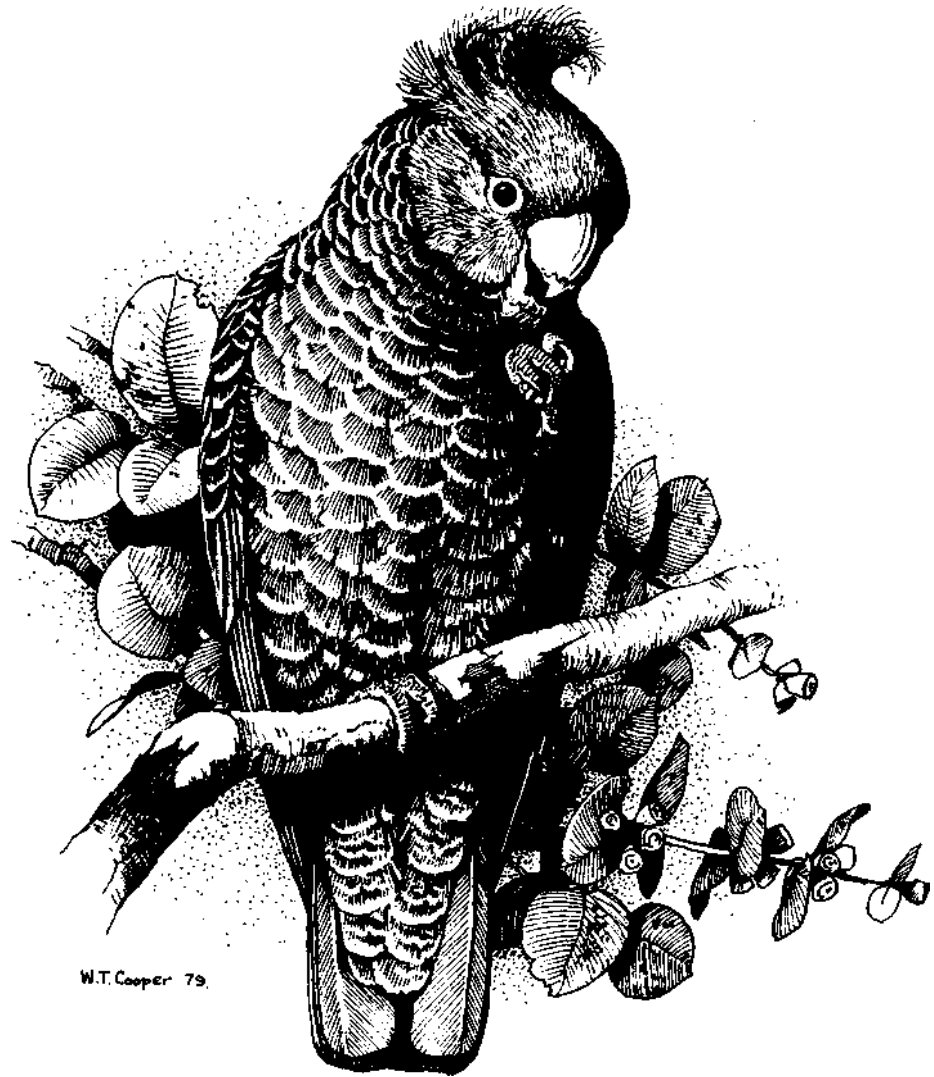


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(Continued inside back cover)

OBSERVATIONS ON THE SUPERB PARROT WITHIN THE CANBERRA DISTRICT

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Introduction

The Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* has a restricted distribution within the ACT. It is recorded once or twice a year and is typically restricted to Hall, Gungahlin and the northern suburbs of Belconnen (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992). Most observations elsewhere in the ACT appear to be of aviary escapees. During the 'ACT Avifauna Database Project' which was undertaken by the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) from September 1986 through to August 1989, the Superb Parrot was recorded only on four occasions (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992).

Within New South Wales, records from *The Atlas of Australian Birds* (Blakers et al. 1984) indicate that the area south-east of Yass is at the eastern edge of the breeding range of the Superb Parrot. A survey conducted from 1985 to 1987 by Rick Webster confirmed this breeding distribution and reported only two breeding records between Yass and Canberra (Webster 1988, Webster and Ahern 1992).

In January 1990 COG extended the grid which was used in the 'ACT Avifauna Database Project' from the boundaries of the ACT so that it fully encompassed COG's area of concern (Canberra Ornithologists Group 1993). Thus the grid system was extended north to include the area from Yass and the Hume Highway through to Goulburn (Figure 1).

In 1993 I decided to survey the new northern grid cells and also some within the ACT to determine whether Superb Parrots still bred

within the area between the Murrumbidgee River, Hume Highway and Federal Highway (see Figure 1). In the process it was hoped to obtain as much information as possible on their abundance, distribution and habitat requirements.

To protect the Superb Parrots from possible harm, details of specific nesting locations are not provided in this paper. These have been entered onto the COG database but can be extracted only with my permission.

The Superb Parrot is listed as vulnerable (New South Wales Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995)) and its distribution covers some of the most productive agricultural land in Australia; virtually all of which is privately owned. Many landowners express concern about disclosing the presence of vulnerable and endangered species on their land. It is therefore likely that there are undisclosed colonies of Superb Parrots within the local area.

Records prior to 1993

There are few historical records of the abundance, distribution and breeding of the Superb Parrot in the Canberra district.

Gillespie (1992) notes that in the Ginninderra district 'the Greenleek or Superb Parrot, which nests in the hollows of tall trees, has apparently moved to more suitable places'. His observations concerned the late 1930s and were his own personal recollections (L. Gillespie pers. comm.). N. Simms (pers. comm.) recalls that during the late 1950s the parrots were a common sight in the Hall area.

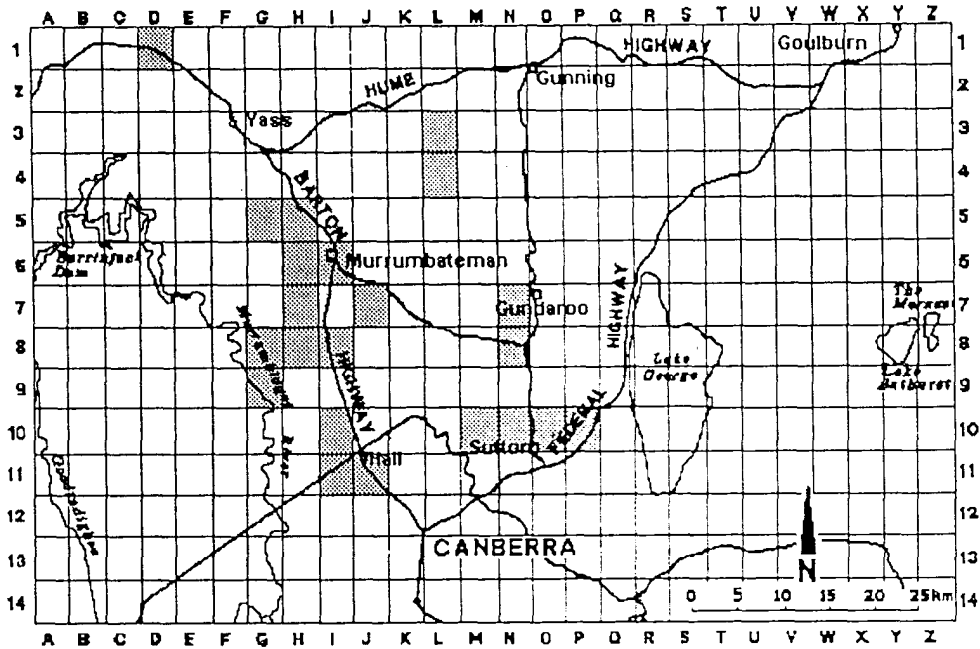


Figure 1. Location of the northern grid cells. The shaded cells are those from which sightings have been reported since 1985 (excluding possible escapees in the suburbs of Canberra).

M. Southwell, who owns a property along the Spring Range Road (grid cell J10), noted in correspondence that from the 1920s to the 1950s Superb Parrots visited his property in quite some numbers and still do, but in very depleted numbers. However, up to 1994 one couple nested near our home in a large yellow box tree (dead). Last year although we heard them about as usual, but did not nest (*sic*).

In the 1940s the Superb Parrot was common and bred around the manager's cottage on 'Cranleigh' in the ACT (T. Shepherd pers. comm.). The cottage was situated in 112 in what is now the north-west corner of Scullin near Levien Street (Coulthard-Clark 1987). Superb Parrots no longer occur in this area. On the CSIRO experimental station at Ginninderra (K11) two pairs have been seen each year and during the spring of 1993 a female was observed leaving a tree hollow

with a male guarding the site. No breeding has been seen since (T. Shepherd pers. comm.).

