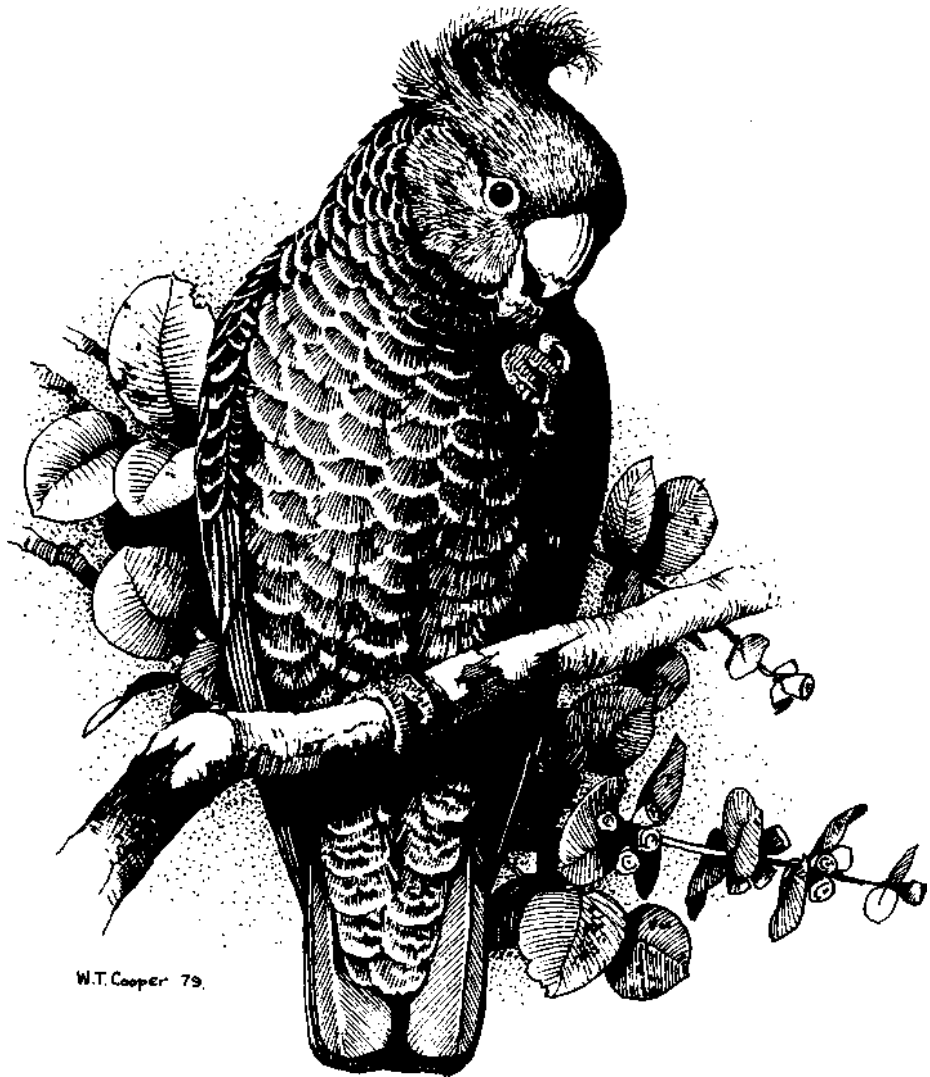


CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

Volume 23
Number 1
March 1998

Registered by Australia Post - publication No NBH 0255



CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP INC.

PO Box 301 Civic Square ACT 2608

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (1998)

	Work 6205 9401 mobile 014 63 5249	Home
Paul Fennell (President)		6254 1804
Jenny Bounds (Vice-President)		6288 7802
Susan Newbery (Secretary)		6254 0960
John Avery (Treasurer)		6281 4631
Malcolm Fyfe		6254 3310
David Landon		6254 2334
David McDonald		6231 8904
Carol Macleay		6286 2624
Harvey Perkins		6231 8209
Sue Mathews		6259 2816
PROJECT CO-ORDINATION GROUP Paul Fennell (Co-ordinator)		6254 1804
COG Surveys:		
Garden Bird Survey	Philip Veerman	6231 4041
Waterbird Survey	Michael Lenz	6249 1109
Mulligans Flat	Jenny Bounds	6288 7802
Murrumbidgee River Corridor	Nikki Taws	6251 1879
Woodland Species	Paul Fennell, Jenny Bounds	6254 1804
Scientific Advice Panel	Chris Davey (Co-ordinator), Michael Lenz, Nick Nicholls, Henry Nix, David Purchase,	
Chris Tidemann.		6254 6324
Other surveys:		
Capertee Valley	Joan Price	6259 2739
Shorebird Survey	Vacant	
Regent Honeyeater / Swift Parrot	Jenny Bounds	6288 7802
DATA MAINTENANCE GROUP David McDonald (Co-ordinator)		6231 8904
Records Verification	Malcolm Fyfe (Co-ordinator)	6254 3310
Records Input	David McDonald (Co-ordinator)	
Waterbird Survey	Malcolm Fyfe (and volunteers)	
Garden Bird Survey	Philip Veerman (and volunteers)	62314041
Special surveys	Project Coordinators TBA	
Members data sheets	Malcolm Fyfe and Tony Harding	
Rarities Panel	Barbara Allan (Co-ordinator), Barry Baker,	
Grahame Clark, Mark Clayton, Dick Schodde		6254 6520
Data Analysis and Reporting	David McDonald (Co-ordinator)	
Database Maintenance and		
Development	David McDonald (Co-ordinator)	

OUR EARLY KNOWLEDGE OF HONEYEATER MIGRATION IN THE ACT

Steve Wilson

56 Harrington Circuit, Kambah ACT 2902

The migration of honeyeaters through the ACT, in particular Yellow-faced Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus chrysops* and White-naped Honeyeaters *Melithreptus lunatus* is well-known, but little has been recorded about our early knowledge of this phenomenon.

