



Canberra bird notes

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Hoping that members are still generous with their money after the Christmas spending spree, I would like to commend to them a worthy cause. This is the K.A. Hindwood Memorial Fund, which was set up in Sydney in memory of the late Keith Hindwood. Keith was a C.O.G. member, and many of us knew him personally.

It is hoped that enough money will be raised to establish a Bird Studies Centre, with library, record material and similar facilities for ornithologists, particularly amateurs. The response has so far been good, but more support is needed. Donations should be made payable to the Australian Museum Keith Hindwood Memorial Fund, and addressed to:

The Keith Hindwood Memorial Fund,

c/- The Australian Museum,

College Street,

Sydney, 2000

All donations are tax deductible.

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THE BIRDS AT PULLETOP

Val Jenkins Peter Gowland Tony Stokes

Pulletop Nature Reserve, formerly part of the property "Acres" at Yenda, lies 15 miles from Rankin Springs on the Griffith/Rankin Springs road. From 1953 onwards, Dr H.J. Frith carried out studies of the Mallee Fowl in the area. Progressive land-clearing led to about 350 acres being 'reserved from sale' on December 23, 1960 for the 'preservation of fauna(Mallee Fowl)'.

The reserve itself was dedicated in the N.S.W. Government Gazette No.5 of January 18, 1963 as 'The Pulletop Faunal Reserve No.22', the area being described as: 'Land District - Narrandera; Shire - Carrathool; County Cooper; Parish Pulletop, being portion 46 of 358 acres and 2 roads.'

On September 4 1967, in accordance with the National Parks Wildlife Act, the reserve was renamed 'Pulletop Nature Reserve.' There have been no additions to the original 358 acres, and it is difficult to see how there could be as the surrounding countryside is given over to pasture and wheat.

Meteorological records in the area show that precipitation can vary greatly but the average annual rainfall for Rankin Springs, 15 miles north is 1696 points, and for Griffith, 25 miles south, 1625 points.

This part of the article will describe a visit made to Pulletop in January 1971. Part 2 will consist of a comprehensive checklist of the birds drawn from three different sources, including the above-mentioned visit.

We were at the reserve from January 26 to 23, 1971. It was raining then and Geoff Moore, the ranger in charge, informed us that since September 1970 excellent rains had fallen.

Broom Bush, Melaleuca uncinata and one of the mallee gums (probably Eucalyptus dumosa) were flowering but the birds appeared to be fewer in number and species than on a previous visit in October 1967. We adopted three methods of recording the birds viz. visual during the day, netting outside the reserve in daylight and spotlighting at night. One of us (TS) is a licenced bander under the Australian Bird Banding Scheme, and in the interests of a more comprehensive list ten mist-nets were raised in the mallee just outside the reserve where the habitat is continuous, and appears identical, with that inside the reserve. The nets proved profitable, yielding five previously unrecorded species, Notes on identification, measurement and moult were taken and the birds released unbanded in the place where they were caught.

Spotlighting was carried out for approximately four hours after sundown on both nights within the reserve and no further than 100 yards from it. No attempt was made to catch birds; identification was the objective, and the method revealed two species which were not recorded in daylight.

cont/-

The following are comments on some of the species we saw:-

EMU Dromaius novaehollandiae Mr Moore told of two nesting in the reserve last year and often sees "mobs of 8 to 14 in adjacent paddocks."

WEDGETAILED EAGLE Aquila audax We saw one old, black bird over a nearby field. Mr Moore says they are very common and we were "unlucky to see only one."

LITTLE EAGLE Hieraetus morphnoides Mr Moore notes they are more regularly seen near the Cocopara Ranges but they are not as common as the above.

MALLEE FOWL Leipoa ocellata This bird was one of the chief reasons for the establishment of the reserve. We hesitate to comment on its status at present as our survey was quite restricted. We saw two birds, and only one active mound was known to the ranger.

PINK COCKATOO Cacatua leadbeateri A pair in roadside mallee. The species is not uncommon in the district.

MULGA PARROT Psephotus varius Two females seen on the road into the reserve.