Forshaw (1969) writes that Superb Parrots had been found breeding at Ginninderra and Gundaroo but no dates or references are provided. In the late 1960s they were breeding in an area now covered by the suburbs of Fraser and Spence (M. Clayton pers. comm.) and in November 1959 a pair was seen leaving a nest hollow at Gungahlin Hill (K12) (R. Schodde pers. comm.).

From January 1983 to June 1991 almost daily records on the presence or absence of Superb Parrots were kept for an area near Sutton, NSW (N10) (J. Wombey pers. comm.). The birds usually appeared during September, departed by February and reached a maximum during December (Table 1).

Table 1. The maximum number of Superb Parrots seen each month from January 1983 to January 1991 in an area near Sutton. No birds were observed from February to August.

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
1982-83	-	-	-	-	0
1983-84	0	4	9	25	0
1984-85	11	0	2	8	0
1985-86	-	2	13	10	2
1986-87	0	0	4	6	8
1987-88	2	5	>12	>30	10
1988-89	0	3	>10	>10	0
1989-90	0	0	0	>15	present
1990-91	1	0	6	>10	0

There are also the following unpublished observations of Superb Parrots from the vicinity of Sutton: although not recently reported they were regularly observed within 010 in 1988-89 (M. Clayton pers. comm.); sometime during the mid to late 1980s a pair were found nesting in a dead tree in M10 (J. Kershaw pers. comm.); and on 24 December 1990 approximately 14 were observed flying from one tree to another in P10 (J. Bradshaw, COG records and pers. comm.). The Annual Bird Reports of COG contain three records of Superb Parrots from the Sutton area: three were seen just north of Sutton on 1 December 1977 (Clark and Lenz 1978); one was seen near Sutton in the second week of October 1982 (Taylor 1983); and four were seen at Sutton on 30 and 31 October 1982 (Taylor 1984).

A complete list of the records contained in the Annual Bird Reports of COG is given in the Appendix. Other than those from the Sutton area, most are from the Murrumbateman and Hall areas, or suburbs of Canberra. It is possible that many of those from the suburbs are aviary escapees. The date of the record from L4, 11 May 1991, suggests it was a misidentification or an aviary escapee. The only breeding record was of flying young making begging calls

and being fed by adults in December 1988 at the Fraser oval. In October 1992 a female Superb Parrot was seen looking into a nest box in Melba but no further interest was shown in the box by the bird (Ormay 1994).

Other COG records of Superb Parrots are unpublished sightings in Ill, 110 and J11 in November 1991, and September, October and December 1992; and seven in H6 in December 1992. There are also sightings from J11 in October 1971 and October 1973, and J12 and G8 in November 1972, included in Dow (1988) which had not been published in Annual Bird Reports.

Methods used for the 1993-96 survey

The methods used to undertake the survey consisted of the preparation and distribution of a form seeking information on the presence of Superb Parrots, and road surveys conducted by myself and by COG members.

In September 1993, with the help of Greening Australia, a survey form was prepared on which people could enter details of their sightings of Superb Parrots. Copies of this form were placed in the village stores at Sutton, Hall, Murrumbateman, Gunning and Gundaroo, also at Hall Primary School.

From 23 September through to 26 November 1993 I surveyed the grid cells in an area from the Sutton to Gunning road, west to the Murrumbidgee River. Starting just before sunrise I drove along roads in the area with both front windows open listening and looking for Superb Parrots. Whenever sighted I stopped and observed the birds for as long as necessary to obtain details of numbers, sex, behaviour and age. Inevitably these observations were restricted to the roadside and therefore do not necessarily reflect the total number of birds in any one cell. Whenever time allowed, up until the end of January 1994, I again visited the cells in which I had seen Superb Parrots.

During the weekend 20-21 November as many roads as possible were travelled in 38 grid cells by eight COG members in four cars. Each vehicle carried a minimum of two people. Observers in three cars searched different cells from Saturday mid-day to late evening and, after camping for the night in L4, observers in four cars covered the area from early Sunday morning to mid-day.

Between 18 September 1994 and 3 January 1995 on one morning in every two weeks I surveyed a standard route in an area between the Barton Highway and the Murrumbidgee River again recording details of breeding, feeding, numbers, sex and age.

Definitions of breeding followed Webster (1988) and a tree hollow was assumed to be a Superb Parrot nesting site if one of the following was recorded:

- a pair of Superb Parrots was seen entering the hollow;
- a male was seen to enter the hollow on his own;
- a male or female was observed entering the hollow on a number of occasions;

- a male was observed feeding a female at the hollow entrance or nearby;
- young birds were observed at the hollow entrance; or
- a Superb Parrot was flushed from the hollow.

Results

1993-94 observations

a) general

The only information received from the survey forms distributed in September 1993 came from observers within a triangular area between the ACT in the south, the Murrumbidgee River to the west and the Barton Highway to the east and north to Long Rail Gully Road. All the observers were contacted and asked to continue with their observations. I confirmed their initial observations and when time permitted continued to follow up as many of the sightings as possible as well as covering the area for additional observations.

I was frequently in the area immediately north-west of Canberra covered by cells H9, G10, H10, I10, H11, I11, J11, G12, H12 and therefore it was particularly well covered. In addition many other cells in the vicinity were visited but no Superb Parrots sightings were recorded.

The maximum number of Superb Parrots seen each week from the end of August to the end of January in grid cells in which Superb Parrots were reported is shown in Table 2. At no time was a grid cell considered to have been adequately surveyed for Superb Parrots; the number reported merely represented the maximum number seen during the week the observation was made.

Table 2. The maximum number of Superb Parrots seen for each week from the end of August 1993 to the end of January 1994.

	G5	G8	G9	H5	H6	H7	H8	H9	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	J10	J11	L3
30 Aug										24		yes		yes			
6 Sep										14							
13 Sep																	
20 Sep	11			2	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	1			
27 Sep										24							
4 Oct																	
11 Oct	10			0					0	13	0	0	0		0	0	
18 Oct														1			
25 Oct										20	0	0	0		0	0	
1 Nov				3					0	18	0	0	0	2	0	0	
8 Nov		3								10				13			
15 Nov	0			0	6			0	0	17		6	0	27	0	0	2
22 Nov				2	5				0	12	0	5	0		0	0	
29 Nov		50	29							10		3		15			
6 Dec												22		14			
13 Dec														13			
20 Dec														20			
27 Dec																	
3 Jan																	
10 Jan	0			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	
17 Jan												3		15			
24 Jan														0			

Superb Parrots were first seen in the area during the last week in August from Murrumbateman (I6), Wallaroo Road (I10) and Jeir Creek (I8). The birds appeared to have left the area by the end of January 1994 (Table 2).

Flocks of more than 10 birds were recorded in G5, G8, G9, I6, I8, I10; interestingly three of the cells were where birds were first reported in late August (Table 2).

Although 38 grid cells were visited in during the weekend survey on 20-21 November (see Methods) Superb Parrots were reported only from cells H6 and L3.

b) breeding observations

The female incubates the eggs and remains on the nest for about two weeks after the eggs hatch, therefore at this time more males than females are seen. The first indication that the birds were breeding locally was in mid-October. There were many more males than females observed in I6 and G5 and males were seen alone perched next to tree hollows and reluctant to move.

11 November I received a reliable report of a female Superb Parrot seen leaving a hollow in a live Blakely's Red Gum *Eucalyptus blakelyi* in G8. On 14 November

chicks were confirmed to be in the nest and photographs were taken.

17 November I observed a pair fly to a dead eucalypt in 18. Within the same tree two pairs of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, one pair of Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla* and one pair of Red-rumped Parrots *Psephotus haematonotus* were nesting. The pair of Superb Parrots was seen feeding young although they were disturbed by the pair of breeding Galahs.

20-21 November During the weekend survey breeding was again confirmed when a male was seen to enter a hollow in a live Blakely's Red Gum in H6 and the begging call of chicks was heard. A pair of Common Starlings was also nesting in the tree. On a visit to the nest site six days later there was no sign of activity from the hollow and I presume the pair had vacated the nest.

9 December A male was seen feeding a female, then both entered a nearby hollow in a live Blakely's Red Gum in I10. When I left the area one hour later the female was still inside the hollow.

14 December A flock of 14 birds, which included a few young, was reported feeding on the seeds of Cootamundra Wattle *Acacia baileyana* in I10. The young were identified by their shorter wing and tail feathers.

During early January 1994 I contacted as many observers as possible and all confirmed my observations that the Superb Parrots, though still in the general area, had dispersed and were seen less frequently.