Early authors who wrote specifically about the birds of the ACT did not mention the migration of honeyeaters. Barrett (1922) made two visits to the Tuggeranong homestead but did not record the Yellow-faced Honeyeater or White-naped Honeyeater. Jones (1924), who was Head Teacher at Duntroon Public School, compiled a list of local birds from 1913 to 1928, and recorded both those species without comment. Mathews (1943), who lived in the ACT from 1940 to 1945, recorded the White-naped Honeyeater as 'rare — country' and the Yellow-faced Honeyeater as 'occasional — city' but made no mention of their migration.

The first published record of migration of either of these two species in the ACT appears to be that of Lamm and White (1950) who said of the Yellow-faced Honeyeater that 'Very extensive migratory movements occur along the [Murrumbidgee] river valley in early April.' Although they listed the White-naped Honeyeater they did not comment on its migratory habits. More detailed observations were provided by Lamm and Calaby (1950) who made a two-year study along the Murrumbidgee River covering a six-mile (9.6 km) stretch of the east bank from Uniarra Crossing to the Cotter River road. In their paper they commented:

The Yellow-faced Honeyeater, which breeds in the valley, arrives about mid-September

and is fairly common until the middle of January. Most of the local birds then leave. On April 3, 1949, flocks averaging about 20 birds each were moving northward up the valley at the rate of about 4,000 birds per hour. A much larger movement took place on April 17, 1949. Flocks on that date were moving across the valley from west to east on a narrow belt at the rate of about 10,000 birds per hour. A sprinkling of other honeyeaters, such as the White-eared and the White-naped, was included in the flocks.

In 1960, together with other members of my family, I began to band birds in the ACT. A regular site was at Lees Creek on Warks Road just before the road starts to climb up the range. In April 1961 we started banding at New Chums Road in conjunction with a visual survey conducted by Don Lamm, then on his second appointment to the US Embassy in Canberra (Lamm and Wilson 1966).

In 1963, Max Mum began banding birds at an old logging site at Blundells Creek on the south side of Blundells Creek Road about 1 km up the hill from its junction with Warks Road. Max soon found that here was a large build-up in the numbers of Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters during March after the local birds' breeding season and for a few years he banded large numbers of both species during this month. Although this site was only 1.5 km from Lees Creek and about 5 km in a direct line from New Chums Road, the build-up of the two species at these sites was minor.

I was also banding regularly at Pine Island and Max decided to try his luck there also. After his first attempt in April 1963 Max told me he saw countless flocks of honeyeaters

flying south at tree-top height and therefore well above his mist-nets. He watched for some time catching nothing and finally in total frustration he picked up a stick and threw it up towards an approaching flock. Instantly the flock broke up and the birds dived into low bushes, many being caught in the nets in the process (Mum 1963, Wilson 1963).

At the time the major surprise to me and other ornithologists was that by flying south in autumn, the birds seemed to be going in the wrong direction. Soon afterwards we banded migrants at Point Hut crossing which were also travelling south. Later it was observed that the birds left the Murrumbidgee River a short distance upstream of the banding site at Point Hut and travelled east. Since then the annual migration has been regularly observed and we understand something of what occurs.

Despite the large numbers of Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters which were banded little was learnt about their migrations from this activity and the banding was discontinued in 1970 — continuation of the banding would have been a waste of bands, time and effort, and it was felt that the meagre quantity of information being obtained would not justify the disturbance caused to the birds (Purchase 1985). As a research tool banding has helped to gather a great deal of information about the life-history of Australian birds, but in this case it proved to be inappropriate as few of the banded birds were recovered away from the banding site.

References

- Barrett, C. (1922). Birds around a homestead. *Emu* 21: 257-261.
- Jones, D.P. (1929). List of birds of Canberra, the Federal Territory. *Dm*/28: 252-254.
- Lamm, D.W. and Calaby, J.H. (1950). Seasonal variation of bird populations along the Murrumbidgee in the Australian Capital Territory. *Emu* 50: 114-122.
- Lamm, D.W. and White, D. (1950). The changing status of avifauna in the Australian Capital Territory. *Emu* A9: 199-204.
- Lamm, D.W. and Wilson, S.J. (1966). Seasonal fluctuations of birds in the Brindabella Range, Australian Capital Territory. *Emu* 65: 183-205.
- Mathews, G.M. (1943). List of birds of the Australian Capital Territory. Commonwealth Forestry Bureau Leaflet No. 53.
- Mum, M. (1963). Autumn banding of migratory Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. *Bird Bander* 1: 121-123.
- Purchase, D. (1985). Bird-banding and the migration of Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters through the Australian Capital Territory. *Corella* 9: 59-62.
- Wilson, S.J. (1963). Further notes on autumn migration of honeyeaters. *Bird Bander* 1: 123-125.
- Steve Wilson requires little introduction to members of COG. But for those who are not familiar with Steve some bibliographic details are contained in Canberra Bird Notes 22: 18. His current project is the preparation of a definitive list of the birds of the ACT.*

THE PERILS OF BIRD FOSTER-PARENTING

Peter Jorm

15 Brinsmead Street, Pearce, ACT 2607

Our street is typical of many in Canberra in that it is home to a family of Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen*. They are very tame and would seem to be adept at obtaining food from more than one house in the street. The entire family takes food from the hand — at least at our house.

There is a lot of pedestrian traffic in our street. We, and others of our neighbours, also spend much time in our gardens. This magpie family has never swooped anyone in our street to my knowledge. Even the postie has no problems with deliveries! By comparison, in a nearby street, we, as pedestrians, have seen a magpie repeatedly swoop a child pushing a bike when the child was only three or so metres away from us.

Our local magpie family is at our house enough that we can recognise certain individual birds by appearance and behaviour. We find the operation of the 'pecking order' and the birds' 'submission' calls and gestures of particular interest. Which is, I guess, our primary interest in birds generally — their behaviour. And this brings me to the perils of bird foster-parenting.

This last nesting season there was a nest established by members of the family in a very large tree in our next door neighbour's back yard. (Interestingly, Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* had nested in this tree in previous seasons, but not this last season.) By using binoculars we could observe the magpie parents feeding their young.

We have found the magpies are particularly partial to devon sausage. This may be the only known use for devon sausage! The

parents would simply break up the devon and feed it straight to the young.