BUDGERIGAH Melopsittacus undulatus A flock of about 30 was seen to fly into the reserve and later a few were flushed in the more open parts of the mallee.

GOLDEN BRONZE-CUCKOO Chrysococcyx plagosus Its presence was confirmed by one netted in the roadside mallee. This was the only bird netted which had no moult whatever, perhaps indicating migration. Length 158 mm; wing 101 mm; wing span 290 mm.

BOOBOOK OWL Ninox novaeseelandiae One was seen on both nights of spotlighting.

TAWNY FROGMOUTH Podargus strigoides One was caught in the spotlight at night.

SPOTTED NIGHTJAR Eurostopodus guttatus This species and the cuckoo were the highlights of the visit for us. Three were flushed from the ground during light rain on the first afternoon. Their silent flight on long brown wings - with white spots near the tips - was immediately diagnostic. One was caught in the spot at night in a nearby paddock. Its eyes shone bright red in the light as it fluttered over us for a minute or so. Its flight was definitely a fast, silent flutter, not a slow flapping like that of an owl or frogmouth. Once again the diagnostic white on the wingtips was immediately noticed. Mr Moore gives a delightful picture of an experience he had with the species near Cocopara Range:

"On holding the spotlight aloft we attracted most of the moths within a large area, and for 15 minutes were entertained by four nightjars catching them in the beam of our torch."

They are regularly seen, quite often in daylight, in the rocky gullies of the Range.

cont/-

SPECKLED WARBLER Chthonicola sagittata One bird with a black eyebrow (see Wilson, 1965) seen on the periphery of the reserve.

EASTERN WHITEFACE Aphelocephala leucopsis This bird does not appear to be 'rare' as reported elsewhere by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. One of us (TS) recorded it near the dam in October 1967, but it was omitted in error from the record of that trip. We netted one in the roadside mallee.

RUFOUS WHISTLER Pachycephala rufiventris In contrast to column two (see next issue) we found this species very common in January. It was often heard, seen and netted.

Reference

Wilson, S.J., 1965. A plumage problem in the Speckled Warbler. Austr. Bird Bander 3: 52.

16, Badgery Street, Macquarie, A.C.T. 2614.

ABORTIVE NESTING BY SILVER GULL

Anthony H. D'Andria

The Silver Gull Larus novaehollandiae has not yet been recorded as breeding in the Australian Capital Territory. The nearest regular breeding colony is at Lake Bathurst, N.S.W. (Frith, 1969).

In 1971 this species attempted to breed at the Fyshwick sewage ponds, but the colony was eventually abandoned.

The first indications that something was afoot came on July 5. About 80 Silver Gulls in breeding colours were at the ponds. They mobbed the observer in the characteristic fashion of nesting birds. At least two pairs appeared to be defending territory against other gulls.

On August 2, 210 gulls were counted at the ponds. Mobbing was again persistent, but there were no nests. The first nests were found on August 16. At least 12 were lined and appeared to be complete. Dung, twigs, feathers and some small mammalian bones were in use as lining. Up to 20 other nests were still being built. Most of the nests were placed in rough herbage along the top of a retaining wall, on a narrow bank between two ponds.

cont/-

On August 19 I counted 33 nests, but still there were no signs of eggs. On August 23 several birds were sitting on nests and appeared to be incubating. Copulation was observed four times within 20 minutes and courtship begging/feeding once. One mating was timed - it lasted 95 seconds. There was some interaction - mainly chasing - between pairs. A White-faced Heron Ardea novaehollandiae that flew near the colony was harried by about 12 gulls. Inspection revealed that the nests were still without eggs.

The situation was much the same on September 6 and 13. Pair interaction and copulation were recorded and some active nest building was being carried out, but in the main the gulls were quiet and all nests were empty.

A week later on September 20 the colony was defunct. Only 14 Silver Gulls were visible, sitting quietly on the bank. The nesting area was occupied by 58 Black Cormorants Phalacrocorax carbo. The presence of these clumsy birds may have contributed to the colony's downfall, but cattle were evidently the main culprits. Cows had trampled on the nests in trying to get at the lush grass growing at the waterline. There were hoof-marks everywhere, and the grass was cropped short. Most of the nests had been obliterated.