1994-95 observations

a) general

Information collected during the 1993-94 breeding season confirmed that within the

area bounded by the Murrumbidgee River, Hume Highway and the Federal Highway the most likely area to observe Superb Parrots was an area east of the Murrumbidgee River, west of the Barton Highway and as far north as the Long Rail Gully Road south of Yass. For the 1994-95 breeding season I restricted my observations to this area to obtain further information on the breeding of the Superb Parrot. At the beginning of August 1994 I also contacted those who submitted observations the previous season asking them to provide further details.

On nine occasions at approximately fortnightly intervals I searched the roads that passed through 14 grid cells. The same route was travelled each time and covered approximately 110 km.

In addition further details were obtained from *ad hoc* visits to certain areas and from data supplied to me by other observers.

The first report I received of Superb Parrots was on 25 August 1994 from an area 20 km south-east of Boorowa, NSW. Apparently they have always appeared at this locality within a week after 20 August (B. Brown pers. comm.).

The first report of birds from within the Canberra district was of three on 7 September in 16. Two days later this number had increased to 15 with a similar number of males and females (Table 3). During the same week three pairs were reported from 18. It is interesting that a pair of aviary escapees, that had been living around Hughes since January 1994 moved away from the area in early September as wild birds were returning (Anderson 1994).

Table 3. The maximum number of Superb Parrots recorded for each week from the start of August 1994 to the end of January 1995.

	G5	G8	H5	H6	H7	H8	H9	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	J7	J10	J11
8 Aug													0		0	0
15 Aug																
22 Aug													0		0	0
29 Aug													0		0	0
5 Sep									15		6					
12 Sep	5		5	2	0	0	0	0	14	0	6	0	0		0	0
19 Sep	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0		0	0
26 Sep																
3 Oct	6		8	0	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0		0	0
10 Oct	6		16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6		0	0
17 Oct		yes											3			
24 Oct									15				7			
31 Oct	9		23	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	3		0	
7 Nov	8		26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21		7		0	0
14 Nov						2	0					0	30			
21 Nov													16			0
28 Nov	11		18	3	5	3	0	0	0	0	25	0	35		0	0
5 Dec													25	25		
12 Dec	8	6	22	5	13	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0		0	0
19 Dec													13			
26 Dec													0			
2 Jan	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20		0	0
9 Jan													0			

Flocks of more than 10 birds were recorded in grid cells G5, H5, H7, I6, I8, I10, J7.

Superb Parrots appeared to have left the area by the middle of January 1995.

b) breeding observations

18 September Interest in tree hollows must start soon after the birds return because lone males and females were seen emerging from hollows in H5. Most appeared paired and all hollows inspected were in Blakely's Red Gum.

3 October A female was seen examining a tree hollow in G5 with a male nearby whilst in a second tree a lone male was seen perching quietly near a hollow. Both hollows were in Blakely's Red Gum.

9 October Thirty birds observed in 16 were of equal sex ratio so it was unlikely that nesting had started.

12 October Single males were seen sitting quietly next to hollows in Blakely's Red Gums in G5 and H5.

18 October A male was observed feeding a female after she had inspected a hollow in a

dead Blakely's Red Gum in 110. A female visited the same hollow in a Blakely's Red Gum in G8 that had been used as a nesting site the previous year.

30 October The number of birds seen on 9 October in 16 was reduced by half and virtually all were males, thus indicating that most of the females were no longer nest searching and that nesting had begun.

31 October Two females observed emerging from hollows in Blakely's Red Gums in G5 and twice as many males to females were seen. Females were seen entering and emerging from hollows in the same Blakely's Red Gum in H5 reported by Rick Webster nine years earlier (Nests 740 and 741 in Webster and Ahern 1992). Of the 23 birds seen in this grid none appeared to be young birds.

15 November Thirty Superb Parrots were reported in 110. Of these only eight were males, possibly indicating that many were young birds.

18 November I visited the same tree in G8 that had been used as a nest site the previous year and which I had seen a female on 18 October. A female was seen leaving the hollow and returning approximately 30 minutes later; chicks could be heard calling on her arrival.

22 November At two hollows in Blakely's Red Gums in 110 females emerged and then immediately re-entered but at neither site could chicks be heard calling.

30 November Indications of breeding were observed in seven cells. In 110, G8, H5, G5 and 18 recently fledged young were seen with adults, whilst in 18, H7, H6 and G5 females were seen emerging from or entering hollows, some with tatty tails probably caused by nesting in small hollows.

6 December A pair was still nesting in a Blakely's Red Gum in 110 with a male nearby and the female seen leaving and then returning to the nest hollow.

16 December There was much less activity and the only signs of breeding was in H7 where a female was seen sitting at the entrance to a hollow. Birds were not observed in the usual spots and were seen in groups rather than pairs.

3 January During a final road survey I did not see or hear any parrots in the usual areas although a day later I was informed there was a flock of approximately 20 birds in I10.

1995-96 observations

No road surveys were undertaken during the 1995-96 breeding season but I was informed that the parrots returned at the usual time with 14 seen in 16 on 26 August, an unrecorded number in J7 on 31 August, 12 in 110 on 2 September and about 20 in H8 on 5 September.

Within J7 about 40 Superb Parrots were observed on 10 September, with a similar number of males and females. The number then greatly decreased until around mid-December when it again increased to about 60 individuals. In the meantime a female was seen leaving a hollow further south near Gooda Creek. The flock reported in mid-December contained very young birds only just able to fly. Interestingly the adult pairs with young just capable of flight left the young in the trees whilst they went out to obtain food and then return to the young. As the calling adults returned, the young, obviously able to recognise the parents call, would then leave the refuge of the trees to follow the parents with a begging call. Eventually the parents would land and regurgitate food to the begging young. Adult birds with older young would fly out

from the shelter of the trees with the begging young following them. On their return to the trees the young would then be fed by the adults. This behaviour is very similar to the creching behaviour of the Galah described by Rowley (1990).

Two sightings, one on 8 November and another on 22 November, of up to eight birds in N7 and N8, were of interest. These sightings and those from Sutton in 1983 to 1991 suggest that the Superb Parrot may still be unreported from the area bordered by the Murrumbateman to Gundaroo road to the north, the Barton Highway to the west and the Gundaroo to Sutton Road to the east.

Superb Parrots left the area around Hall at the beginning of January and around Murrumbateman some three weeks later.

Discussion

Information derived from the survey forms, reports from COG members and other people, historical records, and my own observations indicate that in the Canberra district the Superb Parrot is mainly confined to an area bounded by the Murrumbidgee River to the west and the Barton Highway to the east. However, they may still be present in the area bordered by the Murrumbateman to Gundaroo road to the north, the Barton Highway to the west and the Gundaroo to Sutton Road to the east.

Within the Canberra district the Superb Parrot was first reported during the last week of August in 1993, 1994 and 1995. At this time reports were received from south of Boorowa, Murrumbateman and south to Jeir Creek and Wallaroo Road. Further south near Sutton between 1983 and 1990 the earliest that the birds were reported was in mid-September. In all areas the birds did not arrive at the same time but rather numbers slowly increased and nest searching started

soon after their arrival. There appeared to be a similar number of males to females. A few of the young males, born the previous year, were still moulting into the adult plumage.

Clear plumage differences between sex allow easy identification of males from females in the field. Descriptions from the literature indicate that young can be easily differentiated from adult females. This may be true of birds in the hand but is not so in the field. It is extremely difficult to identify young on plumage or eye colour. Obvious differences are the begging behaviour, though it must be remembered that adult females will beg from adult males. Erratic uncoordinated flight and short wings and tail feathers of young only persist for a very short time after young emergence from the nest. In aviary birds these differences are not obvious beyond 7 to 10 days. It is therefore difficult to determine the number of young of the year, the success of breeding, and the termination of the breeding season.

Following an incubation period of 20 days, which is undertaken only by the female, the young emerge from the nest 40 days after hatching (Forshaw 1981). Thus approximately two months should elapse between the time when females disappear from the visible population, with a concomitant increase in the ratio of males to females, and the time when young enter the population, with an increase in the ratio of females/young to males. This appears to be the case between mid- to late October and mid- to late December.

It is much easier to obtain records of birds first seen on arrival than it is to obtain reports on when they leave. Until about mid-December the birds can usually be seen in their breeding areas, especially during the early morning and evening. After this time the birds are likely to be seen elsewhere.

Table 4. A summary of breeding activity within the Canberra—Yass area. Nesting sites followed definition of Webster (1988).

Grid cell	Nest searching seen	No. of nesting sites	Young seen
G5	Yes		Yes
G8	Yes	2	Yes
H5	Yes		Yes
H6	Yes	2	
H7	Yes		
18	Yes	1	Yes
I10	Yes	3	Yes
J7	Yes		Yes

This suggests that the birds disperse from the nesting areas after the young leave the nest though they do still return occasionally to the nesting areas. Thus birds are seen increasingly less frequently until they are last observed about early to mid-January, but there are unconfirmed reports of birds still present around Murrumbateman until the first week in February. These observations confirm those of Webster who noted that there was a dispersal away from the south-west slopes from late December 1986 through to January 1987 beginning from the east of Boorowa and Cowra (Webster 1988).