After a particularly windy night I noticed that one of the young was out of the nest and perched on a large branch about two metres below the nest. The parents were continuing to feed it. However, it was obvious that the young bird was too immature to be out of the nest and there was no way for it to return. Another problem was that the branch was too large for it to perch on. It was standing, rather than perching on the branch.

On the following morning it was gone from the branch. I found it on the ground in my neighbour's garden — my neighbours being away on holiday at the time. It was much too immature to fly and would inevitably become cat prey. Although it was begging for food, the parents were ignoring it while continuing to feed the remaining young in the nest.

What to do? Let nature take its course? Short of a fire brigade cherry picker, there was no way the bird could be returned to the nest. The standard remedy of putting the bird in a carton as high in the tree as possible would also not work. The tree is very large and the lowest branch is well above the height of a domestic ladder. As well, the bird was weeks away from flying.

I decided to make a cage from a tea chest and put the bird in it. I thought that if I then put the box near where the magpies were accustomed to feed in our back yard, the bird would be protected from cats and the parents could feed it through the wire. Or so I thought.

I sought the assistance of a neighbour's eleven year old child — Tanya — in doing this as my wife was away. I was to catch the bird and she was to assist in getting it into the box. Tanya's house does not appear to be in the magpie family's territory.

The parents, who would not feed the young bird, took great exception to this procedure. Although I was holding the young bird, the parents repeatedly swooped Tanya who was forced to use me as a shelter from their attacks. They did not seek to attack me at any time. This was a traumatic experience for Tanya — and for me having requested her assistance — but the transfer to the box was effected.

How did it all work out? I fed the family, including the parents, near the box. The young bird begged continuously. One of the parents fed the young bird once through the wire of the box but that was the only time it was fed by an adult. Thereafter it was ignored.

I was getting desperate for ideas at this stage.

I tried putting it as high as I could in a nearby tree but its begging was ignored by the parents. I soon found it on the ground again. I tried letting it out of the box just for the period the family was feeding so it could pursue the parents for food. The family, including the parents, ignored it although it pursued them relentlessly.

As the bird was becoming obviously weaker after not being fed for some days, I decided

on drastic remedies. I chopped up devon sausage and, with Tanya's assistance, and using tweezers and an eye dropper, commenced feeding the bird.

How did it all end? In tears. As I had to go away, Tanya and her sister Amanda volunteered to take over feeding the bird. A cat mauled the bird through the wire of the cage and that was that.

The interesting aspects of bird behaviour in this are these:

- The birds swooped Tanya but not me. Do they 'know' me from being fed?
- The parents, and other members of the family, refused to feed the young bird once it was on the ground. Does nature tell them that such a young bird on the ground cannot survive and therefore there is no value in feeding it?

Incidentally the bird's only sibling has now gone from 'spoiled only child' to bottom of the family pecking order and the victim of regular beatings-up by the rest of the family.

Peter Jorm is a new member of COG. He is an ex-army officer and retired public servant who enjoys watching the behaviour of birds in his garden. Five years ago he wrote an article on the use of nest boxes by rosellas (Canberra Bird Notes 18: 3-4).

ACT BIRD WATCHERS HOTLINE**Telephone 6247 5530**

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

ODD OBS

NESTING BOXES FOR ROSELLAS

Five years ago I wrote about providing nesting boxes for rosellas (*Canberra Bird Notes* 18: 3-4). It had been suggested to me that certain birds in the UK would nest only if the site had an entrance facing a particular direction. I wondered if our local birds had similar preferences.

I have since increased the number of boxes to four identical boxes. Each in a different eucalypt and facing a different cardinal point (Table 1).

Table 1. The height above ground level of the nest boxes and the direction in which the entrances faced.

Box No.	Height	Direction
1	5.5m	N
2	3m	E
3	7m	S
4	4m	W

I do not claim my observations are scientific. There are too many uncontrolled variables other than the siting of the entrances. For example:

- How territorial are nesting rosellas? When one box is occupied the nesting pair may force other potential nesting pairs away from nearby boxes (Table 2).
- How high does the box need to be in the tree? The four boxes we have are all at different heights (Table 1).
- What is the effect of human traffic? Two of the boxes are much closer to the street than the other two.

Allowing for the above qualifications, the only two boxes to have been occupied faced north and west. The nesting pairs were Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* on each occasion. Interestingly, the west facing box is the lowest and it is within two horizontal metres and three vertical metres of pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the street.

Table 2. Distance between nest boxes.

	Box 2	Box 3	Box 4
Box 1	14 in	32m	33 m
Box 2	-	29m	35m
Box 3	-	-	12m

The east facing box has never been of interest to pairs looking for a nesting spot. This has been very irritating when pairs of rosellas have been trying to gain access to our roof when we have nesting boxes unoccupied!

The south facing box was taken over by Common *Mynas* *Acridotheres tristis* on two occasions. By having the boxes on pulleys I have been able to take down the south facing box and to destroy their nests. However, I have found the mynas very persistent, returning to lay eggs up to three times in a season. This last season the mynas did not nest in the south facing box — but nor did rosellas take up residence.

My interest is in bird behaviour rather than the collection of sightings of rare birds and wonder if 'our' rosellas will ever come back to feed or nest.

Peter Jorm, 15 Brinsmead Street, Pearce, ACT 2607

A SIGHTING OF WHITE-THROATED NEEDLETAILS FROM REID

On three occasions between 6.00 and 7.30 p.m., during the afternoon of 3 January 1998, I observed from my backyard small numbers of White-throated Needletails *Hirundapus caudacutus* (about six at any one time) flying at about 250 to 300 m high. At this height the birds were difficult to observe but were apparently feeding. Weather conditions were at first overcast, with a heavy grey and even cloud cover, and later dark blue-grey thunder clouds. The temperature was c. 25°C. Possible local storms had been forecast but no rain eventuated. These conditions had occurred for the third consecutive afternoon after a long dry spell. The previous month had been the hottest December on record.

There was no wind and the birds were flying in loose circles, gliding for a few seconds, followed by a quick series of strong wing-beats, usually only four, but no more than six, then either repeating the glide, or sometimes rising into a 'stall' (presumably to capture an insect) then resuming the pattern. In the absence of a prevailing wind their direction was north at one time and later south-east.