Discussion

Watson and Wheeler (1963) state that "the first egg is laid within a few days to a week of completion of the nest." Assuming that no eggs were laid at Fyshwick (some could have been taken by predators), the long period without eggs after the nests were ready seems extraordinary.

It could have been due to excessive disturbance, since "any colony started on the banks without the protection of surrounding water was doomed." (Watson & Wheeler, op.cit). One such colony of 138 nests in October 1954 was found abandoned within three weeks. It was in a situation apparently very similar to that at Fyshwick, and quite unsuitable for a ground-nesting bird. In spring and summer the sewage-pond banks are mown regularly, and this would have wrought havoc among the eggs and young gulls. The colony was exposed and easily accessible to foxes, dogs, cats, cattle, horses and man. Although not visible from the road, sitting birds would have been frequently disturbed by staff from the sewage treatment works.

Other points around Lake Burley Griffin - such as Springbank and Spinnaker islands and the mudbank in Jerrabomberra Creek - appear to be so much more preferable as nesting sites that one cannot help but wonder what it is about a particular area that appeals to a bird's mind.

Reference

Wheeler, W.E., and I. Watson, 1963. The Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* Stephens. *Emu* 63: 98-173.

McCrae Street, Garran, A.C.T. 2605.

LYREBIRD CHASES TIGER-CAT

Peter Fielding

On June 18, 1971, between 0715 and 0730 hrs a Superb Lyrebird Menura novaehollandiae was seen to chase a Tiger Cat Dasyurus maculatus at the Minnamurra Falls Reserve, N.S.W., on the south bank of the Minnamurra River.

The bird's sex was female. Her tail was slightly bent, possibly from nest-sitting.

Moving at a slow trot, the Tiger Cat proceeded along the riverbank. The Lyrebird followed it at distances of eight to ten feet, uttering a constant alarm call. The abuse continued even when the mammal stopped to drink at the river. The bird gave up the chase after about a quarter of a mile.

Similar sightings took place in the same area on July 19 and July 24, 1971.

108 Balgownie Road. Balgownie, N.S.W. 2519

FRIARBIRD FEEDING ON SCALE

Anthony H. D'Andria

Noisy Friarbirds Philemon corniculatus were a conspicuous and vocal part of the scene at Garran in the Spring of 1971. On the morning of October 19 one flew into the garden and was seen to alight in a young eucalypt. It immediately began to peck busily among the foliage. Watching from a few yards away with 12 x 50 glasses I was able to ascertain that it was feeding on Scale Insects (Coccoidea), picking them neatly off the bark and swallowing them with a backward toss of the head.

On examination of the tree later I found its lower branches infested with Scale. These insects were being attended by numbers of small black ants, and the surrounding leaves were sticky with their clear sweet-smelling secretions. One would expect this 'honeydew' to be very attractive to honeyeaters, but the Friarbird was not observed to partake of it. I wonder if other readers have ever noted birds exploiting this food source.

10 McCrae Street, Garran, A.C.T. 2605

LETTER TO THE EDITORDecorative Fauna

Sir,

Some members may already be aware of my interest in tracing the progressive use since settlement of representations of Australian animals and flowers as decorative motifs. I am not referring to illustrations in books, and I am not attempting to cover the ways Australian aborigines used feathers, fascinating as these are.

From the little information I have already acquired here is something about designs incorporating Psittaciformes. Strangely enough considering their bright colours, as far as I can see parrots and cockatoos have seldom been used in decoration. Their general shape is solidly and uncompromisingly their own, and like dahlias or gladioli in a vase they tend to go their own way rather than the designer's. They don't have long, gracefully curved necks, nor (usually) elegantly spread tails.

There are no parrots on our coins or notes, and the only one on a stamp is the Galah Cacatua roseicapilla, designed by Mrs Betty Temple-Watts. The Crimson Rosella Platycercus elegans is included in a recent Norfolk Island set of bird stamps. The Eastern Rosella P. eximius has been the trademark of Rosella Foods Pty Ltd since 1896, and several rosellas have been used in conventional embroidery designs.