Over the three years of this study the Superb Parrot was reported nest searching in hollows of Blakely's Red Gum only from eight grid cells; flying young not long out of the nest were reported from six of these eight cells (Table 4). In eight hollows I observed one or more indications of breeding as defined by Webster (1988).

The survey by Webster conducted between 1985 and 1987 reports only two breeding records from the Canberra district, both from grid cell H5, yet the observations reported here indicate breeding (nesting sites) from four cells (Table 4). In both cases the same

criteria for nesting were used. This should not infer that the Superb Parrot has extended its local breeding range but rather it is a result of the fact that Webster spent little time gathering detailed information on the distribution and activity patterns of the Superb Parrot in the Canberra district (R. Webster pers. comm.)

There are no obvious reasons why the birds are restricted to certain areas because there are many other similar areas without Superb Parrots. All areas in which Superb Parrots were found in 1993 also supported parrots the following year. In H5 parrots were seen nest searching in the same tree that had been used nine years previously.

These observations suggest that birds return to the same sites each year even though other apparently suitable sites are available. Without banding it is not possible to know whether individuals return to the same site, but this is most likely. Further, these observations suggest that from the time of the birds arrival until the young leave the nest the birds remain very close to the nest sites. For example, a major road that I travelled along many times each week at all times of the day, passed within 1 km of a site

containing up to 35 birds. The birds were present throughout the season yet I saw them along the road only twice and then towards the end of December.

These observations highlight the importance of identifying and safe-guarding these remaining breeding sites. They suggest that the breeding areas contain traditional nesting sites and are used each year, probably by the same group of birds. These observations also suggest that individual breeding areas can be small and therefore difficult to find, especially on private land.

Webster (1988) indicates that within the Riverina District of New South Wales the Superb Parrot breeds along river courses, mainly in Red River Gum *E. camaldulensis*, and fly up to 10 km to feed in areas away from the river. My observations do not suggest this happens within the local district — they indicate the birds stay close to the nesting area and hence the difficulty of knowing they are present. This suggests that the birds breed and feed within the same small area.

Webster and Ahern (1992) recommend that no commercial harvesting or silviculture treatments should be authorised within 100 m of any Superb Parrot nest trees, whether containing presently active nests or not. Within the Canberra district where feeding appears to occur close to the nest site it would be necessary to recommend a greater distance.

Every sign of nesting that I have seen or have had reported to me was invariably in a hollow of dead, dying or live Blakely's Red Gum. Other eucalypts are present, usually Yellow Box *E. melliodora* and much less frequently Apple Box *E. bridgesiana* and Red Stringybark *E. macrorhyncha*, but these species do not appear to commonly provide

the hollows required for nesting by the Superb Parrot.

The Superb Parrot appears to be associated commonly with Yellow Box (Webster 1988, Webster and Ahern 1992) and my observations support this conclusion. Yet I have never observed the parrots either feeding or nesting in this tree. Within the local district the birds are always feeding on the ground but will readily fly up to the nearest tree where they are usually found perching. The exception to this is when the birds are feeding on the still attached seed pods of *Acacia* spp, usually Cootamundra Wattle, and other trees that produce large seeds. I have only one observation of them feeding in eucalypts and that was in a flowering Blakely's Red Gum. I believe that within the Canberra district the Cootamundra Wattle is favoured above all other wattles because the seed pods form quicker and are therefore available much earlier. The birds appear to cease feeding off this plant once the seeds harden and fall to the ground.

The association with Yellow Box therefore appears to be indirect and it is the grasses and other plants that grow in association with the tree that are favoured. In addition the Blakely's Red Gum — Yellow Box woodland that is locally common provides both nesting and feeding resources at the same location.

Grid cell I 1 0 is the most southerly to contain breeding birds. This is a neighbour to the cells within the ACT where Superb Parrots are most commonly seen and is, no doubt, the area from which the ACT birds originate.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to David Purchase for compiling the Appendix and for the help he and Peter Fullagar provided in making this paper readable.

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- Chris Davey is a biologist with the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology. His work with CSIRO has mainly involved research on rabbits and ducks. In his spare time Chris has undertaken a variety of bird studies and is a frequent contributor to Canberra Bird Notes. He has been a member of COG since 1969 and has represented the Group in many ways on the committee and sub-committees.*

APPENDIX. List of all records of Superb Parrots contained in the Annual Bird Reports published by the Canberra Ornithologists Group.

The individual records are presented in the order: number seen; date(s); place.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>1966/67 (Wilson 1968)</i>
1; 24 September; Bungendore.
`Single birds'; 5 November, 10,
11 December; Hall.</p> | <p><i>1977/78 (Clark and Lenz 1978)</i>
3; 1 December; just north of Sutton.
5; 12 December; Bywong.
`numerous'; December—January; around
Murrumbateman.</p> |
| <p><i>1968/69 (Wilson 1970)</i>
2; 19 September; Lyneham.
4; 28 September; Lyneham.
3; 1 November; Ginninderra.</p> | <p><i>1979/80 (Lenz 1981)</i>
6; 17, 21 December; Murrumbateman.</p> |
| <p><i>1974/75 (Clark 1975)</i>
1 male `escapee?'; 1 July 1974; Waramanga.</p> | <p><i>1980/81 (Lenz 1982)</i>
1 `escapee?'; 14 July; Fisher.</p> |
| <p><i>1975/76 (Clark 1976)</i>
2; 8 November; near Hall.</p> | <p><i>1981/82 (Taylor 1983)</i>
1; 2nd week October; near Sutton.
1; 1, 25 November; Dog Trap Road, near
Murrumbateman.
1; 4th week November; near Hall.</p> |
| <p><i>1976/77 (Clark 1977)</i>
15; 26 December; Murrumbateman.
1 `escapee' ; July; Chapman.</p> | |

1982/83 (Taylor 1984)
1; 2nd week September; Torrens.
4; 30, 31 October; Sutton.
4; 4th week November; Melba.
1; 4 December; Kambah.
1; 19 May; Sutton.

1983/84 (Taylor and Davey 1985, and
Taylor et al. 1986)
1 male; 4th week October; Fraser.
5; 4th week November; Fraser.
1; 2nd week December; Fraser.
4; 8 March; between Lyneham and
'Gungahlin'.
1; 5th week April; Scullin.

1984/85 (Taylor et al. 1986)
2; 23 September; Sutton.
1 male 'escapee?'; 22 October; Ainslie.
'regular' maximum 8; October to January:
Murrumbateman.
6; 10 December; Gundaroo.
four records of single birds; 1st week
December to 3rd week February; Aranda.
1 'escapee'; 6 January, ANU.
1 male; 27 February; Ainslie.
1 female; 13 April; Cook.

1985/86 (Taylor et al. 1987)
'regular' maximum 30; no date;
Murrumbateman.
3; 10 November; 1 km S. Murrumbateman.
8 male & 12 female; 24 December; Hall.
1 male; 1 April; Fadden.
1 female; 13 April; Cook.

1986/87 (Veerman et al. 1988)
8; 1st week January; Calogoma Homestead
near Gundaroo.

28; 1st to 2nd week September, Wallaroo
Road, Hall.
6; 8 October; Wallaroo Road, Hall.
3; 28 October; Murrumbateman.

1987/88 (Veerman et al. 1989)
'regular in small numbers'; no date;
Murrumbateman.

1988/89 (Canberra Ornithologists Group
1990)
'regular in small numbers'; spring/summer;
Murrumbateman.
no number; 25 September; O'Connor Ridge.
'probably an escapee'; 11 October; Kambah.
1; 12 November; Murrumbateman.
no number; 27 November and 17 December;
Hall cemetery and showground.
'dependent young'; 23 December, Fraser.
no number; 22 January; field firing and
artillery range in N13.

1989/90 (Canberra Ornithologists Group
1992)
4; 24 October; Murrumbateman.
30; 1st week January; Evatt.

1990/91 (Canberra Ornithologists Group
1993)
2; 8 October; Murrumbateman.
2; 11 May; roadside reserve in L4.

1991/92 (Canberra Ornithologists Group
1996)
15; 7 October; Murrumbateman.
20; 13 December; Bowning.
30; 5 to 8 January; Evatt.

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BREEDING SEASON OF WHITE-BROWED SCRUBWRENS IN CANBERRA

Robert D. Magrath

Division of Botany and Zoology, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200.