I wondered what types of insects, which presumably had been caught in a up-draft of warm air, were providing these birds with a source of food at such a height.

This is only my second sighting of needletails this season and on both times small numbers were seen. It is my impression that in recent years this species is much less common in Canberra as a pre-storm visitor than I recall from my early times in Canberra in the 1960s. Certainly I have not seen, for many years, large flocks of needletails scudding across the sky running before a summer storm. Yet when these

conditions exist I habitually scan the clouds seeking, what is for me, the epitome of early summer evenings, that elusive first black 'dart', hopefully to be followed moments later by 20 or 30 whirring, dashing figures of these exotic summer visitors. To see them rushing and twisting before a storm is a marvellous sight. But for me the high point of any summer is the rare time when they scream past at tree-top height, so that their stiff wings can be distinctly heard beating the air and you have to twist your head quickly to see them before they have disappeared from view.

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

WHITE-THROATED NEEDLETAILS AT HOLDER

On 27 February 1998 after three hot days with maximum temperatures in the mid-thirties, a humid day led to a brief downpour at around 2.00 p.m. At Holder, after the rain, I observed a loose flock of White-throated Needletails *Hirundapus caudacutus* flying very fast at treetop height. Only five or six were visible at one time, but between 2.00 p.m. and 3.00 p.m., needletails were present most of the time, flying in all directions. It is impossible to accurately assess numbers in such a fast-moving, but loosely formed flock. As a rough estimate 50 to 100 individuals may have been seen over the hour. I still find it a most satisfying experience being in the middle of a flock of these amazing birds swirling around only 10 m overhead, at breathtaking speed. Such control, such skills, such speed.

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

UNUSUAL GANG-GANG BEHAVIOUR

A few minutes before 9 a.m. on Sunday 15 March 1998, my wife Andrea and I had just started the steep descent from Charlottes Pass to the Snowy River crossing on our way to Blue Lake when we heard the distinctive call of the Gang-gang Cockatoo *Callocephalon fimbriatum*. It took us a few seconds to discover where this was coming from but we soon located, high overhead, a very tight flock of ten birds with two others several hundred metres away. They were coming from approximately a NE direction and continued apace in the general direction of Thredbo, easily clearing the old Summit Road and Kangaroo Range behind it.

Presumably the birds were migrating. We found this unexpected, as we are more familiar with this species travelling at tree-top height, often resting in the trees as they move through. We have since looked at the literature available to us and find that Forshaw (1969, *Australian Parrots* Lansdowne: Melbourne) reports having seen them flying at a considerable height across mountain ranges and over wide valleys. We wonder if readers are familiar with this type of behaviour in Gang-gang Cockatoos.

*Jack Holland, 8 Chauvel Circle, Chapman
ACT 2611*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT - 1997

New Challenges

Two events in 1997 have produced a great challenge for COG for 1998 and the years beyond. This challenge is for COG collectively, but it is also a challenge for every individual COG member. The first is the granting of \$5000 from Environment ACT to COG to monitor woodland birds. The second is the granting of over a million dollars to Birds Australia to compile another Atlas, an activity in which COG will play the key role in this region. Everyone in COG I have spoken to is very enthusiastic about this opportunity to get out into the field and count the birds. And to count them, not just for the sake of counting, but for a very worthwhile conservation purpose. So, dear member, check the diary to make sure you will have time available, look at your maps of the ACT region, and get ready to participate in the woodland survey and the atlas adventure!

In 1997 COG had high hopes of obtaining a significant grant, over five years, from the National Heritage Trust to establish a comprehensive monitoring program of bird species in Yellow-box Woodland Communities. This program would have high conservation value in assisting the ACT Government in protecting this type of environment, which has been in decline at an alarming rate. After a lengthy wait, COG was informed that, while its application had great merit, it was ultimately rejected at the national level in favour of one big national project, a new Australian Bird Atlas. COG welcomes the national atlas activity and we will be working hard to encourage every member to become involved in the new Atlas, commencing in August 1998. COG is already involved in planning for the Atlas, and hopes to have a major input in the Planning Workshop in Melbourne in late April 1998. However, we also have the \$5000 grant from the ACT Government to carry out the Woodland Monitoring Project along the

lines of that proposed for the National Heritage Trust. Now that we are committed to both the Atlas activity, and the Woodland Survey (which was proposed well before we knew about the Atlas) we need every member to get into the local survey activity.

About this time last year COG completed an interesting monitoring project for the Murrumbidgee River Corridor group in Environment ACT, by counting migrating honey-eaters. Nikki Taws coordinated the project, which consisted of monitoring a number of sites over three Sundays, and wrote an excellent report which was well received by Environment ACT. The project worked well, due to Nikki's coordination skills, and the dedication of many COG volunteers who put in a solid five hours on each of three Sundays. There will be no full-scale repeat in 1998, but some monitoring will occur. David McDonald has already reported over 2500 Yellow-faced honeyeaters passing through the Tharwa Sand-wash in late March, a little earlier than usual.

Website

Another highly visible (if you are an Internet surfer) achievement for COG in 1997 was the creation of its home page, Canberra Birds, at <http://www.canberrabirds.dynamite.com.au>. Mike O'Shaughnessy's creativity and hard work have ensured that it is an interesting and effective presence. It has had a steady stream of visitors since its inception, and it provides a comprehensive report of COG activities in many areas, including field trips and meeting information. We hope to make it even more informative with more reports about birds of the Canberra region and about COG's surveys.

COG databases

The COG databases, both the main database and the Garden Bird Survey, are now

installed on COG's new IBM Aptiva computer, and are both fully operational and up to date. Most people who work with computers (and that's most of us these days) know how delightfully simple is the concept 'let's put all our information on a computer database' and how infernally difficult it is to achieve a readily accessible result. Many people have contributed over the years to this project, and in 1997, Malcolm Fyfe and Tony Harding have put a lot of effort into getting our records up to date on the main database, while Philip Veerman has done the same for the Garden Bird Survey. Andrew Newbery has made a major contribution in ensuring that our programs are working, particularly in obtaining the required reports from the Garden Bird Survey, which as you can imagine, is a fairly complicated piece of work. For 1998 Grahame Clark has joined the team to ensure that the databases are maintained in good shape, and that both current and historic information is incorporated when it comes to hand.