The well known Arnott's Biscuits trademark is, I am told, not one of us but a macaw - a bird often seen as a sailor's pet on the sailing-ships of the 1840s, when William Arnott came to Australia and set up business in New South Wales.

I have come across a wood carving of a young Major Mitchell Cacatua leadbeateri on a church pew, and another carving and alabaster book-ends featuring the Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo C. galerita, and the latter species forms part of a cast-iron design of 1880.

And that is about all. Surely somebody must have recognised the spectacular beauty of a Red-tailed Cockatoo and used it in some way - apart from the early fan of tail feathers at the Art Centre in Melbourne.

I would be most interested to hear of any other examples showing how our animals and flowers are used as a basis for design, as I realize that many personal items will be known only to their owners. If anyone can help with photographs, sketches or information I would be most grateful.

Yours,

Ellen M. McCulloch

6, Bullen Avenue, Mitcham, VIC.3132

THE AUSTRALIAN SEABIRD GROUP

On November 25, 1971 in Canberra, it was decided to form an Australian Seabird Group. The inaugural meeting consisted of Dr P.J. Fullagar, Dr G.F. van Tets, Mr A.K. Morris and Mr M. Carins. Dr Fullagar acted as Chairman and the RAOU was represented by Dr van Tets. Seabird enthusiasts in New South Wales were represented by Mr Morris and similar interests in Victoria and Britain by Mr Carins, who acted as secretary during the meeting and was appointed acting secretary of the group.

The aims of the group were discussed at length and are envisaged to be, with geographic modifications, those of the original "Seabird Group" in Britain, as follows:-

1. to support and promote the study of seabirds.
2. to maintain a list of people interested in the seabirds of Australasia, Antarctica and Oceania; to discover the nature of their current interests and activities; and to make them known to each other.
3. to build up a national and international network of active workers prepared to cooperate in the development of studies of all aspects of seabird biology.
4. to circulate a newsletter containing news and views of work in progress.
5. to encourage new work in fields which receive inadequate attention.

The meeting decided to adopt the White-faced Storm Petrel Pelagodroma marina as its emblem. This bird is both distinctive and common in much of our area.

Anyone interested in further information is asked to write to: -

The Acting Secretary, Australian Seabird Group, P.O. Box 235, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608.

A NEW DICTIONARY OF BIRDS

Michael Carins writes:-

The British Ornithologists Union Centenary Publication, "A New Dictionary of Birds" (Ed. Sir A.I. Thomson) has recently been in short supply and a number of members have found difficulty in obtaining copies.

Originally published at £Stg 5.25, its price rose to £Stg 6.50 some three years ago - shortly before it disappeared from the market. It would appear that the surplus copies of the "Dictionary" were obtained by the R.S.P.B. who are now offering copies for sale at reduced prices.

The book is now available for £3.50 plus 20% postage (roughly \$9.08) from: The RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds., England. The use of International Money Orders is recommended, for £Stg.4.20. Book F2006 should be quoted.

In view of the scarcity members are advised to order as soon as possible - cash with order - since supplies are probably limited and a new edition is likely to cost at least \$25 if a reprint is even possible.

C.O.G. ACTIVITIESOctober 13

At this meeting we got two lectures in one, from Mr Donald Trounson. As Executive Officer of the Australian National Photographic Index of Birds he talked about the problems of creating and running this unique project. Photographers were at first rather suspicious of the whole idea, but once they realised they would not be signing away the copyright to their photographs acceptance of the Index was more rapid. A panel of three is responsible for selection of photographs for the Index, on the bases of technical, artistic and ornithological merit. There is also a special classification for photographs of particular ornithological interest but which are not technically or artistically up to scratch.

Mr Trounson then went on to talk about his own efforts at bird photography, the problems he had met and how he solved them. He concluded with a very good selection of slides, including an interesting one of a Peregrine with flaps and undercarriage down, coming in to land.

Copies of photographs in the national Photographic Index of Birds are housed in the Pictorial Reading Room at the National Library, Canberra.

November 5

Mr Arnold McGill had a full attendance for his talk on "Gulls and Terns." After dealing briefly with the systematics of the Laridae, he went on to describe the three gulls and 20 terns on the Australian list.