David McDonald (1996) reported seeing a White-browed Scrubwren *Sericornis frontalis* building a nest in the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra, on 23 July 1996. He noted that this was earlier than previously reported and comments that it 'is unclear why this bird commenced nest-building so early'.

In the most recent publication on the breeding season (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992), White-browed Scrubwrens are reported to build nests from late August to late October, have eggs from late September to mid-November, nestlings from mid-October to mid-January, and dependent young from late September to early February. Clearly this information is incomplete, as the period when dependent young are seen shows that all other periods (but especially nest-building and nests with eggs) must be longer than the nest records suggest. This issue is discussed below.

I have been studying in detail the breeding biology of a colour-banded population of White-browed Scrubwrens in the Australian National Botanic Gardens since the breeding season of 1992-93, and summarise below data on 396 breeding attempts from the four

breeding seasons 1992 to 1995, although results will be reported in detail elsewhere. Figure 1 shows the periods during which there were eggs or nestlings present, and are presented in the style of *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory: An Atlas* (Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992).

The results show the period during which birds build nests and lay and incubate eggs is much greater than reported in the *Atlas*. The earliest date that a clutch was initiated in the population I study was 13 July, in 1993, which implies that the bird started building around the beginning of July. The latest date of clutch initiation I recorded was 27 January, in 1996 (the nestlings were taken by a predator shortly after hatching; otherwise the young would have left the nest in early March!). Nonetheless relatively few birds initiated clutches as early as July or as late as January (Figure 2). The shorter period recorded in the *Atlas* is presumably due to the fact that scrubwren nests are generally very well hidden, and highlights the biases than can be inherent in broad surveys of 'breeding seasons', even for common birds breeding in the centre of Canberra!

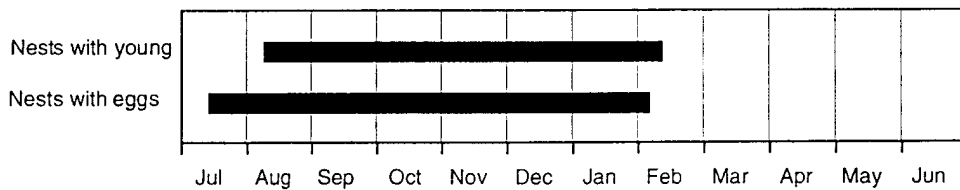


Figure 1. Breeding season of the White-browed Scrubwren in the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

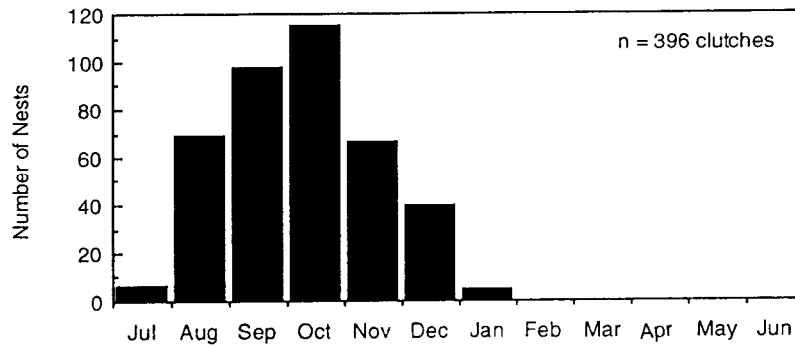


Figure 2. Number of clutches initiated in each month.

The *Atlas* is much more accurate in reporting the period that birds were with dependent young than in reporting earlier stages, presumably because dependent young are more conspicuous than nests. The better data on dependent young can be used, together with a knowledge of the duration of the breeding cycle, to partially counter the biases caused by not finding nests. I have found that the average period between the laying of the first egg of the clutch and hatching young is 22 days, and young remain in the nest for about 15 days. Young scrubwrens are typically fed by adults for at least six weeks after leaving the nest, but in the *Atlas* 'dependent young' refers to 'recently fledged or flightless young', implying (I guess) that they were less than two weeks out of the nest. Thus you can use the *Atlas* data on observations of dependent young to infer that there must have been nests with eggs from early to mid-August until early to late January, depending on the age of observed 'dependent young'. Dates could be even earlier if young greater than two weeks from the nest were considered 'dependent'. Nests can take several days to build and there is usually a delay of a few days from the completion of a nest until laying. Thus the *Atlas* data imply that the birds producing the earliest dependent young must have been building nests in mid-July to early August. These estimates are more

similar to my data on Scrubwren breeding, and are also consistent with David McDonald's observation of a bird building in late July. They show that the apparently late start to breeding reported in the *Atlas* is due to biases in data collection, not unusually late breeding seasons in the years in which the *Atlas* data were collected. These calculations also show that broad-based surveys can produce reasonable estimates of breeding seasons if they are combined with more detailed studies which allow for the correction of biases in sampling.

Acknowledgements

I thank the dedicated and talented group who helped gather data on White-browed Scrubwren breeding; as the *Atlas* data show, scrubwren nests are hard to find! Those who contributed substantially to finding nests and monitoring breeding attempts were Janet Gardner, Tony Giannasca, Ashley Leedman, Anjeli Nathan and Stephen Yezerinac. The research has been supported by grants to RDM from the Australian Research Council.

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FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF THE WHITE-BROWED AND YELLOW-THROATED SCRUBWRENS

S.J. Wilson

56 Harrington Circuit, Kambah ACT 2902

During frequent trips away from Canberra I keep a record of the bird species I see each day. Before a recent trip to northern New South Wales and Queensland I reviewed the birds seen in recent years and realised I had not recorded seeing Yellow-throated Scrubwrens *Sericornis citreogularis* despite having been in suitable habitat.

Yellow-throated Scrubwrens and White-browed Scrubwrens *S. frontalis*, which I did record seeing, are both found in the damp forests, including rainforests, of the south-east coast of Australia from the Bunya Mountains north-west of Toowoomba, Qld, to the Bega area in NSW.

I am familiar with both species in the ACT, in the past, I banded large numbers of White-browed Scrubwrens, chiefly in the ACT, and fewer numbers of Yellow-throated Scrubwrens on the south coast of NSW. I concluded that, despite this familiarity, I had probably failed to recognise Yellow-throated Scrubwrens and mistakenly identified those I did see as White-browed Scrubwrens. Therefore on my recent trip I decided to concentrate on identifying these two species whenever I came across them. The effort

was a success and I recorded both on several occasions.

When the species occur together they are always in densely shaded places. Both are seen on the ground or near it. While they are readily distinguished in the hand, or in good light, it is quite different in rainforest or other dense growth. It must be stressed that the following comments refer only to the identification of adult birds. The identification of juvenile birds is an area that offers opportunity for further study.

The White-browed Scrubwren is morphologically very variable throughout its range. On the south-east coast where the two species occur together, the White-browed Scrubwren has a much smaller facial area of black (dark grey in the female) than the Yellow-throated Scrubwren in which the black extends beyond the eye to the neck. The eye colour of adults is another distinguishing point — it is cream in the White-browed Scrubwren and brown in the Yellow-throated Scrubwren. In dull conditions the colour of the throat is not a good distinguishing character as the yellow of the Yellow-throated Scrubwren appears

little different to the cream of the White-browed Scrubwren. This is particularly so in females as the colours are less definite.

The White-browed Scrubwren has two small white marks on the wing which are not always shown well in the field guides, but are present in the illustration by Betty Temple Watts in *Birds in the Australian High Country* (Frith 1969). By contrast the Yellow-throated Scrubwren lacks these markings but has faint yellowish edges to the outer primaries which are not a good field character. To my eyes these tiny white markings (or their absence) are the best way to separate the two species in the dull light in which one usually finds them.

I use an 'Audubon Bird Call' and both species seem attracted to its squeak. They can also be called-up by other means. Certainly, to call them up and stand still and watch, provides the best chance of seeing these species in unfavourable light.

I have found Yellow-throated Scrubwrens in or near dense forest at sea level at Iluka, NSW, on top of the Bunya Mountains, Qld

at more than 1000 m above sea level, in mountains near Noosa Heads, Qld, and on the Dorrigo Plateau, NSW. Look for them in damp places in deep shade along paths and tracks, particularly on forest edges.

Remember the old Birdo's' trick of watching for rainforest birds along the edges of the forest where they sometimes emerge to feed.

Reference

Frith, H.J. (editor) (1969). *Birds in the Australian High Country* A.H & A.W. Reed: Sydney.

Steve Wilson, a retired public servant, is a foundation member of the ACT Branch of the RAOU — the forerunner to COG. Steve has served COG in many ways, including eight years as editor of Canberra Bird Notes. He is a frequent contributor to Canberra Bird Notes and Corella — the journal of the Australian Bird Study Association of which he is also a foundation member. He was made a Life Member of COG in 1981.