There is still a lot of bird sighting information to be incorporated into the database. Through the NSW/ACT Bird Interest Group Network (BIGNET) we have negotiated the free exchange of bird sighting data among COG, Birds Australia, the NSW Bird Atlassers (NSWBA) and the Cumberland Bird Observers Club. COG has received, but not yet incorporated into the database, fairly significant volumes of data from Birds Australia and from NSWBA for COG's area of interest. The data from the Mulligans Flat surveys have yet to be incorporated, and there will be a considerable data stream emanating from our Woodland Surveys and the Birds Australia Atlas.

An up to date database has enabled COG to make progress in catching up on the backlog of Annual Bird Reports. Malcolm Fyfe, his team of Annual Bird Reporters (Grahame Clark, David Purchase, Chris Davey,

Brendan Lepschi, Bob Digan and Ian McMahon), and editor David Purchase produced the 1992-93 Annual Bird Report in December 1997, and are working on both the 1993-94 and 1994-95 reports which should appear this year.

The information in the COG database is a resource compiled almost exclusively of information supplied by members, and is a resource to be shared. Up until now it has been difficult to give feedback to members on the information they have supplied over the years. Now we have the capacity to provide a print-out of sightings by individual members on request, in a standard format report. We hope to provide this as a free service, but depending on demand, it may be necessary to charge a small fee to cover costs. A sample of a print-out (guess who) is included in this report.

Keeping things running

COG is a diverse organisation, with many activities on many fronts. There are many people working quietly in the background to promote COG's interests and to keep our operations under way. The work done in the administration of the organisation is of vital importance, and it is important for members to know how much constant work it takes to keep the organisation operational. This applies particularly to positions such as secretary (Sue Newbery), treasurer (John Avery), auditor and subscriptions officer (Noel Luff), and keeper of the membership list (Cedric Bear). It applies to other committee members, and to those who undertake many and varied functions to keep the juggernaut rolling. On behalf of all COG members, I thank them for their efforts (and sincerely hope they will continue with them). The major elements of COG's activities public face are our monthly meetings, field trips, *Gang-gang*, *Canberra Bird Notes* and

the Annual Bird Report, the Shopfront, the bird Hotline and our Internet Site. I have already mentioned some of these, and the fact that a chronicle of our activities appears on the Canberra Birds website, which is accessible to many members. Again 1997 was a great year for COG meetings. Barbara Allan continues to provide us with delightful and intellectually delectable speakers. And the continuing high attendance levels at meetings is a vote of confidence in the program. Many thanks to Barbara and the other people who work every month to make sure the meetings are successful. These include Carol Macleay and Anne McKenzie who organise the stall and raffle, and their helpers such as Maria Lukacs.

Our program of field trips has again proved very successful through the coordination of Jenny Bounds and Alistair Bestow. Our thanks are also due to the many COG volunteers who lead the local walks, and to members such as Jim Desmarchelier, the Scrymgeours and the Stephinson who organise walks and campouts in and around their country estates. Thanks are also due to those people who compose the many excellent reports of these outings which are included in *Gang-gang* and given to the world through our website. Harvey Perkins has edited *Gang-gang* with flair and skill, but unfortunately has had to relinquish the much coveted position of *Gang-gang* editor. Sue Mathews has taken up the challenge and we look forward to her imprint on our monthly publication.

David Purchase continues to make a major contribution to COG through his role as Editor of *Canberra Bird Notes* and Annual Bird Reports. Our quality journals continue to provide invaluable and often unique information about bird life and associated matters in the ACT and region. COG is well on the way to publishing two Annual Bird Reports this year, catching up with the

backlog. We have been able to capitalise on the intense competition among Canberra printers to reduce considerably the cost of production for each edition.

The Shopfront in the Griffin Centre continues to provide a public face to COG's activities and interests. Wally Brown provides a valuable service as manager, and is helped by a dedicated group of volunteers. The continuation of this aspect of COG enterprises is however, a vexed question. While the Shopfront does contribute in presenting COG to the broader public, it has become increasingly expensive as government provides less and less subsidy to the operation of community organisations such as COG. Costs have gone up dramatically over the life of the Shopfront, a grant which subsidised its operation is no longer available, and recently both the Field Naturalists and the Herpetologists have withdrawn from the venture. While their contribution to the overall running of the Shopfront was relatively small, it still helped. Grahame Clark is undertaking a review of the Shopfront, and will be reporting to the Management Committee this year. However, the Shopfront performs a number of valuable functions for COG, and if it were to close, there would still be considerable expense and hard work required to continue with the functions, such as storage of valuable stock and equipment, a public contact and advertising point and so on. Grahame will be considering all these issues in his review.

Many thanks are due to Ian Fraser, and to Anthony Overs his emergency backup person, in making the Bird Hotline the success it is. Ian provides valuable public exposure to the birds of the Canberra region, and also of COG's presence on the scene through his regular radio broadcasts. Keep going Ian. He also presents a summary of ACT Hotline on the birding-aus bird chat group on the Internet. It is probably a good

idea to include a regular update of interesting ACT bird sightings on our website, for all the world to admire and marvel at.

Conservation

It has been, as usual, a busy year on the conservation front. The news in this area always appears to be gloomy, as more and more habitat is threatened one way or another, or just plain destroyed. Internationally it has been a particularly bad year. Locally, apart from the severe drought, things are thankfully a little better. Bruce Lindenmayer and Jenny Bounds have brought a very real COG presence to the regional conservation council, and we have made major input into deliberations regarding the management policy of Canberra Nature Parks. As could be imagined, we have made some very strong points in relation to an ACT cat management policy, particularly in respect of the Gungahlin area abutting Mulligans Flat. We don't want cats in or even remotely near Mulligans Flat. Thanks are also due to Maurice Sexton (Namadgi National Park) and David Partner (Canberra Nature Park and Environment Centre) for representing a COG viewpoint on the committees dealing with these issues.