Unlike other countries Australia is poorly endowed with gulls, but has practically half of the world's 42 tern species. Fourteen of these breed here, as do all three gulls. Field identification of the gulls should present no problems, although the larger Dominican and Pacific Gulls could be confused by the inexperienced observer. The terns, on the other hand, may attain a bewildering similarity in eclipse plumage - one of the slides shown at the meeting featured a group of enigmatic birds that were clearly terns, but of which species?

Other slides showed individuals and nesting colonies of Larus, Sterna, Chlidonias and other genera.

November 6

Bad weather rather spoilt the outing to New Chums Road, Brindabella Ranges, in which Mr Arnold McGill took part. The birdlife, although abundant, was hard to observe because of the rain, and most 'observations' were made on calls alone. Some species did brave the wet weather and even appeared quite tame. Excellent views were obtained of Golden and Olive Whistlers, Yellow Robins and Gang-Gang Cockatoos. Olive Whistlers were calling continually as were Fantailed Cuckoos, Crescent Honeyeaters and lyrebirds. Those who had been to New Chums Road before agreed that they had never the bush in such good condition.

SHORT OBSERVATIONS

SPARROWHAWK Accipiter cirrocephalus. One soaring at the University with mouse in talons, on 9/11/71. (A.D'Andria).

BLACK FALCON Falco subniger. One chased and caught a lark or pipit at Orroral on 3/1/71 (M.Carins).

POWERFUL OWL Ninox strenua. Two adults and two juveniles at the Tidbinbilla Reserve on 29/10/71. One adult was holding the remains of a Greater Glider (E. Hoskin).

SUPERB PARROT Polytelis swainsoni. Six were feeding beside the Barton Highway, on 1/11/71 this side of Hall. An adult male was killed by a car and brought to CSIRO Wildlife for identification (J.Forshaw).

MUSK LORIKEET Glossopsitta concinna. A flock of eight circled several times just above treetop level, at the Botanic Gardens on 31/10/71. Details of plumage and calls were recorded (G. & N. Clark) .

SCARLET HONEYEATER Myzomela sanguinolenta. An adult male in a Budleia bush at Chifley on 25/12/71. (T. Gourlay)

LITTLE FRIARBIRD Philemon citreogularis. One seen regularly at Garran during October/November 1971 (H. Elliott).

WHITEBROWED WOODSWALLOW Artamus superciliosus. A flock of between 50 and 100 birds at Gungahlin on 26/10/71 (M.Clayton).

MASKED WOODSWALLOW Artamus personatus. About ten were in the abovementioned flock at Gungahlin on 26/10/71 (MC).

PIED CURRAWONG Strepera graculina. A nest with fledglings was recorded at Red Hill, above the Deakin rubbish tip, on 29/10/71 (S. Davey). This species appears to be becoming a regular nester within Canberra and its environs. Individual birds are seen right through the summer, particularly near pinewoods.

GREY CURRAWONG Strepera versicolor. One was seen to remove and eat a chick from the nest of an Eastern Spinebill on 16/10/71. The nest was in a large Acacia in the "rainforest" gully at the Botanic Gardens (H. Bell & R.D. Mackay).

INDIAN MYNA Acridotheres tristis. Sightings of this species have fallen off recently. A pair was suspected of nesting under an arcade at the Griffith shopping centre, but positive proof could not be obtained though the birds were seen there regularly (AD). It has now been established that Indian Mynas were being imported into Canberra intentionally, and it is presumed that most, if not all, of the birds seen originated from this source.

CONTENTS

page

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| The Birds at Pulletop | 2 |
| - V.Jenkins, P. (Gowland, T.Stokes | |
| Abortive Nesting by Silver Gull | 7 |
| - Anthony H. D'Andria | |
| Lyrebird Chases Tiger Cat | 10 |
| - Peter Fielding | |
| Friarbird Feeding on Scale | 12 |
| - Anthony 'D'Andria | |
| Letter to the Editor | 12 |
| The Australian Seabird Group | 14 |
| A New Dictionary of Birds | 15 |
| C.O.G. Activities | 16 |
| Short Observations | 18 |

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