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ODD OBS

BUSH STONE-CURLEW NEAR BATEMANS BAY

While driving back to Canberra from the coast on 9 November 1996 I noticed two large long-legged birds moving on the edge of dry forest about 30 m from the highway in an area cleared for roadworks on a long bend about 3 km east of the bridge at Nelligen. It was late afternoon (6.30 p.m. summer-time) in dark conditions of threatening cloud following a stormy afternoon with intermittent showers and downpours. It was not raining at the time. The birds appeared to be larger and much taller than Grey Currawongs *Strepera versicolor* (for comparison with a bird I might expect to see in a similar location and activity). They were dark coloured above, lighter underneath, with a possible darker marking on the chest. I drove on for a minute, pondering what they might have been, and concluded they were probably Bush Stone-curlews *Burhinus grallarius*. I returned to the spot and drew up quietly. The two birds were clearly visible to the naked eye, but although conditions were not bright, I was able to satisfy myself of the identification. The birds were nervous of the car and walked quickly to the forest edge, where they flew off through an opening between trees.

Their carriage was close to horizontal, with long necks which became particularly obvious when the birds occasionally pecked at the ground or held their heads high when wary. They were about as tall as they were long, with their bodies about 15 cm off the ground. They walked, not hopped, and when they flew no markings were visible on their tails or wings. Their flight was strong, not fluttering, and easily cleared the undergrowth.

The ridge between Nelligen and Batemans Bay is now developing a modest population of people and as these birds have a distinctive call which carries a long way, and is largely nocturnal, there may be more records of these birds from this area.

Mrs Jill Whiter of the Eurobodalla Natural History Society has brought to my attention that a lone female Bush Stone-curlew has been frequenting the field beside the NSW State Forests Office in Narooma since 18 January 1994 and was sitting on a nest with two eggs from 14 December 1994 (1995, *Nature in Eurobodalla No. 9 (1994)* Eurobodalla Natural History Society: Moruya). The nest was unsuccessful. She continued to frequent the same field throughout 1995, consistently from October to the end of the year and again attempted to nest in November (1996, *Nature in Eurobodalla No. 10 (1995)* Eurobodalla Natural History Society: Moruya).

*Denis Wilson, 39 Anzac Park,
Reid, ACT 2612*

SATIN BOWERBIRDS IN OUR GARDEN IN DUFFY

Each year a small but growing number of Satin Bowerbirds *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*, have been frequenting suburbs in Weston Creek between April and November (Aston 1991, *Canberra Bird Notes* 16: 3-4; Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group 1992, *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory - an Atlas* Canberra Ornithologists Group and National Capital Planning Authority: Canberra). They have been visitors to our garden in Duffy each winter since 1990. Initially these consisted of four to six

females or immature birds, but over the years the numbers have increased to up to eight and include three mature males.

The first bower was erected in 1993 and dismantled and re-erected in the same place on a regular, sometimes daily basis. My theory is that we had a bower-building workshop in our garden. The birds would build a bower and collect blue material to decorate it. It would be assessed by the tutor, then dismantled and the blue material dispersed so that the next student could start from scratch. Based on observations she made of the behaviour of bowerbirds at rudimentary bowers constructed in her garden at Leura, NSW, Reta Vellenga (1970. *Australian Bird Bander* 8: 3-11.) suggested that the adult male plays a considerable part in educating the young birds in bower-building and display.

The first 'permanent' bower was erected in our garden in 1994 with up to two mature male birds participating. It was in the same spot as the previous bowers. With the involvement of these two males there was a lot more chatting, display and courting. The bower was only dismantled and re-erected about once a month — not almost daily as was the case when the workshop was at its peak. Some birds showed an interest in developing a platform in another area of the garden, but did not build a bower on it. Most showed an interest in using the grass from our native grass garden for their constructions, particularly when we had given it a trim.

In 1996 a new bower was constructed in the back garden under a birch tree. Once again there was much display, chattering and courting. This bower has only been dismantled and reconstructed two or three times over the season.

All the bower platforms have been decorated with blue, and sometimes orange, material. In broad terms, the bowers have been orientated in a NE—SW direction.

The bowerbirds have fed on the nectar and sunflower seeds which we provide over the winter months for birds visiting our garden.

*Maurice Sexton, 1 Tinaroo Place,
Duffy ACT 2611*

SATIN BOWERBIRDS AND MILK BOTTLE LIDS

In 1995, while a volunteer attendant at the Natural History Centre, I took a call from an executive of Canberra Milk, who explained that a customer had complained that the blue lids of the two-litre milk bottles were a threat to Satin Bowerbirds *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*. The customer felt there was a risk that, being attracted to blue objects, bowerbirds could get their beaks or heads caught inside the circular seals of these lids if they picked them up. I told the executive of Canberra Milk that the seals represented a small threat to the birds, but none the less it would be appropriate for them to change the colour when their stock of blue lids was exhausted. She agreed to do this and on 15 August 1996 Mr Tony De Domenico, the Minister for Business and Employment in the ACT Government, announced that the two-litre milk bottles would have black lids and seals (*Canberra Times* 16 August 1996).

Canberra Milk is to be commended for its response in solving what some have seen as a threat to the well-being of the Satin Bowerbirds which are now visiting the suburbs of Weston Creek in increasing numbers each winter.

*Bruce Lindenmayer, 17 Monkman Street,
CHAPMAN ACT 2611*

**BEHAVIOUR OF SULPHUR-
CRESTED
COCKATOOS IN RESPONSE TO A
RAPTOR**

In mid-morning on 21 August 1996 I was travelling past some parkland in Canberra when I observed a Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* flying swiftly at tree-top (c. 8 m). Two Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* reacted to the sight of the goshawk by ascending to 24-30 m, well above the bird, and circling tightly with very high, stiff-winged wing-strokes, almost like the 'wing-clapping' flight of the Rock Dove *Columba livia*. However, of most interest was the noises these two cockatoos made — a single, low growling note, uttered two or three times within a few seconds, deeper than any part of their normal rasping call, and different from their alarm screech. I can find no mention of this call in any accounts of the bird. The call appeared to have had the effect of assembling, within a few minutes, a flock of 20 or 30 cockatoos, who joined the first two in their circling flight but did not utter the growling note.

*John Leonard, PO Box 243,
Woden, ACT 2606*

A CURIOUS AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE

Grandchildren tend to leave lying around one's backyard the toys which they draw from the grandparental stock. Mine certainly do.

Early in December 1996, they left an artificial rubber ball: diameter about 10.5 cm; weight about 6 g; colour dark purple decorated with large yellow and white stars. The ball lay while the grass grew around it; no one took any notice of it, certainly not the members of the local avifauna.

Then, in mid-December, there came an

which had a bump of curiosity. The ball took its fancy.

First, the bird examined the ball visually. Then it began nudging the ball, then pushing it with its foot, and then jumping on it with both feet, like the hero in a Hong Kong kung fu film, except that the bird jumped body square on rather than obliquely. At times, the head came into play and, since the bird pursued the ball wherever it rolled, the motions of the head paralleled those of a soccer striker receiving a cross goal kick.

After 10 minutes, all activity ceased and the bird moved off. Was it bored with the lack of response on the ball's part? Had it recognised that the ball was unfit either for eating or mating (that is, if juveniles, as this bird certainly was from its plumage, are interested in mating at their age). Whatever the case, no other magpie has seen fit to disturb the ball again, and the grass round it is now even longer.

And my hopes of one day seeing the (Upper) Narrabundah Naked Nostrils taking the field in the Ericsson Cup have gone out of the window.

*Douglas Ross, 64 Sprent Street,
Narrabundah, ACT 2604*

**A CORRECTION TO 'A NOTE ON
CHARLES DALEY AND JOHN
CUMPSTON: TWO EARLY
CANBERRA BIRDWATCHERS'
(CBN14: 27.28)**

In a previous paper (Lepschi 1989, *Canberra Bird Notes* 14: 27-28), I provided biographical details on Charles Studdy Daley who, at the time, I believed was the author of an early paper on the natural history (including birds) of the Canberra region (Daley 1946, *Victorian Naturalist* 63:

52-54). It has since become apparent that the author of the paper was not Charles Studdy Daley, a prominent local administrator and social figure in early Canberra, but in fact his father, Charles Daley of Melbourne.

Through information received from C.S. Daley's daughter, Mrs Meg Campbell, and the late Jim Willis, the correct identity of the author of the paper has now been established. Charles Daley senior was born in Bendigo, Victoria, in 1859 and worked as a teacher in the Victorian Education Department for an astounding 46 years, retiring in 1924. He was a member of the

Victorian Naturalists Club for many years, and was also an accomplished historian, contributing extensively to the *Victorian Historical Magazine*. He died in Melbourne in 1947, aged 89, an obituary appears in the *Victorian Naturalist* 64: 176, 202-203 (1948).