COG can claim to be a continuing positive presence on the conservation front. As well as the activities outlined in the previous paragraph, COG input into the process of declaring endangered species has resulted in birds nominated by COG have been declared by the ACT Government as being endangered in the ACT. These species include Hooded Robin and Brown Treecreeper, as well as the more nationally recognised endangered species such as Superb Parrot, Swift Parrot, and Regent Honeyeater. This declaration of endangerment has the significant effect of requiring Environment ACT develop action

plans for the preservation of these species. Anthony Overs, a COG member, has been contracted by Environment ACT to write these plans. Well done Anthony.

In terms of membership and finances, COG is bubbling along. Membership has remained relatively steady over the past few years at around about 400. Our financial position is stable, although in 1997 we show a small loss, owing to the write-off of some stock (mainly a field list of ACT birds) which has been on our books for several years and is not shifting.

In closing, I wish to thank once again all those who have contributed to a successful year's operation. I think that much of what COG is, and what COG stands for, is exemplified in the warm 1)1177 of conversation which occurs, on the second Wednesday of every month, in the ten minutes or so just prior to the moment when I have to interrupt and start the monthly meeting.

Paul Fennell, April 1998

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.

Last year I commented on the extent to which articles in *Canberra Bird Notes* are cited in other Australian publications and mentioned one author who had received a request for a reprint from the University of Naples. David McDonald, Chris Davey and Frank Peters responded and said they had also received requests for reprints from overseas. David for a copy of his 'jizz' paper from Puerto Rico, and Chris and Frank for copies of their myna papers from the University of Mar del Plata, Argentina. The editors have told me that papers in *Canberra Bird Notes* are regularly cited in international literature listings. It is good to know that what we write in Canberra is of interest not only in Australia but also overseas.

The Common Starling is a bird that suffers a bad press particularly in countries like Australia where it has been introduced and affect indigenous bird populations. Despite this it is an interesting bird not only for its

considerable ability to mimic other birds but also for its complex seasonal colour changes. These include changing the colour of its beak and feet as well as a colour change from a spotted plumage early in the breeding season to a glossy green/black later in the season. This plumage change is due in fact to the spots being worn off the feathers rather than another moult. Now it appears those glossy chest feathers are even more striking that we mere humans can appreciate. The *New Scientist* reports that studies at the University of Bristol indicate that the glossy male chest feathers emit an ultraviolet glow that is critical in the selection of mates by females — if the males don't glow, they don't make it as a successful mate! Two things intrigue me about this research. First how on earth does somebody think of testing whether a starling glows in ultraviolet and secondly I am curious what a starling would look like if I could see ultraviolet? Is it likely the Shining Starling also glows in ultraviolet?

Regular data collection by amateur ornithologists provides vital information that could not be obtained in any other way. Recent examples of this in Australia are the Australian Bird Atlas and the Bird of Prey Watch where the collection of data by many observers has given a far better understanding of bird distribution and movement. In Britain such data collection has provided another apparent example of the effects of Global Warming. The British Trust for Ornithology co-ordinates annual observations of breeding birds by amateurs in the British Isles. A review of the last 15 years has revealed the startling fact that birds in Britain have been generally laying their

eggs earlier each year since 1971. In fact the laying dates of 20 species have been brought forward by an average of 8.8 days over the past 17 years. The most extreme example was the Magpie *Pica pica* which laid its eggs 17 days earlier in 1995 than in 1971. So remember next time you record some information about birds and submit it to a database, that piece of data which on its own looks fairly meaningless will, in aggregate, help in the long-term studies of our environment. And more importantly even regular information about easily recognised birds can help so even the beginner can assist with ornithological study.

REVIEWS

Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef: Cooktown to Townsville North-Eastern Australia by Lloyd Nielsen (1996). Published by Gerard Industries: Bowden, SA. Pp. 332, 210 x 133 mm, softcover. RRP \$22.95.

This is a field guide with a difference. As it deals only with species occurring in a restricted area of Queensland, north from Townsville, the author has been able to take an approach not attempted before in Australian field guides. There are 13 endemic species in the area as well as many other species which do not occur in the south of the continent. In all, 430 species are dealt with.

In the wet tropics there are still considerable areas of rainforest so a visitor to the area is often faced with trying to identify unfamiliar species by the merest glimpse or by call. On a recent visit to the wet tropics I met quite a few overseas visitors literally bewildered by the many species and calls which were

unfamiliar to them. Even 'southerners' like myself, experienced in Australian birds in general, but not the species which are either endemic to the area, or which do not travel further south, need all the help they can get to identify birds in this unfamiliar and sometimes difficult birding environment.

Unlike conventional field guides, birds do not appear in taxonomic sequence in the main section of the publication. This section, which accounts for more than half the book, is given over to comparisons of species with similar features. Each entry has a good small drawing of the bird and a small but quite explicit map showing where it occurs in the region. This approach is very useful when trying to identify a bird from a not altogether satisfactory viewing during which only one or two distinguishing features were seen.

The next section, which deals with birds in taxonomic sequence, gives valuable information as to the habitats in which the bird may be found. In this regard the

information is much more precise than in the standard field guides.

The most valuable section is that dealing with special birdwatching areas. Eleven maps are presented covering the area from Cooktown south to Townsville. On each map red dots indicate areas of major ornithological importance and green dots show those of lesser importance. Each area is then described, a short list of notable species is given, facilities are listed, and access is detailed. All this is most valuable information, especially for the visitor.

Details of the various 'bird lodges' are given in this section. My wife and I stayed for a week at one mentioned, Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers' Lodge, Julatten, and it was a wonderful experience. About 12 species regularly came to feeders and there were spotlighting tours concluding with a social port or sherry on the verandah. Other lodges have similar reputations.

Four ornithological guiding services based from Townsville to Daintree are listed on p. 326, but the real number is nearer to ten. These seem to be very busy and despite my best endeavours I found *all* except one were busy when I was available and rain prevented me from keeping that appointment. These guiding services have very good reputations in the region and I have heard of daily lists of 120 species when the day's birding was spent from coastal mangroves, through rainforest to the dry hinterland. The distance covered is not that great, despite the transition of habitats.

