B. Lepschi; Wee Jasper

Glossy Black Cockatoo
 2; 29 Aug 92; J. Bounds; north-east slope of Mt Majura

Little Corella
 6; 25 Oct 92; B. Lepschi; 7 km SE Binalong Post Office

Little Lorikeet
 1; 20 Dec 92; B. Lepschi; Fullwood St. Weston

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
 1 (dark morph); 6 Sep 92; J. Nicholls; Kingston Boat Harbour

Pink Robin
 1m; 8 Sep 75; D. Purchase; CSIRO "Gungahlin"

Red-capped Robin
 1f; 26 Jul 91; D. Purchase; Melba District Playing Fields
 1m, 1f; 25 Dec 92 to 4 Jan 93; J. Price; behind Macgregor near old
 Chamwood Rd

Black-faced Monarch
 1; 20 Dec 92; J. Bounds; Mulligan's Flat

Little Friarbird
 2; 6 Dec 92; J. Bounds; Mulligan's Flat

Regent Honeyeater
 1; 26 Sep to 9 Oct 92; W. Hugh; Willcock Pl, Curtin 1;
 6 Dec 92; J. Bounds; Mulligan's Flat
 1; 17 Jan 93; D.H. Woods; Mayo St, Weetangera

Escapees
 Scaly-breasted Lorikeet
 1; 14 Jan 92; B. Whitworth; Scullin

(continued from inside front cover)

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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 occurring in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding area (i.e. New South Wales coast north to Jervis Bay, and west to the Riverina). Contributions can be sent to the editors AO David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 258 2252).

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