I am most grateful to Meg Campbell, David and Shirley Purchase, Ken Simpson and the late Jim Willis for kindly pointing out my error, and providing information on Charles Daley senior.

B.J. Lepschi, 24 Fullwood Street, Weston,

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

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

Recently I was reading about an interesting golf course in Britain which includes living birds as one of the hazards of the course. The course is a 9-hole, par 34, on Sanday, one of Orkney's northern islands. The first three holes have the normal hazards of a golf course. However, the fun starts at the 4th where the hole is next to a colony of Common Gulls. The gulls do not appreciate golfers and show their disdain by regurgitating or defecating on those whose shots go slightly off-line and land near the colony. At the 5th hole it gets worse as the fairway goes nearer to the colony and you do not have to be off-line to be 'blessed' by the gulls. There is no bird hazard at the 6th hole, but at the 7th the fun really begins as Arctic Terns nest on the fairway and unwary golfers can receive their swoops which are like those of Australian Magpies in that they are very frightening and occasionally draw

blood. At the 8th hole it gets decidedly worse as Great Skuas nest on the fairway. These birds are a little larger than Pacific Gulls and they swoop to strike every time with their wings or legs. For the golfers who survive this (apparently quite a few give up at this point) the final hole has no feathered hazards.

So if you visit Orkney and are a golfer, why not try out the course? By the way, the final hazard is the club house which is only an old caravan and does not sell the famous calming medicine that comes from Scotland.

Sometime ago I commented that Common Mynas seemed to behave and feed similarly to Magpie-larks. At the time I idly wondered whether Common Mynas may adversely affect Magpie-larks as well as

hole-nesting birds. Over the last two years the number of breeding territories of Magpie-larks around a friend's house has decreased from three to one. At the same time the number of Common Myna territories has increased from none to two. Is this just a coincidence and caused by other factors or not? Has anybody else noted any similar effects?

In the late 1960s I was surprised when visiting Cairns to note that the Australian White Ibis was a common urban bird even perching on house roofs. On a recent visit to Sydney I noticed that they are now just as common around central Sydney and the eastern suburbs. Although I had noticed them in Sydney on many earlier visits, I had not realised how common they had become. This gave me cause to reflect how the status of various species in Canberra had changed naturally, as to opposed to deliberate introductions, over the last 20 to 30 years. For example, Australian King-Parrots and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos are now common around all of Canberra instead of just being restricted to certain areas of south Canberra; Crested Pigeons have spread from Yass throughout much of Canberra; Australian White Ibis are now common at rubbish tips. No doubt there are others to come — perhaps Satin Bowerbirds will become regular instead of occasional breeding birds. Perhaps one of the original founder members of the ACT Branch of the RAOU could write an article on the status of these and similar species in Canberra in the early 1960s for the sake of 'new corners'? I certainly would be interested to read it.

One of the recent 'growth' industries has been 'eco-tourism'. More and more tours are being developed that are aimed at exhibiting and explaining various aspects of

the environment. Included in these are bird-watching tours.

In a recent *Bird Observer*, the journal of the Bird Observers Club of Australia, Ellen McCulloch has raised the issue of firewood gathering by some commercial tour operators who regularly collect wood for cooking fires. As some of these operators regularly use the same camp sites, the areas around these sites will become cleared of all wood on the ground. This will then adversely affect the local ground-nesting birds as well as those which feed on the organisms (insects, reptiles, etc.) that need fallen timber to survive.

Ellen suggests that before joining a tour we ask tour operators what cooking fuel is used as those who care for the environment will carry their own fuel rather than raid the local area for timber.

On thinking about what she says, I fully agree with her concerns as it only takes a couple of groups to visit an area each year to have a major effect on the amount of timber lying on the ground. So perhaps next time you go on a tour you should raise this issue with the tour operator.

Finally — how do you like the new format of *Canberra Bird Notes*? I will be interested to see what it looks like when it is published. The traditionalist in me grieves slightly at any proposed change as *Canberra Bird Notes* has always been known by its yellow, or shades of yellow paper (although two issues did appear on pink paper). However, I was glad to see Gerry van Tets's drawing of the Australian Pelican resurrected in a recent *Gang-gang*. Can we hope to see more of this original 'trade mark' of COG?

OBITUARY

Donald Wakeham Lamm

Don Lamm, well known to older members of COG, died peacefully at his home in Tucson, Arizona, on 2 December 1996, at the age of 82 after a long illness. So passed my closest friend of 36 years.

Don was born in Washington DC in May 1914 and became an American career diplomat. He chose his appointments with a view to being able to study a variety of bird species and as a result served in many out of the way places. This enabled him to make important contributions to the collection of birds held by the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, especially while in Ghana, Mozambique and Recife, Brazil. An ovenbird he collected in Recife was a new subspecies and now carries the name *Automolus leucophthalmus lammi* Zimmer 1947. He was serving in Japan in December 1941 when that country entered World War II and became a prisoner confined to the embassy building. He was released in mid-1942 and left Japan in a neutral ship following a diplomatic prisoner exchange that was negotiated in Lourenço Marques, Mozambique — a country in which he was to subsequently serve as a diplomat.

Don was appointed to the American Embassy in Canberra from 1947 to 1949 and again from 1960 to 1964. His name figures prominently in the annals of ornithology in the ACT and follows those of Charles Barrett, D.P. Jones and Gregory Mathews. However, unlike his predecessors, who basically provided lists of birds seen in the ACT, Don liked to regularly survey an area over a period. He published five papers in *Emu*, two of which added 62 species to the list of the birds of the ACT. There is little doubt that he has a place in the

ornithological history of Australia as the first person to undertake serious work on the birds of the ACT.

In 1947 he commenced a survey of a portion of what is now known as the Murrumbidgee Corridor, walking regularly from Uriarra Crossing to the Murrumbidgee Bridge at Cotter. Soon after starting he met John Calaby who joined him in this survey and the pair did a lot of other bird observing together. When Don was recalled to Washington, John wrote up the Murrumbidgee River data for publication from Don's notes (Lamm and Calaby 1950). Prior to this Don published a paper adding 17 species to the ACT list (Lamm and White 1950).

On Don's second appointment to Canberra he arrived late in 1960 and I met him shortly afterwards. With John Calaby's help he explored the Brindabella Range and other places in search of a suitable place to undertake a bird survey. He was looking for a site which was rich in numbers and species of birds, and which could be reached by a 2-wheel drive vehicle in all weathers. At that time the bitumen ended at the Murrumbidgee Bridge. New Chums Road, which connects Warks Road and Bendora Dam Road, was chosen and his survey began in January 1961.

In March 1961, my sons, Brendan and Denis, and I started to use mist nets to capture birds for banding at Lees Creek in the Brindabella Range. Don suggested that we also use this technique at New Chums Road at the same time as he undertook his visual survey. The first collaborative visit was made in April 1961 and these visits continued to be made until December 1963

when Don had notice of his retirement (Lamm and Wilson 1966). At the time we were not to know that the mist-netting component of the survey would continue to be undertaken on a regular basis until 1983.

During this time he made a survey of the birds of the north-eastern portion of Lake George from the shore below Gearys Gap and around to the hills on the eastern side (Lamm 1965). At the time the lake extended much further north and south than it has at any time since. He also published a paper which added a further 45 species to the ACT list (Lamm, Wilson and Belton 1963).

On his retirement in 1964 he moved to Tucson, Arizona, but visited Australia again in 1974 and 1981. In Tucson he assisted with a banding survey at Tanque Verde Ranch which continued for nearly 30 years, banding chiefly migrating birds.

Don was a great believer in the publication of results and contributed more than 50 articles to ornithological journals in several countries. He retained an interest in his beloved birds to the end, having several feeders in his garden, and remained a member of COG until the advancement of his final illness.

Don is survived by his son Peter, and daughters Judith and Susan. His wife Freddie died in 1976 (see *Canberra Bird Notes* 3(9): 23).

The following paragraph contained in a recent letter from his daughter Judith provides a suitable peroration:

On Wednesday the 11th December family and friends gathered on the patio (at his

home). We drank champagne and told 'Don' stories. All of you would have enjoyed it. Everyone had a few stories the rest of us hadn't heard. As we toasted his memory, the humming-birds visited the feeder, a red-tailed hawk circled overhead, and the trees and hedges were full of white-tailed doves and mocking birds, all apparently listening to the tales. During some of the more outrageous stories, such as the time he mistakenly drank formaldehyde, a ghostly chuckle seemed to join the laughter. He was a very good friend to all of us, and especially to his family.

My thanks to John Calaby for assisting with information for this note.