There are geographical, scientific and English name indices, all of which are most important to the book.

During an 11 week trip to the wet tropics my copy became well thumbed, so much so that the binding started to give way. This is a

book that should be carried by all birdwatchers going to the region no matter what is the level of their experience. It would be particularly helpful to the less experienced, especially when used together with one of the standard field guides.

Steve Wilson

Birdwatcher's Guide to the Sydney Region by Peter Roberts (1993). Published by Kangaroo Press, 3 Whitehall Road, Kenthurst, NSW, 2158. Pp. 168, 8 colour plates, 210 x 135 mm, paperback. RRP \$19.95.

This small book contains a wealth of information on birdwatching in the Sydney region. It should satisfy the needs of the experienced birder and the beginner, as well as those familiar with the region and the first time visitor. Peter Roberts has been interested in birdwatching for over fifty years and his expert knowledge is reflected throughout the book.

In the foreword, Vincent Serventy tries to unravel the eternal question of why humans are fascinated by birds. He compares Peter Roberts' view of the birds in one city to Caley's presentation in *What Bird is That?* in that both authors use an ecological order instead of the taxonomic order found in most modern field guides.

Roberts explains this further in the introduction where he says 'Some liberties have been taken with the order in which the non-passerine birds are presented so that the sea-bird families could be kept together, followed by shorebirds and waterbirds'. This certainly makes the book user friendly.

As the synopsis on the back cover states ' [the book] covers an area that includes pasture and farmlands,

types of reserves, 250 kilometres of coastline and portions of 15 National Parks'. Roberts says it is restricted to an area up to 80 km of the city centre. The introduction also outlines how information was selected for inclusion. For instance, Roberts explains that since 1900 more than 430 bird species have been recorded in the Sydney region, but many of them are now considered rarities so the number dealt with in the book is 286 species. Clearly more than the usual urban species are dealt with but it does beg the question - what will the species count be in 2097?'

The book is divided into three main sections: Localities; Birds; and Habitat Lists; plus a number of appendices.

Under Localities, twenty have been selected for detailed description 'because of their interest to birdwatchers'. These have been arranged in order of their distance from the city, so the inner city parks are dealt with first and those in the outlying areas later.

The information given is comprehensive and includes details of distance from the city, species likely to be seen, access, opening hours, amenities and some advice on 'where to look'. For some locations a map has also been included, although the author advises people to obtain more comprehensive maps of the areas to be visited.

Descriptions of birds are not given in the Birds section, rather, Roberts concentrates on abundance, most likely location to see a bird and a rating of its 'visibility' which indicates how hard it is to find a species; thus a Welcome Swallow has a visibility rating of 2.000 while a Logrunner is rated at 18. Seasonal variations are also given.

In the Habitat Lists section Roberts has given lists of birds which should be seen within a particular habitat, for instance, 25 heathland birds and 57 estuary birds are listed. Here the author has identified the common species, those which are rarely seen, and the seasonal visitors.

By applying the data contained in these three sections one should have little difficulty locating any particular species.

And in the appendices there are notes on birdwatching in general with information on field guides, binocular selection, hazards (fire, snakes, etc.) which may be encountered in the field, details of local ornithological organisations and, lastly, a checklist for recording sightings.

The eight colour plates are attractive and add to the book's appeal. Another endearing feature is the 'tips' and other titbits contained in boxes throughout the book, for instance, 'Tiny bird in earth bank'. 'Beginners are often puzzled by ... (etc.). They usually turn out to be Spotted Pardalotes'. Or the warnings about pelagic trips 'The best birding is often on a rough day when water will be sloshing across the deck and spray flying in all directions.'

Definitely a book for all birdwatchers who live in Sydney or those who only get to visit there from time to time. Undoubtedly Peter Roberts has taken a lot of uncoordinated information and put it together in a most useful and attractive format.

Hazel Wright

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

Efforts have been made over the last year or so to consider and finalise observations awaiting endorsement. This has brought the endorsements up to date (with the exception of a few still in the system).

This list includes a bundle of records from waterbird surveys in the early 1990s, as well as sightings of species which are occasionally recorded in the Canberra region such as Black Falcon *Falco subniger*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis* and Plumed Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna eytoni*. The list also contains a number of Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea* sightings, a species which is now established in the region and is being recorded over a widespread area.

The Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* sightings at Mulligans Flat in 1996 are the first records of that species in the reserve. Of note also in relation to Mulligans Flat is the series of Red-capped Robin *Petroica*

goodenovii sightings in the past three years, a couple of additional records from later in 1997 are awaiting endorsement. This species is irruptive in the Canberra region, but there is a question of whether it is now established in the reserve.

There are several interesting records from the Australian National Botanic Gardens, the Pink Robin *P. rodinogaster* in the winter of 1997, and further sightings of Brown Gerygones *Gerygone mouki* in 1996 in the rainforest gully, where they were recorded in 1995. Also of interest is the immature Common Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* in Deakin in March 1997.

Included in this list are records for Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* and Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* which, following the revision in June 1993 (see *Gang-gang* August 1993) are no longer considered as 'unusual birds'. They are included as they were made before the revision.

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO. 45

Plumed Whistling-Duck

1; 5 Oct 96; P. Orray; Turtle Creek, Smiths Road area.

Intermediate Egret

2; 30 Oct 94; N. Montgomery; Kellys Swamp.

Glossy Ibis

3; 19 Nov 91; M. Lenz; Lake George north.

1; 19 Nov 91; M. Lenz; Lake George south.

1; 30 Dec 91; M. Lenz; Lake George north.

2; 30 Dec 91; M. Lenz; Lake George south.

Black Kite

1; 15 Nov 96; S. Wilson; Mugga Lane tip.

Spotted Harrier

1; 23 Feb 92; M. Lenz; south end of Lake Bathurst.

1; 28 Sep 96; M. Fyfe; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.

Grey Goshawk

1; 17 Jun 95; B. and E. Compston; sewage ponds, Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

Black Falcon

2; 23 Mar 96; J. Leonard; West Basin, Lake Bathurst.

- I; 9 Jun 96; J. Leonard; Fairlight Road near Uriarra Crossing.
- Marsh Sandpiper
9; 23 Sep 95; T. Howard; West Basin, Lake Bathurst.
- Ruddy Turnstone
2; 22 Sep 91; M. Lenz; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.
- Pectoral Sandpiper
1; 22 Dec 91; M. Lenz; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.
1; 23 Feb 92; M. Lenz; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.
2; 1 Dec 92; M. Lenz; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.
1; 28 Dec 92; M. Lenz; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.
- Pacific Golden Plover
8; 25 Sep 88; P. Milburn; Lake Bathurst.
- Grey Plover
3; 15 Dec 90; M. Lenz; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.
1; 22 Sep 91; M. Lenz; East Basin, Lake Bathurst.
- Peaceful Dove
1; 13 Apr 97; and 2; 20 Apr 97; J. Bounds; Gigerline sandwash reserve.
- Little *Corella*
2; 24 Nov 94; J. Layton; Holt.
14; 22 Sep 94; P. Wicksteed; north of Gundaroo (Grid 06).
2; 24 Dec 96; B. Lepschi; Weston.
2; 12 Aug 97; J. Nicholls; Australian National University.
- Superb Parrot
2 (pair); 12 Sep 96; M. Brookfield; near large darn, Mulligans Flat (Grid L11).
1 (female); 5 Oct 96; N. Montgomery; near large darn, Mulligans Flat.
- Common Koel
1; 4 to 9 Dec 96; D. McDonald; Kambah.
1; 7, 10 and 11 Dec 96; B. Wilson; Kambah.
1 (immature); 8 Mar 97; R. Bell; Deakin.
- Chestnut-rumped Heathwren
1; 20 Oct 96; G. Schoeff; Sutton Road (Grid N12).
- Little Friarbird
2; 8 Dec 96; J. Bounds; near small darn, Milligan Flat (Grid L10).
1; 29 Mar to 2 Apr 97; D. Johnson; Stirling.
1 (juvenile); 3 May 97; D. Purchase; Melba.
- Regent Honeyeater
1; 20 Aug 97; J. Bounds; Kirinari Street, University of Canberra.
- Red-capped Robin
2 (pair); 15 Nov 94; R. Anderson; Mulligans Flat (Grid M 10).
1 (female); 17 Aug 96; N. Montgomery; Mulligans Flat (Grid L11 east side).
1 (female); 6 Apr 97; J. Bounds; near shearing shed ruin, Mulligans Flat (Grid L10).
- Pink Robin
1 (female or immature male); 9 Jul 97; J. Nicholls; Australian National Botanic Gardens.
1 (female or immature male); 22 Aug 97; J. Bounds and P. Goddard; Australian National Botanic Gardens.
- White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
1; 5 Apr 92; R. Allen; near Stirling Park (Grid K14).
1; 12 Aug 97; J. Nicholls; CSIRO gate, Australian National Botanic Gardens.
- Pied Butcherbird
1; 22 Apr 96; D. Landon; Scullin.

(Continued from inside front cover)

COMMUNICATIONS GROUP	David Landon (Co-ordinator)	6254 2334
Publications Production	Paul Fennell (Co-ordinator)	6254 1804
<i>Canberra Bird Notes</i>	David Purchase and Grahame Clark	6258 2252
<i>Gang gang</i>	Sue Mathews	6259 2816
Internet Home Page	Mike O'Shaughnessy	6258 7130
Other publications	Paul Fennell	
Meetings (speakers)	Barbara Allan	6254 6520
Membership Administrative		
Support	Sue Newbery (Co-ordinator)	6254 0960
Membership list and renewals	Vacant	
Publication distribution	Ann McKenzie	6288 0167
Product sales and promotion	Carol Madeay	6286 2624
Public Presentation	David Landon (Co-ordinator)	6254 2334
Displays and events:	David Landon	
Exhibitions	David Landon	
Publicity and Advertising	Shirley Kral	628 5780
Slide Library	Debra Johnson	6288 5177
Shopfront	Wally Brown	6281 5319
Library	Chris Curry	6253 2306
Hotline	Ian Fraser / Anthony Overs	6247 5530
Internet Home Page	Vacant	
CONSERVATION GROUP	Vacant	
Conservation Council	Bruce Lindenmayer, Jenny Bounds,	6288 5957
Other Forums:		
Namadji National Park Issues	Maurice Sexton	6288 3699
Canberra Nature Park Issues	David Pfanner	6247 7572
Baren Grounds	Tony Lawson	6288 9430
Environment Centre	David Pfanner	
BGNET	Harvey Perkins	6231 8209
FIELD TRIPS GROUP	Jenny Bounds (Co-ordinator)	6288 7802
Local Field Trips:	Alistair Bestow	6281 1481
Standard local walks	Vacant	
Mid-week walks	Malcolm Fyfe	6254 3310

Production and distribution of this issue of *Canberra Bird Notes*:

Editor: David Purchase

Assistant Editor: Grahame Clark

Camera-ready Copy: Cedric Bear

Distribution: Ann McKenzie and helpers

Annual Subscriptions for 1998 are: Student (18 years of age and younger) \$15.00; Individual \$28.00; Family \$28.00; Institutions \$28.00. All receive one copy of *Canberra Bird Notes*.

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 c/o David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 6258 2252).

CONTENTS

Canberra Bird Notes 23(1) March 1997

Articles

Our early knowledge of honeyeater migration in the ACT. <i>Steve Wilson</i>	1
The perils of bird foster-parenting. <i>Peter form</i>	3

Odd Obs

Nesting boxes for rosellas. <i>Peter form</i>	5
A sighting of White-throated Needletails from Reid. <i>Denis Wilson</i>	6
White-throated Needletails at Holder <i>Denis Wilson</i>	6
Unusual Gang-gang Behaviour <i>Jack Holland</i>	7

President's Report — 1997	7
---------------------------	---

Out and About	11
---------------	----

Reviews

<i>Birds of Queensland's Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef: Cooktown to Townsville North-Eastern Australia</i> by Lloyd Nielsen	12
<i>Birdwatcher's Guide to the Sydney Region</i> by Peter Roberts	13

Rarities Panel News (Endorsed List No. 45)	15
--	----

(Printed August 1998)