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Steve Wilson

FROM THE EDITORS

We hope that readers (including G. Tibicen!) are happy with the new format. Last year, in order to reduce the cost of printing and postage, the COG Committee decided to reduce the number of parts of *Canberra Bird Notes* issued each year from four to two (No. 1 in March and No. 2 in September). These two parts will form a volume. Annual Bird Reports will be issued as supplements to the volumes. These new arrangements were previously outlined in the September 1996 issue of *Canberra Bird Notes*.

The yellow cover has been retained to maintain tradition. A break with tradition is the use of white paper for the text pages. This has been done: 1. to make it easier to print photographs should this be required; and 2. it is cheaper to use white paper than yellow paper. The money saved has enabled a better quality card to be used for the cover. It is felt that the change to the use of columns makes it easier to read the text — even though the font has been reduced from 11 pt to 10 pt. The change to columns and a smaller font has meant a 25% reduction in the number of pages required to print an issue of *Canberra Bird Notes*. Using the previous format this issue would have required 37 pages.

However, the important thing is that *Canberra Bird Notes* remains a medium for the publication of articles and notes concerning 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). Above all it is the repository of historical facts on changes in the local bird population.

David Purchase and Grahame Clark

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

This is the first list published for almost two years and as such contains a variety of sightings over an extended period — including some waterbird records from 1991 and 1992.

The only record that is a 'first' for the Canberra region is the Striped Honeyeater *Plectorhyncha lanceolata* at Charnwood. However, there are also some interesting observations amongst the remainder.

The presence of Bell Miners *Manorina melanophrys* at Yarralumla raises the question of whether they came from the colony at Queanbeyan and whether the Queanbeyan colony is still there.

In late autumn in 1995 and 1996 there were again several sightings of dark morph White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina papuensis*. Where do these birds come from and why is there such a preponderance of dark morphs reported from the Canberra region? Is it because they are easier to recognise, or is it because the population they come from has a high proportion of dark morph birds?

Little Friarbirds *Philemon citreogularis* and Regent Honeyeaters *Xanthomyza phrygia* were again reported on the north side of Canberra indicating perhaps that birds from the Western Slopes arrive in Canberra via the Gunning/Gundaroo gap.

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO. 44

- Cape Barren Goose
2; 22 Jun 94; M. Fyfe; Lake George west.
- Pied Cormorant
1; 29 Oct 91; M. Lenz; Lake George south.
1; 1 Jun 92; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
1; 23 Jan 95; M. Lenz; Lake George south.
- Intermediate Egret
1; 19 Nov 91; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
3; 19 Oct 94; J. Nicholls; Kelly's Swamp.
- Australasian Bittern
4; 29 Oct 91; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
2; 19 Nov 91; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
2; 31 Jan 92; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
- Grey Goshawk
I (white morph); 19 May 95; R. Anderson;
Jerrabomberra Wetlands.
1; 8 Sep 95; S. Wilson; Kambah.
- Buff-banded Rail
4; 27 Dec 95; J. Nicholls; Jerrawa Creek,
near Gunning.
- Marsh Sandpiper
3; 6 Mar 92; M. Lenz; Lake George south.
4; 30 Dec 94; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
21; 25 Jan 95; M. Lenz; Lake George north.
- Common Sandpiper
1; 5 Apr 94; J. Layton; Lake Ginninderra.
- Great Knot
1; 22 Sep 91; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
- Red Knot
3; 1 Oct 92; M. Lenz; Lake Bathurst east.
- Diamond Dove
1; 20 May 95; J. Leonard; Mt Majura.
1; 31 Mar 96; H. Perkins; Kambah.
1; 21 Apr 96; J. Avery; Illoura horse
paddocks.
- Peaceful Dove
1; 15 Dec 95; J. Bounds; Mt Majura Reserve
North Watson.
2; 24 Dec 95; J. Avery; Illoura horse
paddocks.
1; 27 Dec 95; M. Delahoy; Mt Majura
Reserve North Watson.
3; 21 Apr 96; J. Avery; Illoura horse
paddocks.
- Long-billed Corella
1; 14 Feb 96; S. Wilson; Garran.
1; 27 Feb 96; J. Nicholls; Mulligans Flat.
- Little Corella
5; 11 Mar 95; N. Montgomery; Uriarra
Crossing.
3; 1 Jul 95; B. and E. Compston; Griffith.
2; 9 Nov 95; J. Bounds; Mt Majura Reserve
North Watson.
24; 27 Feb 96; J. Nicholls; Mulligans Flat.
- Turquoise Parrot
1; 16 Oct 94; R. Anderson; Mulligans Flat.
2; 5 Nov 94; R. Anderson; Mulligans Flat.
- Common Koel
1; 14 Nov 95; D. Wood; Weetangera.
1; 17 Nov 95; J. Nicholls; Deakin.
1 male; 27 Dec 95; J. Nicholls; Deakin.
- Channel-billed Cuckoo
1; 5 Jan 95; B. Graham; Gilmore.
1; 13 Jan 96; J. Leonard; Federal Highway
(Grid P10).
- Chestnut-rumped Heathwren
3; 16 Aug 95; V. Kowalski; Captains Flat
Road near Queanbeyan.
- Brown Gerygone
4; 30 May 95; J. Nicholls; ANBG.
- Striped Honeyeater
1; 28 Oct 95; J. Price; Charnwood.

Little Friarbird

- 1; 4 Dec 94; N. Montgomery; Mulligans Flat.
- 2; 31 Dec 94; N. Montgomery; Mulligans Flat.
- 1; 2 Jan 95; M. Butterfield; Mulligans Flat.
- 1; 3 Oct 95; D. Purchase; Melba.
- 3; 24 Oct 95; B. Lindenmayer; Campbell Park.
- 1; 29 Oct 95; M. Delahoy; Mulligans Flat.
- 2; 1 Nov 95; J. Bounds; Mt Majura Reserve North Watson.
- 1; 5 Nov 95; J. Bounds; Mulligans Flat.
- 2; 3 Dec 95; J. Bounds; Mulligans Flat.
- 1; 10 Dec 95; J. Bounds; Mulligans Flat.
- 1; 10 Dec 95; J. Nicholls; Campbell Park.

Regent Honeyeater

- 1; 5 Aug 95; I. McMahon; Belconnen.
- 1; 9 Aug 95; J. Leonard; Belconnen.
- 1; 27 Aug 95; J. Bounds; Belconnen.
- 2; 20 Sep 95; J. Bounds; Black Mountain Peninsula.
- 1; 8 Oct 95; M. Butterfield; Black Mountain Peninsula.
- 4; 25 Oct 95; M. Delahoy; Mt Majura Reserve North Watson.
- 8; 1 Nov 95; J. Bounds; Mt Majura Reserve North Watson.

Bell Miner

- 4; 23 Jun 95; P. Muller; Greenleigh Estate. Queanbeyan.
- 2; 30 Dec 95; J. Nicholls; Yarralumla.
- 4; 11 Jan 96; S. Wilson; Yarralumla.
- 2; 14 Jan 96; M. Moffat; Yarralumla.
- 2; 14 Jan 96; D. McDonald; Yarralumla.
- 4; 6 Apr 96; S. Wilson; Yarralumla.

Scarlet Honeyeater

- 1 male; 12 Nov 94; N. Montgomery; Murrumbidgee River, (Grid 116).
- 1 male; 25 Oct 95; J. Nicholls; ANBG.
- 1 male; 26 Oct 95; M. Braby; ANBG.

Red-capped Robin

- 1 female; 30 Aug 94; M. Fyfe; Grid N13.
- 2; 23 Dec 94; I. Crawford; Gungahlin cemetery.
- 2; 3 Oct 95; J. Price; Fraser.
- 1 female; 18 Oct 95; N. Taws; Aranda Bushland.

Pink Robin

- 1 male; 21 Apr 96; J. Bounds; Tallaganda State Forest.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike

- 1 (dark morph); 5 Apr 95; S. Wilson; Kambah.
- 1 (dark morph); 25 Apr 95; H. Perkins; Kambah.
- 1 (dark morph); 16 Apr 96; M. Fyfe; Weetangera.
- 1 (dark morph); 20 Apr 96; M. Fyfe; Weetangera.

Escapees:

King Quail

- 1 male; 10 Oct 95; D. Purchase; Melba.

Spotted Turtle-dove

- 1; 19 Oct 95; D. Purchase; Melba.

Lovebird sp.

- 1; 23 Aug 95; D. Purchase; Melba.

(Continued from inside front cover)

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Canberra Bird Notes is published biannually by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Contributions are welcome. These should fit into one of the following categories: major articles (up to about 5000 words); short notes and "Odd Obs" (up to about 400 words); reviews of books and articles (up to about 800 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, preferably on an IBM-formatted disk together with a hard copy, to the editors do David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 258 2252).

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